

Charlemagne

Charlemagne was born in 742 AD as the oldest son of King Pippin the Short and Bertrada. At the age of 26 (in 768) Charlemagne inherited the western part of his father's kingdom while the other part was given to his younger brother Karlmann. Charlemagne's reign lasted for a period of 46 years. Because he reigned for such a long time he was able to see his life's work come to fruition, which was to increase God's realm on earth. He managed very well especially as the best part of Western Europe succumbed to his command, more or less voluntarily. Charlemagne reached the pinnacle of his career after he had conquered half of Europe. On the 25th December 800 he was crowned "Imperator Romanum" in Rome by Pope Leo III. Nobody had been given this title for more than 300 years.

This amount of power makes one assume that Charlemagne was a rigorous and uncompromising sovereign. However his biographer Einhard provides us with a character assessment that was quite different. Einhard was born in 770 as the son of wealthy landowners and became Charlemagne's biographer. He describes Charlemagne as lenient, generous in spirit and liberal. However he could also be impulsive and jump to conclusions.

Charlemagne was of an imposing stature. Being more than six feet his height was that of a blond giant and it was amplified by an enormous stomach and an upright and straight posture. This strong and vital man had 19 children and he was the epitome of the qualities of a sovereign. Apart from his mother tongue, which was Frankish, he also spoke Latin and Greek and developed the Frankish grammar. Together with his personal adviser Alkuin, who was born in 735 in Anglo Saxony as the son of aristocratic parents, he introduced a general education system, which didn't distinguish between servants and freeborn people.

In spite of his success Charlemagne kept his feet on the ground. His clothes were not very different from those that his people wore. He didn't drink too much and tried to avoid formal banquets whenever he could. Instead he loved his "Carolingian

Hall Evenings". These social events were laid back and enjoyable. The guests ate and drank as much as they liked. There was music and everybody joined in various subjects of discussion. Charlemagne liked excellent food, a fact that gave his doctors reason to worry. At events like these Charlemagne's dedication to his family became obvious because his family literally was the entire household including the servants and advisers. It is worth looking closer at his family life, which was quite different from today's understanding of a family. He had an extensive family and survived four wives. Additionally he had several unofficial wives who were called "Friedelfrauen". This way he produced eleven children from his marriages and another eight outside his marriages.

Charlemagne loved bathing in the hot springs. He spent a couple of hours every day swimming and since he enjoyed company so much, he was usually surrounded by hundreds of other people. Hunting was his favourite sport. Strangers and friends alike were always welcome at his court and he always made sure to receive them gracefully.

Shortly before his death when Charlemagne was 72 years old, the administration of the empire became more difficult. Internally the empire was threatened by riots and rebellion and externally France and Denmark posed a threat.

A hunting accident led to pleurisy. Charlemagne became seriously ill and died on January 28th 814. He was buried in the Aachen Palace Chapel (today's Cathedral) on the same day.

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