



PROJECT MUSE®

Charlemagne

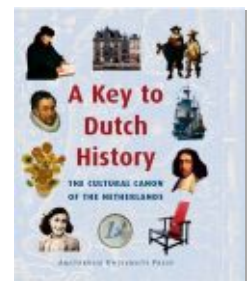
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A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

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742 AD - 814 AD

Charlemagne

Emperor of the Land of the Setting Sun

Charlemagne was the most important king of the early Middle Ages. In 771 AD he became King of the Franks, whose territory included what would be the Low Countries. Charlemagne was at war throughout his entire reign: against the Moslem rulers of the Iberian peninsula, against the Langobards in the south and against the Saxons and the Danes in north-western Europe. Charlemagne was successful because he managed to expand the kingdom of the Franks into an empire that encompassed large parts of what we know today as Europe. On Christmas day 800 AD, the Pope crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the West.

To govern his enormous empire, Charlemagne used “vassals” or liegemen who had to serve him “in word and deed”. They had to advise him on all kinds of administrative matters and serve him as

warriors in times of war. In exchange, they received a “fief” from Charlemagne, control over and the revenues of a large area of land. The vassals in turn often divided their land among tenants. Initially, the agreements terminated on the death of the vassal, but over the course of time the vassals began to regard their fiefs as hereditary possessions and adopted an increasingly independent position in respect of their liege lord.

Charlemagne kept palaces throughout his empire. Such a palace was known as a “palts”. Charlemagne travelled from palts to palts arranging his affairs with his vassals on the spot. He also had a palts in Nijmegen: the Valkhof. Here, Charlemagne busied himself, among other things, with the situation in the Frisian bishopric and kept abreast of the campaign of his armies against the heathen Saxons. Charlemagne’s first

biographer, the monk Einhard, regarded this 33-year-long battle as the “longest, most horrible, and, for the Frankish people, the most exacting war he ever waged”.

Charlemagne set great store by education, culture and science. Although he himself could barely write his own name, he was accomplished in maths and astronomy and he spoke several languages. Charlemagne established schools to train young noblemen for serving the empire. He also was in contact with the Moslem world through the Caliph of Baghdad, Harun al-Rashid, who gave him an elephant as a gift.



Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Charlemagne crowned Emperor (800 AD)
Einhard: the first biographer of Charlemagne
Knight's Tales: Charlemagne and Elegast,
Song of Roland, Haymon's Four Children

Secondary education sector

Liege lords and vassals
The "Carolingian Renaissance"
The tradition of *Chanson de Roland*:
Charlemagne in literature
Charlemagne and Islam
Charlemagne and the Pope

Past and Present

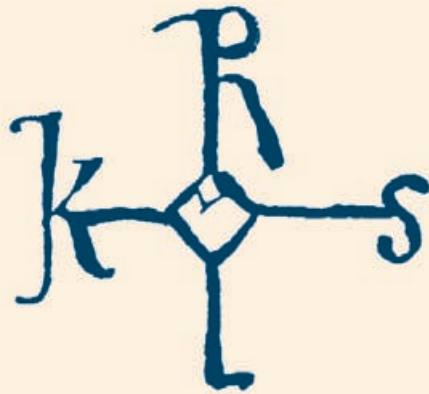
Charlemagne and the importance of education
Contemporary tales of heroes

In the Treasure Chest

Small statue of Charlemagne on his horse

In the last years of his life, Charlemagne settled down in his palace complex at Aix-en-Chapelle, where he was buried in 814 AD. His palace chapel formed the basis for the present Cathedral (the Dom), where his throne and elaborately-decorated coffin can still be seen today.

Even in his own lifetime, many stories went around about Charlemagne. After his death they became even more expansive and embellished; people started to regard him as a saint. Charlemagne is considered one of the greatest kings in history.



References

Places to Go

Aix-en-Chapelle: Dom, treasure chamber
Nijmegen: The Valkhof

Books for young people

Agave Kruijssen, *Elegast* (10+)
Agave Kruijssen, *Razende Roeland, een ware held* (10+)

Background literature

Marco Mostert, "Karel de Grote (747-814)"
in Els Kloek (ed.), *Verzameld verleden: Veertig gedenkwaardige momenten en figuren uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis*, Hilversum 2004

Websites

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