

# Charlemagne's tactics and machiavelli's ideas

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Machiavelli and Charlemagne were from two different eras but they had very similar ideals. They both made a tremendous impact on how power was used and kept throughout the centuries, but would Machiavelli agree with Charlemagne's tactics, would he agree with his ruthlessness and his iron fist rule, would he agree with his generosity? Machiavelli discusses what he thinks a ruler or prince should do to keep power in his book *The Prince*. We will compare his writings to Charlemagne's actions.

Einhard and Notker both vary in their descriptions of Charlemagne. In the account that Einhard writes, he was a former member of Charlemagne's Royal court and a close friend to Charlemagne. This helped him become aware of the personal and public life of the King. Einhard's friendship with Charlemagne was so close that he was able to recall an entire account of the King's life during the peak years of his reign. When Einhard retired from his position in the King's court, he retreated to a monastery and decided to write about the life of his former king. By the time he began writing his account of him, Charlemagne had passed away, which shows how much of Einhard's account was from memory. Einhard says in his book "I am very conscious of the fact that no one can describe these events more accurately than I, for I was present when they took place and, as they say, I saw them with my own eyes. What is more, I cannot be absolutely sure that these happenings will in fact ever be described by anyone else." (Einhard 57) Einhard's closeness with the King made him think he was the most qualified to write about Charlemagne's great story of his life. The focus of Einhard's writings was the official political life of Charlemagne. He wrote about the wars that Charlemagne waged, the immensely important political decisions that he

took, the civil projects he had patroned. When it comes to the King's family and personal life it is kept to a minimum in his writings.

Notker or otherwise known as the Monk of Saint Gall wrote an alternate biography that is less serious than Einhard's and more light-hearted. In his account, Notker takes several literary liberties and chooses to sacrifice the historical accuracy of his writings in order to achieve a more aesthetic effect. The language is bright, and the picture painted of Charlemagne is larger than life. Comparing two biographies, this is certainly a more hyperbolic interpretation and exaggerated. Notker's book is the more humorous of the two works. Notker pokes fun at himself in his writings, Notker refers to himself as a stammering toothless old man as a way of separating himself from other such as Einhard who was on the King's court. Notker also focuses on the personality that Charlemagne portrays and his actions. He talks about Charlemagne who shows great generosity. He has a sharp mind which is shown in the King's careful decision making. He set of principles he follows. Notker also talks about the darker side of the Charlemagne, has a tendency to be spiteful towards people he interacts with, his intolerance for other people's opinions, and he has great brutality of his punishments. When reading through Notker's account one can't escape being put in a world of magic realism. " I saw the King of the Franks, in full regalia, in the monastery of Saint Gall, two gold-petalled flowers stuck out from his thighs. The first of these rose up so high that it was as tall as the King himself; the second, growing gradually upwards, adorned the top of his trunk with great glory and protected him as he walked." (Notker 108) This type of description make

Notker's account seem more colorful and makes the king seem more mythical.

Machiavelli (the author of *The Prince*) would have a decent amount of advice for the Charlemagne on how he could improve his rule over his kingdom. According to Machiavelli, the reputation of the King plays a Significant role in determining the success of their rule. The reputation they build can be interpreted from whether a king is Loved by the people or hated by the people they govern. Machiavelli states that " it may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person it is much safer to be feared than loved, when only one is possible," (Machiavelli 98). The perception that Einhard had of Charlemagne would paint the picture that he was an inadequate ruler in the eyes of Machiavelli. When a King or a ruler is loved by the people, he governs it tends to create the perception that the king would be merciful king in cases of deciding punishment for a crime. People think he will allow the criminals to get away with crimes. This improper decision-making would then hurt the welfare of their kingdom. Machiavelli would favor Notker's perception of Charlemagne as his version of Charlemagne instilled terror into his people. " The people did as Charlemagne asked not because they loved him, but rather because they feared him, which meant that people were more loyal to Charlemagne and did not expect much leeway from him, as they feared any punishment for possible wrongdoings. when only one is possible," (Machiavelli 98). Einhard's description of Charlemagne would make for an inadequate ruler according to Machiavelli, as the love for the ruler would instill an image that the prince would be merciful and allow them to get away with their crimes.

Making improper decisions like these would otherwise hurt the welfare of the kingdom. Machiavelli would agree much more with Notker's perception of Charlemagne, since in his account of Charlemagne he instills fear into his people by giving them very harsh punishments. The people obeyed Charlemagne and his wishes not because he asked; they did not love him, but they obeyed because they feared him. This fear of him meant that people became more loyal to Charlemagne and did not expect much mercy if they ever betrayed him. They feared the punishment that Charlemagne would give them if they crossed him.

Machiavelli would advise Einhard's account of Charlemagne to become a more feared ruler and not rely on love from people in his kingdom. It is possible that they could turn on him if he were to ever become too violent with his punishments or any acts that they did not like, this would happen more if he is loved rather than feared. Machiavelli would also advise Notker's account of Charlemagne that he was in the right when he decided on being a feared ruler rather than one that is loved one. One thing he needs to improve upon is the ruthlessness of his punishments so that his people would not soon see him as an out of control tyrant. Charlemagne should be wary of this because the people would be willing to try and dispose of him from his rule. Cesare Borgia was a ruler that Machiavelli greatly admired. Machiavelli states "was considered cruel: notwithstanding, his cruelty calmed the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty," (Machiavelli 97) Borgia was an efficient ruler in his rule. He was feared by his people and due to that fear, they obeyed him, and he was able to control his kingdom.

Machiavelli would still have more advise directed towards Charlemagne. One piece of advice is to practice parsimony more. Parsimony is "the quality of being careful with money or resources" (Merriam-Webster) Einhard's account of Charlemagne is that he was a very generous person with his wealth.

Machiavelli states that generosity is an unfavorable trait for a prince to have, because the people will immediately turn on the prince once they start to try to stop giving money to the people. Machiavelli states that "a prince should guard himself, above all things, against being despised and hated, and liberality leads you to both," (Machiavelli 96). By sharing too much wealth, the prince risks losing a lot of their fortune. "Anyone wishing to maintain among men the name of liberal is obliged to avoid no attribute of magnificence; so that a prince thus inclined will consume in such acts all his property," (Machiavelli 94). The prince will lose all their money by being generous and his people will turn on them once he loses his fortune. Notker does not describe Charlemagne as much of a generous ruler, while Einhard talks about Charlemagne's kindness towards others and generosity. Notker doesn't mention Charlemagne's generosity much and instead introduces the idea that Charlemagne was a frugal leader.

While Machiavelli condemns generosity in *The Prince*, he would most likely advise Einhard's account of Charlemagne to become a more frugal ruler and to stop sharing his wealth with all the people in his kingdom. Although Machiavelli is in favor of keeping the prince's wealth, he is not entirely against sharing wealth accumulated from warfare. Machiavelli believes that wealth looted from conquering other lands should be shared. He believes that the wealth should be shared with the people involved, it will not hurt the

prince's wealth very much since it wasn't his to begin with and his relations with the people in his kingdom will improve in doing so. He is essentially rewarding his followers on their loyalty.

Lastly, Machiavelli iterates that a prince should avoid being hated and despised at all costs. If hated long enough, this will eventually lead to rebellion from the people against their ruler. Einhard's account of Charlemagne is shown as having no hostilities with any of the other kingdoms. However, Notker's account of Charlemagne shows that he established fear and hatred from people due to his impulsive and cruel punishments that he gives out to criminals. Machiavelli would most likely infer Notker's account of Charlemagne would inevitably have been dethroned by his people considering how the people truly viewed him. Due to this, Machiavelli would have advised Charlemagne to soften his cruelty, as he surely had issued enough dislike from his people that he would be at risk of facing a rebellion from the people.

The accounts of Einhard's and Notker's of Charlemagne would have benefited from Machiavelli's advice. Einhard's account of Charlemagne thought that having a favorable reputation can help lessen the chance of rebellion. Therefore, why the king acted with kindness and showed hospitality towards his people and the kingdoms surrounding him. One flaw that Einhard's description of Charlemagne had was that he did not know the importance of parsimony, instead Charlemagne embraced generosity, which Machiavelli states would lead to his downfall. Einhard's account of Charlemagne also valued the love of his people rather than the respect of his

people. Machiavelli states that their rule would slowly fall apart as his people would try to take advantage of his kindness.

Comparatively, Notker's account of Charlemagne seemed to have fit Machiavelli's view of a prince. Notker's account of Charlemagne chose to instil fear in his people, which will dismay his people from rebelling. Notker's account of Charlemagne also understood valuing love over fear would lead to rebellion once a problem should arise, he used fear to ensure the people would not deny his rule. He also was a wary of the future or Prudent, this is another trait Machiavelli valued in rulers. He limited his generous which stopped people from being upset when he would stop giving contributions, Notker's account of Charlemagne also eliminated this problem from ever happening by not being too generous and stopping the people from expecting anything from the ruler. On the other hand, the actions of Notker's account of Charlemagne would slowly grow distrust and hated, which Machiavelli stated would be the downfall of the reign.