

Charles Martel

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Charles Martel (c. 688 – 22 October 741) was a Frankish statesman and military leader who, as Duke and Prince of the Franks and Mayor of the Palace, was de facto ruler of Francia from 718 until his death.^{[1][2][3][4][5]}

The illegitimate son of Frankish strongman, Pepin of Heristal, and a noblewoman named Alpaida, Martel successfully asserted his claims to power as successor to his father as the power behind the throne in Frankish politics. Continuing and building on his father's work, he restored centralized government in Francia and began the series of military campaigns that re-established the Franks as the undisputed masters of all Gaul. In foreign wars, Martel subjugated Bavaria, Alemannia, and Frisia, vanquished the pagan Saxons, and halted the Islamic advance into Western Europe at the Battle of Tours.^[6]

Martel is considered to be the founding figure of the European Middle Ages. Skilled as an administrator and warrior, he is often credited with a seminal role in the development of feudalism and knighthood. Martel was a great patron of Saint Boniface and made the first attempt at reconciliation between the Papacy and the Franks. The Pope wished him to become the defender of the Holy See and offered him the Roman consulship. Martel refused the offer, but it was a sign of the things to come.^{[7][8]}

Although Martel never assumed the title of king, he divided Francia, like a king, between his sons Carloman and Pepin. The latter became the first of the Carolingians, the family of Charles Martel, to become king. Martel's grandson, Charlemagne, extended the Frankish realms to include much of the West, and became the first Emperor since the fall of Rome. Therefore, on the basis of his achievements, Martel is seen as laying the groundwork for the Carolingian Empire.^{[9][10]} In summing up the man, Gibbon has written, Martel was "the hero of the age," whereas Guerard describes him as being the "champion of the Cross against the Crescent."^{[11][12]}

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Mayor of the Palace



The statue of Charles Martel at the Palace of Versailles in Paris

Duke and Prince of the Franks

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Coronation	718
Predecessor	Pepin of Herstal
Successor	Pepin the Short

Mayor of the Palace of Austrasia

Reign	715 – 741
Coronation	715
Predecessor	Theudoald
Successor	Carloman

King of the Franks (Acting)

Reign	737 – 741
Coronation	737
Predecessor	Theuderic IV

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Successor	Childeric III
Spouse	Rotrude of Trier Swanhild
Issue	Carloman Pepin Grifo Bernard Remigius Hiltrud Others
House	Carolingian
Father	Pepin of Herstal
Mother	Alpaida
Born	688 Herstal
Died	741 Quierzy
Burial	Basilica of St Denis

Background

Martel was born as the illegitimate son of Pepin of Herstal and his concubine Alpaida.^{[13][14]} He had a brother named Childebrand, who later became the Frankish dux of Burgundy. The brothers, being illegitimate, were not considered to be part of their father's paternal family, the Pippinids, who since the early seventh century, had dominated the politics of Francia.

Carolingian dynasty

Pippinids

- Pippin the Elder (c. 580–640)
- Grimoald (616–656)
- Childebert the Adopted (d. 662)

Arnulfings

- Arnulf of Metz (582–640)
- Chlodulf of Metz (d. 696 or 697)
- Ansegisel (c. 602–before 679)
- Pippin the Middle (c. 635–714)
- Grimoald II (d. 714)
- Drogo of Champagne (670–708)
- Theudoald (d. 741)

Carolingians

- **Charles Martel** (686–741)

After the reign of Dagobert I (629-639) the Merovingians effectively ceded power to the Pippinids, who ruled the Frankish realm of Austrasia in all but name as Mayors of the Palace. They controlled the royal treasury, dispersed patronage, and granted land and privileges in the name of the figurehead king. Martel's father,

- Carloman (d. 754)
- Pepin the Short (714–768)
- Carloman I (751–771)
- Charlemagne (742–814)

After the Treaty of Verdun (843)

- Lothair I, Holy Roman Emperor (795–855; Middle Francia)
- Charles the Bald (823–877) (West Francia)
- Louis the German (804–876) (East Francia)

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Pepin, was the second member of the family to rule the Franks. Pepin was able to unite all the Frankish realms by conquering Neustria and Burgundy. He was the first to call himself Duke and Prince of the Franks, a title later taken up by Charles.

Pepin died of old age in 714. His legitimate grandchildren (his legitimate sons having predeceased him) claimed themselves to be his true successors and, with the help of Pepin's legitimate wife, Plectrude, tried to assume power in the realm. Pepin had agreed to name one of them, Theudoald, heir to Francia. Plectrude subsequently imprisoned Charles to secure matters. But, he managed to escape. Charles was able to gather an army for himself, having gained favour among the Franks, primarily for his military prowess. Indeed, he was nicknamed *Martel*, meaning "the hammer" in French, by later, 9th century chronicles.^[15] Although he was entirely neglected in his father's will, being a bastard son, Martel was now determined to become the ruler of all Francia.

Contesting for power

In December 714, Pepin of Herstal died. Prior to his death, he had, at his wife Plectrude's urging, designated Theudoald, his grandson by their son Grimoald, his heir in the entire realm. This was immediately opposed by the nobles because Theudoald was a child of only eight years of age. To prevent Charles using this unrest to his own advantage, Plectrude had him imprisoned in Cologne, the city which was destined to be her capital. This prevented an uprising on his behalf in Austrasia, but not in Neustria.

Civil war of 715-718

In 715, the Neustrian noblesse proclaimed Ragenfrid mayor of their palace on behalf of, and apparently with the support of, Dagobert III, who in theory had the legal authority to select a mayor, though by this time the Merovingian dynasty had lost most such powers.

The Austrasians were not to be left supporting a woman and her young son for long. Before the end of the year, Charles Martel had escaped from prison and been acclaimed mayor by the nobles of that kingdom. The

Neustrians had been attacking Austrasia and the nobles were waiting for a strong man to lead them against their invading countrymen. That year, Dagobert died and the Neustrians proclaimed Chilperic II king without the support of the rest of the Frankish people.

In 716, Chilperic and Ragenfrid together led an army into Austrasia. The Neustrians allied with another invading force under Radbod, King of the Frisians and met Charles in battle near Cologne, which was still held by Plectrude. Charles had little time to gather men, or prepare, and the result was the only defeat of his life. According to Strauss and Gustave, Martel fought a brilliant battle, but realized he could not prevail because he was outnumbered so badly, and retreated.

He fled the field as soon as he realized he did not have the time or the men to prevail, retreating to the mountains of the Eifel to gather men, and train them. The king and his mayor then turned to besiege their other rival in the city and took it and the treasury, and received the recognition of both Chilperic as king and Ragenfrid as mayor. Plectrude surrendered on Theudoald's behalf.

Military Brilliance

At this juncture, however, events turned in favour of Charles. Having made the proper preparations, he fell upon the triumphant army near Malmédy as it was returning to its own province, and, in the ensuing Battle of Amblève, routed it. The few troops who were not killed or captured, fled. Several things were notable about this battle, in which Charles set the pattern for the remainder of his military career: first, he appeared *where* his enemies least expected him, while they were marching triumphantly home and far outnumbered him.

He also attacked *when* least expected, at midday, when armies of that era traditionally were resting. Finally, he attacked them *how* they least expected it, by feigning a retreat to draw his opponents into a trap. The feigned retreat, next to unknown in Western Europe at that time — it was a traditionally eastern tactic — required both extraordinary discipline on the part of the troops and exact timing on the part of their commander. Charles, in this battle, had begun demonstrating the military brilliance that would mark his rule. The result was an unbroken victory streak that lasted until his death.

In Spring 717, Charles returned to Neustria with an army and confirmed his supremacy with a victory at the Battle of Vincy, near Cambrai. He chased the fleeing king and mayor to Paris, before turning back to deal with Plectrude and Cologne. He took her city and dispersed her adherents. He allowed both Plectrude and the young Theudoald to live and treated them with kindness—unusual for those times, when mercy to a former gaoler, or a potential rival, was rare.



The Frankish kingdoms at the time of the death of Pepin of Heristal. Aquitaine (yellow) was outside Arnulfing authority and Neustria and Burgundy (pink) were united in opposition to further Arnulfing dominance of the highest offices. Only Austrasia (green) supported an Arnulfing mayor, first Theudoald then Charles. The German duchies to the east of the Rhine were *de facto* outside of Frankish suzerainty at this time.

On this success, he proclaimed Chlotar IV king of Austrasia in opposition to Chilperic and deposed the archbishop of Reims, Rigobert, replacing him with Milo, a lifelong supporter.

Consolidation of power

After subjugating all Austrasia, he marched against Radbod and pushed him back into his territory, even forcing the concession of West Frisia (later part of the county of Holland). He also sent the Saxons back over the Weser and thus secured his borders—in the name of the new king Clotaire, of course. In 718, Chilperic responded to Charles' new ascendancy by making an alliance with Odo the Great (or Eudes, as he is sometimes known), the duke of Aquitaine, who had made himself independent during the civil war in 715, but was again defeated, at the Battle of Soissons, by Charles.

The king fled with his ducal ally to the land south of the Loire and Ragenfrid fled to Angers. Soon Clotaire IV died and Odo gave up on Chilperic and, in exchange for recognising his dukedom, surrendered the king to Charles, who recognised his kingship over all the Franks in return for legitimate royal affirmation of his mayoralty, likewise over all the kingdoms (718).

Foreign wars from 718-732

The ensuing years were full of strife. Between 718 and 723, Charles secured his power through a series of victories: he won the loyalty of several important bishops and abbots (by donating lands and money for the foundation of abbeys such as Echternach), he subjugated Bavaria and Alemannia, and he defeated the pagan Saxons.

Having unified the Franks under his banner, Charles was determined to punish the Saxons who had invaded Austrasia. Therefore, late in 718, he laid waste their country to the banks of the Weser, the Lippe, and the Ruhr. He defeated them in the Teutoburg Forest. In 719, Charles seized West Frisia without any great resistance on the part of the Frisians, who had been subjects of the Franks but had seized control upon the death of Pippin. Although Charles did not trust the pagans, their ruler, Aldegisel, accepted Christianity, and Charles sent Willibrord, bishop of Utrecht, the famous "Apostle to the Frisians" to convert the people. Charles also did much to support Winfrid, later Saint Boniface, the "Apostle of the Germans."

When Chilperic II died the following year (720), Charles appointed as his successor the son of Dagobert III, Theuderic IV, who was still a minor, and who occupied the throne from 720 to 737. Charles was now appointing the kings whom he supposedly served, *rois fainéants* who were mere puppets in his hands; by the end of his reign they were so useless that he didn't even bother appointing one. At this time, Charles again marched against the Saxons. Then the Neustrians rebelled under Ragenfrid, who had left the county of Anjou. They were easily defeated (724), but Ragenfrid gave up his sons as hostages in turn for keeping his county. This ended the civil wars of Charles' reign.



The Saracen Army outside Paris, 730-32, in an early nineteenth-century depiction by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

The next six years were devoted in their entirety to assuring Frankish authority over the dependent Germanic tribes. Between 720 and 723, Charles was fighting in Bavaria, where the Agilolfing dukes had gradually evolved into independent rulers, recently in alliance with Liutprand the Lombard. He forced the Alemanni to accompany him, and Duke Hugbert submitted to Frankish suzerainty.

In 725 and 728, he again entered Bavaria and the ties of lordship seemed strong. From his first campaign, he brought back the Agilolfing princess Swanachild, who apparently became his concubine. In 730, he marched against Lantfrid, duke of Alemannia, who had also become independent, and killed him in battle. He forced the Alemanni capitulation to Frankish suzerainty and did not appoint a successor to Lantfrid. Thus, southern Germany once more became part of the Frankish kingdom, as had northern Germany during the first years of the reign.

But by 731, his own realm secure, Charles began to prepare exclusively for the coming storm from the south and west.

In 721, the emir of Córdoba had built up a strong army from Morocco, Yemen, and Syria to conquer Aquitaine, the large duchy in the southwest of Gaul, nominally under Frankish sovereignty, but in practice almost independent in the hands of the Odo the Great, the Duke of Aquitaine, since the Merovingian kings had lost power. The invading Muslims besieged the city of Toulouse, then Aquitaine's most important city, and Odo (also called Eudes, or Eudo) immediately left to find help.

He returned three months later just before the city was about to surrender and defeated the Muslim invaders on June 9, 721, at what is now known as the Battle of Toulouse. This critical defeat was essentially the result of a classic enveloping movement by Odo's forces. After Odo originally fled, the Muslims became overconfident and failed to maintain strong outer defenses and continuous scouting. Thus, when Odo returned, he was able to launch a near complete surprise attack on the besieging force, scattering it at the first attack, and slaughtering units caught resting or that fled without weapons or armour.

Raising an army

Due to the situation in Iberia, Martel believed he needed a virtually full-time army—one he could train intensely—as a core of veteran Franks who would be augmented with the usual conscripts called up in time of war. (During the Early Middle Ages, troops were only available after the crops had been planted and before harvesting time.) To train the kind of infantry that could withstand the Muslim heavy cavalry, Charles needed them year-round, and he needed to pay them so their families could buy the food they would have otherwise grown.

To obtain money he seized church lands and property, and used the funds to pay his soldiers. The same Charles who had secured the support of the *ecclesia* by donating land, seized some of it back between 724 and 732. Of course, Church officials were enraged, and, for a time, it looked as though Charles might even be excommunicated for his actions. But then came a significant invasion.

Eve of the Battle of Tours

Historian Paul K. Davis wrote, "Having defeated Eudes, he turned to the Rhine to strengthen his northeastern borders - but in 725 was diverted south with the activity of the Muslims in Acquitane."^[16] Martel then concentrated his attention to the Umayyads, virtually for the remainder of his life. Indeed, 12 years later, when he had thrice rescued Gaul from Umayyad invasions, Antonio Santosuosso noted when he destroyed an

Umayyad army sent to reinforce the invasion forces of the 735 campaigns, "Charles Martel again came to the rescue."^[17] Charles Martel could have pursued the wars against the Saxons—but he was determined to prepare for what he thought was a greater danger.

The Muslims were not aware, at that time, of the true strength of the Franks, or the fact that they were building

a disciplined army instead of the typical barbarian hordes that had dominated Europe after Rome's fall. The Arab Chronicles, the history of that age, show that Arab awareness of the Franks as a growing military power came



The "Age of the Caliphs", showing Umayyad dominance stretching from the Middle East to the Iberian peninsula, including the port of Narbonne, c. 720

only after the Battle of Tours when the Caliph expressed shock at his army's catastrophic defeat.

Battle of Tours

Main article: Battle of Tours

Lead-up and importance

It was under one of their ablest and most renowned commanders, with a veteran army, and with every apparent advantage of time, place, and circumstance, that the Arabs made their great effort at the conquest of Europe north of the Pyrenees.^[18]

—Edward Shepherd Creasy, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*

The Cordoban emirate had previously invaded Gaul and had been stopped in its northward sweep at the Battle of Toulouse, in 721. The hero of that less celebrated event had been Odo the Great, Duke of Aquitaine, who was not the progenitor of a race of kings and patron of chroniclers. It has previously been explained how Odo defeated the invading Muslims, but when they returned, things were far different. The arrival in the interim of a new emir of Cordoba, Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, who brought with him a huge force of Arabs and Berber horsemen, triggered a far greater invasion.

Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi had been at Toulouse, and the Arab Chronicles make clear he had strongly opposed the Emir's decision not to secure outer defenses against a relief force, which allowed Odo and his relief force to attack with impunity before the Islamic cavalry could assemble or mount. Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi had no

intention of permitting such a disaster again. This time the Umayyad horsemen were ready for battle, and the results were horrific for the Aquitanians.

Odo, hero of Toulouse, was badly defeated in the Muslim invasion of 732 at the battle prior to the Muslim sacking of Bordeaux, and when he gathered a second army, at the Battle of the River Garonne—Western chroniclers state, "God alone knows the number of the slain"—and the city of Bordeaux was sacked and looted. Odo fled to Charles, seeking help. Charles agreed to come to Odo's rescue, provided Odo acknowledged Charles and his house as his overlords, which Odo did formally at once. Charles was pragmatic; while most commanders would never use their enemies in battle, Odo and his remaining Aquitanian nobles formed the right flank of Charles's forces at Tours.

The Battle of Tours earned Charles the cognomen "Martel" ('Hammer') for the merciless way he hammered his enemies. Many historians, including Sir Edward Creasy, believe that had he failed at Tours, Islam would probably have overrun Gaul, and perhaps the remainder of Western Europe. Gibbon made clear his belief that the Umayyad armies would have conquered from Japan to the Rhine, and even England, having the English Channel for protection, with ease, had Martel not prevailed. Creasy said "the great victory won by Charles Martel ... gave a decisive check to the career of Arab conquest in Western Europe, rescued Christendom from Islam, [and] preserved the relics of ancient and the germs of modern civilization."

Gibbon's belief that the fate of Christianity hinged on this battle is echoed by other historians including John B. Bury, and was very popular for most of modern historiography. It fell somewhat out of style in the 20th century, when historians such as Bernard Lewis contended that Arabs had little intention of occupying northern France. More recently, however, many historians have tended once again to view the Battle of Tours as a very significant event in the history of Europe and Christianity. Equally, many, such as William E. Watson, still believe this battle was one of macrohistorical world-changing importance, if they do not go so far as Gibbon does rhetorically.

Contemporary historians

In the modern era, Matthew Bennett and his co-authors of *Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World*, published in 2005, argue that "few battles are remembered 1,000 years after they are fought ... but the Battle of Poitiers, (Tours) is an exception ... Charles Martel turned back a Muslim raid that, had it been allowed to continue, might have conquered Gaul." Michael Grant, author of *History of Rome*, grants the Battle of Tours such importance that he lists it in the macrohistorical dates of the Roman era.

It is important to note however that modern Western historians, military historians, and writers, essentially fall into three camps. The first, those who believe Gibbon was right in his assessment that Martel saved Christianity and Western civilization by this battle are typified by Bennett, Paul Davis, Robert Martin, and educationalist Dexter B. Wakefield who writes in *An Islamic Europe*:

A Muslim France? Historically, it nearly happened. But as a result of Martel's fierce opposition, which ended Muslim advances and set the stage for centuries of war thereafter, Islam moved no farther into Europe. European schoolchildren learn about the Battle of Tours in much the same way that American students learn about Valley Forge and Gettysburg."^[19]

The second camp of contemporary historians believe that a failure by Martel at Tours could have been a disaster, destroying what would become Western civilization after the Renaissance. Certainly all historians agree that no power would have remained in Europe able to halt Islamic expansion had the Franks failed. William E. Watson, one of the most respected historians of this era, strongly supports Tours as a

macrohistorical event, but distances himself from the rhetoric of Gibbon and Drubeck, writing, for example, of the battle's importance in Frankish and world history in 1993:

There is clearly some justification for ranking Tours-Poitiers among the most significant events in Frankish history when one considers the result of the battle in light of the remarkable record of the successful establishment by Muslims of Islamic political and cultural dominance along the entire eastern and southern rim of the former Christian, Roman world. The rapid Muslim conquest of Palestine, Syria, Egypt and the North African coast all the way to Morocco in the seventh century resulted in the permanent imposition by force of Islamic culture onto a previously Christian and largely non-Arab base. The Visigothic

kingdom fell to Muslim conquerors in a single battle at the Battle of Guadalete on the Rio Barbate in 711, and the Hispanic Christian population took seven long centuries to regain control of the Iberian Peninsula. The Reconquista, of course, was completed in 1492, only months before Columbus received official backing for his fateful voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Had Charles Martel suffered at Tours-Poitiers the fate of King Roderick at the Rio Barbate, it is doubtful that a "do-nothing" sovereign of the Merovingian realm could have later succeeded where his talented major domus had failed. Indeed, as Charles was the progenitor of the Carolingian line of Frankish rulers and grandfather of Charlemagne, one can even say with a degree of certainty that the subsequent history of the West would have proceeded along vastly different currents had 'Abd ar-Rahman been victorious at Tours-Poitiers in 732.^[20]

The final camp of Western historians believe that the importance of the battle is dramatically overstated. This view is typified by Alessandro Barbero, who writes, "Today, historians tend to play down the significance of the battle of Poitiers, pointing out that the purpose of the Arab force defeated by Charles Martel was not to conquer the Frankish kingdom, but simply to pillage the wealthy monastery of St-Martin of Tours".^[21] Similarly, Tomaž Mastnak writes:

Modern historians have constructed a myth presenting this victory as having saved Christian Europe from the Muslims. Edward Gibbon, for example, called Charles Martel the savior of Christendom and the battle near Poitiers an encounter that changed the history of the world... This myth has survived well into our own times... Contemporaries of the battle, however, did not overstate its significance. The continuators of Fredegar's chronicle, who probably wrote in the mid-eighth century, pictured the battle as just one of many military encounters between Christians and Saracens - moreover, as only one in a series of wars fought by Frankish princes for booty and territory... One of Fredegar's continuators presented the battle of Poitiers as what it really was: an episode in the struggle between Christian princes as the Carolingians strove to bring Aquitaine under their rule.^[22]



Bataille de Poitiers, en octobre 732, by Charles de Steuben from 1834 to 1837.

However, it is vital to note, when assessing Charles Martel's life, that even those historians who dispute the significance of this one battle as the event that saved Christianity, do not dispute that Martel himself had a huge effect on Western European history. Modern military historian Victor Davis Hanson acknowledges the debate on this battle, citing historians both for and against its macrohistorical placement:

Recent scholars have suggested Poitiers, so poorly recorded in contemporary sources, was a mere raid and thus a construct of western myth-making or that a Muslim victory might have been preferable to continued Frankish dominance. What is clear is that Poitiers marked a general continuance of the successful defense of Europe (from the Muslims). Flush from the victory at Tours, Charles Martel went on to clear southern France from Islamic attackers for decades, unify the warring kingdoms into the foundations of the Carolingian Empire, and ensure ready and reliable troops from local estates.^[23]

After Tours

In the subsequent decade, Charles led the Frankish army against the eastern duchies, Bavaria and Alemannia, and the southern duchies, Aquitaine and Provence. He dealt with the ongoing conflict with the Frisians and Saxons to his northeast with some success, but full conquest of the Saxons and their incorporation into the Frankish empire would wait for his grandson Charlemagne, primarily because Martel concentrated the bulk of his efforts against Muslim expansion.

So instead of concentrating on conquest to his east, he continued expanding Frankish authority in the west, and denying the Emirate of Córdoba a foothold in Europe beyond Al-Andalus. After his victory at Tours, Martel continued on in campaigns in 736 and 737 to drive other Muslim armies from bases in Gaul after they again attempted to expand beyond Al-Andalus.

Wars from 732-737

Between his victory of 732 and 735, Charles reorganized the kingdom of Burgundy, replacing the counts and dukes with his loyal supporters, thus strengthening his hold on power. He was forced, by the ventures of Radbod, duke of the Frisians (719-734), son of the Duke Aldegisel who had accepted the missionaries Willibrord and Boniface, to invade independence-minded Frisia again in 734. In that year, he slew the duke, who had expelled the Christian missionaries, in the battle of the Boarn and so wholly subjugated the populace (he destroyed every pagan shrine) that the people were peaceful for twenty years after.

The dynamic changed in 735 because of the death of Odo the Great, who had been forced to acknowledge, albeit reservedly, the suzerainty of Charles in 719. Though Charles wished to unite the duchy directly to himself and went there to elicit the proper homage of the Aquitainians, the nobility proclaimed Odo's son, Hunald of Aquitaine, whose dukedom Charles recognised when the Umayyads invaded Provence the next year, and who equally was forced to acknowledge Charles as overlord as he had no hope of holding off the Muslims alone.



Charles Martel depicted in the French book "*Promptuarii Iconum Insigniorum*" by Guillaume Rouille, published in 1553.

This naval Arab invasion was headed by Abdul Rahman's son. It landed in Narbonne in 736 and moved at once to reinforce Arles and move inland. Charles temporarily put the conflict with Hunold on hold, and descended on the Provençal strongholds of the Umayyads. In 736, he retook Montfrin and Avignon, and Arles and Aix-en-Provence with the help of Liutprand, King of the Lombards. Nîmes, Agde, and Béziers, held by Islam since 725, fell to him and their fortresses were destroyed.

He crushed one Umayyad army at Arles, as that force sallied out of the city, and then took the city itself by a direct and brutal frontal attack, and burned it to the ground to prevent its use again as a stronghold for Umayyad expansion. He then moved swiftly and defeated a mighty host outside of Narbonne at the River Berre, but failed to take the city. Military historians believe he could have taken it, had he chosen to tie up all his resources to do so—but he believed his life was coming to a close, and he had much work to do to prepare for his sons to take control of the Frankish realm.

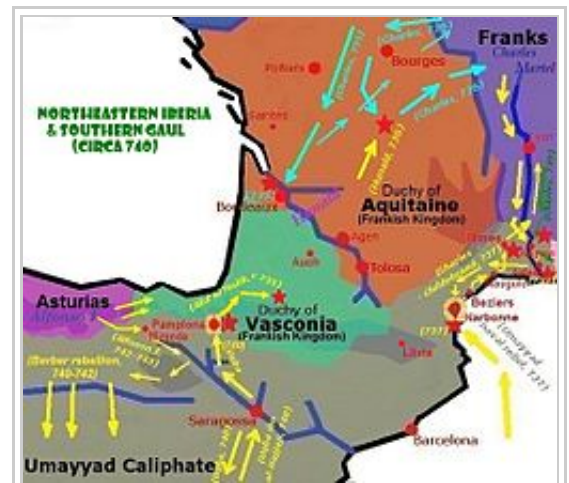
A direct frontal assault, such as took Arles, using rope ladders and rams, plus a few catapults, simply was not sufficient to take Narbonne without horrific loss of life for the Franks, troops Martel felt he could not lose. Nor could he spare years to starve the city into submission, years he needed to set up the administration of an empire his heirs would reign over. In addition, he faced strong opposition from regional lords such as the patrician Maurentius, from Marseille, who revolted against the Frankish leader. Moreover, the Aquitanian duke Hunald threatened his lines of communication with the north, so deciding him to withdraw from Septimania and destroy several strongholds (Béziers, Agde, etc.).^[24] He left Narbonne therefore, isolated and surrounded, and his son would return to conquer it for the Franks.

Notable about these campaigns was Charles' incorporation, for the first time, of heavy cavalry with stirrups to augment his phalanx. His ability to coordinate infantry and cavalry veterans was unequalled in that era and enabled him to face superior numbers of invaders, and to decisively defeat them again and again. Some historians believe the Battle against the main Muslim force at the River Berre, near Narbonne, in particular was as important a victory for Christian Europe as Tours.^[25]

Further, unlike his father at Tours, Rahman's son in 736-737 knew that the Franks were a real power, and that Martel personally was a force to be reckoned with. He had no intention of allowing Martel to catch him unaware and dictate the time and place of battle, as his father had. He concentrated instead on seizing a substantial portion of the coastal plains around Narbonne in 736 and heavily reinforced Arles as he advanced inland.

Abdul Rahman's son planned from there to move from city to city, fortifying as they went, and if Martel wished to stop them from making a permanent enclave for expansion of the Caliphate, he would have to come to them, in the open, where, he, unlike his father, would dictate the place of battle. All worked as he had planned, until Martel arrived, albeit more swiftly than the Moors believed he could call up his entire army. Unfortunately for Rahman's son, however, he had overestimated the time it would take Martel to develop heavy cavalry equal to that of the Muslims.

The Caliphate believed it would take a generation, but Martel managed it in five years. Prepared to face the Frankish phalanx, the Muslims were totally unprepared to face a mixed force of heavy cavalry and infantry in a



Charles Martel's military campaigns in Aquitaine, Septimania and Provence after the Battle of Tour-Poitiers (734-742)

phalanx. Thus, Charles again championed Christianity and halted Muslim expansion into Europe. These defeats, plus those at the hands of Leo in Anatolia, were the last great attempt at expansion by the Umayyad Caliphate before the destruction of the dynasty at the Battle of the Zab, and the rending of the Caliphate forever, especially the utter destruction of the Umayyad army at River Berre near Narbonne in 737.

Interregnum

In 737, at the tail end of his campaigning in Provence and Septimania, the king, Theuderic IV, died. Martel, titling himself *maior domus* and *princeps et dux Francorum*, did not appoint a new king and nobody acclaimed one. The throne lay vacant until Martel's death. As the historian Charles Oman says (*The Dark Ages*, pg 297), "he cared not for name or style so long as the real power was in his hands."

Gibbon has said Martel was "content with the titles of Mayor or Duke of the Franks, but he deserved to become the father of a line of kings," which he did. Gibbon also says of him, "in the public danger, he was summoned by the voice of his country."

The interregnum, the final four years of Charles' life, was more peaceful than most of it had been and much of his time was now spent on administrative and organisational plans to create a more efficient state. Though, in 738, he compelled the Saxons of Westphalia to do him homage and pay tribute, and in 739 checked an uprising in Provence, the rebels being under the leadership of Maurontus. Charles set about integrating the outlying realms of his empire into the Frankish church.

He erected four dioceses in Bavaria (Salzburg, Regensburg, Freising, and Passau) and gave them Boniface as archbishop and metropolitan over all Germany east of the Rhine, with his seat at Mainz. Boniface had been under his protection from 723 on; indeed the saint himself explained to his old friend, Daniel of Winchester, that without it he could neither administer his church, defend his clergy, nor prevent idolatry. It was Boniface who had defended Charles most stoutly for his deeds in seizing ecclesiastical lands to pay his army in the days leading to Tours, as one doing what he must to defend Christianity.

In 739, Pope Gregory III begged Charles for his aid against Liutprand, but Charles was loath to fight his onetime ally and ignored the Papal plea. Nonetheless, the Papal applications for Frankish protection showed how far Martel had come from the days he was tottering on excommunication, and set the stage for his son and grandson to rearrange Italian political boundaries to suit the Papacy, and protect it.

Death (741)

Charles Martel died on October 22, 741, at Quierzy-sur-Oise in what is today the Aisne *département* in the Picardy region of France. He was buried at Saint Denis Basilica in Paris. His territories were divided among his adult sons a year earlier: to Carloman he gave Austrasia and Alemannia (with Bavaria as a vassal), to Pippin the Younger Neustria and Burgundy (with Aquitaine as a vassal), and to Grifo nothing, though some sources indicate he intended to give him a strip of land between Neustria and Austrasia.

Gibbon called him "the hero of the age" and declared "Christendom ... delivered ... by the genius and good fortune of one man, Charles Martel."

Legacy

At the beginning of Charles Martel's career, he had many internal opponents and felt the need to appoint his

own kingly claimant, Clotaire IV. By his end, however, the dynamics of rulership in Francia had changed, no hallowed Meroving was needed, neither for defence nor legitimacy: Charles divided his realm between his sons without opposition (though he ignored his young son Bernard). In between, he strengthened the Frankish state by consistently defeating, through superior generalship, the host of hostile foreign nations which beset it on all sides, including the non-Christian Saxons, which his grandson Charlemagne would fully subdue, and Moors, which he halted on a path of continental domination.

Though he never cared about titles, his son Pippin did, and finally asked the Pope "who should be King, he who has the title, or he who has the power?" The Pope, highly dependent on Frankish armies for his independence from Lombard and Byzantine power (the Byzantine Emperor still considered himself to be the only legitimate "Roman Emperor", and thus, ruler of all of the provinces of the ancient empire, whether recognised or not), declared for "he who had the power" and immediately crowned Pippin.

Decades later, in 800, Pippin's son Charlemagne was crowned emperor by the Pope, further extending the principle by delegitimising the nominal authority of the Byzantine Emperor in the Italian peninsula (which had, by then, shrunk to encompass little more than Apulia and Calabria at best) and ancient Roman Gaul, including the Iberian outposts Charlemagne had established in the *Marca Hispanica* across the Pyrenees, what today forms Catalonia. In short, though the Byzantine Emperor claimed authority over all the old Roman Empire, as the legitimate "Roman" Emperor, it was simply not reality.

The bulk of the Western Roman Empire had come under Carolingian rule, the Byzantine Emperor having had almost no authority in the West since the sixth century, though Charlemagne, a consummate politician, preferred to avoid an open breach with Constantinople. An institution unique in history was being born: the Holy Roman Empire. Though the sardonic Voltaire ridiculed its nomenclature, saying that the Holy Roman Empire was "neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire," it constituted an enormous political power for a time, especially under the Saxon and Salian dynasties and, to a lesser, extent, the Hohenstaufen. It lasted until 1806, by which time it was a nonentity. Though his grandson became its first emperor, the "empire" such as it was, was largely born during the reign of Charles Martel.

Charles was that rarest of commodities in the Middle Ages: a brilliant strategic general, who also was a tactical commander *par excellence*, able in the heat of battle to adapt his plans to his foe's forces and movement — and amazingly, to defeat them repeatedly, especially when, as at Tours, they were far superior in men and weaponry, and at Berre and Narbonne, when they were superior in numbers of fighting men. Charles had the last quality which defines genuine greatness in a military commander: he foresaw the dangers of his foes, and prepared for them with care; he used ground, time, place, and fierce loyalty of his troops to offset his foe's superior weaponry and tactics; third, he adapted, again and again, to the enemy on the battlefield, shifting to compensate for the unforeseen and unforeseeable.



14th century depiction of the death of Charles Martel.



Charles Martel divides the realm between Pepin and Carloman. Grandes Chroniques de France. Bibliothèque Nationale.

Gibbon, whose tribute to Martel has been noted, was not alone among the great mid era historians in fervently praising Martel; Thomas Arnold ranks the victory of Charles Martel even higher than the victory of Arminius in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in its impact on all of modern history:

Charles Martel's victory at Tours was among those signal deliverances which have affected for centuries the happiness of mankind.

—History of the later Roman Commonwealth, vol ii. p. 317.

German historians are especially ardent in their praise of Martel and in their belief that he saved Europe and Christianity from then all-conquering Islam, praising him also for driving back the ferocious Saxon barbarians on his borders. Schlegel speaks of this "mighty victory" in terms of fervent gratitude, and tells how "the arm of Charles Martel saved and delivered the Christian nations of the West from the deadly grasp of all-destroying Islam", and Ranke points out,

as one of the most important epochs in the history of the world, the commencement of the eighth century, when on the one side Mohammedanism threatened to overspread Italy and Gaul, and on the other the ancient idolatry of Saxony and Friesland once more forced its way across the Rhine. In this peril of Christian institutions, a youthful prince of Germanic race, Karl Martell, arose as their champion, maintained them with all the energy which the necessity for self-defence calls forth, and finally extended them into new regions.^[citation needed]

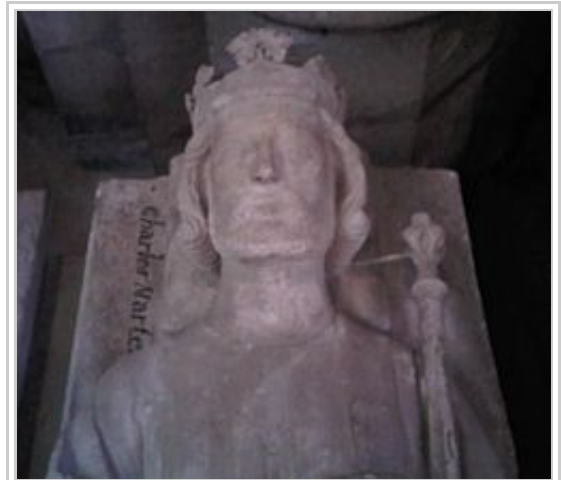
In 1922 and 1923, Belgian historian Henri Pirenne published a series of papers, known collectively as the "Pirenne Thesis", which remain influential to this day. Pirenne held that the Roman Empire continued, in the Frankish realms, up until the time of the Arab conquests in the 7th century. These conquests disrupted Mediterranean trade routes leading to a decline in the European economy. Such continued disruption would have meant complete disaster except for Charles Martel's halting of Islamic expansion into Europe from 732 on. What he managed to preserve led to the Carolingian Renaissance, named after him.

Professor Santosuosso^[17] perhaps sums up Martel best when he talks about his coming to the rescue of his Christian allies in Provence, and driving the Muslims back into the Iberian Peninsula forever in the mid and late 730s:

After assembling forces at Saragossa the Muslims entered French territory in 735,^[citation needed] crossed the River Rhone and captured and looted Arles. From there they struck into the heart of Provence, ending with the capture of Avignon, despite strong resistance. Islamic forces remained in French territory for about four years, carrying raids to Lyon, Burgundy, and Piedmont. Again Charles Martel came to the rescue, reconquering most of the lost territories in two campaigns in 736 and 739, except for the city of Narbonne, which finally fell in 759. The second (Muslim) expedition was probably more dangerous than the first to Poitiers. Yet its failure (at Martel's hands) put an end to any serious Muslim expedition across the Pyrenees (forever).^[citation needed]



13th-century tomb of Charles Martel, Basilique Saint-Denis^[26]



Tomb of Charles Martel, Basilique Saint-Denis (detail).

Skilled as an administrator and ruler, Martel organized what would become the medieval European government: a system of fiefdoms, loyal to barons, counts, dukes and ultimately the King, or in his case, simply *maior domus* and princeps et dux Francorum. ("Mayor of the Palace, Duke of the Franks") His close coordination of church with state began the medieval pattern for such government. He created what would become the first western standing army since the fall of Rome by his maintaining a core of loyal veterans around which he organized the normal feudal levies. In essence, he changed Europe from a horde of barbarians fighting with one another, to an organized state.

Beginning of the *Reconquista*

Further information: Reconquista

Although it took another two decades for the Franks to drive all the Arab garrisons out of Septimania and across the Pyrenees, Charles Martel's halt of the invasion of French soil turned the tide of Islamic advances, and the unification of the Frankish kingdoms under Martel, his son Pippin the Younger, and his grandson Charlemagne created a western power which prevented the Emirate of Córdoba from expanding over the Pyrenees. Martel, who in 732 was on the verge of excommunication, instead was recognised by the Church as its paramount defender. Pope Gregory II wrote to him more than once, asking his protection and aid,^[27] and he remained, till his death, fixated on stopping the Muslims.

Martel's son Pippin the Younger (Pepin II, The Short) kept his father's promise and returned and took Narbonne by siege in 759. His grandson, Charlemagne, actually established the *Marca Hispanica* across the Pyrenees in part of what today is Catalonia, reconquering Girona in 785 and Barcelona in 801. Carolingians called this region of modern-day Spain "The Moorish Marches", and saw it as more than a simple check on the Muslims in Hispania.^[citation needed] It formed a permanent buffer zone against Islam and became the basis, along with the efforts of Pelayo (Latin: Pelagius) and his descendants, for the Reconquista.

Military legacy

Heavy infantry and permanent army

Victor Davis Hanson argues that Charles Martel launched "the thousand year struggle" between European heavy infantry and Muslim cavalry.^[28] Of course, Martel is also the father of heavy cavalry in Europe, as he integrated heavy armoured cavalry into his forces. This creation of a real army would continue all through his reign, and that of his son, Pepin the Short, until his Grandson, Charlemagne, would possess the world's largest and finest army since the peak of Rome.^[29] Equally, the Muslims used infantry - indeed, at the Battle of Toulouse most of their forces were light infantry. It was not till Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi brought a huge force of Arab and Berber cavalry with him when he assumed the emirate of Al-Andulus that the Muslim forces became primarily cavalry.

Martel's army was the first standing permanent army since the fall of Rome in 476.^[29] At its core was a body of tough, seasoned heavy infantry who displayed exceptional resolution at Tours. The Frankish infantry wore as much as 70 pounds of armour, including their heavy wooden shields with an iron boss. Standing close together, and well disciplined, they were unbreakable at Tours.^[30] Martel had taken the money and property he had seized from the church and paid local nobles to supply trained ready infantry year round.

This was the core of veterans who served with him on a permanent basis, and as Hanson says, "provided a

steady supply of dependable troops year around." While other Germanic cultures, such as the Visigoths or Vandals, had a proud martial tradition, and the Franks themselves had an annual muster of military aged men, such tribes were only able to field armies around planting and harvest. It was Martel's creation of a system whereby he could call on troops year round that gave the Carolingians the first standing and permanent army since Rome's fall in the west.

Charles Martel's most important military achievement was the victory at Tours. Creasy argues that the Martel victory "preserved the relics of ancient and the gems of modern civilizations." Gibbon called those eight days in 732, the week leading up to Tours, and the battle itself, "the events that rescued our ancestors of Britain, and our neighbours of Gaul [France], from the civil and religious yoke of the Koran." Paul Akers, in his editorial on Charles Martel, says for those who value life and freedom "you might spare a minute sometime today, and every October, to say a silent 'thank you' to a gang of half-savage Germans and especially to their leader, Charles 'The Hammer' Martel."^[31]

Martel analysed what would be necessary for him to withstand a larger force and superior technology (the Muslim horsemen had adopted the armour and accoutrements of heavy cavalry from the Sassanid warrior class, which made the armored mounted knight possible). Not daring to send his few horsemen against the Islamic cavalry, he had his army fight in a formation used by the ancient Greeks to withstand superior numbers and weapons by discipline, courage, and a willingness to die for their cause: a phalanx. He had trained a core of his men year round, using mostly Church funds, and some had been with him since his earliest days after his father's death. It was this hard core of disciplined veterans that won the day for him at Tours.

Hanson emphasizes that Martel's greatest accomplishment as a general may have been his ability to keep his troops under control. Iron discipline saved his infantry from the fate of so many infantrymen - such as the Saxons at Hastings - who broke formation and were slaughtered piecemeal. After using this infantry force by itself at Tours, he studied the foe's forces and further adapted to them, initially using stirrups and saddles recovered from the foe's dead horses, and armour from the dead horsemen.

The defeats Martel inflicted on the Muslims were vital in that the split in the Islamic world left the Caliphate unable to mount an all-out attack on Europe via its Iberian stronghold after 750. His ability to meet this challenge, until the fragmentation of authority within the Muslims, is considered by most historians to be of macrohistorical importance, and is why Dante writes of him in Heaven as one of the "Defenders of the Faith."

H. G. Wells says of Charles Martel's decisive defeat of the Muslims in his "Short History of the World:

The Muslim when they crossed the Pyrenees in 720 found this Frankish kingdom under the practical rule of Charles Martel, the Mayor of the Palace of a degenerate descendant of Clovis, and experienced the decisive defeat of Poitiers (732) at his hands. This Charles Martel was practically overlord of Europe north of the Alps from the Pyrenees to Hungary."^[32]



Stained glass window depicting Charles Martel at Strasbourg Cathedral.

However, when the Muslim first crossed the Pyrenees, Aquitaine was actually an independent realm under duke Odo's leadership and the Gothic Septimania remained out of Frankish rule. Odo, who was Charles's southern rival, had struck a peace treaty after the Frankish civil wars in Neustria and Austrasia, and garnered much popularity and the Pope's favour for his victory on the 721 Battle of Toulouse against the Moors. On the eve of the Muslim expedition north (731), Charles Martel crossed the Loire and captured the Aquitanian city of Bourges, while Odo re-captured it briefly after.

John H. Haaren says in "*Famous Men of the Middle Ages*"

The battle of Tours, or Poitiers, as it should be called, is regarded as one of the decisive battles of the world. It decided that Christians, and not Moslems, should be the ruling power in Europe. Charles Martel is especially celebrated as the hero of this battle.

Just as his grandson, Charlemagne, would become famous for his swift and unexpected movements in his campaigns, Charles was renowned for never doing what his enemies forecast he would do, and for moving far faster than his opponents believed he could.

It is notable that the Northmen did not begin their European raids until after the death of Martel's grandson, Charlemagne. They had the naval capacity to begin those raids at least three generations earlier, and constructed defenses against counterattacks by land, but chose not to challenge Martel, his son Pippin, or his grandson, Charlemagne. This was probably fortunate for Martel, who despite his enormous gifts, would probably not have been able to repel the Vikings in addition to the Muslims, Saxons, and everyone else he defeated.

Conclusion

J.M. Roberts says of Charles Martel in his note on the Carolingians on page 315 of his 1993 *History of the World*:

It (the Carolingian line) produced Charles Martel, the soldier who turned the Arabs back at Tours, and the supporter of Saint Boniface, the Evangelizer of Germany. This is a considerable double mark to have left on the history of Europe."

Gibbon perhaps summarized Charles Martel's legacy most eloquently: "in a laborious administration of 24 years he had restored and supported the dignity of the throne... by the activity of a warrior who in the same campaign could display his banner on the Elbe, the Rhone, and shores of the ocean."

Family and children

Charles Martel married twice:

His first wife was Rotrude, daughter of Leudwinus, (died 724). They had the following children:

- Hiltrud (d. 754), married Odilo I, Duke of Bavaria
- Carloman
- Landrade (Landres), married Sigrand, Count of Hesbania.
- Auda, Aldana, or Alane, married Thierry IV, Count of Autun and Toulouse.
- Pepin the Short

His second wife was Swanhild. They had the following child:

- Grifo

Charles Martel also had a mistress, Ruodhaid. They had the following children:

- Bernard (b. before 732–787)
- Hieronymus, son of Charles MartellHieronymus
- Remigius, archbishop of Rouen (d. 771)

Notes

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7. ^ "Pope Gregory III, menaced by the Lombards, invoked the aid of Charles in 739, sent him a deputation with the keys of the Holy Sepulchre and the chains of St. Peter, and offered to break with the emperor and Constantinople, and to give Charles the Roman consulate (ut a partibus imperatoris recederet et Romanum consulatum Carolo sanciret). This proposal, though unsuccessful, was the starting point of a new papal policy." Charles Martel - NNDB (<http://www.nndb.com/people/874/000092598/>)
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17. ^ ^a ^b Santosuosso, A. (2004). *Barbarians, marauders, and infidels : the ways of medieval warfare*. Westview Press. ISBN 978-0-8133-9153-3. OCLC 433381450 (<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/433381450>).
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21. ^ Barbero, 2004, p. 10.
22. ^ Mastnak, 2002, pp. 99-100.
23. ^ Hanson, Victor Davis, 2001, p. 167.
24. ^ Lewis, Archibald R (1965). *The Development of Southern French and Catalan Society, 718–1050* (<http://libro.uca.edu/lewis/sfcatsoc.htm>). Austin: University of Texas Press. ISBN 978-0-292-72941-4.
25. ^ In *Barbarians, Marauders, and Infidels*, Antonio Santosuosso, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Western Ontario, and considered an expert historian in the era in dispute, puts forth an interesting modern opinion on Martel, Tours, and the subsequent campaigns against Rahman's son in 736-737. Santosuosso presents a compelling case that these later defeats of invading Muslim armies were at least as important as Tours in their defence of Western Christendom and the preservation of Western monasticism, the monasteries of which were the centers of learning which ultimately led Europe out of her Middle Ages. He also makes a compelling argument, after studying the Arab histories of the period, that these were clearly armies of invasion, sent by the Caliph not just to avenge Tours, but to begin the conquest of Christian Europe and bring it into the Caliphate.
26. ^ Created under Louis IX; cf. R.E. Giesey, *The royal funeral ceremony in Renaissance France* (1960), p. 31 n. 13; E.A.R. Brown, *The Oxford collection of the drawings of Roger de Gaignières and the royal tombs of Saint-Denis* (1988), p. 11 n. 15.
27. ^ Medieval Sourcebook: Pope Gregory II - Appeal to Charles Martel (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/g2-martellet.html>)
28. ^ Hanson, 2001, p. 141-166.
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- Michael Grant "History of Rome"

External links

- Ian Meadows, "The Arabs in Occitania"

(<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/199302/the.arabs.in.occitania.htm>): A sketch giving the context of the conflict from the Arab point of view.

- <http://www.standin.se/fifteen07a.htm> *Poke's edition of Creasy's "15 Most Important Battles Ever Fought According to Edward Shepherd Creasy" Chapter VII. The Battle of Tours, A.D. 732.*
- Richard Hooker, "Civil War and the Umayyads" (<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ISLAM/UMAY.HTM>)
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Charles Martel Carolingian Dynasty Born: 686 Died: 741		
Regnal titles		
Preceded by Pepin II the Middle	Mayor of the Palace of Austrasia 717–741	Succeeded by Carloman
Preceded by Ragenfrid	Mayor of the Palace of Neustria 717–741	Succeeded by Pepin the Short
Preceded by Theuderic IV	King of the Franks (Acting) 737–741	Succeeded by Childeric III

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