

Prehistory and Early Middle Ages

The earliest testimonies of human settlements along the river Main near Frankfurt took the form of ceramics with band ornamentation, dating back to 5000 BC. However, undisputed evidence of humans in and around today's Frankfurt did not occur until 2000 years later, in the neolithic period.

Around the BC/AD turning point large parts of Germania were conquered and occupied by the Romans. After a campaign against the tribe of the Chatti in 80 AD the Rhine-Main area finally became part of the Holy Roman Empire, and a fortified military camp and supply base were set up in Nida-Heddernheim and on the Domhügel (Cathedral Hill, now part of Frankfurt). In 110 AD the Nida garrison was moved to the Roman border in Saalburg in the Taunus region, and the fort was replaced by a civilian settlement. Nida became the administrative centre of the civitas tauniensium.

During the 3rd century Roman influence began to grow weaker in Upper Germania. After a period of Alemannic rule, the Rhine-Main area was occupied by Franconians around 500 AD, when they created a structure of tribal districts (called Gau), regions (Forst) and royal estates (Königsland). In Frankfurt Franconian settlements could be found on the Domhügel (Cathedral Hill) and the Karmeliterhügel (Carmelite Hill). Place names ending in -heim show that they were founded by Franconians.

Frankfurt was first mentioned in writing in a deed for St. Emmeram's Monastery in Regensburg, signed by Charlemagne on February 22, 794. The emperor was spending Easter in his imperial residence at Franconofurd. In June that year he gathered together all the spiritual and secular dignitaries for an imperial synod.

In 822 the Emperor Louis the Pious convened an imperial assembly in Frankfurt, to negotiate the eastern parts of the empire. He had new buildings added to his palace, offering sufficient space for himself and his entourage. The vast royal estate to the right of the Rhine, of which the dimensions are chronicled in the 9th-century Lorschurbar, secured adequate supplies for the Carolingian court.

When the Franconian empire was split in the Treaty of Verdun in 843, Louis the German was given East Franconia, with Frankfurt as its capital (*specialis sedes orientalis regis*). In 852 Louis dedicated the imperial chapel to the Saviour (Salvator) and founded a chapter for twelve secular priests. In 855 Lothar II, a nephew of Louis's, was elected king in Frankfurt (First Royal Election). The imperial residence became the centre of a royal administrative district, situated conveniently at the intersection of several highways and at the ford (Furt in German) on the Lower Main.

During the next few centuries Frankfurt continued to be the scene of imperial politics and royal elections, even though the main power bases were now outside the Rhine-Main area. German rulers often came to stay in the town. In 994 Otto III endowed the Salvatorkirche (Saviour's Church) with royal fishery rights on the river Main. Frankfurt received the title of castellum and was apparently given fortified walls.

In the 11th century the town played a minor role for a while. The imperial residence was no longer suitable for official and social functions, due to a fire, and between 1024 and 1125 the Salian rulers stayed there only six times.

However, when Frankfurt won the favour of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, in the mid-12th century, it gained in significance and became the venue for royal elections. In 1138, under Conrad III, the first Hohenstaufen king on the German throne, the royal access courtyard in the southwest corner of the Domhügel (Cathedral Hill) area was converted to a castle (Saalhof), to replace the dilapidated Carolingian imperial palace. It became part of the town's fortifications, the Staufeu Wall.

On March 4, 1152, Frederick I, called Barbarossa, was elected king in Frankfurt. The premises of the palace were further extended, to strengthen the imperial estate and thus to counteract dynastic territorial developments. There is evidence of an imperial mint from 1194 onwards, where silver coins with the image of the emperor were made.

The expansion of trade - and later also long-distance trade - led to a significant rise in population and to an increasingly complex social structure. According to present-day estimates, Frankfurt had about 10,000 inhabitants in 1200. Although the town had never been formally founded as such, the settlement around the cathedral had clearly grown into a city. Under the Hohenstaufens the citizens of Frankfurt included not

only merchants and ministerial officials, but also Jews and of course craftsmen. Nearly 60 trades and professions were in evidence in 13th-century Frankfurt. During the High and Late middle ages the further development of the city was especially promoted by Frederick II, Louis the Bavarian and Charles IV through numerous royal privileges.

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