The First Medieval Synthesis

European Civilization in the Early Middle Ages, 750 - 1000
Europeans and the Environment

- Sparsely populated, heavily forested landscape, de-emphasis of cities
- Farming
  - Less than 10 percent of land cultivated
  - Low crop yields
- Climate
  - Improving weather after 700
  - Constant threat of natural disaster
Origins of the Carolingians

Carolingian dynasty were Frankish nobles with origins in the 7th c.

By 751, when the Merovingians were deposed, Pepin had the power to be named King of the Franks.

His father, Charles Martel, had re-introduced heavy cavalry & horse-drawn supplies to warfare.

Franks were falling back into tribal customs.

Saxons of Northern Europe were at best nominally Christians.
The World of the Carolingians

- Charlemagne from *Carolus Magnus*, or Charles the Great (742 – 814)
- Physically impressive; est. 6’3” tall
- Described as fair-haired, tall, “bull-necked”
- Favored fairly simple dress (not overtly royal)
- At first joint ruler with brother Carloman (starting 768); after Carloman’s death (771), Charlemagne ruled alone
- Biography written by Einhard (c. 775-840): *Vita Karoli Magni*
Governing Charlemagne’s Empire

**Governing the Empire**
- Income from royal estates
- Counts as administrators
- *Missi Dominici*
- ‘Counts’ as administrators
- Vassalage system
- Help from the Church

**Charlemagne as Emperor**
- Pope Leo III (795 – 816)
- Charlemagne crowned emperor in 800
The Carolingian Renaissance

The so-called Carolingian Renaissance was short-lived.

Art and learning were encouraged and the great king nearly restored order to Europe.

Unfortunately his successors were less capable and outside invasions destroyed his empire’s unity.
The Carolingian Intellectual Revival

- Scriptoria
- Carolingian Miniscule
- Carolingian Renaissance
  - Alcuin of Northumbria
Monks as Copyists
The Carolingian Renaissance

The Supposed Sword of Charlemagne
Carolingian Texts

St. Gall Gospel
Back Cover
An important development in Carolingian scriptoria was the invention of a new kind of writing – Carolingian miniscule – which used both upper and lower case letters.
The Carolingian Empire
End of the Carolingian Renaissance

Charlemagne’s death left the empire in weaker hands.

By the treaty of Verdun, the Frankish Empire was divided among his grandsons.
End of the Carolingian Renaissance

-Outsiders also threatened the empire.

-From the North came the Vikings.

-From the East came the Magyars.

-From the South came the Moslems.