Einhard's Charlemagne: Virtue through Misfortune

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This essay endeavors to scrutinize the nuances in Einhard's approach, probing the interplay between his role as an eyewitness and his use of rhetorical devices. The duality of his motives is notably articulated in Einhard's prologue, as per the manuscript group (A). Einhard skillfully transforms descriptions of defeat or misfortune into commendations of virtue. Furthermore, manuscript group (B), featuring an epilogue penned by Gerward, offers valuable insights into the overarching theme of Einhard's biography: Carolingian kingship – its rise, transmission, the imperial title and the intricacies of succession. Einhard extends beyond a mere biography and glorifies Louis the Pious, positioning him as the rightful heir and destination of the familial kingship in order to glorify Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and the Carolingian dynasty.

Keywords: biography, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, manuscript studies, Einhard, Gerward, Carolingian kingship, historiography

Introduction

Einhard is by no means a new subject of historical research, even in China. His *Life of Charlemagne* was translated into Chinese as early as 1979 in the series »World Academic Classics in Chinese Translations«, published by The Commercial publication, one of the most famous Chinese publication companies.[1] As Einhard's *Charlemagne* continues to be studied in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, it provides a rich tapestry for exploring historical narratives, cross-cultural reception, and the intricate interplay between imitation and innovation in the art of biography.

It's worth noting that this Chinese version is based on Arthur J. Grant's English translation from 1907, which, despite being comprehensive, is relatively outdated. Grant's translation includes another *Life of Charlemagne* by Notker the Stammerer, though the authorship was not recognized by Grant, who instead attributed the work to a monk from St. Gall monastery.[2] Grant preferred to base his translation on Jaffe's Latin edition from the *Bibliotheca*

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1 Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, trans. Qi Guogan.

2 *Early Lives of Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. Grant. Like its model, the Chinese translation of Notker has also omitted paragraphs 20 to 26 of book 1.

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Rerum Germanicarum, relying heavily on the Latin manuscript no. 10758 discovered by himself in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, rather than Pertz's edition in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.[3]

The Chinese translation of Einhard faithfully follows the structure of the English model. It begins with the prefaces of Walafrid Strabo and Einhard, followed by the main text of biography itself. The main text is divided into two parts: Part One, titled »His Exploits at Home and Abroad«, covers chapters 5 to 17, while Part Two, titled »Private Life and Character«, encompasses chapters 18-33. The initial chapters 1-4 are organized under the heading »Einhard's Book Begins«.

However, the absence of details about Charlemagne's childhood, as explained by Einhard in chapter 4, has a significant impact on the structure of the biography. This gap prompts a focus on Charlemagne's life as a king and emperor, emphasizing his inheritance of the kingship, the battles engaged by him to expand the kingdom, his personal habits, the arrangement of his imperial successor, and finally, his death, his will and its execution by his successor.

In the introduction, Qi Guogan, the translator followed earlier scholarship in emphasizing Einhard's reliance on Suetonius' biography: *The Lives of Twelve Caesars*. The structured division of Einhard's work into two main parts, for example, mirrors Suetonius's division of the *Twelve Caesars*. Scholars have long noted Einhard's extensive borrowing and slavish imitation of his predecessor at least since the 16th century.[4] This relationship between these two historians and their respective biographies has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention.[5] The challenge lies in achieving a balanced perspective between Einhard's imitation and originality, especially in terms of reinventing the secular biography.[6]

It is intriguing that the Chinese translator's overall assessment of the work is very similar to that of Leopold von Ranke. Ranke maintained the reliability of Einhard despite acknowledging its many inaccuracies.[7] According to Halphen, the biography should be called the »life of the thirteenth Caesar«.[8]

The transformation of Einhard's image in historical scholarship over the past decades reflects a nuanced understanding of his role as an excellent writer employing rhetorical instruments effectively in the pursuit of his writing task. Recent research has shown his familiarity

3 *Einhardi Vita Caroli Imperatoris*, ed. Pertz, 426-463. I use the sixth edition of MGH *Einhardi vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Pertz, Waitz and Holder-Egger.

4 *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. Bouquet, 87, Bouquet pointed out that Isaac Causubon (1559-1614) might be the first editor comparing the two works closely.

5 Fleckenstein, Einhard; Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, 159-162; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 15-16; Hartmann and Hartmann, *Karl der Große und seine Zeit*, 144-146.

6 Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages,* 158-161. David Ganz has persuasively analysed the prologue of Einhard from inter-textual context and the author's creativity; Ganz, The Preface to Einhard's ›Vita Karoli‹, 299-310.

7 Ranke, *Zur Kritik fränkisch-deutscher Reichsannalisten*, 4.

8 Halphen, Études critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne; Éginhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. Halphen, xi; Nicoll, Some Passages in Einhard's ›Vita Karoli‹, 117-120. Louis Halphen was called »detractor of Einhard« by Laurent, Compte-rendu de Eignhard à Gand.

with ancient Roman authors such as Cicero, Tacitus, not to mention Suetonius.[9] To enhance comprehension of the literary value of the biography, the new French translation, replacing Halphen's version, has invited a literary expert to collaborate with a historian.[10] This reevaluation prompts considerations of whether Einhard, as argued by Steffen Patzold, played a role akin to a new Cicero at the court of Louis the Pious, not only as a skillful writer and sophisticated adviser serving the emperor, but also leaving a literary monument for posterity.[11]

Nevertheless, there are scholars who insist on the veracity of his biography. Klaus Scherberich, among others, contends that Einhard's approach aligns more with that of a historian, setting him apart from his predecessors, particularly Suetonius.[12] This divergence in perspectives raises the question: did Einhard, through skillful imitation, present an authentic portrayal of Charlemagne's life?[13] Could we find the way by which Einhard combines truth and eulogy?[14]

The paper aims to explore the dual facets of Einhard – as an eyewitness and as a skillful writer – beginning with an examination of the double motives articulated in his preface, as found in group A of manuscripts, one of the two major groups of manuscripts. Subsequently, the analysis delves into how Einhard employed his writing skills to navigate these dual motives, particularly how he praises the virtue of Charlemagne through description of his misfortune and faults. The epilogue by Gerward, replacing Einhard's preface in another major group of manuscripts (B), will be considered, shedding new light on why the work was perceived by Gerward as praising Louis the Pious alongside Einhard's original patron and emperor. The study will further uncover the prominence of the Carolingian family and its royal rulership as a central theme beyond Charlemagne's life in the biography.

9 Kempshall, Some Ciceronian Models for Einhard's Life of Charlemagne; Innes, Classical Tradition in the Carolingian Renaissance; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 17-20; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 14-16; Bagge, The Model Emperor.

10 Eginhard*, Vie de Charlemagne*, trans. Sot and Veyrard-Cosme, ix

11 Patzold, *Ich und Karl der Grosse*, chapter 15; Patzold, Einhards erste Leser, 33-56; McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World*, 30.

12 Scherberich, Zur Suetonimitatio in Einhards Vita Karoli Magni. Scherberich has emphasized that Suetonius and Einhard use typical phrases differently, although he adhered to the ancient criteria separating the genre of history from biography.

13 Noble has criticized the hypercriticism from Halphen to Collins, he also argued that most of Einhard's description was supported by the other sources, while he has to treat Einhard's selectivity as his own interpretation; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 17.

14 Morse has rightly pointed out that Einhard was scrupulous to create a true image for the posterity, while her analysis mainly focuses on Einhard's imitation of Suetonius; Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, 159; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 17.

The Dual Motives

The dual motives articulated by Einhard in his prologue,[15] as found in manuscripts A,[16] unveil the complex reasons behind his decision to write a biography of Charlemagne. According to this prologue, Einhard's primary motivation was to express his gratitude for the unbroken friendship he had enjoyed with Charlemagne and his children since his teenage years at the royal court, dating back to around 790. At that time, Charlemagne was already 50 years old according to Einhard, though he is commonly accepted by modern historians to have been born in 748.[17]

Despite the lack of consensus on the precise date of the biography,[18] scholars agree that Einhard served Charlemagne and his son for approximately thirty years or more, earning their favor, when he began to write. This long and dedicated service prompted Einhard's desire to repay the royal favor by immortalizing the memory of his old patron through the written word. Einhard's gratitude and loyalty to Charlemagne fueled his commitment to writing a biographical account.[19]In fulfilling his promise, Einhard is determined to face potential criticism from contemporary readers rather than to neglect the memory of this great man, Charlemagne.

Einhard's second motive, expressed clearly in the preface too, was his commitment to writing honestly and truthfully about Charlemagne's life. He asserted that no one could write more truthfully about the events than himself because he was an active participant in those events, having been present and relying on the testimony of his own eyes. Einhard, therefore, positioned himself as an eyewitness, emphasizing that his firsthand experience guaranteed the reliability of the biography: »no one could write these things more truthfully than I, since

15 David Ganz's excellent analysis of the preface; see Ganz, The Preface to Einhard's ›Vita Karoli‹, 299-310.

16 At present about 123 manuscripts exist, which copy part or whole of the biography. These manuscripts were generally divided into three Groups, respectively group A, group B and group C. Group A is characterized with Einhard's preface, while group B has Gerward's epilogue in place of Einhard's preface. Group C only possesses some details different from the above two groups, such as the number of Charlemagne's concubines. *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Pertz, Waitz and Holder-Egger, xviii-xxiv. Also Janet Nelson's succinct description of Matthias Tischler's exhaustive analysis of the manuscripts; *eadem*, Tracking Einhard's ›Life of Charlemagne‹, 301-307.

17 Werner, Das Geburtsdatum Karls des Großen; Werner, La date de naissance de Charlemagne; Becher, Neue Überlegungen zum Geburtsdatum Karls des Großen; Stoffella, Quando è nato. My thanks go to the anonymous reviewer for pointing to Stoffella's article.

18 The proposed dates range from 817, during Einhard's active service in the royal court, to 830, when he retired to the church of St. Marcellinus & Peter. Within this timeline, three primary opinions have emerged: the early 820s, the middle 820s & the late 820s. According to Sot's survey, all three arguments have their own merits, there is no conclusive evidence to definitively support one over the others. Sot, Au fondement du sourvenir de Charlemagen. In addition to the three schools of thought surveyed by Sot, McKitterick and Innes have provided another date of the work: 817; see Innes and McKitterick, Writing of history, 203-209, also McKitterick, *Charlemagne,* 7-21. Noble succinctly argued against the earliest date opinion in the introduction to his translation; see *idem*, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 10. I thank the anonymous reviewer for recommending Innes' and McKitterick's study.

19 It is common sense, however see Ganz's systematic treatment; *idem*, Einhard's Charlemagne: the characterisation of greatness.

I was there and I knew confidently, as they say, what I saw going on around me«.[20] This approach contrasts with that of Suetonius, who, lacking direct personal involvement with his subjects, had to gather information mainly from second hand sources.[21]

The tradition of bearing witness in historical narrative was firmly established by the era in which Suetonius undertook his literary endeavors. Nonetheless, within Roman imperial literary circles, biography was considered a distinct genre for a depiction of the hero's character, affording authors the liberty to delve into the minutiae of a subject's daily life. As Plutarch (c. 45-125 CE) eloquently noted, »a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character«.[22] In this context, a biographer assumes the role of a meticulous painter, diligently striving to capture the likenesses in their portraits. The temporal chasm between ancient biographers and their subjects allowed for a nuanced and liberated depiction of lives.

This tradition of ancient imperial biography wielded a discernible influence on Einhard, particularly as he endeavored to extol the greatness of Charlemagne. Einhard's literary endeavor proved triumphant, establishing his work as a seminal contribution that indelibly shaped perceptions of Charlemagne. Even in China, the biography is recognized as one of world classics. Analogous to a celebrated painting, Einhard's portrayal of his esteemed patron emerged really as a classic, offering readers an authoritative understanding of Charlemagne's character and accomplishments.

Beyond simply praising Charlemagne's *gesta*, Einhard aspired to provide an authentic representation of the historical figure to posterity, aiming for an eyewitness account. A generation later, Walafrid Strabo attested to the meticulous accuracy of Einhard's account, praising him, »not only for his accurate knowledge – his testimony gains strength because he was an eyewitness to almost everything – but also for the complete honesty of his mores«.[23]

Einhard had only encountered aged Charlemagne around 790. On account of the difference of age many of Charlemagne's actions took place before Einhard's presence at the court. The problem is how Einhard realized his dual motive through his narrative? Did Einhard mainly tell the reader about the events he had been present at and he had seen?

Charlemagne in his old age

As an eyewitness account, Einhard's perspective on Charlemagne is inherently tied to the emperor's later years. Historians often use this temporal difference between the two figures to cast a negative light on the biography's historical value, as Janet Nelson has recently pointed out.[24] However, it is necessary to note that while historians are aware of this

20 Ganz, The Preface to Einhard's ›Vita Karoli‹, 299-310; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 22.

21 Townend, Suetonius and His Influence, 84. For an earlier brief survey of the scholarship, Dennison, Epigraphic sources of the writings of Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, 26-30; Power, Collected Papers on Suetonius, x.

22 *Plutarch's Lives, vol. II, Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Perrin, 225; Jacobs, Plutarch's Pragmatic Biographies, 1-4; Pelling, Plutarch and Biography, 11-28.

23 *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, trans. Noble, 21; Ganz, The Preface to Einhard's ›Vita Karoli‹, 299-310.

24 Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 7.

phenomenon, the logical connection between the age difference and the value of the narrative is not straightforward.

To assess Einhard's contribution properly, a distinction must be made between the events he could have witnessed and those beyond his observation. Einhard dedicated the first part of the biography to the wars and the expansion of the Frankish kingdom under the rule of Charlemagne. Among Charlemagne's ten battles meticulously detailed by Einhard in the initial part of the biography, the biographer only had the opportunity to witness two engagements. Specifically, these were the war against the Huns and the anticipated conflict with the Northmen. At best, Einhard might know the Saxon wars, a prolonged conflict persisting until the early 9th century, in its concluding stages. Given Einhard's limited experience of these wars, it is crucial to consider the persuasive arguments put forth by Louis Halphen in the early 20th century, that there are numerous errors in Einhard's depiction of these wars.[25]

Einhard candidly acknowledges in chapter 6, »my purpose in the present work is rather to describe Charles's manner of life than to chronicle the events of the wars that he waged«. This statement serves as a partial explanation for potential inaccuracies in his war descriptions. Nevertheless, the core issue persists, namely the lack of firsthand experience allows for a more liberal manipulation by the author. Instead of recounting authentic war experiences, Einhard opted for a stylized representation of Charlemagne's engagements. He emphasized the idealized path to victory rather than the authentic complexities of warfare. This approach served Einhard's overarching motive: to validate Charlemagne's greatness, setting him as a model for emulation by subsequent emperors and admiration by readers.[26]

In the second part of the biography, Einhard was probably able to draw on his direct experience of the majority of the events chronicled. Chapters 18-19 delve into the sorrowful episodes of Charlemagne mourning the deaths, in chronological order, of his mother Bertrada and his wife Hildegard (both † 783), his next wife Fastrada († 794), Pope Hadrian († 795), his daughter Gisela († 810), and his sons, the young Charles († 810) and Pippin of Italy († 811). Except for Bertrada and Hildegard, who passed away in 783, all above mentioned family members and associates died after 794, a year when Einhard was already present at Charlemagne's court, and Charlemagne had certainly already reached an advanced age.

In chapter 19, Einhard endeavors to justify Charlemagne's distinctive fondness for his daughters, a sentiment prompted in part by the critique leveled by Louis the Pious, the newly anointed emperor. Louis, in contrast, banished his own sisters from the royal court. Among Charlemagne's well-documented nine daughters, Hrotrud was the eldest, initially betrothed to Constantine VI, the child emperor of Constantinople. However, in the year 786, when Hrotrud was just eleven years old, the engagement was abruptly terminated. Approximately four years later, Einhard arrived at court. Manifesting a keen interest in the marital affairs

25 Halphen, Études critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne; Francois Ganshof, a critic of Halphen, also agrees; see Ganshof, Notes critiques sur Eginhard. More recently, Latowsky, Foreign embassies and Roman university, 25-57.

26 Louis Halphen argued that the part on Charlemagne's war and politics was mainly a »cento« of the Royal chronicles and that of Suetonius; see Éginhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. Halphen, xii. Latowsky, Foreign embassies and Roman university, 25-57.

of Charlemagne's daughters, Einhard's preoccupation extended notably from the pivotal year of 786, marked by Hrotrud's disrupted engagement, up until the demise of the aging Charlemagne. At the end of that paragraph, Einhard told the reader about Charlemagne's extraordinary love of his daughters so as to prevent them from marrying during his lifetime. His comment aligns well with regulations outlined in the 806 capitula of *Divisio regnorum*. According to this legislation, daughters were only permitted to marry of their own volition after Charlemagne's demise.[27]Probably the policy of 806 is the focus of his narrative about Charlemagne's daughters, the unextraordinary policy produced a unique impact on the relationship between the father and his daughters.

Chapter 20 addresses the rebellion of Pippin the Hunchback in 792, a pivotal event when Charlemagne was approximately 50 years old, according to Einhard's calculations, although he was probably slightly younger than that. Despite two prior noble revolts, Einhard employs this incident to underscore a marked contrast between the earlier years, marred by internal strife, and the subsequent period when Charlemagne seemingly »won the love and favour of all men«.[28]

Einhard, in chapter 21, discusses the arrival of foreign visitors from across the then-known world. Unfortunately, the specific dates of their visit remain obscure.[29] It can be surmised that these visitors were received by an aged Charlemagne, assuming the *palatio* mentioned in the text is indeed the palace at Aachen. Construction of this palace commenced in the 790s, and from 806 onwards Charlemagne seldom spent winters beyond Aachen.[30]

Chapters 22-24 stand out as among the most frequently cited sections of the biography,[31] offering a vivid portrayal of Charlemagne's physical attributes and his clothing habits. The depiction encompasses details such as his »beautiful white hair«, routine actions in the last years before his death, and specific preferences, including his inclination for roast meat over boiled. White hair clearly symbolizes old age, while his sleeping habits, indicative of light and fragmented sleep, suggest the challenges of advancing years.

A noteworthy revelation in these chapters is that Charlemagne rejected foreign clothing on two occasions in Rome. The first instance occurred at the behest of Pope Hadrian, and the second, upon the entreaty of Pope Leo. The timing of the first event remains speculative, but the second should be the solemn imperial coronation, which took place at Christmas 800. If the Einhard's account is accurate, it also implies Charlemagne's familiarity with the coronation ceremony before entering the basilica of St. Peter.[32]

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27 No. 45. Divisio regnorum. 806. Febr. 6, ed. Boretius, 129; Nelson, Women at the court of Charlemagne, 43-62; de Jong, Einhard, the Astronomer and Charlemagne's daughters, 551-566.

28 Davis, *Charlemagne;s Practice of Empire*, 140. Helmut Reimitz' exellent study of historical memories of this revolt, *idem*, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity*, 390.

29 Anne Latowsky has recently argued that these diplomatic relations with foreign princes should be located in the context of the imperial coronation; *eadem*, Foreign embassies and Roman university, 30.

30 Hartmann and Hartmann, *Karl der Große und seine Zeit*, 57; Ristow, Karl der Große und Aachen, 60-63.

31 Michel Sot has emphasized the rhetoric behind the portrait of Charlemagne, contrary to Louis Halphen, who criticised its untrustworthiness; Eginhard: *Vie de Charlemagne*, trans. Sot and Veyrard-Cosme, 52, note 93. For Charlemagne's real stature, Rühli *et al.*, Charlemagne was very tall, but not robust, 289-290.

32 Paul Fouracre has rightly pointed out »the age-old literary convention of humility in the great and good«,

In subsequent chapters, Einhard reveals Charlemagne's passion for learning languages and for scholarly pursuits. Charlemagne emerges as a diligent student. Einhard names Peter of Pisa, who returned to Italy in the late 780s, as one of the teachers at court. Unfortunately, it is unclear when Charlemagne learned Latin grammar from Peter; what is certain is that Peter was an old deacon when Charlemagne began his study of grammar. After completing grammar under Peter's guidance, Charlemagne continued to learn various disciplines from Alcuin, according to Einhard's account. The two magisters may have taught consecutively, with Alcuin starting to teach at the palace school from 787.[33]

Astronomy particularly his keen interest in the art of calculation and the study of the stars, held a special place in Charlemagne's educational pursuits. A surviving capitulary from 809 contains approximately 20 inquiries related to the calculation of the date of Easter festivals,[34] suggesting Charlemagne's engagement with astronomical studies during that period. Einhard organizes the sequence of Charlemagne's educational endeavors, progressing from elementary courses to more complex subjects. Interestingly, writing is mentioned as the last skill acquired by Charlemagne. Paul Dutton has suggested that Charlemagne began learning to write in about the year 800.[35]

Commencing from chapter 26, Einhard delves into an extensive portrayal of Charlemagne's piety. Key historical events mentioned in this phase include the initiation of the construction of the Church of St. Mary in Aachen around 793, Charlemagne's momentous visit to Rome in 800 culminating in the imperial coronation, and subsequent governmental and administrative activities extending until Charlemagne's demise. The biography concludes with Charlemagne's will, drafted in 811, and its execution by his successor, Emperor Louis the Pious.[36]

Considering the biography in its entirety, a pronounced dichotomy exists between its two parts. In the initial section, Einhard's presence on the battlefield during the wars he describes is doubtful, although he occasionally employs rhetoric to create an illusion of personal involvement. For instance, when detailing the Frankish army's crossing of the Alps in 773 with Charlemagne, Einhard seemingly recounts the difficulties and toils faced during that passage.[37] However, he personally overcame the rocky pass probably later in 806, when he was sent to Rome by Charlemagne, crossing the Alps as a legate, not with the army in 773.

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idem, Frankish Gaul to 814, 105. We may complement the anxiety of Charlemagne during the period of more than 10 years when he had to seek and wait for the recognition of his imperial title by his »brothers« at Constantinople.

33 Gorman, Introduction, xix.

34 Das Aachener Verhör von 809 (Cap. comp.), 1034-1054; Sprinsfeld, Karl der Große, Alkuin und die Zeitrechnung, 53-66.

35 Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 69-92; McKitterick, Charters, languages, and communication, 42-47 offers a new reading of this passage which takes the multilingual and cultural realities of that time into account.

36 Matthew Innes' insightful analysis of the will; *idem*, Charlemagne's Will; Liu, Charlemagne's Testament, 27-36.

37 Michel Sot has persuasively argued that the quotation has the effect of rhetoric function rather than of a statement of fact. *Eginhard: Vie de Charlemagne*, trans. Sot and Veyrard-Cosme, lii.

The second part of the biography, primarily focusing on the later years of Charlemagne's life, offers a vivid account of the emperor's daily routines and habits as observed and heard by Einhard. Almost all of Charlemagne's actions in that part occurred in his later years. Although articulated with rhetorical finesse, this section essentially fulfills Einhard's motive of presenting the life of the aged Charlemagne through personal presence and eyewitness testimony, as he declared in his preface: »ipse interfui(t)« and »praesens oculate«.

However, acknowledging Einhard's recollection of the aged Charlemagne's life from his own experience does not necessarily guarantee the truthfulness of his description, and thus, an accurate portrayal of Charlemagne. While drawing from personal experiences is one aspect, recounting those experiences is another matter, especially given Einhard's brilliant career as a courtier.[38] It is essential to consider Einhard's adept skill in expression in order to understand how the author artfully employs eloquence to extol his subject while simultaneously creating an impression of unwavering truthfulness for the readers.

Virtue through Misfortune: A Courtier's Discourse

Einhard's biography of Charlemagne is undoubtedly a panegyric to praise his old patron, a well-known phenomenon that requires no further elaboration. What warrants exploration here is the methodology and rhetoric employed by Einhard to both to apologize for and laud his late patron. Several instances in the second part, reported as eyewitness accounts by Einhard, will be scrutinized to unravel the nuanced messages between the lines, particularly concerning the intricate relationship between verity and glorification.

Chapter 20 grapples with the question of why there were three conspiracies against Charlemagne in the 780s and 792, reframing the circumstances through the lens of virtue. To justify why Charlemagne faced criticism during this period, Einhard introduces Queen Fastrada as a scapegoat, who held sway over the court from 783 to 794. This simplistic yet common strategy of attributing blame serves to apologize for any perceived faults. Behind this direct apology may lie the personal adjustments of Einhard as a newcomer to the court of the great king and his wife Fastrada. During this time, an incident involving the young Louis the Pious is also notable. According to the account of the Anonymous Astronomer, the second biographer of Louis the Pious, Louis awaited the return of his father by staying with his stepmother during the winter when Pippin the Hunchback, his eldest brother rebelled against his father. The Astronomer seems to downplay the involvement of Louis in that conspiracy by emphasizing his absence. Considering the emotional state of young Louis probably adds depth to understanding Einhard's explanation of the rebellions.[39]

In other cases, Einhard has to utilize a far more complicated strategy to persuade his readers. He asserts in chapter 19 that Charlemagne's deep affection for his daughters prevented him from marrying them off. While Einhard was undoubtedly privy to the genuine reasons behind this circumstance, his commentary introduces a layer of complexity. The mention of gossip implies that there might have been rumours or speculation about the daughters,

38 Airlie, Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association, 191-204.

39 However, see Coupland, A coin of Queen Fastrada and Charlemagne, 1-13.

possibly their marriages or personal lives.[40] Einhard subtly supplements this observation with a commentary on his old patron's lack of fortune in this aspect. The underlying question becomes, what does Einhard aim to convey with such a comment? The point at issue lies in Charlemagne's attitude, unmoved by the gossip as if it were inconsequential. This attitude mirrors Charlemagne's response to signs foretelling his imminent death in chapter 32, Einhard draws a parallel between Charlemagne's indifference to the gossip about his daughters and his similar attitude towards signs indicating his own death.

In both instances, Einhard utilizes the resulting clauses »ita dissimulavit, acsi de eis nulla…« and »sic aut dissimulavit aut sprevit, acsi nihil…«, underscoring the consistent logic behind these phenomena – his daughters' behaviors/his death, gossip/signs: – Charlemagne's unwavering determination. Einhard's commentary implies that Charlemagne harbored no shame, even though his daughters brought him misfortune. Within these narratives, we discern one of Einhard's writing strategies, wherein the depiction of defeat or adversity is transformed into an appraisal of virtue. In Charlemagne's life, genuine challenges and setbacks do exist, yet his patient endurance and courageous response to failures are commendable. This strategy involves framing potentially negative situations, such as gossip about his daughters or signs of his death, in a way that reflects positively on Charlemagne's character.

In chapter 23, Einhard highlights Charlemagne's reluctance to wear the imperial dress and assume insignia, emphasizing his extreme patriotism and deep love for Frankish traditions. Commentators have long observed a pronounced dichotomy within the paragraph, highlighting a significant contrast between Frankish identity and Roman identity.[41] This observation gains further substantiation when considering Einhard's hagiographical contributions, particularly evident in his work such as the *Translation of the Relics of the Saints Marcellinus and Peter*. In this hagiographical opus, Einhard expresses less-than-favorable sentiments towards certain Romans.[42] Furthermore, Einhard introduces an extra layer of meaning by portraying Charlemagne's habit of dressing like a commoner on regular days, reserving elaborate clothing for special occasions. This deliberate humility in dress becomes a focal point, contributing to Einhard's appraisal of Charlemagne's virtue.

Chapters 23 and 28 of Einhard's work reveal an intriguing connection, particularly in his praise of Charlemagne's magnanimity, a quality instrumental in overcoming the hostilities of his »brothers«, the Roman emperors in Constantinople. The narrative unfolds further in chapter 28, where Einhard recounts Charlemagne's efforts to secure recognition of his imperial title by »his brothers« in Constantinople. Despite numerous legates sent for approval, the anticipated recognition did not materialize until 812, a staggering twelve years later. The extended diplomatic exchanges, marked by limited success, led to Charlemagne's frustration. Einhard skillfully portrays this frustration in chapter 23, where Charlemagne is said to have often murmured to his courtier(s) that he would have been reluctant to enter the Church of

40 Johannes Fried has argued that the court was full of »erotic intrigue«; Fried, *Charlemagne*, trans. Lewis, 327. Additionally, Janet Nelson recently argued that the daughters acted as intermediaries at court; *eadem*, *King and Emperor*, 442-443.

41 Eginhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, trans. Sot and Veyrard-Cosme, 54, note 99.

42 *Einhardi Translatio et mriacula ss. Marcellini et Petri*, lib.I, c. 2, ed. Waitz, 240.

St. Peter if had he known the imperial ceremony awaited him. In showcasing Charlemagne's frustration, Einhard once again adeptly transforms a setback into an appreciation of virtue. The veil of magnanimity, as described by Einhard, subtly conceals the inner turmoil faced by Charlemagne during this diplomatic endeavor and thus shrouds any unrest, presenting Charlemagne as a resilient and virtuous leader.

In chapter 25, Einhard vividly portrays Charlemagne's eagerness to learn to write. Through nuanced grammatical investigations by Paul Pascal and detailed analyses by Paul Dutton,[43] it has become increasingly evident that Charlemagne, despite his earnest efforts, did not achieve proficiency in writing, marking the culmination of his learning journey with a notable failure. Einhard, however, skillfully depicts Charlemagne's fervor for learning with vivid detail, noting how he carried tablets and placed writing-sheets under the pillow of his couch to familiarize himself with the formation of letters during spare moments. The rhetoric of glorification employed by Einhard proves compelling, underscoring the success of Einhard's portrayal.

Thegan in his biography of Louis the Pious, as David Ganz has rightly pointed out,[44] attempts to sanctify Charlemagne's writing capacity by describing him correcting the four gospels with the assistance of Syrian and Greek courtiers.[45] While Thegan takes a pivotal step in recounting this event, he appears to follow a legacy left by Einhard. Einhard, in his own work, skillfully transformed setbacks into eulogies by artfully choosing ambiguous expressions to veil underlying truths. – A spiritual victory, even amid factual losses. Einhard's portrayal, set against the backdrop of religious piety in chapter 25, firmly embeds the quest for literacy within the Christian cultural context. As seen in capitularies like *Admonitio generalis*, which mandate meticulous writing of the Gospel, Psalter, and Missal by men of mature age,[46] writing was closely linked to Christian culture, as emphasized by Rosamond McKitterick and other scholars.[47]

When recounting Charlemagne's death (chapter 31), Einhard relates a curious tale where the courtiers, unsure of Charlemagne's desired burial place, unanimously decide to inter him in the church of St. Mary at Aachen. Janet Nelson's interpretation challenges the literal understanding of that sentence that Charlemagne had not arranged his burial site. Instead Nelson suggests that Charlemagne may have collaborated with his daughters and courtiers in determining his eternal resting place, evident in the use of a coffin brought from Ravenna.[48] This perspective, exploring the dilemma faced by Charlemagne and his courtiers, unveils the complexity of the situation beyond a literal reading of Einhard's phrases.

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43 Pascal, Charlemagne's Latin, 19-21; Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 69-92. For a more recent synthesis, see Krotz and Gorman (eds.), *Grammatical Works*.

44 Ganz, Einhard's Charlemagne; Shimahara, Charlemagne, premier souverain chrétien commanditaire d'exégèse biblique?, 101-118.

45 *Theganus, Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, c.7, ed. Tremp, 184-186.

46 *Admonitio generalis*, 789, M. Martio 23, No. 22, vol. I, ed. Boretius, 59-60.

47 McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity*, 315-320; Contreni, Learning for Gods.

48 Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 482-483. Matthias Becher has similar argument, *idem*, *Karl der Grosse*. About the investigation of Charlemagne's tomb, see Caillet, Que sait-on aujourd'hui?, 183-191.

In 813, a pivotal year preceding Charlemagne's demise, he orchestrated five grand synods across the five major cities of his realm – Mainz, Reims, Tours, Chalon-sur-Saône, and Arles. The *Frankish Royal Chronicle* notes that a concise compilation of canons from these councils was presented before the emperor after these assemblies,[49] possibly in the form of the capitulary no. 78, *Capitula e Canonibus Excerpta*. Chapter 20 of this collection explicitly dictated that only bishops, abbots, or loyal and virtuous priests were entitled to burial within a church,[50] excluding lay individuals like Charlemagne, despite his imperial stature. Einhard, in narrating Charlemagne's silence on his burial site, strategically absolved him of any transgression against this synodal canon. It is not strange that Charlemagne's burial place differs not only from that of his ancestors, such as Pippin the Short, his father, and Charles Martel, his grandfather; but also from that of his successors, such as Louis the Pious, his son and Lothair, his grandson.[51] These ancestors and descendants are all buried in the monastery church, while Charlemagne rests in the church of St. Mary.

Einhard employed diverse strategies both to exonerate and to extol Charlemagne. In instances like chapter 20, he deflected blame onto Queen Fastrada. In chapter 31, Einhard explicitly stated Charlemagne's innocence regarding any violation of the synodal canons. Chapters 23, 25, and 28 show Einhard employing a unique rhetoric, transforming Charlemagne's shortcomings into a commendation of his virtue, spotlighting positive attitudes rather than negative outcomes. Singing the praises of a ruler, especially a powerful and astute king and emperor like Charlemagne, posed a formidable challenge. Einhard utilized the courtier's discourse to present an idealized image of Charlemagne. He appears as a king whose humility shone through his choice of attire, whose anxiety and complaints about the imperial coronation were portrayed as magnanimity, and whose struggles in learning to write were transformed into an ode to his eager pursuit of knowledge.

The courtier's discourse, while constructing an idealized narrative, also hints at the concrete realities and challenges faced by Charlemagne, offering a glimpse into the intricate psychology of a ruler striving for excellence in the eyes of his court. Beneath the layers of rhetoric, a discerning reader can unearth the complexities and dilemmas Charlemagne faced. In this classic biography, there is no simple truth; instead, the truth lies beneath the rhetorical discourses. By penetrating the biographer's discourses, we may discover additional layers of the text's meanings. Einhard not only glorifies his old patron, Charlemagne, but also subtly praises his new patron, Louis the Pious. It is Louis who stands at the end of the series of great kings and as a suitable successor.

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49 *Annales regni Francorum*, A. 813, ed. Pertz and Kurze, 138. Here I have used the translation of Scholz and Rogers, *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories*, 95-96.

50 *Ut mortui in ecclesia non sepeliantur, nisi episcopi aut abbates vel fideles et boni presbiteri*, No. 78. Capitula e canonibus excerpta. 813, ed. Boretius ed., *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. I, p. 174. Scholz, Normierung durch Konzile, 271-280.

51 Nelson, Carolingian royal funerals, 131-184; Dierkens, Le tombeau de Charlemagne, 56-180 and Dierkens, La morte, les funérailles et la tombe de Pépin le bref, 37-52.

Glory be to Carolingian Kingship and Louis the Pious

While Einhard's biography primarily celebrates the virtues of Charlemagne, it also extends its commendation to encompass the entire Carolingian royal family. Although some historians speculate about subtle allusions to Louis the Pious' faults,[52] a significant manuscript tradition (B) omitting the preface of Einhard, instead adding an epilogue by Gerward, Louis the Pious' librarian, sheds light on the another overarching purpose of the biography: it was crafted to laud the new emperor, Louis the Pious. Einhard, in his work, indeed appraises Louis the Pious on various occasions, emphasizing his devout execution of Charlemagne's will and depicting his imperial coronation as a divine inspiration for the welfare of the realm.

Considering Gerward's assertion, a new perspective emerges, emphasizing the familial connection between Charlemagne and Louis as father and son. Intriguingly, the biography commences with a detailed account of Charlemagne's ancestors, delving into the story of Pippin III, Charlemagne's father. This genealogical construct creates a narrative symmetry, linking the beginning and end of the text. It starts with the transmission of power from father to son, and concludes with a similar transmission from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious. Notably, the opening word, »gens«, introduces a family story, signifying the replacement of the Merovingians by the Carolingians in ruling power.

In essence, Einhard's biography transcends a mere celebration of Charlemagne's virtues. It weaves a narrative tapestry that explores the evolution of Carolingian kingship, from its origin and rise to its zenith under Charlemagne, concluding with the pivotal act of transmitting imperial authority to the next generation embodied by Louis the Pious.

Within Einhard's biographical narrative, the family life of Charlemagne assumes a central position (spanning paragraphs 18 to 22) anchoring the familial kingship, while the portrayal of Louis the Pious' enthronement (paragraph 31) and his execution of his father's will (paragraph 33), stands at the end of the narrative. As Gerward astutely acknowledged, Einhard's work glorifies Louis the Pious, positioning him as the rightful heir and destination of the familial kingship.

Einhard's keen focus on family aligns with Louis the Pious' own familial priorities. Louis established a patriarchal family structure through the *Ordinatio Imperii* in 817, solidifying the father's authority over all family members, with the elder brother designated to succeed the patriarchal role. Notably, during the civil conflict in the 830s, Louis commanded literary efforts, such as a booklet by Jonas, bishop of Orleans, to persuade Pippin I of Aquitaine to obey his parents and as a result adhere to family unity.[53] Concurrently, Hrabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda, meticulously sought biblical references to legitimize Louis the Pious' paternal rule.[54]

52 Barnwell, Einhard, Louis the Pious and Childeric III; de Jong, Admonition, 315-340.

53 *Jonas d'Orléans: Le métier de roi*, no. 407, ed. Dubreucq, 160; Veronese, Jonas of Orléans, 413-428

54 *Hrabani Epistolae* no. 15, ed. Duemmler, 404-415. See also the excellent analyses of Mayke de Jong, Hraban Maur as Mediator and *eadem*, *Penitential State*. Furthermore, Depreux, Penance of Attigny, 370-385; Gravel and Käschke (eds.), *Politische Kultur und Textproduktion*.

In 822 at Attigny, Louis publicly confessed any faults committed by himself or his father, pledging devoted correction.[55] Although it is not certain that possible gossip about Charlemagne's daughters and the nobles' rebellion prompted Louis to openly confess for his father, as a new patriarch, Louis bore the responsibility for his entire family's faults, situating the biography within the Christian culture propagated by Louis the Pious himself.

Einhard's biography transcends a mere individual portrait of Charlemagne; it constructs a collective memory of the Carolingian royal family. By tracing the history of Carolingian kingship from its inception to Charlemagne's reign, the acquisition of the imperial title, and its transmission to Louis the Pious the narrative underscores the family's virtue. The Carolingians initially secured power allegedly under the Roman pope's order,[56] while Charlemagne's imperial title bestowed by Pope Leo III reflected a reward for his piety. The family history unfolds as a progression from power to piety, culminating in Charlemagne's will, extensively copied by Einhard. According to the will, Charlemagne planned how to donate nearly all of his moveable property to churches. Louis the Pious' meticulous execution of the will, marked by »the greatest devotion«, serves as irrefutable proof of his pious virtue, a defining quality of a Carolingian emperor. Chapters 30 and 33, highlighting the ritual ceremony of imperial succession, underscore Louis the Pious' virtues, affirming Gerward's assertion and elevating Louis the Pious as the last climax of the narrative.

Einhard's exceptional writing skill transcends mere praise; it artfully honors both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Drawing inspiration from Suetonius and ancient writers, he introduces a novel criterion for biographers to select sources: eyewitness accounts. This approach results in a unique biographical style, allowing Einhard to fulfill his dual objectives, that is capturing his observations while portraying a specific character. As a seasoned courtier, he navigates the delicate balance of eulogizing Charlemagne without deviating significantly from the truth. Despite Charlemagne's imperfections, Einhard strategically shifts focus from outcomes to Charlemagne's attitudes and motives, transforming failures into celebrations of virtue.

The biography not only provides a close-up view of an aging Charlemagne – his familial relations, eating habits, religious piety, and approach to mortality – but also sets out the history of the Carolingian kingship, its transmission, and the virtuous foundations supporting it. Through this familial tapestry, Einhard immortalizes not just an individual but a dynasty, forever linking the legacy of Charlemagne with the virtues embodied by Louis the Pious.

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55 *Annales regni Francorum*, A. 822, ed. Pertz amd Kurze, 158. On this event, see the outstanding explanation of Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State*.

56 McKitterick, Illusion of royal power, 1-20; Schneider, Königserhebung Pippins, 243-276; Goosmann, *Memorable Crises*.

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Abbreviations

MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
SS rer. Germ.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum schlolarum separatim editi
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

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