Charlemagne and the European Idea. An Imaginary Contention:
Jacques Le Goff vs. Christopher Dawson

Ovidiu Forai

The European idea, located in the foreground in almost all contemporary political concepts, had one of the most controversial precursors in the person of Charlemagne. To the middle of the last century, the status of "Father of Europe", assigned to the Frank emperor, was almost unquestionable recognized by the historiography and passed to the index between the fundamental truths of history. The iconoclast momentum of Annals School was needed, so that the Carolingian myth to be turned on all the faces, revealing some serious fissures. Of course, it is the trend that has as flagship Jacques Le Goff (born 1924) that wrote among others, the remarkable series of works, "The Making of Europe."

The man who launched the concept "The Long Middle Ages", also places in this period “the appearance and genesis of Europe as reality and representation "(Le Goff, 2005: 9). Le Goff said that the medieval reality did not embrace the European idea in the sense of unity as felt in our days, which is understandable in the social and political context of the half past millennium (i.e., in full Middle Ages, on the French author conception. In his opinion, this historic period should be extended until the time of the modern era and even the
The exception from this, the vision, or better said from the lack of vision, is represented by Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini with his work, *Europe* (1458). The book of the humanist-Pontiff was released only five years after one of the major events of the Middle Ages, the fall of Constantinople, seen by Le Goff, paradoxically, like removing an obstacle from the path of a united Europe (Le Goff, 2005: 242), as the Orthodox religion, which continued to subsist in Eastern Europe, had to weaken the connections with the former Imperial capital, approaching *volens-nolens* the West.

Being a declared agnostic, Le Goff does not remove Christianity from the choir page of unifying factors, but he is either assigning it the role of the lead singer. In his view, "the end of the control exercised by the Catholic Church is not the end of the common Christian culture, nor of a certain civilization and certain values; the secularism will be both heir and successor of the Christian values and their opponent in the ruthless conflicts that are to come in the late fifteenth century" (Le Goff, 2005: 243). The Church’s status, seen as a faithful soldier, who disappears in the foreground after a hard and tiredly struggle, echoes from other lines of the French historian, the forming nation belief, the technical progress and in particular the time progress, seen as an economical, cultural and existential value: “The Europe from the late fifteenth century is a Europe of precious time, of time appropriated by individuals and organizations that will compose the Europe to come”. (Le Goff, 2005: 247). Looking closer, it is a conclusion drawn from the philosophy of the "new history" that amends happenings, the chronological sequence of classical history and highlights "the constants of depth, the “objective” behaviors and long term processes,
independent of human intentionality and invariably, beyond their power to control 

The “New History” had, however, weaknesses and one of them was the compromise of synthetic tests, building history “in pieces”, with the advantage of the accuracy at local level but with a reduced cohesion, ”in terms of the unity, as well as the possibility to deduce from the evolution of various phenomena one direction or at least an overview”2. Of course, Jacques Le Goff indicated a direction, has explained it, but his vision is not unanimous.

The coagulation of a European concept in the mid fifteenth century is approved also by the British historian Christopher Dawson (b. 1889 – d. 1970), but with a different mechanism. Four centuries earlier, that is to say in the early 1000, Dawson sees Europe divided into several cultural-provinces, and between them the Occidental Christianity was not the strongest nor the most civilized one (Dawson, 1952: 284): Northwest Europe just passed to Christianity although still retaining enough local elements. In the South, the Islamic culture already “dressed up” the Mediterranean West basin. The Byzantine air was dominating Eastern Europe, but also the Aegean area, Southern Italy as well as the big commercial cities of Adriatic basin. The territory between the Black Sea and Baltic included Slavs, Balts and Finno-Ugrics, most of them still pagans who began to come into contact with Christian influences of the South - Byzantium, Western - Occidental Christianity, and the Southeast - Islamic culture of Central Asia (Dawson, 1952: 285).
Peripheral and barely formed at the time of this review, the specific civilization of Western Europe covers the territory of the former Carolingian empire having an increased intensity in Northern France and West Germany. Hence, it has extended its influence concentrically covering and converting all neighboring territories: Scandinavia, Western Slavs, the south impregnated by binomial Islam-Byzantium. Although the core, the nucleus of this effervescence generating movements of conquest and spiritual absorption, says the British historian, is the territory between the Loire and the Rhine, "the true home of medieval culture, the source of his great achievements. It was the cradle of Gothic architecture, the great medieval schools and the monastic and ecclesiastical reform movements, the ideal of the crusade. It was the center of specific development for the feudal state” (Dawson, 1952: 286).

The clash "wave" of Western civilization, hungry for knowledge and territories, with Islam and Byzantium was in Dawson's vision a crucial element in the further development of the medieval culture. The absorption of Arab-Greek literature contributed to the birth of the new intelligentsia of the West. When reaching 1453, previously mentioned by Le Goff, Dawson sees it as a start, but still to the West! Being for centuries under Turkish influence, the East is getting somehow out of the picture, so that the active Europe, Occidental Europe, is returning to the Atlantic and to the alleged terra incognita in the West. A reform occurs on terra ferma during this period, but according to the British author, the Western civilization was already sufficiently cohesive and autonomous; thus, the ecclesiastical scission did not have dramatic consequences and did not turned into a split: "Europe keeps its cultural unity, now based on
common intellectual tradition, on a loyalty to the classical traditions, rather than the common believes" (Dawson, 1952: 289).

Unlike Le Goff, Dawson is a deeply Catholic historian and his fiber education and his beliefs are deeply steeped in the discourse that he presents. An intellectual from Spengler and Toynbee’s class, he seeks to discern and highlight the foundation of social and spiritual forces that govern civilizations. Like Weber, Dawson sees in religion the main driver of the differences between cultures. Thus, in his view, the Western Christianity is the red thread of the European project and the Carolingian empire and unity, being it even temporarily, built by Charlemagne in the early ninth century, is the source of the sketch of the project. For Jacques Le Goff the Carolingian chapter is an auxiliary one in the process of building Europe. It is rather a negative example, an “inside out” inspiration source because in his opinion it is about a “perverted Europe”, an “anti Europe” so to name two of the phrases used by the prestigious French medievalist. Instead, the British historian has a different view: "(...) The Carolingian unity can be regarded without exaggeration as the foundation and the starting point of the entire development of medieval Western civilization". (Dawson, 1952: 286).

This distinction between visions is the central point of the present approach which outlines the opinions, arguments and interpretations of two great historians, about one of the myths of the old continent: Charlemagne as the “Father of Europe”. It is obvious to everyone that in his time the emperor has not occurred (or at least it is hard to believe that this happened) that posterity will judge the paternity status of a project that he saw with different eyes,
trained by the more prosaic motives in a very different context. Within a few years after Charles’s death, many parts of his project were going to fail. Two centuries later, Dawson also sees, rightly, Europe divided into four centers very different from each other, in terms of civilization, economy and religion. Today, despite the differences that still exist in all these areas, Europe of West origin is much bigger. Europe is also in Madrid, Athens, Prague, Moscow or Hamburg. And yet, what is the contribution of the Carolingian outline in today’s project? Was this a viable “draft”, a personal ambition or just a simple plan warlike connotation, like many others? A clear answer is difficult to give, but an analysis, supported by two scholarly references with different points of view (but not the opposite!) can be done.

Both reminded authors have dealt, in different times, with what we call the construction of Europe. Two of their works deal closely with this concept: "The Middle Ages and the birth of Europe" by Jacques Le Goff and "The Making of Europe", author Christopher Dawson. Regarding these two works, often quoted in this essay, I use the author-date system for simplicity.

In a very brief overview, Charlemagne, king of the Franks, then Roman Emperor (since 800), was born in 742 and ruled between 768 and 814. (From 771 he took over the territories controlled by his brother Carloman). He conquered the Kingdom of the Lombards (without the duchies of Spoleto and Benevento), Bavaria and Saxony, after fierce fighting with the Longobards and the Germanic tribes from the North. He spread his influence in the East, up to Danube, after he defeated the Avars located in Pannonia, which was transformed in Mark. In the
West, the empire included Gaul (except for the duchy of Brittany) and in the
South it extended up to the Pyrenees including Hispanic Marks. From 46 years
of reign, only two were deprived of military campaigns. At first glance, he was
(only) a great warrior and a conqueror.

Charlemagne's reign was often described as the first major attempt to
build a Europe. Naturally, not an integrated Europe as desired today, but with
some features that make an outline, being it of little consistency, in the next
unity. "Assuming that the idea is correct, we must emphasize that it was the first
example of a perverted Europe. Indeed, Charlemagne's vision is a nationalist
one" (Le Goff, 2005: 42). The French historian clearly shows skepticism towards
the European idea of the eight-ninth century which makes him, in fact, to put a
caucic chapter title from which we quoted above: "A Europe born prematurely:
the Carolingian world". Le Goff also shows, continuing the previous paragraph,
that what the emperor wanted to accomplish animated by a "true patriotic
spirit" was in the first place a Frankish empire. In this respect, he even planned
to give Frank names to calendar months! "This is something (...) important to
underline, because it is the first failure of attempts to build a Europe dominated
by a nation or an empire" (Le Goff, 2005: 42). The Carolingian emperor’s attempt
is likened by the French author with the “anti-Europe” of Napoleon or Hitler,
projects that were clotted around a single nation, subjected, as seen, to failure.

On the other hand, Christopher Dawson argues that the importance of
the Carolingian era transcends its material achievements, even if the Empire
founded by Charlemagne did not survive its founder, being organized later (and
Easterly), on the basis of the first project.
"The centre of mediaeval civilisation was not be on the shores of the Mediterranean, but in the northern lands between the Loire and Weser which were the heart of the Frankish dominions. This was the formative centre of the new culture, and it was there that the new conditions which to govern the history of mediaeval culture find their origin" (Dawson, 1952: 214).

Dawson is not hesitating in crayoning the emperor in more European colors than Le Goff, regarding his ideals. Charlemagne approaches, according to the British author, the noted archetype, the "Father of Europe":

"He was above all a soldier with a talent for war and military enterprise which made him the greatest conqueror of his time. But in spite of this ruthlessness and unscrupulous ambition he was no mere barbaric warrior; his policy was inspired by ideals and universal aims" (Dawson, 1952: 216).

There is no doubt that the universality of Charlemagne’s ideas, embraced more or less, depending on the views of quoted authors, and of others, flows from his role as Christian emperor, moreover, the protector and expansionist agent of Christianity. Before getting to his coronation, it is important to mention how his father, Pepin the Short, became the King of the Franks. “The most significant and loaded with consequences fact is that Pepin was anointed again as king4 along with his sons, Charles and Carloman, in 754, in Saint Denis, by the pope. This return to the ritual of biblical kingship consecrates the king’s person as a Christian leader and enhances the monarchy’s prestige that will survive here and there in Europe until this day” (Le Goff, 2005:43).
Rightfully, Jacques Le Goff grants a considerable importance to this issue, reminding us in another one of his works how the anointing and the transformation of the kings into representatives of Divinity in worldly things led to the belief in the magical powers of sovereigns, a phenomenon widely described by March Bloch in "The Magic-working kings". Returning to Pepin, the Pope Stephen the II’s gesture was, in a way, a reward. In the campaign of 754, and later in 765, Pepin intervenes, by the request of Sovereign Pontiff, defeating the Lombards and creating *patrimonium Petri*, the Papal state. In the absence of the Constantinople's Basileus, being literally and figuratively far away from the situation, Pepin becomes the papacy’s protector. His status was assumed without difficulty by Charlemagne who, in his turn, will oblige the Papal state through active force, against the wild Longobards. In Rome, on the Christmas day in 800, Charlemagne will be crowned by Pope Leo III as Roman emperor. Thus, after more than three centuries, a bishop of Rome performs the coronation exercise of the Emperor, this time on a Frank king, the force vector of a nation, who until recently were barbarians. The coronation of Charles was a natural consequence of the circumstances of those times, but a long shot event, viewed from the perspective of the future.

The two historians who analyze the coronation event have a different perspective over its significance. The imaginary seen from different points of view, has, therefore a fertile ground to unfold. Certainly, Le Goff right argues in sustaining that coronation marks the still early independence of Western Christianity from the Orthodox Byzantine Empire, but from here the derivation
of the “Father of Europe” status seems to him more like a tribute, an expression of the imaginary than a historical reality ”(Le Goff, 2005:45).

"The coronation of Charlemagne as emperor, both for the papacy, which he had planned, and also for the Frank king, who accepted it rather passively, was in fact a return to the past, an attempt to revive the Roman Empire, and not a project for the future, as the destiny of Europe is”(Le Goff, 2005:46).

Furthermore, according to the French historian, the emperor wanted to have a Rome of his own, different from the original one, "that Rome, (...) the capital of a Pope who has little power" (Le Goff, ibidem), but different, as well, from the New Rome, located far away in the East Constantinople. Aix-la-Chapelle should have probably become the capital of the West, if not even, the center of the medieval universe. Thus, its spiritual center, the Palatine Chapel, built by Charles before his coronation, was combining oriental elements, from Eudes des Metz native origin, an architect of Armenian descent, with the octagonal form of San Vitale, a Byzantine church from Ravenna. But Ravenna was (already!) Western at the dawn of the eight century and the rise of the ninth century, in spite of its original architecture, of Constantinople origination. Jacques Le Goff’s observation regarding the Eternal City and its first inhabitant is logical, since both Charlemange and his father served well the Roman Curia, actually helping it to survive the imminent Longobards attacks. From this point of view, a more symbolic one, center of Respublica christiana “avant la lettre”, the French author
claims that Aix-la-Chapelle was for a while what the emperor wanted it to be, but after his death,

"(...) the city ceased to be the capital of the West, although the myth lasted throughout the entire Middle Age period. Today, all that remains are a few famous monuments that stand as the testimony of Charles's dream. The European events that are taking place today at Aix-la-Chapelle are just some nostalgic ceremonies. From a long term perspective and especially from a European perspective, the Carolingian Empire was a failure" (Le Goff, *ibidem*).

Describing the impermanence of the *Third Rome*, which was Aix-la-Chapelle, the French medievalist uses for the second or third time the word "failure" as a prosaic conclusion of the Carolingian project. However, we do not have to disregard, that the myth as Le Goff names it, is not, just for one time, the instrument that guards across the centuries the great ideas. It is also, probably the case of the “nostalgic ceremonies” mentioned earlier, that find in past a stable reference point, a breeding ground of ideas, culture and spirituality, not at all nostalgic in its time. The arch over time of the current Aachen is viable precisely because there is a *second leg of the bridge*, viable, solid, with 1200 years ago. And more importantly, there is a bridge, or even a deck!

Without outlining the importance, mythical or not, of the old imperial capital and returning to the matter of coronation, Christopher Dawson sees things in a different light. Judging almost as an accountant the initiative of the event, according to the British author, it could only belong to Charles, the Frank
dynast having all the advantages in this. It was unlikely that the Pope, who depended *de jure* on the Constantinople’s emperor authority, but also depended *de facto* on the immediate power of the Franks emperor, to propose the restoration of another empire in the vicinity of his institution (Dawson, 1952: 221 *et passim*). This does not mean that the Pope did not attempt to make a warrior, but condescending neighbor, in an official ally.

„It is difficult to say how far the Pope acted on his own initiative or whether he was the instrument of Charles and his Frankish advisers. The testimony of Charles biographer, Einhard, is in favour of the former alternative, but it has met with little favour from modern historians, at least in France and England. Certainly Charles was the gainer, for his universal authority in the West now received the sanction of Roman law and tradition. For the papacy, however, the advantage was no less clear. The supremacy of the Frankish monarchy which had threatened to overshadow that of Rome was now associated with Rome, and consequently also with the papacy” (Dawson, 1952: 221).

As an emperor recognized by the pope, Charlemagne’s reputation soared. He is the arrayed arm of Christianity and today it is difficult to establish in percents how many of his actions were taken out of conviction and how many were taken out of political calculation. However, the status of Roman Emperor already meant something different than the status of king of the Franks. Dawson explains his statements with arguments:
"As King, Charles had stood outside the Roman tradition; as Emperor, he entered into a definite juridical relationship with the head of the Church. His power was still formidable as ever, but it was no longer indefinite and incalculable. Moreover, the idea of the Roman Empire was still indispensable to the Church. It was synonymous with Christian civilization, while the rule of the barbarians was so identified with heathenism and war that the Liturgy couples together the enemies of the Roman name and the foes of the Catholic Faith" (Dawson, 1952: 221).

The British historian emphasizes that the restoration of the Roman Empire, or rather the foundation of the new medieval empire, had a symbolic and religious significance which surpassed in importance the political consequences. Moreover, Charles was aware of this advantage and used the most of it, although the coronation did not lead to a change in his lifestyle.

"He [Charles] remained a thorough Frank, in dress and manners, as well as in political ideals" (Dawson, 1952: 222).

Indeed, the emperor remained a Frank, but one who joined his feared sword and a more powerful weapon: Christianity. In the British author's vision this is how the phrase "Father of Europe" which is attributed to Charlemagne, should be read and understood. By integrating religion in all parts of the empire, he can, at least, be called the "spiritual father". Christianity was undoubtedly an
integrating factor, if not an unifying one (the empire was fractured but faith resisted) of the old continent. Another British author, Peter Brown, who studied the beginnings of Western Christianity, says that no other ritual outside the Christian one was allowed in a Frank province, and this was under capital threat.

Jacques Le Goff approves this time the monastic unification that happened in Europe under the Charlemagne reign and later under his successors.

"This (n.n - monastic unification) shaped Medieval Europe at its beginnings, given the number, the prestige and the monks work. (...) Equally impassioned by order and unity, Charlemagne supported the efforts, for unification, of a Catalan monk who founded a monastery near Montpellier, in Aniane, and especially revived, renewing a rule, of St. Benedict of Nursia, a rule dating from the sixth century. Assuming the rule of St. Benedict, now modernized, in all the monasteries of the empire was on the agenda of the five councils gathered together, simultaneously, in 813. The Benedictine Rule was declared mandatory by the son and the successor of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, at the council held at Aix-la-Chapelle in 816. Beside the monastic duties established by St. Benedict of Nursia (...) St. Benedict of Aniane added the mission of preaching and conversion of the heathen" (Le Goff, 2005: 47).

The theocratic spirit of these missions of keeping the new religion (the Franks were Christians for three centuries, the Saxons had been Christianized by
force, after a struggle of nearly 30 years!) is revealed in an address of a king’s sent, one of the famous Missi Dominici (we shall return to this imperial institution), address from which Christopher Dawson quoted in "The Making of Europe" (p.218):

„We have been sent here by our Lord, the Emperor Charles, for your eternal salvation, and we charge you to live virtuously according to the law of God, and justly according to the law of the world. We would have you know first of all that you must believe in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (...). Love God with all your hearts. Love your neighbours as your-selves. Give alms to the poor according to your means”.

In an ironic manner, Dawson claims that this Christian address looks more like a Muslim judge speech. Through a cruel simplification, City of God of St. Augustine became a Christian version of Islam, having Charles in a fighter role for faith (Dawson, 1952: 219). In fact, his main advisor, Alcuin, often complained that Saxon faith is troubled by too many taxes and that Charles missionaries act more like robbers than priests (Dawson, ibidem). The portrait of the emperor is not free at all, by some not too western touches:

„The religion of Charles was like the Islam, a religion of a sword, and his private life, in spite of his sincere piety, resembled that of a Moslem ruler (...). In the words of his first letter to Leo III, he was „the representative of God who has
to protect and govern all the members of God”, he is “Lord and Father, King and Priest, the Leader and Guide of all Christians” (Dawson, *ibidem*).

It follows a religious unity imposed by force, tenacity and even meticulousness, by a leader who did not make any back steps when it was about bloodshed to achieve its goals, and not just on the battlefield. In the year 782, at Verden, he did not hesitate to behead 4,500 prisoners, vassals of the refractory noble Saxon, Wildukind*. End justifies the means 1,200 years ago as it does now.

From what Jacques Le Goff calls “the Modern Carolingian myth”, a tangible element was represented by a legal unification.

"Charlemagne promulgated for the entire empire, a number of regulations related to the main areas of governance, they were applied everywhere and to everyone: the large rural areas, in education and legislation, both major political and administrative division of the kingdom and the king’s envoys appointed *missi dominici*. It is about the capitulars” (Le Goff, 2005: 47).

These included, without exception, the necessary rules of a coherent vision in all areas, vision that, certainly, eased the monarch’s control.

„The observance of Sunday, the performance of the ecclesiastical chant and the conditions for the reception of novices into the monasteries are all dealt with in Capitularies, no less than the defence of the frontiers and the economic administration of the royal estate” (Dawson, 1952:218).
In addition to the general regulations of the Capitulars, Charlemagne initiated a legislative unification, which however he failed to carry through. Basically, he wanted to remove the provinces from the influence of the laws of the earth - very different to many nations of the empire (Franks, Burgundians, Longobards, Saxons etc.) - and enrolling them under lex rex, the ruler law, making it one for all. Jacques Le Goff considers this initiative to transcend the ethnic law as "one of the most revolutionary attempts of Charlemagne, and, also, one of the attempts to best foresee the possibility of a European legal unit". (Le Goff, 2005: 47). As a helpful tool, he set up a monetary system, based on silver dinar, but the revitalization of trade, especially in the East, was quite limited (Le Goff, ibidem).

The opinion of the two authors regarding the cultural life at the court of Aix-la-Chapelle, which historians have later called "The Carolingian Renaissance", is interesting. Without touching deeply the cultural phenomenon that was to flourish in Europe six centuries later, we can speak of a local effervescence, with reverberations in all directions, due to the political will of the monarch and having as vectors important theologians and scholars of that time. The exponent of the “Annals School” opines that without being an educated man, even in the ninth century sense,

"(...) [Charlemagne] had still a firmly principle of governance. He considered that science, erudition, is an expression of power and thereof a complex, necessary tool. Knowledge development and the protection of
knowledge were amongst the first duties of a sovereign. He realized that for this mission, he had to rely first on the clergy, with the best preparation in the field (...). A platform like this could not be applied only on Franks, but it had to capture the entire potential of the cultural empire. Charles even included in this programm some representatives of the countries that were not part of the empire, for example Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Spanish "(Le Goff, 2005: 50). 

As Dawson as well shows (p. 223 in "The Making of Europe"), the “Carolingian Renaissance”, both in letters and in the arts, had the center at the court, but then spread in the main monastic and episcopal centers of the Empire: at Fulda, Tours, St. Gall, Reichenu, Orleans, Auxerre or Pavia. The monarch (Dawson calls him in his the work "the almost illiterate warrior" (!) – p. 223), gathered from all corners theologians and scholars: from the Southern Gaul came Theodulf and Agobard, from Italy - Paul the Deacon, Peter of Pisa and Paulinus of Aquileia, from Ireland - Clement and Dungal, from the land of the Franks - Angilbert and Einhard (his future biographer).

Both Le Goff and Dawson are unanimous in appreciating the main cultural counselor of Charlemagne, Alcuin of York. He was the link between what M. Halphen called "Anglo-Saxon pre-Renaissance" and the new Carolingian movement (Dawson, 1952: 224). Without being a literary genius, Alcuin was in the first place a school initiator, a teacher and a great theologian. At the initiative of Charlemagne, he took care of the religious service of that time, crystallizing the liturgy format in the medieval church. The roman rite had been already
adopted by the Anglo-Saxon Church, under Benedictine influence, and becoming the universal rite of the entire empire (Dawson, 1952: 225).

However, the French author believes that the image projected on the Carolingian Renaissance benefits of a certain historiography magnifier, the original being in reality more limited. As an argument, Le Goff highlights the spirit that reigned at the imperial court, the courtiers participation, with the king as leader, in a literary assumed game, experienced alive, in what the author calls an "palate academy". The result is a scene shared by ancient Greek and Roman heroes with biblical characters:

"Alcuin was Albinus or Flaccus, meaning Horatio; Engilbert was Homer, Theodulf was Pindar; Maudoin was Naso, meaning Ovid, Pepin of Italy was Julius, meaning Caesar; others could have been Aaron and Samuel, Adelard was Augustine, and Charlemagne, above all, was David, "the peace-loving king". This program goes well with Alcuin’s intentions: to make from Charlemagne’s court “a prouder Athens than the old one, because it was ennobled by the doctrine of Christ”” (Le Goff, 2005: 51-52).

The French historian paints a kind of agora, true, a Christian one, but resembling to an ancient theater, in which Charlemagne appears as a mix between Pericles and a Deus ex machina. On the other hand, the British author underlines the religious element, even mystical, enlightened in the emperor’s vision, under the influence of Alcuin. Indeed, Carol saw himself as a new David,
as Le Goff says, or even as a second Josua, but not in a playful manner, but in a redeeming role as one who performs a mission entrusted by the Divinity:

“(…) as the latter [Josua] had restored the law of God, so too Charles was the lawgiver of the Church and held the two swords of spiritual and temporal authority”. (Dawson, 1952: 217).

Alcuin’s influence is comparable to that of Boniface, says Dawson; under his impact, Charles saw himself as the rightfully leader of the Christians. Thus, Alcuin built this vision by reading the Bible and the teachings of St. Augustine, more than a simple continuation of the old Roman imperial tradition. Alcuin did not consider the pontifical dignity above his king status - the future emperor. In *Libri Carolina*, a work written around 790, the counselor says that of the three supreme powers of the world, the Rome Pontifical chair, the Empire of Constantinople and the Kingdom of Charlemagne, the last is the most important, because his ruler has been named by Christ as the leader of the Christian world (Dawson, *ibidem*). Meaning, in an Augustinian tone, that Charles was somewhere in the divine fortress tower, however, over the *locum tenens Christi*!

In conclusion, all the aspects of the Carolingian government - including the "Renaissance" of this period, compose the theocratic ideal:
"The new Frankish state was to an even greater extent the Byzantine Empire a *church-state*, the secular and religious aspects of which were inextricably intermingled". (Dawson, ibidem).

Returning to Alcuin’s secular attributes, he made big efforts to unify the unintelligible scripts of the Merovingian era in a new style and a new writing mode, easy to understand and further used in the entire Western Europe. It is known that multiplying the manuscripts made in ancient writing, numerous mistakes and confusion appeared or have been perpetuated in the texts devoted to the religious service, despite the Capitular especially dedicated to the copyists, *De Scribis, ut non vitiose scribant*. The unvarying solution was so called "the Carolingian minuscule" and his origin is in the abbey of Corbie in the second half of the eighth century, later modified and developed by Alcuin’s in his scribing place at Saint-Martin abbey from Tours (Dawson 1952: 226).

"Moreover, it is to the carolingian copyists that we owe the preservation of a large part of Latin literature, and the modern textual criticism of the classics is still largely based on the manuscripts that have been handed from this period" (Dawson, 1952, ibidem).

The Carolingian Renaissance impresses even today with the wealth of its miniatures, of illustrations in general.
"The numerous schools of painting which radiate outwards from the Rhineland to the German monasteries on the one hand and to Metz and Tours and Reims and Corbie on the other (...)” (Dawson, 1952: 227).

The architecture is also a part of the cultural effervescence of the Empire.

"Two innovations will be a legacy of great importance for the European architecture. One is the symbol of the transept, which integrates the cross into the linear plan of the old Roman basilica. It appears around 800 in Saint-Maurice-d’Angaune at the Cologne Cathedral and at the Beçancon. In the same period, at the Abbey of Saint-Riquier appears a new innovation which is destined to have a lot of success. It is the massive westward, including towers that announce the portals of Romanesque and Gothic churches. (...) Financiers and workshop are travelling, and building managers that will later become artists adorn Europe with monuments that respond to each other "(Le Goff, 2005: 53).

Concluding, “we should nevertheless recognize that the intellectual activity of the Carolingian era was one of the European culture’s layers. The importance of knowing the direction of a state and its prestige was enhanced by Charlemagne in the Capitular De litteris colendis” (Le Goff, 2005: 52). The Capitular is, in fact, a letter from Charles addressed to the Abbot of Fulda, Bagualf, and shows the monarch concern for erudition and education, in general. Charles states wisely that “speech errors are dangerous, but much more
dangerous are the errors of comprehension”. If Jacques Le Goff called the Carolingian Empire as a Europe born prematurely or a return to the past in an attempt to revive the Roman Empire, he did not hesitate, as we have seen, to highlight some unifying factors that have crossed through centuries under the form of action, sketch or just under the form of an idea, "elements that underlie the future Europe “(Le Goff, 2005: 47). We mentioned above: the integration of Christianity and the monastic unification, the legal, legislative and monetary unification, adding the Carolingian Renaissance with its many cultural centers spread throughout the entire Empire, continued and amplified after the death of Charlemagne. More accurate in concluding is Christopher Dawson:

„The Roman Empire of the Carolingians was a Roman Empire without the Roman law and without the Roman legions, without the City and without the Senate. It was shapeless and unorganised mass with no urban nerve-centres and no circulation of economic life. Its officials were neither civic magistrates nor trained civil servants, but merely territorial magnates and semi-tribal war leaders. And yet it was also the embodiment and representative of an ideal, and this ideal, in spite of its apparent failure, proved more durable and persistent than any of the military or polical achievements of the period. It outlived the state to which it had given birth and survived through the anarchy that followed, to become the principle of the new order which arose in the West in the eleventh century” (Dawson, 1952: 257).
a century in which the heart of medieval Europe was already formed, the center being held by two great forces that aroused from common "ancestor Empire": the Kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation.

Another great historian said "from the era of the Crusades until the twentieth century, Frank was a term used by the Greeks and Muslims when referring to the Western europeans”. The best known Frank of all time is Charlemagne, if not "father", then at least "grandfather" or "uncle" of today's Europe.

Notes:


3. Obviously, the word *patriotic* should be understood in a particular manner, especially in the early Middle Ages context. Charles intended, of course, to found a dynasty, to expand and secure the territory occupied by the Franks, by using all means that were available to him. We will later see that these means were not limited to sword and shield, and this is where we clearly see the difference between Charles and other dynasts of his time and also the ones that were to come.
4. Pepin the Short was anointed king by St. Boniface in Mainz, in the year 751.

5. “Regarding the miracle accomplished by the kings, here is an important detail in the coronation ceremony of the kings of France: the anointing with oil brought from heaven. This detail distinguishes the king of France from other monarchs belonging to the Christian world and makes him, frankly, a very Christian king. The oil used during the coronation ceremony, at Reims, is not only a holy oil blessed by a highly ecclesiast, conductor of the ceremony, but also a miraculous liquid. The King of France is indeed the Lord’s anointed. (...) Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims, collects in the ninth century the legend on the form will be implemented in the coronation ritual: a dove (the Holy Spirit) brought at the end of the sixth century a bottle containing holy oil, with which St. Remi baptized Clovis, and the church of Reims - the holly guardian of the bottle - uses this oil for consecration of the kings of France”, Jacques Le Goff (1991) *Imaginarul medieval*, București, Editura Meridiane, p. 39.

6. Peter Brown (2002), *Întemeierea creștinismului european*, București, Polirom, p. 256, quoting: "If someone commits pagan rites (...) he will have to pay with his life. If among them slips any unbaptized Saxon and refuses to accept baptism, preferring to remain a pagan, he will be executed”, from H.R. Loyn and J. Percival (1975), *The Reign of Charlemagne*, London, p. 52. On the same page 256 of his work, Brown opines: “The birth of a different Christianity, in the West, during the reign of Charlemagne and his successors was characterized by the alliance between a fundamentally new church and a new political system that imparted both a tremendous confidence in the efficacy of a conjugated writ
and in persuasion, as the order came to be imposed by an authority unprecedented among large populations of Western Europe”.


**Bibliography:**


Brown, Peter, *Întemeierea creştinismului european*, Bucureşti, Polirom, 2002


Le Goff, Jacques, *Omul Medieval*, Bucureşti, Polirom, 1999