CHAPTER II

The Revival of the West

TOWARD the middle of the eighth century a certain degree of political stability seemed to be re-emerging in the lands encircling the Mediterranean Sea. The most active forces during the preceding era of rapid transformation had been the Germans, Slavs, Avars, Bulgars, and Arabs, all of whom rained sledge-hammer blows on the civilized world. By 750 their invasions seemed to have been curbed and the danger of the complete destruction of civilization averted. The Byzantines had been especially effective in containing these attacks; by conserving and organizing their strength, they had saved their empire and by mid-eighth century stood like a bulwark against further barbarian invasion. At the same time the invaders ceased to threaten. The most potent of all, the Arabs, showed signs of running out of offensive power and of being willing to settle for what they had already won. The various Germanic states in Western Europe appeared even less menacing; politically disorganized, economically impoverished, culturally barbarous, and morally backward, they certainly seemed incapable of disturbing the equilibrium of the Mediterranean area.

The promised stability, however, did not materialize. Instead, about 750 the new balance of the Mediterranean world was suddenly shattered by the explosive emergence
of a dynamic power in Western Europe. Behind the transformation of the Frankish kingdom into a major power by the Carolingian dynasty were social, religious, and cultural developments which served notice that the increased influence of the West was more than a flourish of naked power by Germanic war lords. Especially significant in the strengthening of the West was the role of the church. Under Carolingian leadership Western Europe finally became cognizant of its peculiarities and strove harder than ever to give expression to them in its own institutions.

The decline of militant expansionism among the Moslems after 750 provided a welcome relief to the Arabs’ old foes, especially the “second Rome” on the Bosporus. Moslem society underwent radical internal changes, leading toward the creation of a cosmopolitan civilization to replace the nationalistic Arab society of the heroic age of conquest. The brilliance of this new Moslem civilization, however, cast a shadow over Byzantium’s role as world cultural leader. And under Carolingian leadership, Western Europe repeatedly challenged or ignored Byzantium’s already badly shaken claims of political, religious, and cultural authority over Christendom. Thus, whereas the era from 600 to 750 was characterized chiefly by a physical shrinkage of the Byzantine world, the era extending from 750 to 850 witnessed a corresponding diminution of Byzantine prestige.

Rise and Greatness of the Carolingians as a World Power, 714–840

Shortly after his death in 814, Charlemagne’s achievement was commemorated by the following epitaph: “Beneath this tomb rests the body of Charles, the great and orthodox emperor who nobly extended the kingdom of the
Franks and ruled prosperously for forty-seven years. . . ." 
Whoever formulated this tribute came close to summarizing 
the essential features of the whole range of early Caro-
lingian achievements. For the history of Western Europe 
between the early eighth century and about 840 is primarily 
a story of how a new family became "great" in the eyes of 
the world through conquests, good and prosperous govern-
ment, and vigorous support of the true faith.

Origins of the Carolingian Family

It has been previously noted that the Merovingian dy-
nasty of the Frankish kingdom declined during the seventh 
and early eighth centuries until its scions were fittingly 
called "do-nothing" kings. Before they were formally re-
placed, their authority had been usurped by the rising 
Carolingian family. Having gained prominence in the sev-
enth century by acquiring extensive estates in Austrasia, 
the Carolingians soon achieved greater prestige than any 
other noble family by establishing hereditary control of the 
position of mayor of the palace in the service of the Mer-
ovingian rulers of that subkingdom in the northeastern part 
of the Frankish realm. The chief responsibility of this office 
was the management and disposition of the royal lands; and 
through its systematic exploitation over a considerable pe-
riod the Carolingians managed to build up a strong follow-
ing. By extending to the Austrasian nobles parcels of royal 
lands in return for loyal support, the Carolingian mayors of 
the palace succeeded in commanding greater loyalty among 
the nobles than did the weak kings.

The ambitious mayors next launched their forces beyond 
Austrasia into the conflicts raging among the various 
branches of the Merovingian family. Success in this ven-
ture came to Pepin of Heristal, the first Carolingian who
Heirs of the Roman Empire

stands out clearly in history. Posing as a champion of the Merovingian king of Austrasia whom he served as mayor of the palace, Pepin waged war on the mayor of the palace of Neustria, who was trying to exalt his branch of the Merovingian royal family. In 687 by virtue of a decisive military victory, Pepin established dominance over Neustria and then over Burgundy. His victory not only checked the territorial disintegration of the Frankish state and re instituted a single political regime, but enabled him to serve as mayor of the palace for the reunited Merovingian kingdom.

The Carolingians gained new prominence under Charles Martel, son of Pepin and mayor of the palace from 714 to 741. Charles’s policy is very well summed up by the sobriquet “Martel,” which means “the Hammer.” For Charles was essentially a ruthless warrior who crushed internal resistance to the authority of the monarch and beat back foreign attackers. His chief victims within the boundaries of the Frankish kingdom were great noble families who sought to defy the authority of the crown. Although the Carolingians themselves had only recently risen to power by usurping their kings’ authority and wealth, under Charles Martel the family switched its policy to a jealous protection of royal power against the ambitions of the nobility. In order to subdue nobles and to defend the frontiers Charles Martel concentrated military power in his own hands as mayor of the palace. The problem of defense was complicated by a change in methods of warfare which saw the infantryman replaced by the armored cavalryman as the main element of an army. Charles solved the two basic problems inherent in this military transformation by building up a body of loyal vassals bound to the king and his
mayor of the palace by oaths of personal loyalty and large
grants of land, some of it taken from the church.

The land was not merely intended to attach the nobles
to the king but to make it possible for them to support the
 crushing expense—under prevailing economic conditions—
of feeding their chargers and of devoting themselves almost
exclusively to training in the difficult art of fighting in the
saddle. Finally the land was retained by the nobles only so
long as they were loyal in the performance of the expensive
services they owed. So successful was Charles in develop-
ing this revolutionary fighting force that he was able to win
impressive victories over formidable foreign opponents.
His most famous victory came in 732 near Tours, when he
defeated a Moslem raiding party, but nearly as impressive
were his victories over the pagan Saxons and Frisians, who
menaced the northeastern frontier of the kingdom. By the
end of his life Charles was widely respected. Although he
was still only mayor of the palace, he used his personal
power to run the kingdom as he saw fit. The Carolingians
were in fact masters of a large state although as yet they
wore no crown.

Pepin the Short (741–768)

The prestige of the Carolingians continued to grow un-
der Charles Martel's successor, Pepin the Short. Never for
a moment abandoning Martel's policy of ruthless suppres-
sion of those who resisted central authority and of stout
defense of the frontiers, Pepin succeeded in broadening
Carolingian policy in several significant directions.

Probably most important was his active support of the
most progressive religious forces of the era. Frankish rulers
had traditionally posed as protectors of Christianity. How-
ever, Merovingian efforts in that direction had not had the happiest results; the kings' policy encouraged the growth of a Frankish national church which had little connection with the rest of the Christian world and extended the practice of secularizing church offices and property. The outcome was a deepening corruption of religious life which reached scandalous proportions early in the eighth century. Almost from the moment they gained power the Carolingians manifested an inclination to assist the church in resolving its problems. Pepin of Heristal, Charles Martel, and Carloman (Pepin the Short's brother, who shared the office of mayor of the palace with Pepin briefly) all gave active support to missionary effort. Charles Martel and Carloman also aided Boniface, an English Benedictine, in his missionary efforts to organize bishoprics, recruit priests, and found monasteries among the newly Christianized lands along the eastern frontier of the Frankish kingdom. Pepin continued this tradition by helping to initiate religious reform. Guided largely by Boniface, who was acting under papal orders, Pepin attempted to strengthen church organization, improve the quality of the clergy, end pagan practices, and deepen Christian piety. As a consequence, the papacy began to enjoy a larger role in the affairs of the Frankish kingdom. Although the task of reforming the Frankish church was much too overwhelming to complete for decades, Pepin and his family began immediately to garner prestige as servants of religion, thus adding an important new honor to their already great reputation as warriors and administrators.

Pepin's religious policy went even farther than accepting responsibility for the welfare of the Frankish church; before the end of his reign he had shouldered the burden of protecting the papacy, a responsibility that implied a pro-
tectorate over all Western Christendom. The alliance between Rome and the Franks arose out of their mutual need for assistance. Probably the popes' need was the greater. Since the time of Gregory the Great (590–604) the papacy aspired to some degree of temporal independence in Italy as a buttress for its spiritual pre-eminence; and what political strength it was able to muster was based in large part on its territorial possessions in Italy. The popes, however, not being strong enough to retain those possessions by themselves, were forced to rely on the protection of an outside power. For about a century after Gregory’s pontificate the Byzantine emperors acted as papal protectors. They allowed the papacy considerable latitude in managing its affairs in Rome and the immediate environs and at the same time held back the aggressive Lombards, who constantly threatened the Italian territories of both emperors and popes. Occasionally the popes sought to improve their position by playing the Lombards off against the Byzantines, but in general they relied on Constantinople for protection. Early in the eighth century this arrangement began to break down. The Byzantine emperors, staggering under the blows of the Moslems, found it more and more difficult to fulfill their traditional role in Italy and were forced to leave the papacy increasingly to the mercy of the Lombards. Finally after 726, when the papacy condemned the iconoclastic policy of the emperors, co-operation between the papacy and the emperors became virtually impossible. The Lombards were not slow to take advantage of Byzantine weakness and the religious quarrel between Rome and Constantinople to seize papal possessions in Italy.

Faced with the Lombard threat and the unreliability of their traditional protectors, the popes inevitably turned to the rising Carolingian mayors of the palace, who had al-
ready shown themselves favorably inclined toward the papacy in missionary and reforming work. To the initial papal appeals for military aid, Charles Martel made no reply. Pepin, however, was of a different mind. Perhaps he found it difficult to resist the popes, who by the 740's were proclaiming to the whole world that Pepin alone could save the territory and the independence of the see of St. Peter.

Pepin also had problems of his own which required the collaboration of the bishop of Rome. Still only mayor of the palace, he served kings who did nothing while he fought the wars, kept the peace, and promoted the true religion. To change this preposterous situation, however, involved a serious risk of rebellion. The Franks, like all Germans, believed that God had bestowed a special sanctity on those who carried royal blood in their veins and that to bestow the crown on any but a member of the royal family was sacrilege. The Carolingians were not of royal blood and therefore it was unthinkable in the customary scheme of things to depose even a do-nothing Merovingian and elect an upstart such as Pepin to the kingship. Brute strength to carry out the change of dynasty was not enough, and Pepin therefore sought some authority whose approval of his act would supply the necessary aura of legality and receive wide acceptance. The bishop of Rome seemed to meet these exacting specifications. In 749 Pepin sent a legate to Rome requesting a papal opinion about a change of dynasty, and the pope answered that "it is better that the man who has the real power should have the title of king instead of the man who has the mere title but no power." With this sanction, the Frankish nobles elected Pepin king of the Franks in 751; and the papal legate, Boniface, anointed the new king. This ceremony, never previously employed by
the Franks, was probably based on the Old Testament passage describing the anointment of Saul by Samuel and signified to contemporaries that Pepin was more than king in the old tribal sense. He was king by the grace of God. The prestige of the Carolingians had been elevated to new heights; they had become kings of the Franks instead of mayors of the palace and had received a special designation from the greatest ecclesiastical authority in Christendom. With one stroke they had become unique among rulers in the West.

The alliance between popes and Carolingians was drawn still tighter in the years immediately following Pepin’s elevation. Lombard pressure on the papal states increased steadily, finally culminating in 751 in the seizure of Byzantine holdings in northern Italy and a direct attack on Rome. In desperation Pope Stephen II (752–757) undertook the hazardous trip across the Alps in midwinter. Reaching Gaul early in 754, he was received with great respect by Pepin and after a series of discussions was given assurance of aid. In a solemn church ceremony Stephen personally consecrated the Frankish king, his queen, and his sons, obviously attempting to increase the prestige of the recently crowned family. Pepin in return made a promise to restore certain territories in Italy claimed by the papacy, but exactly what territories is not now clear. Apparently Stephen had confronted Pepin with the famous Donation of Constantine. This document, probably forged for the occasion, was compiled from legends current in the eighth century. Purporting to be an edict issued by Constantine at the time that he moved his capital to Constantinople in 330, it stated that the emperor turned over to the pope full authority to rule the West, together with specific possession of Rome and Italy. Since Pepin apparently had promised to restore these
territories in some degree, the pope completed the new arrangement by granting him the title of "Patrician of the Romans." Previously the Latin title "patricius" had designated a Byzantine official holding certain powers, in Rome and other imperial cities, which could only be granted by the emperor. Stephen, of course, had no idea of making Pepin an agent of Byzantium, but rather of arrogating to himself as pope the emperor's power to bestow the titles and to signify that Pepin was now the protector of the papacy and of the Roman population. Perhaps the title was even intended to imply that the Frankish king was the defender of all who professed the Roman faith.

Pepin acted promptly to fulfill his obligation toward the papacy. In spite of the reluctance of some of his nobles, he undertook two military campaigns against the Lombards in 755 and 756 to protect the territories claimed by the pope. During the first expedition he presented a document to Stephen which came to be known as the "Donation of Pepin" and which ordered the Lombards to restore certain territories lying roughly between Ravenna and Rome. In the eyes of the West, at least, this provided a legal basis for the papal states even though much of the territory included was actually Byzantine property. Pepin and Stephen were obviously little concerned with the rights of the emperor even though an embassy from Constantinople protested the action.

The events of 754-756 strengthened the bond between the papacy and the Carolingians. The Carolingians owed their crown to papal sanction, and the papal states, which were the key to papal independence, owed their legal existence to the king of the Franks. The popes had exchanged their Byzantine protectors for Frankish guardians and had profited in the exchange by laying claim to and taking pos-
session of Byzantine territory. The alliance with the Franks was destined to determine papal policy for a long period in the future.

After 756, Pepin’s policy in Italy was less incisive and vigorous. For the rest of his reign the popes begged him incessantly for more decisive intervention, but without success. By his failure to eliminate the Lombards as a factor in Italian affairs, Pepin left the popes in a dependent state. At the same time he was probably more deeply involved in the fate of Italy and the papacy than he realized, particularly as a result of his casual disposal of Byzantine lands and titles. In any case, there can be no doubt that his actions radically altered the role of the Carolingians. By using papal sanction to aid his exchange of status from that of royal servant to king, Pepin involved himself and his successors in the reform of the Frankish church on the Roman model, the protection of the papacy and its Italian territories. No other Western European dynasty could claim so extended or exalted a role.

Charlemagne, 768–814

It was Pepin’s son, Charles the Great, who not only brought the Carolingian dynasty to its full glory but gave it its name. Following lines of policy already charted by Charles Martel and Pepin, Charlemagne achieved success in nearly every venture he undertook. Graced with a dynamic personality and great talent, he made a strong impression on all his contemporaries. His powerful physique, unbounded energy, personal courage, not to mention his love of hunting and the banquet hall, made him a natural leader of the Frankish warriors who constituted his chief support. His deep piety, expressing itself in constant attendance at religious services and in a genuine concern
for the welfare of the church, endeared him to the clergy. By the standards of his day, Charles was well educated for a layman. He spoke and read Latin, an accomplishment which permitted him to enjoy the company of the scholars who gathered about him at his chief residence in Aachen.

Charles earned glory first as a conqueror. In the spring of almost every year of his reign he summoned his great nobles to a meeting at one of his residences. Each came armed and supplied for a campaign. After joining the clergy in whatever political deliberations the king proposed, the warriors set off for a campaign that usually lasted into the summer. Sometimes the nobles and their entourages were joined by infantry contingents of freemen mustered by royal officials. Charles himself often led these expeditions, but on occasion, especially when more than one army had to be sent out, he would entrust commands to faithful vassals. The success of these repeated campaigns expanded the Frankish kingdom into an empire embracing more territory than had been controlled by any single ruler in the west since the fall of Rome.

Charles's first decisive military venture was the victorious conclusion of the struggle his father had begun with the Lombards. Invading Italy in 773, he drove the Lombard army behind the walls of the royal capital at Pavia and after a long siege reduced them to capitulation. So complete was his victory that Charlemagne was able to depose the Lombard king, assume the crown himself, and annex all Lombard lands. This gave him control of all Italy except the Byzantine territories in the southern part of the peninsula, but he recognized the pope's authority in the territories assigned to him by the Donation of Pepin, and in return assumed the title of Patrician of the Romans.

Even before concluding this settlement in Italy, Charles
had undertaken his first campaign against the Saxons. These Germanic barbarians proved his most stubborn foe for over thirty years. Divided into small tribal principalities, the Saxons were no match for the Frankish armies in pitched battle. The Franks, however, found it extremely difficult to convert their military victories into effective control. Since there was no single Saxon ruler with whom they could reach a binding settlement, they were forced to leave small contingents behind to guard Frankish interests after each campaign. Against this form of restraint the savage natives regularly rebelled, slaughtering the small garrisons, and inevitably brought Charles back on another campaign of brutal repression. During one such campaign he slaughtered 4,500 Saxon captives in an attempt to avenge their treachery and to prove the folly of resisting the Franks. He also insisted that the Saxons accept Christianity as a token of submission and on more than one occasion herded them together for forced baptism. Charles also resorted to a policy of forcibly resettling large numbers of Saxons in various parts of the Frankish kingdom. In the course of their struggles with the Franks the Saxons had enlisted the support of the Frisians, another Germanic people living along the North Sea coast from the Rhine to the Weser rivers, making it necessary for Charles to conquer them too as a part of his final destruction of the Saxons.

In the intervals between Saxon campaigns Charles sought to expand the Frankish frontiers toward the southeast and the southwest. His target in the southeast was the Avar Empire lying astride the Danube. This nomadic warrior people of Asian origin had, during the seventh and eighth centuries, created a large state by conquering many weak Slavic tribes. Their raids in search of booty constantly menaced the Frankish state and finally provoked Charlemagne
to counterattack. A preliminary expedition in 791 was followed by a full-scale campaign against the Avars in 796, which captured their great fortified camp near the mouth of the Theiss River, seized a vast accumulation of booty, and destroyed their military power, allowing Charlemagne to annex territory along the Danube.

In 778, Charlemagne led an army across the Pyrenees into Moslem Spain. This first campaign resulted in a series of defeats, climaxcd by the destruction of the Frankish rear guard in the pass of Roncesvalles in a battle immortalized in the mediaeval French epic The Song of Roland. However, Charles later returned to the attack and before his death had established Frankish power as far south as the Ebro River. Brittany, a land largely inhabited by Celtic peoples who had fled the British Isles during the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the fifth century and who had enjoyed virtual independence ever since, was also conquered and annexed to the Frankish realm.

In the midst of these numerous campaigns against foreign foes, Charles occasionally had to deal with serious separatist movements of non-Frankish elements within his kingdom. In Aquitaine, where a strong Gallo-Roman nobility still survived, a rebellion had to be suppressed by force in 769. But serious restlessness continued until in 781 Charles finally granted the areas limited autonomy as a separate kingdom under Frankish overlordship and placed his son Louis on the throne. The Bavarians also clashed with the Franks on several occasions but Charlemagne reduced their resistance by replacing the native duke with Frankish agents in 788.

The object of Charles's campaigns was never mere conquest of territory. Instead he regularly attempted to introduce strong political institutions which would make the conquered peoples truly his subjects. Although they were
permitted to live under their old systems of law, they were usually governed by trusted Frankish counts and dukes who not only exercised the king's power but were responsible for guarding the exposed frontiers. Especially important in Charles's program for incorporating new territories was his insistence upon the Christianization of conquered peoples and the immediate institution of a church organization. As a result of these efforts Charles managed to convince most of his subjects that he was more than a greedy conqueror. Instead he was hailed as a champion who protected his Christian subjects from the grave peril posed by barbarians, pagans, and infidels and promoted the cause of God. Popes, poets, and nobles hailed him as "the strong right arm of God."

While expending an extraordinary amount of energy as leader of successful military ventures, Charles sought to improve the quality of the government he headed. In general, he did not attempt any revolutionary changes, but through constant legislation and careful supervision sought to infuse a new spirit into the administration of the kingdom his dynasty had seized from the Merovingians. His main concern was the establishment and maintenance of peace and order among his subjects. Charles was ruthless in his suppression of internal dissension, whether of Frankish or barbarian origin. Orderly life required rule according to law, and he made a strong effort to provide competent courts where all free men could find protection of their hereditary rights. To create a government capable of bringing peace and order to so vast an empire called for a loyal body of royal officials. It was no small task to select competent men from the ranks of the nobility and higher clergy, to instill in them a sense of responsibility, and to control them once they had been invested with
power. Moreover, the decline of the money economy in the Carolingian state and the consequent reduction of the king's income greatly increased the difficulty. As a consequence of the disappearance of the royal revenues and the frequent failure of lines of communication within the empire, the counts and dukes who represented the king in the local areas could only be paid effectively in grants of land, with the inevitable risk that they would use these resources as a base for defying the king himself. To obviate this danger, Charles attempted to bind his officials with personal oaths of allegiance and to control them by *missi*, itinerant agents sent out from the royal court. He also issued a constant stream of instructions, called capitularies, to guide and define the activities of all his officials. In the strong and able hands of Charles, this cumbersome system not only worked amazingly well but succeeded in re-establishing the prestige of the monarchy as a civilized and useful institution.

Charles clearly recognized that Christianity was the strongest bond of unity in his diverse empire. This realization, reinforced by his great personal piety, led him to develop a strong religious policy with the support of the chief religious leaders of the period, especially the popes. So eager was he to save souls and to add new converts to the Christian camp that he sometimes resorted to what a contemporary called "baptism with the sword." With equal vigor he pressed forward with the reform of the Church begun by his father. The Roman liturgy continued to spread with royal support. On a few occasions he even took it upon himself to define dogma, especially in connection with the iconoclastic quarrel, and to instill in his subjects a deeper knowledge of Christian doctrine. Nowhere in Christendom did there appear to be a greater champion
of the faith. Most Western Europeans would have agreed with the contemporary author who wrote, “fortunate is the people exalted by a prince and sustained by a preacher of the faith whose right hand brandishes the glove of triumph and whose lips sound the trumpet of the true faith.” It is little wonder that he was often hailed as the “most Christian king” or the “new Constantine.”

The indefatigable Charles further distinguished himself by the ardor with which he promoted the cultural life of his court and realm. His biographer Einhard says that he “most zealously cultivated the liberal arts, held those who taught them in great esteem and conferred great honors upon them.” The king personally enjoyed reading. His favorite books included Augustine’s *City of God*, the Bible, and some of the Latin classics. He apparently also admired the heroic tales of the ancient Germanic tribes; at least he was alleged to have ordered that these oral accounts be written down so that they might be preserved. Most of all, however, Charles delighted in the company of the scholars who were attracted to his palace school at Aachen. This group, drawn by Charles from all over Europe, was dominated by the great Alcuin, who had already established a reputation as a teacher and scholar in England before coming to Aachen. From Italy came the Lombard historian, Paul the Deacon, and the grammarian and poet, Peter of Pisa. One of the best classicists of the day, Theodolf, was a Visigoth from Spain. Several Franks joined the circle, the most distinguished being Angilbert and Einhard, whose biography of Charles supplies the best-known picture of his court. The main purpose of the school was to teach students recruited from among the sons of the Frankish nobles and destined for service in the royal court or high office in the church. But assembled scholars
also found time to read classical authors, Scripture, and theology, to collect books, and to compose poems, histories, grammars, and religious expositions. In addition, they often joined the king and his close friends to discuss history, Christian dogma, poetry, astronomy, and rhetoric. This was, however, such an extraordinary and self-conscious form of conversation that each participant was given a name drawn from the literature of the past; Charles was David, Alcuin was Horace, and Angilbert was Homer. The scholars of the court school generated a notable revival of interest in and knowledge of Latin and patristic culture, and their spirit reached out across the kingdom and fell on the fertile soil of the Benedictine monasteries. Thus, before Charlemagne’s death cultural subjects had again acquired a prestige and incited a passion in his realm that further encouraged contemporaries to think that all good things stemmed from the Carolingian dynasty.

Charles’s great success made his next step seem logical and perhaps even necessary in the rise of the Carolingians. On Christmas Day, 800, Charles was in Rome to exercise his authority as Patrician of the Romans. While Charles was engaged in a campaign against the Saxons in 799, Pope Leo III fled to Charles to complain that his enemies had attacked him in the midst of a public procession through the streets of Rome and had tried to blind him and tear out his tongue. Leo asked Charles to settle the problem. Charles therefore journeyed to Rome. After deliberations with his advisers and with Leo he exonerated the pope of any blame in the affair and restored Leo to authority. The king then stayed on to celebrate Christmas by attending services in the most famous church in Christendom, the basilica of St. Peter. While the king was kneeling in prayer, prior to the celebration of the Christmas Mass, Leo III
placed on his head a crown and the assembled crowd shouted three times, "Life and victory to the august Charles, crowned by God, great and pacific emperor of the Romans." The pope then prostrated himself before Charles and adored him.

The intent and import of the event of 800 still puzzles historians. Certainly the coronation was in part the final step in the efforts of the popes to attach themselves to the Carolingians and seemed a kind of symbolic act of jubilation, celebrating the wisdom of the papal choice of strong protectors of civilization and the orthodox religion. After Charlemagne had destroyed Lombard power and made himself master of a large part of Italy, the title Patrician of the Romans, granted by the papacy to Pepin and assumed by Charlemagne, proved to be inadequate. It neither gave the Frankish ruler clear legal basis for his protection of the papacy in Rome nor defined the obligations of the Frankish king to the popes. Popes had long been accustomed to conducting themselves in a political framework controlled by an emperor with well-defined powers. With the disappearance of Byzantine influence from most of Italy in the eighth century, however, the papacy was left without a functioning legal system within which to work. The Frankish "Patrician" did not effectively take the legal place of the Byzantine "emperor," and Leo III, after being brutally attacked by a Roman mob, seems to have conceived the idea of making Charles emperor as the only means of constituting an official power capable of pacifying the city of Rome. The Carolingians, and especially Charlemagne, had championed the papacy long enough to seem worthy of such a role.

Some of Charles's contemporaries, and perhaps Charles himself, tried to represent the coronation of 800 as solely
the responsibility of the papacy. Charles's biographer, Einhard, said that Charles so disliked the act of coronation that, even though it was a great feast day, he would never have gone to the church where he was crowned had he known what the pope intended to do. But this statement can hardly be accepted at face value. For one thing the coronation could not have occurred unless Charles wanted it, and for another it provided the only logical solution to many problems confronting him. His successful conquests made his existing designation of Patrician inadequate to his true situation. Especially troublesome was his role in Italy, where he was assuming the responsibilities, without the title, of emperor. Several of Charles's closest advisers, especially the great Anglo-Saxon scholar, Alcuin, insisted that their master deserved glorification for his work as warrior, religious leader, cultural patron, and legislator. Since most of these men were scholars cognizant of the Roman tradition, it seemed only fitting that their hero should enjoy a title elevating him to equality with the great rulers of Rome.

His religious work especially convinced his followers that he was the rightful heir to the great Christian emperors like Constantine, and Charles himself grew increasingly aware of the position of his state as a world power. He resented accepting a place secondary to that of the Byzantine emperors, who condescendingly addressed him as "son" in diplomatic exchanges, but who nevertheless failed to protect the papacy, perpetuated what to the Western Europeans were false doctrines, seldom won military victories, and demonstrated a penchant for intrigue unbecoming Christian princes. This feeling became more intense after 797, when a woman, Irene, deposed her son, blinded him, and assumed the imperial crown in Con-
stantinople. Perhaps it seemed to Charlemagne necessary to rescue the imperial diadem from what many in the West judged to be the unworthy hands of Irene in much the same way that Pepin had rescued the royal crown from the unworthy Merovingians a generation earlier.

It would be hard to argue, therefore, that Charles did not want the imperial crown, although it is quite likely he did not want it at the time and under the circumstances in which he actually received it. He may have feared that his coronation by the pope implied the subordination of the imperial office to a religious dignitary whose position Charles never considered superior to his own. In his scheme of things he was God’s most potent servant, charged with supervising papal conduct in the same fashion that he regulated other phases of religious life. Perhaps Charles also felt uneasy accepting the crown in Rome, far from his beloved palace at Aachen, from his trusted advisers, and from his Germanic followers. Most of all Charles was concerned over Byzantine reaction to his coronation, but if he hoped that by attributing the responsibility to the pope he could allay Byzantine suspicions he was sadly mistaken. His coronation was deeply resented in Constantinople, and not until 812 did the Byzantine emperors finally recognize Charlemagne’s imperial title. Even this recognition was only momentary, for the Greeks refused to accept Charlemagne’s Frankish successors as emperors.

Louis the Pious, 814–840

Charles’s successor, Louis the Pious, is usually not ranked in the same company with his immediate predecessors. In view of the difficulties that began to plague the Carolingian empire during his reign, there is some justice in demoting him from the ranks of outstanding Carolingians. However,
in the framework of an inquiry tracing the expanding prestige of the Carolingians, his reign is of great importance in defining the nature of the emperorship and the role of the emperor.

Under Charlemagne there was considerable confusion and uncertainty over the meaning of the imperial title. Was Charles the only true emperor or must he share the title with the ruler in Constantinople? Was the new empire to remain unified or could Charles divide it as was the Frankish custom? Did the new office bring its holder new powers or was the title merely an honor signifying little? Did the emperor owe his office to the papacy or could he receive it by other means? In the last years of his reign Charles seemed not to have any clear consistent view of the nature of his imperial position.

His son and successor Louis the Pious, however, attempted to answer these problems. He was firmly convinced that the bearer of the imperial title had a great responsibility to labor for the creation of a more Christian society; the empire recently created must be an imperium Christianum before it was anything else. Louis sought to embody this ideal in an intensified program of religious reform that occupied most of his energies during the early part of his reign. He launched his reform in a dramatic fashion immediately after his father's death by purging the court at Aachen. Several notables were forced to retire to monasteries as punishment for their lax morality. Louis' sisters, one of whom had borne illegitimate children fathered by Angilbert, the "Homer" of the court circle, were compelled to take the veil.

A puritanical Benedictine monk, Benedict of Aniane, was brought from Aquitaine and installed in a monastery near Aachen as Louis' chief adviser, replacing the more worldly
churchmen and nobles that had surrounded Charlemagne. Under the inspiration of Benedict a series of laws were then promulgated touching on every aspect of religious life. Poets and artists filled their works with discussions and representations of themes that stressed religious responsibilities, the ultimate effect being that the empire was "holy" above all things and that the most desirable quality of the emperor was "piety." Louis' religious sentiments were so powerful that he allowed the papacy to assume the role of grantor of the imperial office. Louis had already been crowned emperor in 813, when his father summoned an assembly of notables to Aachen and in their presence imposed the imperial crown on his son with his own hands and without the assistance of the clergy. But in 816 the pope came to Louis' court and anointed him in a ceremony which implied that papal sanctification alone gave substance to the imperial crown and that the empire was Roman in its origin. Louis' most important act toward defining the nature of the empire came a year later when he issued a document regulating the disposition of his empire among his three sons. His decree provided that one would be called "emperor" and would receive the largest portion of the imperial territory, while the other two would receive the title of "king" and smaller portions of territory. To assure the unity of the empire, however, the holder of the imperial title was granted supremacy over the kings, who would rule their allotted principalities under his general supervision.

Louis' attempt to define with greater clarity the nature of imperial office obviously exalted the Frankish ruler in the eyes of those who sympathized with him. As will be seen later, Louis' concept of empire was too exalted for the resources he commanded and for the sentiments of the
society he directed. And so during his reign the Carolingian empire was constantly threatened with catastrophe. Nevertheless, Louis represented the Carolingian dynasty at the peak of its power and prestige. His title, "Emperor Augustus by the ordinance of divine providence," symbolized a degree of power far excelling the rank held by his family in the seventh century, when the Carolingians were merely rich nobles in the kingdom of Austrasia. Western Europe had at last produced a dynasty whose fame was widely known. For the moment at least the West had emerged from the shadows.

Nature of Carolingian Society

Merely to relate the success of the Carolingians by no means does justice to the dynasty's role in history, for it represents that moment when at least the ruling elements became fully aware of the fact that Western Europe had been launched on its own destiny. Carolingian history, therefore, is more than a record of events falling between two dates; it is the story of the genesis of a conscious and unique state of mind in the West. And yet the persistence of Germanic institutions and influences were so obvious as to raise doubts about the existence of an independent Carolingian society, standing distinctly apart from the earlier Germanic peoples of the West. Germanic law, for example, remained dominant in spite of the extensive legislation of the Carolingian kings, and almost no changes were made in the Germanic form of government inherited from the Merovingians. The Carolingian princes were all warriors in much the same sense that the old tribal chiefs had been. Even Charlemagne in 806 divided his empire in the manner of family property among his three sons living at that time, thereby throwing doubt on the serious-
ness with which he accepted the implications of the imperial title of 800. The Carolingians depended in the main on the support of the great noble families of Austrasia, assuring the predominance of a Germanic aristocracy in Carolingian society. The few insights that one can gain into the manner of living characteristic of the Carolingian age suggest the persistence of barbarism, violence, ignorance, and superstition. For all the revival of Latin learning there is clear evidence that the Germanic language prevailed over a considerable area of the empire and that the development of a barbarized Latin—the romance languages—began in pre-Carolingian times and used by people in the daily conduct of life proceeded unhindered in its remaining parts.

Although evidence of this kind tends to suggest that the Carolingian era merely marked a continuation of the Germanization of the West, the survival and even the development of pronounced Germanic qualities provided a unique element in Western Europe's progress toward the creation of an independent civilization. But the mere persistence of Germanic traits does not account for all the new features that emerged to divide the West even more distinctly from the rest of the world.

Nowhere was this clearer than in political development. If Carolingian government differed little in outward form from early Germanic regimes, especially the Merovingian, it did have its own distinctive features. Perhaps most important was the clarification of the political alliance between kings and landed nobles which stemmed from the embryonic feudal order of the Merovingian period. Under the Carolingian princes, government depended largely upon the performance of services by men bound to the king by oaths of obedience and by grants of land. In this recip-
rocal system the land enabled its recipient to render the services to which he was obligated by his oath. The various instrumentalities regulating and defining this lord-vassal relationship were given sharper legal definition during the Carolingian era. Not only did Charlemagne himself devote much of his political efforts to the systematic exaction of services owed him by his noble vassals, but all of the Carolingians sought, on the whole successfully at least to 840, to convince their vassals that everyone's good lay in mutual service. In the pursuit of this policy they insisted that oaths of fealty be sanctioned by religion, bestowed liberal grants of land, provided impressively bold leadership in war, meted out vigorous punishment for disloyalty or rebellion, consulted constantly with the great men of the realm, and imposed speedy justice on wrongdoers. But in no way did even the most successful implementation of this policy impede the solidification of feudal institutions as a political system peculiar to Western Europe. This system of government stood in sharp contrast to the centralized, bureaucratic governments of Byzantium and the Moslem Empire.

Perhaps the ability of Carolingian rulers to utilize these basic feudal relationships for their own benefit and to persuade the powerful landed nobles to support them depended on a renewed awareness of the purpose of the state and the ruler which clearly manifested itself in this period. The early Germanic kingdoms, including the Merovingian Frankish state, had suffered seriously from the view, shared by rulers and ruled alike, that government was nothing more than a device for personal gain. The true greatness of the Carolingians derived largely from the fact that they transcended this corrosive concept of power.

In the Christian religion the Carolingians also began to
find a new sense of direction for their energies as rulers. Spelled out simply, they felt a compulsion to guide their subjects to eternal salvation, to shape here on earth a community of the faithful where good would prevail, to create an earthly city of God. Charlemagne seems at times to have considered himself a superpriest ordained by God to survey every aspect of life and to "correct" it in terms of his understanding of Christianity. This theocratic impulse prompted him to order popes, bishops, and abbots to amend their lives, to correct clerical abuses, to define theology, to direct the use of ecclesiastical wealth, and to supplement church funds with grants from the royal treasury. In addition many of his secular political actions—war, suppression of rebellion, administration of justice, patronage of learning—were directed toward religious ends. Thus in a brief span of time a new concept of the good prince developed in Western Europe. Far more refined than earlier Germanic concepts and far different from the Roman idea of the perfect ruler, this Carolingian ideal of the Christian prince long influenced political life in Western Europe. It is not to be wondered at that Charlemagne was glorified in legend throughout the Middle Ages; his earnest and vigorous service to the ideal of the Christian prince so impressed his age that he became the image of the perfect ruler.

The elevation of Charlemagne to the rank of emperor in 800 was the dramatic expression of the new political independence of the West and of the consciousness of many western Christians of the excellence of their Christian prince. Believing him truly worthy of his new title, many of Charles's advisers expected his Christian leadership to be even more effective after he became emperor. Even though they fully realized that neither the extent nor char-
acter of his rule could properly be compared with those of the earlier Roman emperors, they still thought him worthy of the imperial dignity because of his great service to God. Alcuin, the most influential scholar of Charlemagne's day, expressed the sentiment of many pious men when in 799 he wrote a letter to Charlemagne summarizing the world situation. He pointed out that up to that moment three dignitaries had stood at the head of the world: pope, Byzantine emperor, and Frankish king. Now two of the dignitaries had come on evil days; the pope had been beaten by a street mob in Rome, and a woman had usurped the imperial crown. Then Alcuin continued:

Now in the third place is the royal dignity which our Lord Jesus Christ has reserved to you so that you might govern the Christian people. This dignity surpasses the other two in power; it excels them in wisdom, and exceeds them in regnal dignity. It is now on you alone that rests the support of the churches of Christ, on you alone that depends their safety; on you, avenger of crimes, guide to those who err, consoler of the afflicted, exalter of the good.¹

Once having acquired the imperial title, Charles and especially his son Louis took special pains to give it meaning that accentuated its Frankish and Western character. Neither really sought to realize the universal power over the whole civilized world implied in their new title of Roman emperor. They claimed no more than coequality with the emperor in Constantinople and the right to rule their own western domain according to their own peculiar needs and views. Both rulers sought to give expression to the political realities of the era, to acknowledge and act on the fact

¹ Alcuin, Epist., #174, ed. E. Dümmler, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae, IV (Berlin, 1895), 288; tr. by the author.
that new, unique political institutions and ideals had emerged in Western Europe.

Religious development further reinforced political evolution in this early Carolingian period by increasing the differences separating the West from the rest of the Christian world. The rapid consolidation of Roman Christianity was the most significant product of Carolingian reliance on and support of the bishop of Rome. It was this intimate union between the papacy and the Carolingians which made possible the realization of Gregory the Great's dream of a religious community directed from Rome. The popes gained possession of a sizable papal state in Italy and the protection of the strongest princes in the west, laying the true basis for their independence. The Carolingian rulers in their role as religious reformers worked to institute Roman usages in liturgy and discipline throughout their vast realm, the result being that a considerable degree of religious uniformity was effected by the beginning of the ninth century. The widespread adoption of the Benedictine rule as a guide for monastic life in the Carolingian Empire resulted in a growth in the numbers of "soldiers of Christ" bent on propagating Roman usages and ideas. The close co-operation practiced by the Carolingians and the popes in missionary work resulted in the widespread acceptance of Roman guidance in matters of dogma, ecclesiastical organization, and discipline, as well as of Carolingian authority. In providing the Carolingians first with a royal title and then with an imperial crown, the papacy not only played a new role but achieved a new and exalted position for itself as well as for its protégés. These developments all meant that during the early Carolingian era Roman Christianity became an effective force over most of Western Europe instead of only in parts of Italy and in a few
missionary areas on the fringe of Christendom, as had previously been the case.

The cultural revival nurtured by Charles, which has come to be known as the Carolingian renaissance, also served to accentuate in the minds of Western Europeans the concept of an independent Christian West. Believing that sound political administration, effective moral reform, and the purification of religious services depended upon the existence of an educated class, the king promoted cultural revival to serve practical ends. To achieve these goals the new learning emphasized specific forms suited to the needs of the West: mastery of Latin, the production of an increased number of books, the development of a usable style of handwriting, a careful study of Scripture, of the works of the church fathers and of selected classical authors, and a system of patronage allowing scholars to pursue these ends. Charles made his court at Aachen the center of learning, and he also encouraged monasteries to continue their cultural activity. Learned men recruited from all over Europe found adequate patronage to enable them to devote their lives to mastering the Latin tongue, compiling grammars, copying books in a beautiful new script, composing manuals for religious education, occasionally writing an original literary work dealing with theology, history, or biography, and corresponding with other learned men.

The emphasis on education and learning was accompanied by a revival of the arts which bore a Western European stamp. Church building commanded the best efforts of the period. In general, Carolingian churches were modeled after Roman basilicas of the late classical period. The basic ground plan consisted of a long nave crossed by a transept and ending in a circular apse where the choir and the altar were located. Side aisles usually flanked the nave.
Some churches, including Charles's chapel at Aachen, were built in an octagonal form, a style derived from Byzantine models. The walls of the churches were of stone, either cut into blocks or broken and set in mortar. Wooden roofs were used, since most Carolingian craftsmen apparently lacked the skill to construct stone roofs. The outsides of the churches were undecorated, but inside frescoes portraying scriptural stories adorned the walls. On the altars were golden chalices and candelabra, beautifully handwritten missals bound with carved ivory covers, and fine altar cloths. Although Carolingian churches in the main imitated earlier styles in their basic features, there were innovations of great significance for the future of Western European artistic history. Most important were the modifications made in church architecture to suit certain features of the Roman liturgy. Chapels devoted to the veneration of various saints began to be built around the apse. Crypts were constructed below the church as repositories for the relics of the patron saint of the church. The choir was steadily enlarged to accommodate the numerous participants in the celebration of Mass and the performance of the monastic offices. These developments were precursors of the Romanesque style that developed in full form by the eleventh century. In the delicate ivory carvings and the beautiful manuscript illuminations of the Carolingian period one can detect the prototypes for the magnificent stone sculpture which later adorned Romanesque churches. Many of the ivories and illuminations show a skillful combination of styles and themes derived from classical, Celtic, Germanic, and oriental sources, acquiring thereby a distinctive quality unique to the West.

The positive results of these activities seem modest if compared with contemporary cultural life in Islam or By-
Carolingian scholars were familiar with only a few of the classical Roman authors, and their understanding of these was often superficial and naïve. The Latin employed by even their best authors was far inferior to classical models. Much of the poetry and theological writing was purely imitative in form and even content. For instance, Einhard patterned his biography of Charlemagne after the work of Suetonius, the biographer of the Roman emperors. In spite of the fact that several members of the court school strongly advocated a broad liberal education based on the study of rhetoric, dialectic, grammar, arithmetic, geometry, and theology, the actual operation of episcopal and monastic schools hardly achieved this end. Most of the students in these schools spent their time learning to read and write from rudimentary texts, answering questions posed by their masters about the symbolical meaning of scriptural passages, practising the various liturgical exercises connected with the performance of the divine office, and copying books. Even the mighty Charlemagne failed on occasion to excel in matters of learning. Einhard said of him that “he also tried to write, and kept tablets and blanks in bed under his pillow, so that during his leisure hours he might accustom his hand to form the letters; however he did not begin his efforts in time, but rather late in life, and therefore they met with ill success.” Although the Carolingian period saw much greater artistic activity than the Merovingian age, still the total production of new buildings was slight compared with the late classical period or with later periods in the Middle Ages.

Yet at the time, the Carolingian renaissance, for all its limitations, had a tremendous impact. It made Western European society more aware of the importance of its cul-
tural heritage. No longer was learning the exclusive concern of a few isolated monks. Instead, it was again accepted as necessary to the health of the government and the vigor of the whole religious establishment, and as such, the responsibility of the entire community. Further the vigorous concentration of Carolingian scholars on the Latin heritage deepened the cultural gap separating the West from the East. Not until many centuries later was the Greek aspect of the classical heritage reintroduced into Western European hands. Finally, the Carolingian renaissance played a significant role in creating the machinery of a productive cultural life. The textbooks, the schools, the book collections, the methods of study and teaching, and the styles in literature and art remained a permanent part of the Western European scene. From this Carolingian base most of Western mediaeval culture was to develop.

Finally, in this brief inquiry into the outstanding qualities of Frankish society, a word must be said about the fact that the Carolingian state truly became the center of Western European society. Actually, there were many political groups in Western Europe who were not a part of the Carolingian realm, including the Moslem caliphate and several small Christian states in Spain, the several English kingdoms, numerous Slavic principalities, the Scandinavian nations, and the Byzantine territories in southern Italy. And still nearly all of these were to some degree drawn into the orbit of Carolingian power, either in dependent alliance or dangerous hostility. When Byzantine and Moslem rulers turned to the west, they usually saw only the Carolingian rulers and thus tended to equate Western Europe with the Franks. It has already been noted that the Carolingian state commanded the cultural talents of
all of Western Europe. In addition the Romanized religious order of the Carolingian Empire even reached out to touch some of the western Slavs and the Scandinavians, thus beginning the process of their assimilation into Western European society. As one observes the process by which “Carolingian” became “Western European” in the first half of the ninth century, he might rightly conclude that the most vital aspect of Carolingian history was the polarization of the entire West around an axis running from Rome to Aachen. This is but another way of saying that the Carolingian dynasty down to 840 sharply accentuated the unique features of emergent Western European society and did so with such a magnificent flair that all the world became conscious of its strength and vigor. This was the first Europe.

Moslem Power under the Early Abbasid Caliphs

While the great Carolingian princes were actively engaged in setting a distinct pattern for Western European civilization, changes equally important were developing in the vast Moslem empire which the Arab warriors of the Prophet had created during the course of the century that followed Mohammed’s death in 632. During the first century, the impact of Islam on the civilized world had been chiefly military. By about 750 the conquering impulse had begun to wane; and as this happened the huge state that had been held together primarily by the arms of a small warrior minority underwent a grave internal crisis. After 750 the creative efforts in Moslem society were turned more toward constructing internal institutions intended to strengthen or preserve rather than further extend the empire.
The First Abbasids, 750–847, and the New Caliphate

The new developments in the Moslem empire after 750 were connected with the appearance of a new dynasty, the Abbasids, who held nominal power from 750 to 1258, but whose period of effective rule was confined to the years between 750 and 847. Successfully capitalizing on the discontent caused by the Umayyad policy of maintaining the Arabs as an elite within the Moslem empire, the Abbasid family seized power by force. Although the Arab warriors had assured military successes for a century, they came ultimately to be viewed as a parasite population living handsomely from the tribute levied on their victims. They offered little to their subjects, most of whom were culturally, economically, and politically their superiors. The Umayyad leaders were so preoccupied with war, diplomacy, and tribute-taking that they sometimes forgot that as caliphs they were religious leaders; and many Moslems charged them with the secularization and corruption of the true faith. As long as the Arab element predominated in the Moslem empire, the old tribal quarrels characteristic of the early desert society persisted. In this state of division and conflict, Umayyad rule was ripe for revolt and in 750 was swept away by a figure who claimed the in calculable superiority of direct descent from Mohammed.

This is not the place to chronicle the detailed history of the great Abbasid caliphs who reigned during the next century. A few of them, especially Harun-al-Rashid (786–809) and Al-Mamun (813–833), rank among the world's greatest rulers. Collectively the first caliphs followed a policy that revolutionized the existing empire and uli-
mately established the basic features of Moslem civilization. From the very beginning the dynasty insisted on stressing the religious nature of the caliphate. Charging that the Umayyads had debased the caliphate by making the office too secular, too much like the office of a Roman emperor, the Abbasids represented themselves as religious leaders charged by God to renew the regime of righteousness instituted by Mohammed. They began to demand that all Moslems obey them on this ground alone, and that the old tribal ties of the desert and the comradeship of the military camp be eliminated as the bases of political life. The Abbasids were "commanders of the faithful" but not exclusively commanders of the Arab warriors. They thus made their regime much more universal, causing the rights, privileges, and duties pertaining to the faithful Moslem to accrue equally to all who believed in God, not merely to an elite minority of Arabs.

In many ways the Abbasid concept of the state was a reflection of oriental ideas of priest-kings. It is not surprising then that the Abbasids moved their capital from Hellenized Damascus to Baghdad, where Persian influences were strong. The Umayyads had tried to pattern the practical institutions of government after Roman models; the Abbasids used Persian examples. The caliphs created at Baghdad an elaborate court, where they lived in splendid luxury in a withdrawn and mysterious atmosphere amidst their harems, their eunuchs, their courtiers, and their agents of government. Court life unfolded in one continuous round of ceremony, in which the caliph was the focus of attention of hundreds of brilliantly attired courtiers, each performing a ritual to the accompaniment of formal incantations and blasts of trumpets.

Although the personnel of the court was drawn from
the whole huge empire, Persians actually predominated. Even the armies of the Abbasid caliphs were manned chiefly by Persian troops. The court was distinguished by the existence of several well-defined administrative departments usually directed by a vizier, who was the chief agent of the caliph and often a figure of great power. From Baghdad an elaborate administrative network reached out to control provincial governors (emirs), who in turn created provincial capitals and courts modeled after Baghdad. The emirs developed a further hierarchy to carry authority down to a local level. Thus under Abbasid guidance a vast bureaucratic state replaced the old community of warriors.

The regime of the Abbasids also developed undesirable features: court intrigue, constant political assassination, spying, terroristic methods of political control. Yet it was a strong government when directed by capable caliphs, and its power was reflected in the magnificence of the capital—Baghdad—in the reigns of Harun-al-Rashid and some of his successors, as portrayed, for instance, in the famous Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, or A Thousand and One Nights. Baghdad was a city of over a half-million people, second only to Constantinople in size. Its majestic mosques, ornate palaces and public buildings, bustling artisans’ shops, paved streets, and public water system reflected the wealth that poured into the city from tribute and trade. The most splendid structure in the city was the caliph’s residence, the Palace of the Golden Gate, whose towering dome dominated the city and the surrounding plain.

The upper classes lived in great splendor in residences bedecked with brilliant mosaics and decorative tiles. They adorned their persons with fine silks, rare perfumes, and precious jewels. Poets and artists found enthusiastic patronage among the rich of the city. For the scholars and stu-
dents there was the famous House of Wisdom, a great university founded by the caliph Al-Mamun (813–833), with a huge library and remarkable laboratory facilities. Instruction was offered in almost every branch of knowledge by learned scholars from every corner of the empire. To the caliph's court, to the markets, and to the schools came a constant stream of travelers from far places to add a cosmopolitan air to the great city.

By contrast, Charlemagne's capital at Aachen was primitive. Its few thousand inhabitants, its modest church and palace, its handful of scholars struggling to master the rudiments of Latin and to instruct a few students in a simple course of studies, its lack of substantial trade and industry, and its domination by nobles who appeared at the city only when summoned to war indicate in part the superiority of the East over the West in the ninth century.

The newly constituted Abbasid regime did not attempt to continue its predecessor's campaigns of military conquest. In the west it tried to court Frankish support against the Spanish Moslems, who refused to recognize its authority. Harun-al-Rashid, for instance, caused considerable stir in Charlemagne's court when his ambassadors arrived in 801 and again in 807 bearing splendid gifts, including an elephant and a mechanical clock. This friendly attitude of the Baghdad caliphs relaxed Moslem pressure on Western Europe. Similarly, the sporadic campaigns waged against the Byzantine Empire tended increasingly to end in negotiated peace, and a well-defined boundary began to emerge across Asia Minor. As Byzantium was thus divided from Islam, each society could feel fairly secure behind the new frontier. The Moslems did wrest certain important territories from the Byzantine Empire during this period, the chief ones being Crete and Sicily, but they no longer ate
up kingdoms and empires in whirlwind campaigns. This cessation of militant expansion relieved Byzantium of a terrible burden, and it introduced a degree of stability into the Mediterranean world that was not disturbed until the last half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the crusades.

During the first century of Abbasid rule, the Moslem world enjoyed remarkable prosperity. Having conquered some of the richest agricultural, commercial, and industrial centers in the world, the Moslems had then linked these economic centers in a common state, thereby easing the processes of economic interchange and encouraging the growth of trade in products and techniques. In order to increase the base for taxation the Abbasids encouraged trade and especially agriculture. Moslem products, especially Damascus steel, Cordovan leather, Persian rugs, Syrian glass, paper, and linen, cotton, and silk textiles were among the finest in the world. Agricultural methods were the most advanced then known. Western Europeans were amazed when they first encountered the variety of agricultural products produced in Spain or in Syria and the Holy Land; especially impressive to them were the fine livestock, sugar, and fruits. Because of this superiority numerous common words in our language derive from Moslem terms for the products of their shops and farms: muslin, alcohol, orange, lemon, damask, cotton, coffee, and sherbet.

Economic growth was further stimulated by the spread of a common language, which greatly facilitated travel and exchange. The ease with which residents in one part of the empire could learn about the living conditions of people in other far-distant parts of the empire bred new tastes and thus new demands for goods. The sum total of these forces produced a growth of trade, industry, and agricul-
ture which brought the Moslem world to a level of prosperity as high as, or even higher than, that enjoyed any place in the contemporary world.

*Universal Islam*

The political and economic development of the early Abbasid period quite probably did not contribute as much to the formation of Moslem society as the rapid spread of Islam and the consequent creation of a vast religious community of the faithful. Even under the preceding dynasty many non-Arabs began to accept the religion of Mohammed, and, ironically, contributed to the fall of their rulers. Regularly treated as inferiors by the Umayyads, the non-Arab converts were ready to support the Abbasid challenge with its promise of equality for all Moslems and the unity of Islam. Under the new regime conversions to Islam continued to increase so that the population of the vast area stretching from Spain to India became predominantly Moslem.

Most of the conversions seem to have resulted chiefly from the appealing qualities of the Moslem religion. The Abbasid government seldom resorted to force as a means of conversion. Its usual policy was to extend considerable freedom to all religious groups within the empire and especially to Jews and Christians, who in the Moslem scheme of things were groups to whom God had revealed a part of the truth. The government did levy special taxes on non-Moslems and did keep them from holding certain offices, but these disabilities were probably not severe enough to compel conversions. The Moslem religion spread by virtue of its own merits, and it therefore became an effective bond of unity.

It is sometimes said that the century from 750 to 850
saw the definition of the orthodox Moslem religion that has so long been a powerful force in history. Of course, the basic shape of the religion had existed from the time of Mohammed, whose revelations were set forth in the Koran, compiled in the first few years after his death. In the Abbasid age, theologians and canon lawyers devoted a tremendous amount of energy to the study and elucidation of the religious pronouncements (hadiths) attributed to Mohammed when he was speaking as an individual but not as the Prophet of God. Also the theologians and lawyers labored to reconcile Moslem religious truths with foreign religious and philosophical concepts circulating in the Moslem world. The result of the study of religious tradition was the compilation of vast collections of material enlarging upon and illuminating the Koran. The acceptance of this tradition became obligatory on the orthodox, who are usually referred to as Sunnite Moslems, and the overall effect was to transform into a complex and subtle religion the simple faith set forth in the Koran. The study of law and the derivation of a code of conduct befitting true believers were also pursued with vigor. Since there was not an extensive amount of legislative material in the Koran, Moslem jurisprudence became a highly speculative study. The lawyers were forced to derive specific laws from general principles, a practice that led to divided opinion but resulted in the elaboration of a vast body of law defining Moslem rights and duties. This, too, became binding for orthodox Moslems, adding still another level of complexity to the simple faith proclaimed by Mohammed.

Neither the widespread conversions nor the definition of orthodox dogma, ritual, and ethical codes assured complete religious unity in the Abbasid Empire. Large and active communities of non-Moslems—Jews, Christians,
Zoroastrians—continued to exist within the empire; and by the mid-ninth century fundamental divisions had begun to emerge in the community of Islam. The main body of the Moslems, the Sunnites, were challenged by a vigorous schismatic sect, called the Shiites, who insisted that the essence of Islam was preserved by the descendants of Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, rather than by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, whom the Shiites viewed as usurpers. This sect tended to develop its own doctrines and usages, to split into internal factions, and to oppose the Sunnites. In spite of these religious divisions, however, the world of Islam found its major bond of unity in religion, and the early Abbasid period was the golden age of the true and universal faith.

*Development of Moslem Culture*

The spiritual unification of the Moslem world, fostered so strongly by religious developments, was also promoted by a vigorous cultural revival which permeated the entire empire. The first century of Abbasid history witnessed the real birth of a distinctive Moslem culture. The Arab warriors of the previous era had been little interested in cultural pursuits, and consequently cultural life under the Umayyads consisted chiefly of the continuation within their original habitats of the pre-Moslem cultural traditions—Graeco-Roman, Persian, Indian—with little interaction. The Umayyad period did witness the start of a cultural revival induced by the spread of a common language and a common religion, but prior to 750 little came from this new development. The brilliant cultural revival of the early Abbasid period, which was destined to influence the history of the whole world, was based primarily on the translation of a large
body of Greek, Persian and Indian learning into Arabic, thus making this knowledge available to all Moslem scholars. The range of this material was tremendous—astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, geography, physics, philosophy, belles-lettres, ethics, and law. Among the scholarly translators—whose chief center was Baghdad—the most prominent were not Arabs but rather Syrians and Persians, who as Moslems had learned Arabic but whose culture was based on their native traditions. In the cosmopolitan world of the Abbasids their knowledge commanded patronage quite irrespective of their origins. The period also saw a rapid development of those kinds of learning particularly suited to scholarly pursuits, especially linguistics, logic, and grammar. Between 750 and 850 the activity of Moslem scholars resembled that of Carolingian scholars of the same period—it would even be proper to speak of an Abbasid renaissance comparable to the Carolingian renaissance—since both movements were engaged in searching out bases for their new learning in their earlier cultural traditions. Nothing, however, so impresses one with the vigor of the Abbasid renaissance as a comparison of the range of Moslem scholarship with that of the Carolingian schools and monasteries. The Carolingian effort to recover and master a few Latin works seems pitiful compared with the huge number of diverse scientific and philosophical works recaptured by the Moslems.

The early Abbasid period left behind little in the way of architecture and painting by which to judge progress in these fields. Unfortunately the great monuments of Baghdad have all been destroyed. What little evidence survives suggests the development of a composite art style made up of liberal borrowings from Graeco-Roman, Indian, Persian, and Egyptian models. The typical mosque might
well feature the long colonnaded hall of Egypt, the horse-
shoe arch and stucco exterior from Persia, and the Byzan-
tine vaults supported by marble columns. The use of
geometric designs and of mosaics was already charac-
teristic of the decorative arts. Because of religious inhibitions
against the representation of the human form, religious
painting did not develop freely in the Moslem world, and
yet a vigorous style of painting evolved in palace decora-
tion and a remarkably beautiful one in manuscript illumina-
tion. Evidence is clear, however, that the new vital art of
the Abbasid period, like the contemporaneous scholarship,
drew its chief strength from a synthesis of earlier sources
and traditions.

*Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Age, 741–843*

The achievements of the Carolingian rulers and the
Abbasid caliphs were hardly matched by the efforts of
the Byzantine emperors of the last half of the eighth and
the first half of the ninth centuries. As a consequence, By-
zantium suffered a further decline in her position during
this era. Her loss was not in territory, as it had been from
Justinian’s reign to the early eighth century, but mainly
in prestige. The claim of her emperors to be the universal
heads of the Roman-Christian world was challenged by
the Carolingian counterclaim to the imperial title at least
in the West. At the same time the Byzantine court found
another powerful rival in the Moslem court at Baghdad.
Byzantine cultural life was equaled if not outshone by
the Moslem renaissance and even challenged by the Caro-
lingian renaissance. In large part the relative decline of
Byzantium resulted from a bitter religious quarrel that
divided the population and sometimes paralyzed the im-
perial government. However, between 741 and 843 By-
zantine society did preserve a basic internal strength in its institutions and culture that prepared the way for a brilliant revival toward the middle of the ninth century, a recovery which quickly restored the empire to new prominence.

**Iconoclasm, Politics, and Defense**

The dominant issue of Byzantine history in the era extending from 741 to 843 was religious. From time to time, it is true, the internal situation was complicated by foreign attacks, especially from the Moslems and the Bulgars, which placed heavy burdens on the imperial government even if they seldom posed a threat to its existence. As a matter of fact, during the early part of the iconoclastic age, Byzantine forces were actually able to take the offensive against the Moslems and Bulgars (Leo III had turned back the great Moslem assault of 717–718 and had begun the liberation of Asia Minor. He also inaugurated internal reforms which strengthened the army, the peasantry, and the central administration, and left his empire relatively stronger at his death. His successor, Constantine V (741–775) exploited the new situation with great skill. He took advantage of Moslem weakness during the transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty to recover the rest of Asia Minor. Simultaneously, after a long fight he managed to check Bulgar expansion in the Balkans.

These same forceful rulers, however, opened a deep wound in Byzantine society by bringing the iconoclastic quarrel into public view, particularly when Leo III decreed in 726 that his subjects must cease using icons, that is, statues, mosaics and painted images, in religious worship. The forces leading to this decision were complex. Almost from the beginning of Christian history, art ob-
jects had been used to embellish the liturgy in spite of con-
tinual protests that such practices would lead to idolatry. By the eighth century brilliantly colored statues and paint-
ings had become a major means of expressing piety, and some of the faithful clearly experienced difficulty in dis-
tinguishing between these artistic representations and the deity being worshiped. Although the problem prevailed throughout Christendom, it was especially serious in the Byzantine Empire. Probably the terrible uncertainty im-
posed on the imperial population by the constant danger of invasion during the seventh century had driven many
to place an excessive hope in the miraculous intervention of God in the daily affairs of life. Byzantine literature of
that era contains countless references to images of Christ or the Virgin that spoke, cured the ill, quieted the storms,
and helped the suffering faithful with a wide variety of assistance. Large numbers of people filled their homes and
adorned their clothing with the miracle-working icons. They prayed to them, sang to them, burned candles to
them, and in every way evidenced a conviction that the icons were in reality divine forces.

These excesses ultimately bred a reaction among the Byzantines. Opposition was especially strong in Anatolia
in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire, where powerful bishops protested on theological grounds and
where the simple peasants, influenced in part perhaps by
their close contact with Jews and Moslems, tended to be
puritanical and less inclined to demand visual representa-
tions of their deity. That the opposition to icons centered
in Anatolia suggests that strong eastern religious influences
had penetrated the Byzantine Empire during the seventh
and early eighth centuries along with Moslem soldiers. A
Syrian by birth, Leo III had grown up with a deep personal
aversion to icons, which seems to have been reinforced during the many years he spent in Anatolia as a military commander. Intricately involved in the question of the icons was the problem of the role of monasticism in Byzantine society. The monks, through the development and exploitation of a complex and ornate ritual, exercised a powerful hold over large elements of the population. The typical Byzantine monastery was filled with holy objects around which evolved elaborate ceremonies. As a result the monasteries received such extensive gifts from the faithful as to make them appear to rival the wealth and authority of the emperors themselves.

In the edict published in 726, Leo III forbade any further use of icons in religious services, undoubtedly hoping both to purify Byzantine religious life and eliminate the independent power of the monasteries. From the beginning there was strong resistance to the decree, especially from the monks and from the populace in Constantinople and the European provinces. Leo, however, stuck by his decision. Disregarding popular riots in Constantinople, he reissued his edict, deposed a patriarch who opposed the reform, replaced him with a pro-iconoclast, and took legal action against those who opposed his decree. His successors, Constantine V (741–775) and Leo IV (775–780), continued his policy. Constantine was especially ardent in the cause, ruthlessly stripping the churches of their splendid art works and persecuting their defenders, known as “iconodules.” Although his measures established iconoclasts in high church offices, his policy by no means won the support of all his subjects. Under pressure of persecution the iconodules defined their position and elaborated an impressive theological defense. Especially serious was the papal resistance to iconoclasm, for it further exacerbated
the quarrel between pope and emperor and was in part responsible for the papal decision to seek an alliance with the Franks. This agreement, as noted earlier, ended in the seizure by the popes and the Franks of considerable Byzantine territory in Italy.

After the uncompromising iconoclasm of Leo III, Constantine V, and Leo IV, the empire suffered the even more disturbing effects of a sudden reversal of policy. In 785, Leo IV's ten-year-old son, Constantine VI, became emperor, with his mother Irene as regent. Personally opposed to iconoclasm and able to count on the support of a powerful faction in the empire, Irene caused an ecumenical council to be held in 787 at Nicaea to order the restoration of the icons. The iconoclasts, now on the defensive, remained firm in their opposition to the new imperial policy, skillfully exploiting Irene's ambition to acquire the throne for herself as a supporting issue. By blinding and deposing her son Irene did succeed in seizing the throne in 797, but the price of her ambition was high. Many of her own subjects doubted that it was legal for a woman to occupy the throne, and her usurpation provided the excuse for the imperial coronation of Charlemagne in 800. Not until 812 did the Byzantine emperor openly admit the existence of a western emperor, but well before that it was clear that Byzantine prestige suffered a severe blow from the bold action of the Franks and the papacy. Under Irene's reign there was also a relaxation of frontier defenses and a consequent resumption of Moslem and Bulgar attacks under the command of their great rulers, Harun-al-Rashid and Krum, respectively.

Irene, who was overthrown in 802, left her immediate successors a legacy of court intrigue, external threats, and an empty treasury, difficulties which were soon com-
pounded by a new imperial assault on the icons. In 813, Leo V, another military commander from Anatolia, assumed the purple. Influenced by his eastern background, encouraged by clergymen who still detested the use of icons, and inspired by a desire to emulate Leo III and Constantine V, the new emperor in 815 decreed a second abolition of the icons. This policy was continued by his successors, Michael II (820–829) and Theophilus (829–842). Although they all resorted to forceful methods to impose their policy, these emperors of the second phase of the iconoclastic struggle found opposition more violent and determined than ever. The populace in Constantinople and the western provinces were fervently devoted to their beloved icons and could not be persuaded to abandon them by imperial orders. The monks who led the iconodule opposition developed a skillful campaign which extended the quarrel to the issue of church-state relations and succeeded in casting doubt on the validity of the imperial claim of supremacy over the church. In support of this line Theodore, from the monastery of Studion, marshaled a powerful array of learned monks. In addition to theology, the iconodules also restorted to court intrigue to serve their cause. Against this resourceful attack, the emperors, able administrators and competent generals though they were, found it impracticable to enforce their religious policy.

Once again it was a woman’s hand which ended the iconoclastic quarrel. After the death of Theophilus, his widow Theodora assumed the regency for her young son Michael III. Moved by a clear realization that the iconoclastic quarrel was both undermining imperial authority and losing its appeal, Theodora and her advisers began cautiously to restore the icons. At the same time the adherents of iconoclasm were treated with considerable
moderation, to make their defeat easier to accept. This moderate policy angered the most zealous iconodules, especially the followers of Theodore of Studion, but they were effectively curbed by the imperial government and soon made to realize that they had no hope of dictating religious policy to the imperial government. The end of the iconoclastic quarrel opened a golden age in Byzantine history. It had, however, been a costly struggle, breeding bitter internal strife for over a century, paving the way for a loss of valuable lands in Italy, encouraging the pretensions of the Franks to the imperial crown, and weakening the defense of the imperial frontiers. Unquestionably the chief iconoclastic emperors were men of high principle and strong faith, determined to reform religious life in their empire, but the cost of their intransigence was high and reduced the status of their empire relative to those of the Abbasids and Carolingians.

*Byzantine Civilization in the Iconoclastic Age*

Byzantine history between 741 and 843 was not, however, completely dominated by the bitter fight about the icons. During this period the empire maintained and even developed its basic political and economic structure, a factor which assured a rapid recovery once the religious struggle was ended.

The great strength of the Byzantine political system derived from the emperor’s claim to absolute power as God’s agent on earth. Not one emperor from Leo III to Theophilos ever relaxed either his autocratic pretentions or the sense of responsibility for the welfare of his subjects implied in his exalted claims. Even the most ardent iconoclastic emperors, such as Leo III, Constantine V, and Theophilos, enjoyed high respect for their efforts to de-
fend the empire and to render justice to their subjects. Theophilus, for instance, became a hero in the eyes of the population of Constantinople for his efforts in behalf of justice. He made frequent trips through the streets of the city to ask people the price of food and clothing, to punish those guilty of cheating, and to allow all who desired to approach him with their requests. The centralized bureaucracy operated efficiently in the service of the emperor and proved capable of sustaining the ordinary functions of government throughout the period. The emperors were keenly conscious of regulating the conduct of their numerous civil servants. Leo III, for instance, undertook an important revision of the Code of Justinian in order to provide a more usable guide for the actions of the imperial courts. This revised code, called the Ecloga, was written in Greek instead of Latin and represented a modernization of parts of Justinian’s Code to fit the requirements of the new age.

At times the imperial government was impeded by lack of income, but again reforms were instituted to provide the resources needed for effective government. The sound financial system of the empire offers a marked contrast with the contemporary Carolingian state which had to rely on the personal services of royal vassals to conduct the affairs of state. The power of the emperor was effectively exercised through an efficient system of local government which enacted the will of the emperor in every corner of the empire.

Probably the chief source of imperial strength was the military system. The emperors of the iconoclastic era continued to utilize the system of recruitment and organization instituted during the seventh century, the bulk of the soldiers being drawn from the free peasantry to whom land
was granted in return for military service. The theme organization was extended and refined to assure the efficient use of military resources. Even when the religious quarrels were fiercest, the emperors of the iconoclastic era could rely on the military forces to act vigorously and efficiently against external foes. Especially useful in supporting the efforts of the army was the well-organized Byzantine diplomatic corps, which operated far and wide—in the Moslem world, among the Slavs, in Bulgaria, and in the West—to gain allies and to frustrate enemies. In general, the bitter internal quarrels of the era did not seriously weaken the structure of Byzantine autocracy, although at times they did divert its energies into fruitless ventures.

Even during the iconoclastic struggle and in spite of the efforts of some—especially the monks—to free the church from imperial control, the church continued throughout this period to add its vigorous support to the power of the autocratic emperor. The patriarch of Constantinople was the head of the Byzantine church and usually conducted himself as an agent of the emperor who elected him. The bishops serving under the patriarch generally followed his guidance, creating a well-defined hierarchy that labored to encourage unity and obedience within the empire. The populace, always moved by strong religious sentiments, continued to be responsive to ecclesiastical leadership. This close intertwining of state and church, begun earlier in Byzantine history, continued virtually uninterrupted throughout the iconoclastic struggle. Although it would hardly have appeared so at the time, the violent strife probably deepened spiritual life in Byzantine society, particularly in monastic circles, by revealing excesses in some liturgical usages and by forcing Christians to think about the meaning of their religious practices. Iconoclasm also contributed
significantly to the separation of the Byzantine church from the rest of the Christian community. Believing iconoclasm to be heretical, the popes bent their labors more toward preserving the purity of religious life in the West rather than the universal structure. When the iconoclastic struggle was finally ended, the papacy had already cemented its alliance with the Franks, making it impossible to resume relationships between Rome and Constantinople on the old basis. Similarly the patriarchs of Constantinople had benefitted from the widening breach by receiving clearer recognition as leaders of the Byzantine church. No schism yet existed between East and West, but each of these two segments of the Christian world had gained a firmer conviction of its own separate existence.

The imperial government was also solidly grounded in the economic bases of the country. Clearly recognizing the importance of the independent peasantry the emperors sought to improve their condition and to protect them against the encroachments of the aristocratic landowners. As part of the same over-all policy, traders and artisans were encouraged and favored in the empire. As a result, Constantinople remained one of the great trading and manufacturing centers of the world even after the Moslems had cut into this sphere by seizing control of strategic Mediterranean positions, especially Sicily and Crete. These losses were not severe enough to affect the basic vitality of the teeming markets and shops which continued to provide an array of products that contributed to the brilliance and comfort as well as the wealth of Byzantine society.

The iconoclastic period was not, however, one of great cultural brilliance. The religious dispute resulted in the widespread destruction of religious art. Many learned men were silenced by persecution, exile, and even martyrdom.
Some of the literature of the period was so violently partisan as to lose all value. And yet the iconoclastic dispute did have a stimulating effect that called forth important intellectual and artistic efforts which were to bear fruit ultimately in a splendid cultural revival. The religious conflict provoked an avid interest in theological studies. In their search for self-justification, scholars on both sides of the issue studied Scripture and the church fathers with a new intensity which not only increased concern with religion but indirectly stimulated interest in education. Study of the Greek classics honed men's skills in dialectic and rhetoric, as the extensive writings of John of Damascus (died about 750) and Theodore of Studion, both opponents of iconoclasm, illustrate. Theodore of Studion also played an important role in emphasizing internal discipline and learning in the monasteries, a reform that eventually produced several intellectual leaders destined to bring glory to Byzantine society after 850.

Even in art, where the iconoclastic quarrel had the most destructive influence, there were evidences of renewed vitality. Those most violently opposed to the pictorial representation of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints were not hostile to other kinds of art. As a consequence the artists cultivated new themes and expressed themselves with considerable skill in scenes of everyday life, portraiture, and historical subjects, revealing marked tendencies toward realism modeled on Hellenistic styles and abstraction derived from Moslem geometrical designs. One noted historian of Byzantine art has said that the iconoclastic period witnessed the sowing of artistic seeds which produced a golden harvest in the late ninth and tenth centuries, with the return to late classical models. This continuing vital tradition, based on an interest in classical culture and strongly influenced by
religious ideals, gave to Byzantine intellectual and artistic life a special quality that accentuated its differentiation from Western European and Moslem civilizations.

During the century from 750 to 850 the Mediterranean world had thus passed through a new phase of its history. By 850 the three distinctive civilizations were much more firmly established in their different ways than had been the case in 750. Especially rapid had been the progress of Western Europeans in the articulation of their cultural, religious, and political life. The Moslems had supplemented their demonstrated military power by developing a Moslem culture and by transforming their faith into a truly universal religion. In spite of being weakened internally by almost constant religious quarrels, the Byzantine Empire had sustained its basic institutions and had kept its political, religious, and cultural identity. By 850 old Rome was almost lost from sight behind the three new societies which were already filling the stage of the Mediterranean world and beginning to experience the pressures and tensions of their new circumstances and relationships.
CHAPTER III

Internal Division within the
New Civilization

ABOUT the middle of the ninth century, the Mediterranean area entered a third—and, for this study, final—phase of its evolution away from the unity of Rome toward tripartition into Moslem, Byzantine, and Western European civilizations. The distinctive feature of the century following approximately 850 is not to be found in any remarkable new departures from the already established characteristics of the three civilizations. Each continued to develop in its own particular direction, thus accentuating the course of historical growth that has been outlined in preceding parts of this essay. There was no undoing the effects of the rise of Islam or the Germanization of the West or the transformations of Byzantium under siege. The true significance of the years following 850 lies in an important turn of events within each of the three civilizations. The unity that had consistently been a feature of Byzantine civilization and that had come to be a near reality in Western European and Moslem societies under the early Carolingians and the early Abbasids gave way to diversity. Gradually the internal bonds of each of these very different civilizations relaxed, leaving loose groups of political units