

The development of kingship in the middle ages

[History](#), [Middle Ages](#)



Before modern technology, and the advent of cars, there were castles, catapults, and horse drawn carts. There were also kingdoms, and with kingdoms came kings, and with kings came politics, conflict, war, and regicide. The King, throughout history, and in modern times, was believed to be the sole ruler of a country, having the final word on all that happened within the bounds of their kingdom. This has indeed been true since Cain was cast out of his home, and he established the city of Chanoch, all the way to the ancient rulers of Babylon.

The rulers, emperors, and kings reigned with sovereignty, and their will was rarely questioned, even while some of them reigned fire and brimstone on their people, murdering them, and pillaging their homes. This was the power of a king, unquestioning loyalty from servants, guards, and massive amounts of infantrymen and cavalry. Whether they ruled through terror, or did terrible things for the good of their country, was a matter of the personality bearing the crown.

There have been times in history, as noted in numerous books, where those who are held to be honorable have been forced to perform a seemingly distasteful act for the greater good, even if the true motives aren't with the good of his people, such as Blancandrins, a knight as noted in the Song of Roland 2, who spoke these words: Stand honour bound, and do him fealty. Send hostages, should he demand surety, Ten or a score, our loyal oath to bind; Send him our sons, the first-born of our wives; -- An he be slain, I'll surely furnish mine.

Better by far they go, though doomed to die, Than that we lose honour and dignity, And be ourselves brought down to beggary. 3" In the previous paragraph, an excerpt from a major literary work written in the time, we see that in those times, the welfare of a nation outweighed the welfare of a few simple farmers or peasants, which lies in great contrast to the world of today. This is not an indicator of evil as evil today is defined by laws and morals that have been put in place by modern men, or better men as some would believe.

However the morality in that time was a completely different story, and right or wrong simply cannot be applied. The general public would not mind such a sacrifice, as it is for the greater good, and a good king will do anything for his country, to ensure that everything and everyone manages to survive. A good king will maintain relations with foreign nations to bring in supplies, and trade. Such was demonstrated by Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, the king of France from the year 768, till he died in 814, and was widely regarded as The Father of Europe.

Throughout his reign, with his diplomacy toward other nations, and his generous treatment of foreigners⁴. It is not uncommon for a king, should he care about his people, to build great structures, and to give to the poor, as St. Louis of France did, noted in the Life of St. Louis: "... He began then to build and found hospitals or houses for poor people to lie in, edified minsters of religion, and gave yearly to other poor sufferers in divers places in the realm much money, pecunies or silver. He founded many convents of the order of friars preachers, and to many other

poor religious builded churches, cloisters, dortoirs, and other edifices convenable, gave for God largely alms to the blind, beguines, daughters of God, and releved the minster of many a poor nunnery.. 5” The king of a nation will be highly educated, his language, and articulation will be high above that of a normal peasant, and as such he will be seen as an extremely intelligent person, worthy of ruling a kingdom, though if he is a good king, he will concern himself more with the people, giving them food, clothing, and shelter, the basic necessities above all else.

He will also hold true to the religion of the land, ensuring that he follows the laws, and demands that others do as well. “... Whereof it befell that a citizen of Paris who loathly swearing had blasphemed Jesus Christ, against the act or statute royal, which Saint Louis by the counsel of the prelates and princes had ordained and made for the swearers and blasphemers, at the commandment of the said saint he was marked or tokened, at the lips of him with a hot

and burning iron, in sign of punishment of his sin, and terror and dreadfulness to all others... 7” The role of a king can change greatly over the years, in times of peace caring for the people would be as simple as building structures, providing clothing, and making sure all are fed. In times of war the job becomes dangerous, as the king must see to it that the country is defended, and that all are safe, even if that means making sacrifices.

As fate would have it, the role of the king changed dramatically in France, around the time of Childeric III, of the Merovingian family among whom the French chose their kings for generations, when Childeric's position was taken over by Pepin the Short, son of Charles Martel, who became Mayor of the

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Palace, making all the vital decisions of the king, who simply sat on the throne and made no real decisions, only saying what he was told to say, even to dignitaries and ambassadors who came from near and far to seek his counsel.

This lasted until the Roman Pontiff, Stephen II deposed Childeric, and Pepin took over the matters of the palace, both home and abroad⁷. These are the events that led up to the era of Charlemagne, a golden era for the European continent. This is but one example of the extreme measures one must go to, in order to ensure the safety of a kingdom, even at the risk of one's own life. So what does all this mean? In short, the role of a king is more than being comfortable in the position, and simply ruling.

A king, being solely in charge of a nation, in most cases, must not only care for the people, he must also watch his back, and ensure everything is being done properly, lest someone steal the throne from him, and the title of “king” takes on an entirely new meaning. As new technology becomes available, in the areas of plumbing, food, aqua ducts, lighting, and especially architecture, the king should do his best, if possible, to make sure that it is available to his people in some form or another.

New architecture could mean safer buildings, or more stable foundations, which translates into fewer structural collapses, and therefore fewer deaths. After all, while a king may resolve to sacrifice men for the sake of peace, a king shouldn't be eager to watch his citizens die needlessly! The role of the king is complicated, and our only means of understanding it, is the stories, and documents which have been passed down, to give us a glimpse into the past, but what we can ascertain, is that the role itself implied danger, and

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that the world survived such as it is now, is to be credited to those great men.