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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MEDIÉVAL EMPIRE

When we say Europe, what do we mean? Perhaps it has never been more necessary than it is today to apply not emotion but scientific method in answering this question. If we ask the politicians they will tell us of the continuity of Europe and its function in world politics. The geographer will speak of the special qualities of the soil and the flora. Might we not usefully regard the map of Europe from the point of view of the other, so much more extensive continents? From that point of view, would the continent of Europe seem to be an annex of Asia or Africa? No, certainly not. There are grounds of paramount importance which make such a view impossible: reasons, determined by the common history of the European nations and the common civilisation which was the product of their historical development.

Accordingly, the common efforts and common destinies of the European nations throughout the centuries constitute the materials we have at hand when we try to answer the question: what was Europe, what is it now, and what may it become? Here we are confronted by the fact

that the course of history is determined by general forces, and at times controlled by individual decisions. We cannot deny that many men had power to make choices between various possibilities, such choice often being one favourable or unfavourable as the case might be to the destiny of the future Europe. A choice like that was granted to the Germanic peoples who fought on the side of Attila and equally to those who followed the Roman Aetius; to the Visigothic counts who led their Arabs across the Straits of Gibraltar, and to the king who withstood the invaders without hope of victory. In the same way, Charlemagne might have refused the crown of the Roman Empire. But he accepted it, in spite of the fact that it imposed upon him duties, the performance of which exceeded the powers of a Frankish ruler.

Up to this time Europe had existed only as a geographic concept invented by the classic world, or perhaps it was merely a unit of the imperial administration. Even after Charlemagne's time this was true for the Byzantine rulers: *Evrope* or *Dysis* was the designation for the complex of *themata* or 'provinces' in Italy and the Balkans. No one took notice of the fact that in the meantime Europe had found itself, intellectually as well as politically. The Frankish court had proclaimed the independence of the West from Byzantine tutelage, several years before the coronation in A. D. 800, and even more plainly by the fact of the coronation itself. This date marks the birth of Europe, an opinion which the sources corroborate: for since the time of Charlemagne the term Europe, meaning practically the same as it does today, was used in the Frankish kingdom. It signified a totality composed of many peoples, including Spain and England, which were outside Charlemagne's orbit, but not yet Scandinavia, which was still pagan, nor yet the Byzantine Balkans.

Of course Europe did not issue like Pallas Athene fully armed from the head of a 'father of gods and men'. Men of genius may hasten the course of history but they are not the final cause of changes. It is our task, often an onerous one, to examine the sources for all possible indications of ideas which may have existed in the minds of a few men during many centuries and then were suddenly transformed into concrete acts. But the historian should at the same time confront these ideas with reality. For the practical trends of political and social life are mostly quite different from ideal demands, often they contradict the ideal, and only rarely does a situation arise in which practical trends and ideal demands complement each other. Even if they do, the right moment may be missed, the leading men of the time may lack the power to make decisions and draw conclusions.

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But this is just the place where the great personality can act. And when he does, a great hour, historically speaking, has struck.

Such was the hour when Alexander the Great spread out before the eyes of his Macedonians and Greeks the riches of the East—with ideas quite other than those of his soldiers. His was the idea of the oneness of all humanity, which he wanted to see united into one great state. His, also, was the idea of the god-like dignity and power of a ruler over such a united world. This world seemingly extended only from Gibraltar to the river Indus, an error which had very dire consequences. Alexander failed, but he left a two-fold heritage to a later day: the barrier between Europe and Asia had been broken down and the idea of a world-state had been brought to the attention of the West. Here the Stoics stood for unity as a philosophic idea; but also as political concept it was to be revived later on. Roman senators had visited Alexander in Babylon, and it was Rome that fell heir to his realm. One country after the other succumbed to the new power, and soon the Roman Empire seemed to extend to the boundaries of the civilised world.

This empire remained in theory the rule of one city over other cities, the responsibility for the peace of the empire devolving upon the citizens of Rome. The first citizen of Rome was the emperor, a model for all other citizens. Yet the concept of Alexander could not be extinguished; Constantine wore the diadem of the great Macedonian; he no longer ruled as a Roman, but as a ruler of all men, having the same rights and duties with respect to the universal state. Constantine, like Alexander, undertook to war against the Persians, who were considered dangerous rivals in the field of claims for universality. Since the time of Sapor the First, the title of the Persian kings was 'King of Iran and Non-Iran', and the monarchy was closely linked up with a universal religion, that of Zoroaster. In the Roman Empire, too, the deities of the various cities were now to give way before the 'highest god' of the Stoics, who was soon replaced by the god of the Christians. The Christian creed got its security from the state, in order that it, in turn, might secure the state, bear witness to the equality of all human beings, and extol the emperor as the 'Saviour of humanity' and the 'Vicar of Christ'. The pagan deities of the cities were still tolerated; but one city above all others should be specially consecrated to the Christian god: Constantinople, the new capital, bearing, according to the pattern set by Alexander, the name of its founder.

Thus Christian doctrine was the bond that held together the provinces tending to cut loose from the empire; the bishops became the functionaries

of the state, the ruler turned into the 'preceptor of all the peoples', who summoned the councils there to arbitrate theological controversies. It was a form of 'Cæsaro-papacy' where the Pope played the role of a statish in the great drama of imperial rule. But it was not possible to eliminate the Pope altogether. The Church organised itself into a fixed hierarchy of ranks and grades following the pattern of the state, and in this hierarchy the Pope claimed a sovereignty similar to that of the Emperor in the state—at first only in theory, later on in actual practice. Conditions for the implementation of these claims were much more favourable in the West than in the East which was dominated by the ancient and renowned patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, and the strong rule of imperial power. The great invasions destroyed the political unity of the West, and nothing remained but the Church and its spiritual head, the Pope. Even so, the idea of the Empire was a strong factor, inasmuch as it recalled the past and promised hope for the future. For a short time it seemed as if a great Emperor of the East would realise such hopes. But Justinian's attempts failed, leaving behind them among the population of Italy a strong resentment against the rule of Byzantium which had conducted itself no better than the German conquerors.

Accordingly the gap between idea and reality had grown wider and 'Christianity' was no longer identical with Empire. The Christian 'Romans' were now condemned to live among Arian 'barbarians' who determined their political destiny. The Germanic peoples had left the Romans their faith and their church, yet the theological opinions of the West differed from those of the East. It was a time of confusion in what was supposed to be the divine order, and the literature of Christian Europe is full of laments. Yet brighter spots there were too: one of the Germanic nations, the Franks, had adopted the Roman creed and derived great political gain from their decision; for the entire non-German population of Gallia preferred their domination to that of the Arians. Was it possible that the Catholic Franks might offer to the Church and the Papacy that which was so essential and could no longer be afforded them by the Eastern Empire, namely protection against political oppression?

A long time was to elapse till matters had advanced so far. Charles Martel denied the request of the Pope; he did not want to break with the Lombards who supported him in his battles against the Arabs. Not until the next generation was the alliance between the Franks and the Papacy consummated: Pepin assumed those duties which the Byzantine 'Exarch' of Italy could no longer render. He delivered Rome from the danger of an

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invasion by the Lombards, and for this received from the Pope the title of 'Patricius', which properly belonged to the Exarch. Stephen the Second had in reality not broken off relations with the Eastern Emperor, only with his functionaries, and yet that was after all a break with the Emperor. It was a temporary solution which for the time being left matters in the balance. It was up to the future to decide who was to be the defender of Christianity and thus the defender of the Pope as well.

The two highest powers of the Middle Ages have been compared to the two foci of an ellipse; they might move further apart or approach each other, but in order that the form be preserved, both had to be present. This ellipse never became a circle, either in the time of Constantine or in the eighth century. Of course many folk dreamed that the Pope was the real master of Europe to whom already Constantine had given the power here in Rome. Yet the facts spoke otherwise. If ever an empire of Christian peoples was to reappear as a political entity, a more powerful ruler was needed than the Pope, who scarcely commanded the obedience of all the nobles in his own city.

Nor did the emperors of the East have this power, aside from the fact that they represented views on the worship of the images different from those held by the Pope and the majority of Christendom. Byzantium had been forced to confine its rule to an infinitesimal portion of its former dominions, and in the streets of Constantinople the mob often held sway. And yet the emperors clung to the fiction that they were regents of the Church and of the whole world on the model set up by Constantine. So much the worse for the world if it would no longer submit to the word of the 'Lord of the world' and only 'rebels' and 'wild beast' took the place of the imperial officials. Soon, so the Byzantine ambassadors warned at the courts of princes, the ever-victorious Emperor would bend the stiff necks of kings before him. Humbly the barbarians would appear before the 'Vicar of Christ' to receive his orders and learn the first principles of civilisation.

As for the political threats, certainly no one in the West took them seriously. And yet, the Franks were hit on a sore spot: here was the power, there the legitimate claim; here was the anxious desire to learn, there the wealth of cultural attainments. How much labour, how many pains did the friends of Charlemagne expend to revive science and art under his rule! As for Charlemagne himself—one need not repeat the anecdote that he had written tablets placed under his pillow at night. Probably this tale is an invention, but it is nevertheless touching that the victor of so many

campaigns did not disdain to apply his great will-power and his modest knowledge of Latin on the emendation of ancient texts.

It is a fact that the elder civilisation was carried over to the court of Charlemagne without being entirely understood nor having anything new added to it. But this achievement was sufficiently important to take its place worthily beside the political ones of the Frankish ruler. For indeed it was in itself a political achievement, and it prepared the way for a more important one. I mean that the 'Carolingian renaissance' was to prove the cultural legitimacy of the Frankish court, which intended to show itself not a barbarian court but the centre of Christian civilisation. Not until this had become an incontestable fact could Charlemagne venture a direct confrontation with Byzantium.

The matter could not be settled in the field so familiar to the Franks, that is, on the field of war. A campaign waged against Constantinople was impossible for practical reasons, even after the victory over the Avars in the valley of the Danube. And though the re-establishment of a universal empire was anticipated, this empire was to serve the cause of peace. Charlemagne did not conquer all the lands in which there were Christians; but the weight of his authority was sufficient to enable him to exercise the functions of an emperor in place of the Byzantine ruler. A Frankish treatise (*de Officiis*) tells us that not only he who rules the whole world could be an Emperor, but that he who occupies an important position in it could be too. From this point of view, Charlemagne's friends regarded him as the ruler of Christendom, as an *Imperator* who lacked nothing but the crown. In Rome, at least in the time of Pope Hadrian, one was a bit more careful, but it is very questionable whether Hadrian's successor, Leo III, in reality had as large a share in the plan of the coronation of Charlemagne as many scholars have assumed.

We have now arrived at the famous quarrel of the historians concerning the coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor. However much paper has been blackened on this subject, we do not believe that it was wasted, for every fact, no matter how insignificant, is valuable if it can throw light on such a focal point of history. It must however be stated that the scholars who have treated this theme have not always opened up new sources. Often they have contented themselves with interpreting the existing documents in accordance with their personal judgments. But even these reports may be examined with profit for they remind us of the limitations of the knowledge we may acquire. The personal point of view can never be entirely eliminated; in the strictest sense of the term there is

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no such thing as historical objectivity. It was a vain effort on the part of certain scholars of the past century to do historical research according to the patterns set by the natural sciences; for did not these sciences themselves for a long time overestimate their own objectivity? Even the physicist cannot completely exclude his own personality when he prepares for an experiment and observes its progress.

We may, however, claim that our understanding of this problem is progressing both as regards the interpretation of the sources and the unearthing of more of them. Besides the established historical texts, archives and liturgical texts have more recently been examined, and the author of these pages has attempted to let the archaeological remains speak for themselves. We now know that the coronation of Charlemagne was not the result merely of the temporary difficulties in which the Pope was involved, as several scholars thought. On the contrary, the event already cast its shadow before, not only as regards the ideas and plans of the leading personalities, but no less in their actions. It is these actions that we should like to discuss; for if we look at them and their inter-relations as a whole, we get a clear picture of the purposes behind them.

Charlemagne had not been educated by scholars. He lived in accordance with the practical political demands of his dominions, and the prestige of his own person and his family's. Perhaps the past of the Germanic sagas was nearer to his heart than the history of the Roman Empire and its theological foundations. It is unlikely that it was his own idea to aspire to a dignity for which his language did not even have a name. It is true that Charlemagne was not only the King of the Franks but also King of the Lombards and Protector of the Romans, but this threefold honour did not need to be summed up in a more elevated title. It is wrong to speak of a 'Germanic idea of empire', as contrasted with the Roman and Christian imperial concept. None of the Germanic peoples had the notion that the ruler of several kingdoms should be designated Emperor, and even the *bretwalda* of the Anglo-Saxons was called *Imperator* not by themselves but by the neighbouring Celts. Dominion over a number of kingdoms was practised rather as dominion over a number of landed estates. This was the concept of the Merovingians, and the fact that it was not foreign to Charlemagne, not even after A.D. 800, is indicated by his last will and testament. He distributed his kingdoms among his sons as a nobleman would distribute his lands. There was not a word about the imperial dignity.

Charlemagne had not been brought up by scholars but he sought to

learn from them, and what they taught could be supplemented by object lessons in his travels through Italy. As early as 774 he became familiar with the buildings of the defunct Empire and with the hopes of the papacy for Rome and the Church. Both were bound up with the spot Charlemagne first visited when he entered Rome: the chapel where the Emperor Constantine was supposed to have been baptised by Pope Silvester I; after which ceremony the Pope had received the Empire of the West as a gift (according to the document forged by papal functionaries). The chapel was in the Lateran palace and the palace itself was actually a gift of Constantine whose monument was here shown to visitors. When one spoke of these things to Charlemagne, he was surely not allowed to forget the fundamental meaning of the imperial dignity and could contrast the actual state of Christianity with the ideal picture. Indeed, the demands of practical politics itself indicated to the Frankish king the idea of giving his attention to the successors of the Roman Emperors. The son of the king of the Lombards had fled to Constantinople and there had assumed the title of '*Patricius*', the title used by Charlemagne in his own edicts after the conquest of the Lombards. In the following year there was even a Byzantine fleet ready to take this enemy of Charlemagne back to Italy. The undertaking was never carried out, but Charlemagne surely understood even at this date that he must not lose sight of Byzantine claims to universality.

Charlemagne had no fleet with which to wage war against this adversary, and a land expedition was bound to be stopped, after long and gruelling marches, before the impregnable walls of Constantinople. Accordingly a diplomatic adjustment was sought, and in 780 the death of the Emperor and a political upheaval at Byzantium presented an opportunity. No longer did the enemies of the cult of the images rule at Byzantium, but its defenders; and thus the papacy had an opportunity to resume the relations so long intermitted. It also appeared that the claims for the universal rule of Byzantium were now no longer valid, for the empire there was governed by a woman, Irene, who was regent for her minor son, Constantine VI. Such a government could never fulfill the demands made of an emperor: 'The feebleness of the feminine sex and the mutability of their hearts does not permit a woman to put herself in the highest rank in matters of faith and position, rather she is obliged to submit to masculine authority'—such was the point of view of the Frankish court, where the masculine authority of Charlemagne was prepared to occupy the highest rank.



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In the beginning there was an alliance, and the Frankish ruler promised to marry his daughter Rotrud to the young Constantine VI. This alliance lasted for six years, until Irene let it be known that she had not forgotten the former claims of the emperors to be the leaders of Christendom. She called at Nicaea a Council of all the members of the Christian Church. This was to sit in the same place and be conducted in the same manner as the Council the great Constantine had summoned for the discussion of Arianism. But now it was a woman who sat at the head of the assembly of 350 bishops, which included the representatives of the Pope. It was not for him to protest against such a course of action, for the theological differences could well be settled in the end. But if Irene signed the resolutions of the Council and thereby made them obligatory, where did this leave Charlemagne, who had deserved so well of the Church in arduous battles against the enemies of Rome and Christendom and thereby was surely entitled to preside at this assembly?

In this year, 787, the differences between Byzantium and Europe enter a new and decisive stage. It was not so much an armed dispute, though that too followed after the events of Nicaea. Charlemagne refused to send his daughter to Constantine VI, who then undertook a campaign against the partisans of the Frankish king in Lower Italy. Still more important, however, was the spiritual opposition to Byzantium, no light task considering that the Pope refused to lend his aid from the ideological side. Charlemagne had to rely on his friends at the Court, that handful of men who nevertheless represented all Europe: there was Alcuin the Anglo-Saxon, Theodulf the Visigoth, Angilbert the Frank, Arno the Bavarian, Paulus Diaconus the Lombard. These men, together with some others, made up the circle of imperialist clerics, who called Charlemagne leader of the 'chosen people', 'a second David', and protector of the *imperium Christianum*.

Their efforts were directed principally against the Council of Nicaea, the minutes of which were not at all easy to obtain. Only after a lapse of two years could a Latin translation be procured, and it was defective. Thereupon Charlemagne informed the Pope in a *Capitulare de imaginibus* of his own decision concerning the cult of images, adopting the procedure used by Byzantium in making the resolutions of Nicaea the law of the land. It is not necessary to stress the fact that this *Capitulare* defended ideas quite different from those held at Nicaea, but it is also clear that Pope Hadrian was not willing, for the sake of the Franks, to recant opinions which he had approved. In the meantime, one of Charlemagne's friends, most

probably Theodulf, had completed that famous polemic which is known as the *Libri Carolini*. This was the size of a ponderous tome and its contents were heavy with scholarship. The preface claims that the volume is the work of Charlemagne himself and gives an indication of the contents: an attack against the rulers of the East who not only defend false theological doctrine, but make themselves into idols, calling themselves 'divine' and ruling 'together with God'. When this work was read aloud to Charlemagne, he uttered words of praise at the important passages, which a cleric noted on the margin of the pages. Valuable testimony this, the exact words of the ruler in a situation which was surely more foreign to him than the practical administration of his domains. But Charlemagne was ready to turn into a theologian if his role as protector of Christendom demanded it.

That he was indeed this protector was to be proven by the Council that Charlemagne summoned to Frankfurt in 794 as a counter-weight to Nicaea. The king himself was in the chair, gave explanations of the disputed paragraphs—surely according to notes that had been put in his hand—and uttered the decisive words in the presence of the bishops of his kingdoms, the delegates from England, and the papal legates. The resolutions actually adopted were not quite in conformity with all this display of power, for the assembly could not make up its mind to relinquish more than one single principle of the Council of Nicaea. Notwithstanding, the venture was successful from the point of view of demonstrating Charlemagne's position, and another trump had been played in the game with Byzantium. It was not the only trump the Frankish king had in his hand.

A few months later the court moved to Aix-la-Chapelle, the new capital city, the construction of which had probably begun in 788. This fact does not appear of particular note in this connexion, but it is, nonetheless, of great importance. Up to this time the Frankish rulers had had no fixed capital; they travelled about in their domains according to the Germanic custom, in contrast with the practice of the Romans and also of the Popes. I have already mentioned the Lateran Palace which was but a modest residence compared with the *sacrum palatium* of Constantinople, situated between the Hippodrome and the Sea of Marmora. It was considered sacred, like all else touching the Emperor, and like his edicts, the *sacra praecepta*. The clerics of the Synod at Frankfurt had objected to this cult, but to our astonishment we hear them speak of the 'sacred palace' and the 'sacred edicts' of Charlemagne. Up to now such language had been unheard of; it gives a new significance to the words of the poets who

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proclaimed at the same time that another Rome was being built at Aix-la-Chapelle and represented their ruler in the pose of a classic sovereign who founds a city, *disponens venturae moenia Romae*.<sup>1</sup>

*Nova Roma* had, however, since the days of yore been the name of the capital which Constantine had founded for himself on the Bosphorus. When one looks at the facts, Aix-la-Chapelle was a very modest competitor of Constantinople. But the Middle Ages were used to expressing themselves in symbols, a branch could stand for a whole forest, a city gate serve as an abbreviation for an entire city. Viewed symbolically, the buildings of Aix-la-Chapelle might well represent a whole capital city.

But not every building erected by Charlemagne in Aix was such an abbreviation. There was one building which constituted a precise copy, viz., the centre of the 'sacred palace', the place where the throne of the emperor was set. This was copied from the *Chrysotriklinos* or *Christotriklinos* built by Justinian's successor. It was both throne-room and church, with a large mosaic representing the Christos. Under this picture, however, was not an altar but the throne, and on great occasions even the old throne of the sanctified divine Constantine was shown. All these things corresponded to the ideas of the emperors as to their honour and glory, for here they themselves prayed to God and here they allowed their subjects to worship them as demi-gods.

The *Chrysotriklinos* had the shape of an octagon crowned by a central dome. On the ground floor there were eight vaulted niches; the one in the east contained the throne which I just mentioned. Above the niches there was a gallery, above that, the sixteen windows of the dome. Thus the structure belonged to a very special type of church architecture, of which only three examples are preserved: the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, San Vitale in Ravenna, and the Palatine Chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle. In fact the *Chrysotriklinos* is more closely akin in some respects to Charlemagne's church than it is to the other two: for example, they both carry on top of the dome a golden 'apple', which in reality is a globe, the symbol of the dominion over the world.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller Documentation on Charlemagne, Byzantium, and Aix-la-Chapelle, see: Fichtenau, *Mitteilungen des Instituts fuer Geschichtsforschung*, vol. LIX. Vienna, 1951. Fichtenau, *Das Karolingische Imperium*. Zürich, 1949. Revised Italian edition, *L'Impero di Carlo Magno*. Bari, 1951. The same subject is treated somewhat differently in the very scholarly book of the late L. Halphen: *Charlemagne et l'Empire Carolingien*, 2nd ed. Paris, 1949. On the coronation of Charlemagne, cf. address given at Glasgow, 1949, by F. L. Ganshof: 'The Imperial Coronation of Charlemagne, Theories and Facts', Glasgow University Publ., LXXIX, 1949. For a later period, see the excellent work by R. Folz, *Le Souvenir et la Légende de Charlemagne dans l'Empire Germanique Médiéval*. Paris, 1950.

Art historians have drawn our attention to the fact that the chapel at Aix-la-Chapelle is related to San Vitale but they could not solve the riddle why that particular building and no other had attracted the interest of Master Odo, the architect of the chapel. We can solve this riddle when we think of Charlemagne's conflict with Byzantium and read in the *Libri Carolini* that Charlemagne had his ambassadors report to him in detail about the churches of Constantinople. Ravenna had been in past times the centre of Byzantine rule in Italy, and here we find the only building in the manner of the *Chrysotriklinos*, in a region where the power of the Franks was effective. If Charlemagne had sent his architect to Constantinople to study the construction of the most sacred part of the 'sacred palace', the poor man would scarcely have found the way back to Aix-la-Chapelle.

The *Chrysotriklinos* was both a throne-room and a church, and the same holds for the chapel at Aix-la-Chapelle, though here the accent has shifted: in Constantinople the throne is the more important requisite, in Aix-la-Chapelle it was the altar of Christ and that of Mary. But in Charlemagne's chapel the throne, standing in the west of the gallery had its function too: we know that he crowned his son Louis there. This shifting of the accent is quite in accordance with the teachings of the *Libri Carolini*, which intended to give honour to God before all else. These writings emphasised that the Byzantine ruler misused his office, and therefore called him sometimes 'king' of the Greeks instead of Emperor. Such views found their corroboration in the chapel at Aix-la-Chapelle which was to show that here a truly Christian lord ruled.

Books are written in less time than it takes to build such buildings: the vaulting of the chapel was completed only in 798 but the plans for it surely were made as far back as those for the *Libri Carolini*. Again we go back to the decisive years after the Council of Nicaea which paved the way for what was done, seemingly as improvisation, in 800. A further indication of the trend is also apparent: since the time of the Synod at Frankfurt Charlemagne had borne the title 'King David'. This was not a mere poetic whimsy, as one used to believe, but a political proclamation. For the people of Byzantium called their ruler by the name of this biblical king when they wished to prove his legitimate descent from the ruler of the 'chosen people', the Jews, whose heirs were the *populus Christianus*. Not only did the people of Constantinople use the name of David in their *laudes*, but the Pope himself had adopted this usage at the opening of the sixth Synod of Constantinople. At the time of the political tension between Rome and Constantinople over the cult of images, the papacy had used

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this honorific for the Frankish ruler; it was changed when Hadrian I made the compromise with Irene. It was not the Pope who reverted to this title but the scholar Alcuin, who seems to have been the first to use it. Charlemagne's other friends soon followed his example.

It is clear then, that several years before the coronation of Charlemagne the intellectual climate was set for the event. All that was missing was the actual occasion which turned these claims and wishes into an event of political significance. It was not the victory over the Avars which gave rise to this occasion, even though it certainly heightened Charlemagne's self-confidence and brought Byzantium nearer. Nor was it the upheaval in Byzantium, when Irene thrust her son Constantine VI off the throne and appeared as sole 'Emperor of the Romans'. Not even a delegation of her enemies which repaired to Charlemagne's court in 798 and, according to a recently found source, offered him the crown seems to have obtained his consent. It was the disturbance in Rome, directed against the new Pope, Leo III, that was the immediate cause of the great event; this revolt, too, seems to have been somehow connected in its origin with the Greeks who lived in Rome and had been the friends of the deceased Pope Hadrian. Leo III could not, as did his predecessor, take the position of mediator between Aix-la-Chapelle and Byzantium. He had to place himself entirely at Charlemagne's disposition. Indeed, his enemies put him in prison, whence he escaped and appeared at Aix-la-Chapelle begging for help. Charlemagne had him conveyed back to Rome and took the opportunity, much more favourable than that in 794, to show the whole world his position as the protector of Christianity and of the Church. A synod met in Rome, and Leo was restored to his office and dignities. It is probable that even more important things than the papacy were discussed, and the Pope must have known of the desires of the Frankish court, which chimed with his own needs of permanent security for Rome and the papacy. And thus the famous events of Christmas 800 came to pass: when Charlemagne rose from prayer at St. Peter's, the Pope placed a crown on his head and the 'people of Rome' intoned the chorus, which had been for ages part of the rite whereby Roman emperors and their successors in Constantinople entered into their dignities.

Byzantium looked with scorn at the barbarian who had dared to invest himself with the imperial insignia. At the same time there was grave fear lest Charlemagne conquer Sicily and from that vantage point undermine the foundations of Irene's power. By dispatching a delegation, the Empress sought to anticipate such events, but these emissaries found the

situation much more favourable than could have been expected; there was no sign of military preparations, on the contrary, an offer of an alliance by marriage. Occidental sources had good reason to be silent on the subject of the proposals that Charlemagne submitted to Constantinople; it was a Byzantine chronicler who handed them down to us, and we have no reason to mistrust him. It was an extraordinary proposal, but it was to bring about a fundamental solution of the problems which had agitated all minds ever since 787: Irene should 'submit to masculine authority' by becoming the wife of Charlemagne. If Byzantium were to recognise Charlemagne as co-emperor, the conflict would be ended for good and all, the power of the West to be joined to the legal right of the East.

But the wheel of History could not be turned back and we are spared the trouble of guessing what would have been the result of the experiment which Charlemagne proposed. Irene was not loth to accept his wooing, and for that reason was deposed by her own court, with the Frankish delegates as witnesses. It was not until many years later that a compromise was effected with Byzantium, and that was quite different from the one dreamed of in Aix-la-Chapelle. Although Charlemagne's title of Emperor was recognised, he was not to be called Emperor of the Romans, a move which safeguarded the Byzantine claims, while it satisfied at the same time at least the greater part of the Frankish aspirations. Not all of them, however: for Charlemagne was not declared co-emperor; in Byzantine opinion he bore an empty title without political content.

In this way the fact was established that henceforth there were to be two empires, an *imperium occidentale*, and an *imperium orientale*; each believed itself to be the genuine and true empire of Christendom without, however, making an effort to draw the conclusions which followed from these views. The 'imperialist clerics' had believed in a universal empire of Christendom, and yet as the instruments of historical fate had had their share in shaping a unified Europe. It is true that it was a cultural rather than a political unity, which found expression only in the person of the Emperor. The times of the old Roman empire had not returned with the events of the year 800, and the kingdoms and counties continued to be the concrete political form governing the life of Charlemagne's subjects.

It was the dynasty rather than the imperial title, which constituted the link between these kingdoms in the succeeding decades. That was not even sufficient in the time of Charlemagne's grandson, Lothar I, to prevent the slow disintegration of the domains. A hundred years after Charlemagne's death this process was completed. It was good to remember the

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golden age of his reign, but no one dared in the midst of civil war and heathen invasions to aspire to the comprehensive plans of a past epoch. Yet the French no less than the Germans clung to the notion that they were Franks, their kings called themselves *rex Francorum* and were guided by Frankish law. It might be possible for one of these kings, the west-Frankish French, or the east-Frankish German, to succeed in placing a large portion of the Carolingian inheritance under his rule and extend his hegemony as well over Italy where the Roman tradition prevailed. Then would the hour be at hand for a renewal of the claim to the imperial title, though this new empire could not possibly be the same as that of Charlemagne.

In the tenth century France had at her disposal legitimate descendants of the Carolingians, but they were practically powerless. In Germany the kings ruled with a strong hand but they were descended from those Saxon nobles who had been Charlemagne's bitter enemies. Power and legitimacy were in different hands, as had happened before; and now again—just as under the Merovingians and under Charlemagne—power was legalised by the assumption of a title. Otto I was proclaimed emperor and defended his title against Byzantium in the same way as Charlemagne, in spite of the fact that this empire was erected on a much narrower foundation and corresponded much less to the ideal of universality than the earlier one. Even so the Saxon emperors ruled over central Europe, between independent France on one side and the Slavic peoples in the east, who were already beginning to play a role in the history of Europe.

Otto I tried to convert the Slavs by force and attempted to merge them with the German domains. Otto III, son of a Byzantine princess, replaced this very simple concept with new ideas, which were none other than the old Roman-Byzantine ones. He did not want to found a universal monarchy by means of war, but desired that the princes, including the Slavic ones, should freely yield to his rule. He harked back to the old traditions of Rome, and at a time when the will to a *renovatio* of the brilliance of the old capital grew ever stronger. But Otto III was no less mindful of Aix-la-Chapelle, and of Charlemagne, whose tomb he had opened to commune with the remains of the dead emperor.

Such ideas were not so remote from reality as one might think; in Poland and in Hungary at least they led to practical results. Both these states had declined to submit to the German kingdom and yet had emphasised that they considered themselves as part of Christendom. Both Mieszko of Poland and Stephen of Hungary acknowledged the Pope as



supreme lord, a prelude to what, in the time of Gregory VII, became a fact with even larger implications. Otto III tried to subordinate the papacy to his imperial will and was on the whole successful. If the Pope was merely a functionary of the Emperor, then the latter, also in Poland and Hungary, could appear as supreme ruler of these lands.

With the death of Otto III, this imperial concept broke down, and the East declared its independence. But neither Poland nor Hungary could assert this independence in the long run nor play a leading role in Christendom or the Empire. The rulers of these countries shipwrecked on the dissensions of their subjects and their own families, just as the great Slavonic kingdom of Swatopluk was wrecked when for a moment it had seemed to bid fair to compete with the declining Frankish state. Only one Slavic country could develop a lasting imperial tradition: Russia. Vladimir, the first Christian on the throne of Rurik, a contemporary of Otto III, was celebrated in his capital Kiev as the 'new Constantine of Rome the Great', he was 'like the Apostles' and was a 'holy Czar' after the model of the great Constantine. Such claims were directed against Byzantium, not against the Western Empire with whom the Russian state was at peace. When Constantinople fell, Moscow asserted itself as the 'third Rome'. Actually 'Holy Russia' became the heir of the Byzantine Empire and took over the belief that it had a special mission among the peoples.

The Slavs have never been able seriously to dispute the Empire with the Germans. This was not true of the French where the Carolingian tradition, particularly cherished at St. Denis, was never forgotten. The fact that Frederick Barbarossa had his bishops pronounce Charlemagne a saint was due to the political situation caused by the claims of the French kings who in several cases assumed the imperial title. But only after the fall of the Hohenstauffen was the time ripe to make these claims official. Charles of Anjou bore the name of the great Emperor and considered himself the heir of the Hohenstauffen empire in Italy. He himself felt no craving after the imperial title but desired that the imperial honours should be passed on to the family of the French kings. He tried to persuade Pope Gregory X to make his nephew Philipp III emperor: '*se il estoit empereur it porroit coeillir chevaliere de par tot de monde*'—the new emperor would enlist the knighthood of all of Europe in a crusade. The attempt was not successful, and several later attempts failed likewise; the empire remained, as before, bound up with the rule of the German kings.

It is true that at that moment the imperial idea represented a great tradition, not a real political power. For in the meantime the Church had



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tried to grasp this power for itself, and wished to carry out in fact what the papacy had established as theory centuries before. Gregory VII did not want to be a functionary of the empire but judge over the kings and their liege lord. He wanted himself to protect Christendom against the heathen and was planning to gather an army of crusaders, leading them in person. Yet Gregory, no more than Innocent III later on, succeeded in treading in the steps of the Emperor. The belief was too old that the Roman Empire must continue to survive until the Day of Judgment, and that its end would mean the coming of Anti-Christ. I have compared Christendom to an ellipse having two foci, the Emperor and the Pope. It did not change. Neither was finally the victor in the embittered struggle which profited only those who least participated in it: in the West, it was the kings; in Germany and Italy, the minor local powers who became the almost unchallenged lords of their territories. The political unity of Europe was lost and so remained down to later centuries. But the struggles between popes and emperors, just like the crusades, helped to further the contacts, both intellectual and cultural, between the inhabitants of the various kingdoms. Society, both feudal and urban, was organised according to similar principles throughout Europe. In politics too, the situation we now call 'the Concert of Europe', so characteristic of modern times, was being initiated. The states refused to obey the command of a single man, indeed they joined against anyone who wished to establish a hegemony over them.

The Empire fell and the nations became its heirs; but they formed an ensemble which would not have been possible without this Empire, its idea and its traditions—derived from the time of Charlemagne. Europe is held together by a common civilisation which it has passed on to the entire world. We are sure that this civilisation will endure and we hope that it will make of all the nations of the world one great family just as, in spite of everything to the contrary, Europe is one family. It is true that from the efforts of the 'imperialist clerics' at Charlemagne's court to the present time the road was long indeed and things turned out otherwise than they imagined. But their endeavours were not in vain, and Europe, indeed the whole world, has good reason to remember them with gratitude.