



The Abduction of Europa by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1632.

4. Conquering Europe – The Romans and The Holy Roman Empire



Your aim

To explore and understand a historical period from the past when Europe was united by conquest and the influences that one particular character i.e. the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne had on that process.



Learning Outcome

By the end of this lesson students will have come to understand and reflect on the fact that European empires created through conquest have risen and fallen over time. They will also have explored a key character from history by sharing information with each other.



Time

Double class



Materials or Sources required

- » Atlases
- » Resource sheets: **'Maps and The Triumph of Rome, 180 A.D.'** and **'The Death of Charlemagne, 814 A.D.'**
- » Question Sheet I: **Understanding the Past**
- » Question Sheet II: **The Real Charlemagne**
- » Charlemagne Cards



Preparation

- » Prepare copies of the resource sheets for whole class or groups on OHP/data projector depending on approach being taken
- » Photocopy and cut Charlemagne Cards
- » Photocopy the question sheet



Potential Partner Activity

Given at the end of the lesson

Introduction

The teacher begins the class by explaining that early European history can illustrate the attempts that have been made throughout history to unite Europe through conquest.

Group Work

S/he divides the class into pairs and gives each pair a copy of the following three resource sheets

- » **'Maps and Background of Roman Empire 180 A.D.'**,
- » **'Death of Charlemagne 814 A.D.'**
- » **'Understanding the Past'** question sheet

The first task is for students to familiarise themselves with the contents of the resource sheets. Once the students have had time to read and examine the maps, they can begin to discuss the questions on the question sheet I: 'Understanding the Past'. (Alternatively, the teacher can put this sheet on an OHP and the questions can be discussed as a whole-class exercise). If the questions are discussed by the students in their pairs, a selection of answers should be presented back orally leading to general class discussion.

Following the completion of discussion and feeding back to the questions in the 'Understanding the Past' question sheet, the teacher then explains to the students that they are going to examine in more detail the character of Charlemagne.

The teacher begins by dividing the class into seven groups. Each group should choose one Charlemagne card that contains extracts from a contemporary biography of Charlemagne, written shortly after his death. The teacher explains that each excerpt portrays a very colourful picture of Charlemagne, written by Abbot Einhard, who knew Charlemagne well while he was alive.

Each group is asked to read the extracts from the biography that they have chosen. Once they have read it and have been given time to think about it, they are asked to pass their card on to the next group and they receive a card from another group. This reading and passing sequence continues until all groups have read all extracts. The teacher collects all the extracts and then explains that it is time to test their memories.

The teacher distributes **'The Real Charlemagne'** question sheet to each group and allows them to answer the true/false questions. The teacher can then either re-distribute the cards and begin to ask students with the appropriate card to give an answer to the question or s/he can call out the correct answers and each group can correct their own or pass their sheet to another group to be corrected.

Conclusion

To end the class, the teacher can ask the class to summarise what they have learned about the struggle to unite Europe and to consider whether it would have happened without the presence of Charlemagne. The teacher could also ask the students if they think that the description of Charlemagne character is truthful. The students could be asked to reflect upon how leaders of today will be portrayed in history books in a hundred years.



Homework Option

For homework the students can be asked to write a short version of Charlemagne's biography by using the true/false questions, or by picking out any aspect of Charlemagne's life which they found the most interesting. Alternatively, they may wish to write their thoughts about how he compares to other modern leaders or their opinions of him based on the biography.

Or

Students could send a post card or e-card to a friend pretending to write from one of the two periods described in this lesson. They should aim to describe what the period is like and outline the ways in which it is different from their current 21st century life.



Potential Partner Activity

- » Students could take a key figure from Irish history and write an account of what made him/her famous and send it to their partner school.
- » Students could pose a question such as the one sampled below and ask their partner school to debate it and present back to them by email some of the main arguments and their concluding opinions: E.g. Does a united Europe ensure safety from attack?
- » Alternatively, the class could make up other questions for possible debate.
- » Partner schools could agree to debate a topic such as the one above through video conferencing, allowing both sides to present their arguments and then to have a moderated discussion before a result is decided.

Roman Empire 180 A.D.

The map of Roman Empire 180 A.D. represents the geographical limits of the Roman Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. It is generally regarded as the high point of the Roman Empire, before the decline set in. However, we will focus on the more famous Emperor Julius Caesar, to illustrate the way in which the Roman Empire was created by conquest.

Gaius Julius Caesar suffered from poor health as a boy but he grew to be one of the world's great generals. He defeated various Celtic tribes in Gaul (modern day France), made brief visits to Britain, and made expeditions on German lands. He was so successful that he became a legend even while he was still alive. He shared the food, sleeping quarters and hardships of his soldiers and he famously dictated his account of his campaign in Gaul.

Caesar also symbolises the change from Republic to Empire. Rome had been ruled by the Senate, elected by the people, but after assuming control of the government Caesar proclaimed himself Dictator for life. He began to wear a purple toga, the symbol of monarchy, and he revived a family legend that he could trace his ancestors to the goddess Venus. Following his death in 44 B.C. (he was stabbed to death in the Senate on the 15th of March), Rome became an Empire ruled by Emperors called Caesar for 400 years.

By 180 A.D. the Romans had been so successful in conquering and controlling other peoples that the territory controlled by them had expanded to include all the areas shown on the map.

Holy Roman Empire 814 A.D. - Charlemagne

"To Charles, most revered, crowned of god, long life and victory". So chanted the congregation in St. Peter's in Rome when after mass on Christmas Day 800 A.D. the Pope placed the Imperial crown on the head of Charles the Great (Charlemagne), King of the Franks. Western Europe had a Roman Emperor once more. Charles as King of the Franks was a descendent of the barbarian tribe the "Franks" who had attacked the Roman Empire in the 5th century. They had then settled in the area known as "Gaul" which later came to be called France. During the reign of Charlemagne the feeling grew that Europe should be united, which it hadn't been since the decline of the Roman Empire. If it was united it would be safer from attack than if it was divided. Arab tribes had been advancing into Europe from the 7th century, occupying the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Spain and spreading the religion of Islam. There was also the pagan Saxons to the east of his territory. Charlemagne believed that it was his duty to convert or obliterate the hostile people who threatened Christianity. Charles was not just a blood thirsty warrior who fought and pillaged to enlarge his kingdom. He pushed the boundaries of his empire and Christianity into Germany, where he defeated the Saxons and forced them to convert to Christianity. He succeeded in defeating the Lombards in Italy and pushed the Arab tribes back over the Pyrenees. Eventually his empire ran from the Atlantic to the River Vistula, further east even than the Romans. The empire was doubled in size. At Charlemagne's court at Aix la Chapelle (Aachen in modern Germany) the Greek term "Europe" began to be used to describe his empire.

In his empire he promoted peace, learning, law and stable administration in close alliance with the Church. He ruled through tribal chiefs, who swore personal allegiance in exchange for grants of land. It was not the centralised rule of the old Roman Empire, but it was the first shred of unity since the decline of Rome.

Understanding the Past

Take your time over the following questions and use your maps to help you answer them.

1. Describe the extent of the Roman Empire by listing the present day countries whose territory would have been under Roman rule.
2. List some present day European countries whose area never came under Roman control.
3. What evidence is there on this map that shows that rivers provided a major barrier to conquest in Roman times? Why do you think this is so? Would it still be a barrier to conquest today? Explain.
4. What present day countries are contained within the borders of Charlemagne's empire?
5. By 814 AD what other major empire controlled parts of south Eastern Europe/Mediterranean? Can you identify the capital of this empire? Compare the area under the control of Charlemagne's Frankish Empire by 814 with that under Roman control in 180.
6. What present day cities can you identify that have already been established by 814 AD? List 6 that you recognise.
7. Comparing the two maps can you find: 3 cities that had the same name in Roman and Charlemagne's time, and 3 cities which seem to have been present in Roman times but had a different name then.
8. What do you notice about the place names in most of what we would call Spain? Can you find an explanation for this in the introduction to Charlemagne's Empire?

1. 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 practised 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 latter 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.

* Aix la Chapelle is in modern day Germany and is now called Aachen.

2. Dress/ Appearance

He used to wear the national, that is to say, the Frank-dress next to his skin of 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 jewelled 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.

3. 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 provided 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.

4. Studies/ Education

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 honours 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 labour 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.

5. Piety

He cherished with the greatest fervour and devotion the principles of the Christian religion, which had been instilled into him from infancy. Hence it was that he built the beautiful basilica at Aix-la-Chapelle, which he adorned with gold and silver and lamps, and with rails and doors of solid brass. He had the columns and marbles for this structure brought from Rome and Ravenna, for he could not find such as were suitable elsewhere. He was a constant worshipper at this church as long as his health permitted, going morning and evening, even after nightfall, besides attending mass; and he took care that all the services there conducted should be administered with the utmost possible propriety, very often warning the sextons not to let any improper or unclean thing be brought into the building or remain in it. He provided it with a great number of sacred vessels of gold and silver and with such a quantity of clerical robes that not even the doorkeepers who fill the humblest office in the church were obliged to wear their everyday clothes when in the exercise of their duties. He was at great pains to improve the church reading and psalmody, for he was well skilled in both although he neither read in public nor sang, except in a low tone and with others.

6. Generosity [Charles and the Roman Church]

He was very forward in helping the poor, and in that gratuitous generosity which the Greeks call 'alms', so much so that he not only made a point of giving in his own country and his own kingdom, but when he discovered that there were Christians living in poverty in Syria, Egypt, and Africa, at Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Carthage, he had compassion on their wants, and used to send money over the seas to them. The reason that he zealously strove to make friends with the kings beyond seas was that he might get help and relief to the Christians living under their rule.

He cherished the Church of St. Peter the Apostle at Rome above all other holy and sacred places, and heaped its treasury with a vast wealth of gold, silver, and precious stones. He sent great and countless gifts to the popes; and throughout his whole reign the wish that he had nearest at heart was to re-establish the ancient authority of the city of Rome under his care and by his influence, and to defend and protect the Church of St. Peter, and to beautify and enrich it out of his own store above all other churches. Although he held it in such veneration, he only repaired to Rome to pay his vows and make his supplications four times during the whole forty-seven years that he reigned.

7. Charlemagne Crowned Emperor

When he made his last journey thither, he also had other ends in view. The Romans had inflicted many injuries upon the Pontiff Leo, tearing out his eyes and cutting out his tongue, so that he had been compelled to call upon the King for help [Nov 24, 800]. Charles accordingly went to Rome, to set in order the affairs of the Church, which were in great confusion, and passed the whole winter there. It was then that he received the titles of Emperor and Augustus [Dec 25, 800], to which he at first had such an aversion that he declared that he would not have set foot in the Church the day that they were conferred, although it was a great feast-day, if he could have foreseen the design of the Pope. He bore very patiently with the jealousy which the Roman emperors showed upon his assuming these titles, for they took this step very ill; and by dint of frequent embassies and letters, in which he addressed them as brothers, he made their haughtiness yield to his magnanimity, a quality in which he was unquestionably much their superior.

Source: Medieval Sourcebook, Einhard: The Life of Charlemagne (New York, Harper & Collins 1880)

1.	Charles was tall, fair and pleasant faced	T/F
2.	He looked like a king	T/F
3.	He suffered from poor health all his life	T/F
4.	His doctors wanted him to change his diet in later years	T/F
5.	He was lazy and not interested in exercise or athletics	T/F
6.	He dressed, without fuss according to the weather and the occasion	T/F
7.	He sent abroad for fancy clothes from far off lands	T/F
8.	He wore grand clothes and jewels on special occasions	T/F
9.	He liked to fast for religious reasons, but often got drunk	T/F
10.	His favourite food was salmon	T/F
11.	He liked to listen to music or reading during meals and to take a nap after his midday meal	T/F
12.	He hated to be disturbed while he was getting dressed	T/F
13.	He was a good and confident speaker in several languages including Latin and Greek	T/F
14.	He was interested in education and took lessons from a scholar called Alcuin	T/F
15.	He liked to study the stars and astronomy	T/F
16.	He wrote very well from an early age	T/F
17.	He converted to Christianity in his middle age	T/F
18.	He built a beautiful church at Aix la Chapelle and decorated it with gold and silver lamps, brass railings and marble from Rome and Ravenna.	T/F
19.	He was very pious and thought it was important to have beautiful chalices and vestments and provided uniforms for everybody working in his church.	T/F
20.	He was generous to the poor in his own country and abroad, and also contributed to St. Peter's Church in Rome	T/F
21.	The pope crowned him Roman Emperor on Easter Sunday 800 A.D. and everybody in Rome was delighted	T/F

1.	True
2.	False
3.	False
4.	True
5.	False
6.	False
7.	False
8.	True
9.	False
10.	False
11.	True
12.	False
13.	True
14.	True
15.	True
16.	False
17.	False
18.	True
19.	True
20.	True
21.	False