

Einhard: the life of charlemagne essay



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An exciting discovery is being celebrated half way around the world today. Ms. Arlene Rose of Anchorage, Alaska was working with a field crew on the restoration of the Palatine Chapel, in Germany when a great historical document was unearthed. The document was a narrative written by the Barbarian, Einhard; a fostered son as well as loving and loyal subject to King of the Franks, Charlemagne, also known as Charles the Great. This piece of history was Einhard's endowment to the legacy of his great king.

It was once quoted by the Roman Orator, Cicero, “ It is an outrageous abuse both of time and literature for a man to commit his thoughts to writing without having the ability either to arrange them or elucidate them, or attract readers by some charm of style. ” (Einhard) However some might receive Einhard's account as a disorder of written expression, Ms. Rose described it as, “ a romanticized account of a glorious life, which leaves the reader with a little more hope for the compassions of men.

The account of Charles' life, as written by Einhard recounts the glory of his reign by beginning with the king's delegation of power. Pepin, Charles father, had ruled over the Franks for 15 years before dying of dropsy in September of 768. Upon his death, Pepin consecrated his power to his two sons, Charles and Carloman. Pepin named them both kings, and mandated that they divide the country equally between them. Peace came with great difficulty at the persuasion of Carloman's court, however after only two years of reign, he died of disease.

Charles was then elected unanimously, as King of the Franks. Some of Charles greatest achievements in life were through his military efforts. The

Aquitania War, which Pepin had begun, was reignited by Charles with great determination. Hunold, who was attempting to seize power in Aquitania, was pursued relentlessly by the Franks. Charles sent ambassadors to Gascony where Hunold had fled. The king's demand of fugitive or force, was communicated to Lupus, the Duke of Gascony.

Lupus conceded, giving up Hunold, himself, and his province. Next came the king's declaration of war upon the Lombards and the Saxons.

Charlemagne exhausted King Desiderius of Lombard after a long siege, forcing him to surrender and driving his son out of the country. Charlemagne then restored power to the Romans. The Saxon War, which had been on hold, resumed and lasted for 33 years. It was a bitter and costly war in which the Saxons were defeated countless times. They would humbly comply with the king's wishes to denounce the devil and turn to Christianity, but would always violate the agreement. The king, once and for all, defeated those that resisted.

He then relocated tens of thousands of families throughout Germany and Gaul and absorbed them into the Franks union to form as one country. A great many of the wars Charlemagne waged unfolded in much the same manner; submitting to his will with minimal detriment to the Franks. Every town and castle of Spain that Charles attacked, surrendered, with no loss of life to the home army. Both Breton and Benevento were subdued without warfare. War with the Huns in 791, lasted significantly longer, battling for seven years; only two Franks fell.

At the end of that war, the Hun nobility and all of their glory had perished and the Franks were rewarded with magnificent riches. The question had been asked, “ Whether [the kings] fortitude or his good fortune [was] to be more admired. ” (Einhard) Charles never trusted in his prosperity and was unyielding in the face of adversity. Through his efforts he more than doubled the territory he had inherited. The private life that Charles the Great led was said to be equally as extraordinary, full of admiration from those that knew him intimately.

The kings of foreign countries sought not just alliance with Charlemagne, but his friendship. The King of Persia once sent Charles the only elephant he had, at his request. It is said that he openly wept, as though he had lost a brother, upon the death of Hadrian, the Roman Pontiff. The king went to great lengths during his reign to protect foreigners, never feeling them a burden.

Charlemagne, even in the face of deceit, spared the life of those that conspired against him. Charlemagne’s children were shown the utmost affection from their father.

He never travelled or even ate dinner without them by his side. He paid a great deal of attention to their education; both the girls and boys. The king cherished his daughters so, that he never allowed a man, citizen or foreigner, to seek marriage with one of them. Christianity was one of the biggest driving forces in Charlemagne’s life; he was at constant worship. It was for his faith that he had the beautiful basilica built along with many other great works of architecture in the name Christ.

He went to great lengths to do all he could for his church. King Charles even sent gifts to foreign Christians that he found were in poverty and befriended the kings of those countries in hopes of facilitating relief. At the time of Charlemagne's death, he had reigned for 47 prosperous years. It is written that as death approached, the sun eclipsed the moon; through various omens, it seemed as though the earth had already begun to mourn him. This great work of Einhard's speaks volumes to the soul and history is grateful to have discovered it.