

**MEDIEVAL EUROPE
(476-1450):
CHARLEMAGNE:
EMPEROR OF THE
ROMANS 800 CE**



MEDIEVAL EUROPE (476-1450): CHARLEMAGNE: EMPEROR OF THE ROMANS 800 CE

Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance, how the Frankish king was able to expand his lands across Europe, and how he ultimately strengthened an already tight relationship between the Franks and the Catholic Church to the point where the Pope had him crowned Emperor of the Romans in 800.

Subjects

World History
European History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Charlemagne Statue, Paris
- Aachen Cathedral, Aachen, Germany

Essential Questions

- Who was Charlemagne?
- How and why was Charlemagne able to carve out a substantial empire in Central Europe during the Dark Ages?
- What was Charlemagne's relationship with the Catholic church? How did he use this relationship as a secular ruler?
- What happened to Charlemagne's empire after he died?

Academic Summary

From The Life of Charlemagne by Einhard (9th century CE)

22. Personal Appearance

Charles was large and strong, and of lofty stature, though not disproportionately tall (his height is well known to have been seven times the length of his foot); the upper part of his head was round, his eyes very large and animated, nose a little long, hair fair, and face laughing and merry. Thus his appearance was always stately and dignified, whether he was standing or sitting; although his neck was thick and somewhat short, and his belly rather prominent; but the symmetry of the rest of his body concealed these defects. His gait was firm, his whole carriage manly, and his voice clear, but not so strong as his size led one to expect. His health was excellent, except during the four years preceding his death, when he was subject to frequent fevers; at the last he even limped a little with one foot. Even in those years he consulted rather his own inclinations than the advice of physicians, who were almost hateful to him, because they wanted him to give up roasts, to which he was accustomed, and to eat boiled meat instead. In accordance with the national custom, he took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase, accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks. He enjoyed the exhalations from natural warm springs, and often practiced swimming, in which he was such an adept that none could surpass him; and hence it was that he built his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, and lived there constantly during his later years until his death. He used not only to invite his sons to his bath, but his nobles and friends, and now and then a troop of his retinue or body guard, so that a hundred or more persons sometimes bathed with him.

23. Dress

He used to wear the national, that is to say, the Frank, dress-next his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches, and above these a tunic fringed with silk; while hose fastened by bands covered his lower limbs, and shoes his feet, and he protected his shoulders and chest in winter by a close-fitting coat of otter or marten skins. Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt about him, usually one with a gold or silver hilt and belt; he sometimes carried a jeweled sword, but only on great feast-days or at the reception of ambassadors from foreign nations. He despised foreign costumes, however handsome, and never allowed himself to be robed in them, except twice in Rome, when he donned the Roman tunic, chlamys, and shoes; the first time at the request of Pope Hadrian, the second to gratify Leo, Hadrian's successor. On great feast-days he made use of embroidered clothes, and shoes bedecked with precious stones; his cloak was fastened by a golden buckle, and he appeared crowned with a diadem of gold and gems: but on other days his dress varied little from the common dress of the people.

24. Habits

Charles was temperate in eating, and particularly so in drinking, for he abominated drunkenness in anybody, much more in himself and those of his household; but he could not easily abstain from food, and often complained that fasts injured his health. He very rarely gave entertainments, only on great feast-days, and then to large numbers of people. His meals ordinarily consisted of four courses, not counting the roast, which his huntsmen used to bring in on the spit; he was more fond of this than of any other dish. While at table, he listened to reading or music. The subjects of the readings were the stories and deeds of olden time: he was fond, too, of St.

Augustine's books, and especially of the one entitled "The City of God."

He was so moderate in the use of wine and all sorts of drink that he rarely allowed himself more than three cups in the course of a meal. In summer after the midday meal, he would eat some fruit, drain a single cup, put off his clothes and shoes, just as he did for the night, and rest for two or three hours. He was in the habit of awaking and rising from bed four or five times during the night. While he was dressing and putting on his shoes, he not only gave audience to his friends, but if the Count of the Palace told him of any suit in which his judgment was necessary, he had the parties

brought before him forthwith, took cognizance of the case, and gave his decision, just as if he were sitting on the Judgment-seat. This was not the only business that he transacted at this time, but he performed any duty of the day whatever, whether he had to attend to the matter himself, or to give commands concerning it to his officers.

25. Studies

Charles had the gift of ready and fluent speech, and could express whatever he had to say with the utmost clearness. He was not satisfied with command of his native language merely, but gave attention to the study of foreign ones, and in particular was such a master of Latin that he could speak it as well as his native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could speak it. He was so eloquent, indeed, that he might have passed for a teacher of eloquence. He most zealously cultivated the liberal arts, held those who taught them in great esteem, and conferred great honors upon them. He took lessons in grammar of the deacon Peter of Pisa, at that time an aged man. Another deacon, Albin of Britain, surnamed Alcuin, a man of Saxon extraction, who was the greatest scholar of the day, was his teacher in other branches of learning. The King spent much time and labor with him studying rhetoric, dialectics, and especially astronomy; he learned to reckon, and used to investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies most curiously, with an intelligent scrutiny. He also tried to write, and used to keep tablets and blanks in bed under his pillow, that at leisure hours he might accustom his hand to form the letters; however, as he did not begin his efforts in due season, but late in life, they met with ill success.

Europe's medieval period after the fall of Rome (476-1350 CE) is often seen by many students and teachers as an era of ignorance and disorganization when the continent was dominated by lawlessness, poverty, superstition, a lack of unity and tales of bloody raids from Norsemen. The imagery of the so-called "Dark Ages" is a powerful one, especially when compared to the subsequent "Renaissance" of the 14th and 15th centuries. Even in the midst of such darkness, however, one can find short periods of light. Many of the oldest universities were founded during this period, including the University of Bologna (1088), Oxford (1167) and Cambridge (1209). Most fledgling kingdoms during the medieval period were subordinate to the all-encompassing power of the Catholic Church, but there were a few exceptional rulers who sought to challenge the Pope's power in secular and religious matters. The most important such ruler was Charlemagne (also known in modern English as Charles the Great).

Charlemagne was born sometime in the 740s (the exact date of his birth is unclear) in what is today western Germany (probably Aachen, although multiple cities lay claim). He was the eldest son of Frankish king Pepin the Short and the grandson of the Frankish ruler Charles Martel, family connections which ensured Charles of a direct line to the throne. The Franks, one of the Germanic tribes to conquer Europe during the Fall of Rome, also had a strong relationship with the papacy in Rome due to Martel's leadership at the Battle of Tours in 732. Charlemagne would use these advantages to lay and enforce his claims after he took control of the throne in 768 CE after his father's death.

His reign is commonly referred to as the "Carolingian Renaissance", and was a time of renewed interest in learning. Charlemagne ordered the consolidation of his lands and numerous administrative reforms as he tried to bring stability and prosperity to central Europe for the first time in over 300 years. Court scholars and scribes copied many ancient texts, ultimately preserving them for the modern age. The king even became an early patron for artists, scientists and astronomers.

Charlemagne maintained a strong and deep relationship with the Church over his entire lifetime. As the grandson of Charles Martel, Charles saw himself as the defender of Christianity, a vision strengthened after he came to the Pope's rescue in the 770s, when Rome faced destruction at the hands of the Lombards. As Charlemagne expanded his Frankish Empire across Europe and into the Mediterranean basin, he ran into the Moors (Muslims centered in Iberia). Christian knights fighting for Charlemagne and his successors would be the driving force behind the beginning of the Reconquest. By the time of his death in 814, Charlemagne's kingdom was the largest in Europe.

On Christmas Day in 800 CE, Charlemagne, who had come to Rome at the request of Pope Leo III, was bestowed with the title of "Emperor of the Romans" at a coronation ceremony held during Christmas Mass. Charlemagne thus established the Holy Roman Empire.

Unfortunately, much of Charlemagne's work was undone by his successors after the emperor passed away in 814 after a 46-year reign. Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's only son, took over as emperor and was able to hold the empire together, but his grandsons split it apart after Louis's death in 840, plunging the empire into civil war. The Treaty of Verdun (843) split Charlemagne's empire into three separate parts, a division which ultimately laid the foundations for the modern countries of Germany and France. Hostilities after the split drove Europe into the Dark Ages, when many of Charlemagne's best efforts went by the wayside.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance, how the Frankish king was able to expand his lands across Europe, and how he ultimately strengthened an already tight relationship between the Franks and the Catholic Church to the point where the Pope had him crowned Emperor of the Romans in 800.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Frankish king was able to expand his lands across Europe.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Charles was able to strengthen an already solid relationship between the Franks and the Catholic Church to the point where the Pope would crown him Emperor of the Romans in 800 CE.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Discuss the lack of European unity in the decades after the Fall of Rome. (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Charlemagne (20 min)
- Video – Charlemagne (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Charlemagne, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Charlemagne (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the importance of Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance, how the Frankish king was able to expand his lands across Europe, and how he ultimately strengthened an already tight relationship between the Franks and the Catholic Church to the point where the Pope had him crowned Emperor of the Romans in 800 CE.

Extension

On tour: Aachen Cathedral, Aachen, Germany

While on tour, students in Aachen can visit the Aachen Cathedral, where they can see for themselves the Throne of Charlemagne and the emperor's final resting place. Aachen, today the westernmost city in Germany, was Charlemagne's capital. Inside the Aachen Cathedral, built on Charlemagne's orders beginning in 796 CE, students will see the emperor's throne. One legend says that the marble plates that make up the throne were taken from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, while another says they come from the steps of Pilate's palace. Either way, Charlemagne no doubt used these stories to give legitimacy to his reign and to cement his relationship with the Catholic Church. Students should be reminded that the cathedral isn't just a historical monument. It is also a working church. Although the cathedral is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, tourist visits are not allowed during religious services. There are daily tours in English at 2pm. Be sure to look for the different Charlemagne relics found in the church. Please see the website below in the links section.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/einhard.asp
Einhard: The Life of Charlemagne (primary source) – full text of the book (33 chapters) from the Medieval History Sourcebook at Fordham University. Each “chapter” is only a paragraph or two, so the work does not take long to read. Full reading is highly recommended for all AP/Advanced students.
- www.fordham.edu/Halsall/sbook1h.asp
Selected Sources: The Carolingians and After (primary sources) – from the Medieval History Sourcebook at Fordham University. Great resource for any students needing sources for a research paper.
- www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1630galileo.asp
The Crime of Galileo (primary source) – from the Modern History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/galileo-tuscany.asp
Galileo: Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina, 1615 (primary source). This letter spells out Galileo’s observations and the reasons he gives in support of the heliocentric model. This copy is from the Modern History Sourcebook at Fordham University.
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/charlemagne.shtml
Charlemagne (website) – from the BBC, this article contains enough information on Charles the Great, but is still short enough to be used in all classes. Great place to start for all students.
- www.history.com/topics/charlemagne
Charlemagne (website) – from the History Channel
- www.thehistoryblog.com/archives/date/2014/01
Charlemagne’s Bones (web article)
- www.aachendom.de/
Aachen Cathedral Official Website (website) – website is in German, but online translations work well.
- <http://online-history.org/wc1-docs/Charlemagne.ppt>
Charlemagne (PowerPoint) – from Edrene McKay, history professor at Northwest Arkansas Community College
- www.slideshare.net/gsill/rise-of-charlemagne
Rise of Charlemagne (PowerPoint) – from Greg Sill, social studies teacher in the Smithtown School District (NY)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEtbdUvGW1c
Charlemagne (video) – 10-minute video cut from the History Channel’s Dark Ages. Highly recommended for in-class showings.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnFctcpZIKM
Dark Ages – The Carolingians (video). This 40-minute video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students to see on their own as an out-of-class assignment.
- www.learner.org/resources/series58.html?pop=yes&pid=836#
The Western Tradition #18: The Age of Charlemagne (video). This 25-minute video, although perhaps too long for most in-class showings, is well worth watching. It is part of a much larger (52-part) series produced by WGBH TV in Boston in 1989 and features Dr. Eugen Weber, former history professor at UCLA and one of the foremost experts in Western History before his death in 2007. The series, called “The Western Tradition” consists of 52 lectures of 30 minutes each, and covers subjects from the Dawn of History to the Twentieth Century. Highly recommended for students and teachers.

Background Information

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne>
Charlemagne – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire
Holy Roman Empire – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolingian_Empire
Carolingian Empire – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_benelux_countries/brussels_to_cologne
On the Road: Brussels to Cologne – from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

- Aachen (also known as Aix-la-Chapelle)
- Carolingian
- Charlemagne
- Franks
- Holy Roman Empire
- Imperial
- Lombards
- Moors

