CHAPTER I

Representations of Charlemagne

INTRODUCTION

Charlemagne, king of the Franks from 768 to 814, is one of the few major rulers in European history for whom there is an agreed stereotype. According to this he was a great warrior, and with his conquests he expanded his realm from a region smaller than France to include most of what we now know as western Europe. He promoted Christianity, education and learning. He was crowned emperor by the pope on Christmas Day 800, and provided thereby both the essential ideological potential for subsequent imperial ambitions among the medieval and early modern rulers of western Europe and a link between the 'germanic' and Roman political worlds. He was already hailed as the 'father of Europe' by a poet of his own day.[1] Modern scholars in search of Europe's linguistic core have proposed a 'Charlemagne *Sprachbund*', for the area where French, German, Italian and Dutch are spoken.[2] With the modern *International Karlspreis / Prix International de Charlemagne* for services to European peace and unity, first awarded in 1950, this Frankish ruler has also attained status as a symbol of European unity and integration. The prize itself was even awarded to the Euro in 2002.

Throughout the history of France and Germany and even in the new kingdom of the Belgians in the nineteenth century, this stereotype of Christian emperor, mighty conqueror and patron of learning also served as a focus of national identity. A liturgical feast in honour of St Charlemagne

[1] *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH Poet.* I (Berlin, 1881), pp. 366–79; and W. Hentze, *De Karolo rege et Leone papa: der Bericht über die Zusammenkunft Karls des Großen mit Papst Leo III in Paderborn 799 in einem Epos für Karl den Kaiser* (Paderborn, 1999).

[2] J. van de Auwera, *Adverbial constructions in the languages of Europe* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 823–5. This *Sprachbund* is also known as SAE or Standard Average European. See also R. Thieroff, 'The German tense-aspect-mood system from a typological perspective', in S. Watts, J. West and H.-J. Solms (eds.), *Zur Verbmorphologie germanischer Sprachen*, Linguistische Arbeiten 146 (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 211–30 at p. 228, and B. Heine and T. Kuteva (eds.), *The changing languages of Europe* (Oxford, 2006), p. 8.

was actually instituted in 1165 when Pope Alexander III canonized him and a cult of Charlemagne spread across western Europe.[3] It was at a later stage that Charlemagne's bones were translated into the gaudy gold reliquary commissioned for the purpose by the Emperor Frederick II.[4] In literature, too, Charlemagne enjoyed every variant of valiant Christian warrior in any number of medieval Latin and vernacular epics, such as the Old French *Chanson de Roland*, the Irish *Gabáltais searluis móir* and the German *Kaiserchronik*.[5] The Carolingian emperors, most particularly Charlemagne but increasingly because he was seen as a sort of composite super-emperor, moreover, provided political ideologues with a powerful model. This was not just a matter of claiming Frankish descent, though that happened too. Robert Peril's genealogies of the emperors of Austria published in 1535 in French, Spanish, Latin and Dutch versions, for example, did precisely that.[6]

It was not only a Carolingian imperial ideal and its resonance with the Roman empire that proved so powerful throughout the middle ages and into the early modern period, as Dürer's famous imaginary imperial portrait of 1512/13 (still in Nürnberg),[7] and Cointin's *Charlemagne et le rétablissement de l'empire romain*, published in 1666, indicate.[8] The imagination of political leaders was also fired by what they understood of his achievements. No less a leader than Napoleon thought of himself as a second Charlemagne in his relations with the pope and the church.[9] In the procession which formed part of a spectacle organized in Aachen in June 1811, a colossal effigy of Charlemagne bore the legend 'Nur Napoleon ist grösser als ich' (Only

[3] R. Folz, *Etudes sur la culte liturgique de Charlemagne dans les églises de l'empire* (Paris, 1951).

[4] H. Müllejans, *Karl der Große und sein Schrein in Aachen: eine Festschrift* (Aachen, 1988).

[5] See R. Folz, *Le souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne dans l'empire germanique médiéval* (Paris, 1950); *Gabáltais searluis móir (The conquests of Charlemagne)*, ed. D. Hyde, Irish Texts Society (London, 1917); and K.-E. Geith, *Carolus Magnus: Studien zur Darstellung Karls des Großen in deutschen Literatur des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1977). See also B. Bastert (ed.), *Karl der Große in den europäischen Literaturen des Mittelalters: Konstruktion eines Mythos* (Tübingen, 2004).

[6] R. Peril, *La généalogie et descente de la très illustre maison Dautriche* (Antwerp, 1535). See J. Voss, *Das Mittelalter im historischen Denken Frankreichs: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalterbegriffes und der Mittelalterbewertung von der zweiten Hälfte des 16. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1972); R. McKitterick, 'The study of Frankish history in France and Germany in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Francia* 8 (1980), pp. 556–72; and R. Morrissey, 'Charlemagne', in the section 'De l'archive à l'emblème', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, III: *Les Frances* (Paris, 1992, repr. 1997), pp. 4389–425.

[7] P. Schoenen, 'Das Karlsbild der Neuzeit', *KdG*, IV, pp. 274–305.

[8] A useful introduction is R. Folz, *The concept of empire in western Europe from the fifth to the fourteenth century* (London, 1969) from the 1953 French edition.

[9] R. Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France: a thousand years of mythology*, trans. C. Tihanyi (Chicago, 2003) (from the French edition of 1997).

Napoleon is greater than I).[10] Contemporaries were not slow to find super-ficial comparisons: the famous equestrian portrait of Napoleon crossing the Alps by Jacques-Louis David in the Belvedere in Vienna, for example, explicitly reminds the viewer in inscriptions on the rocks under the horse's feet that Napoleon was literally following in the footsteps of both *Annibal* and *Carolus Magnus*. Both Charlemagne and Napoleon were described by the author in his preface to a study of Charlemagne published in Brussels in 1848 as 'veritable demi-gods who, like Alexander the Great and other ancient conquering heroes, changed the course of history'.[11] It was Napoleon who appropriated, for his triumphal procession in Paris in 1798, the magnificent sarcophagus in which Charlemagne is thought to have been buried. This tomb, returned to Aachen in 1815, was one of the highlights of the remarkable exhibition mounted in Paderborn in 1999 to celebrate the meeting between Charlemagne and Pope Leo in 799. It is 2.15 m long, 62 cm high and 65.5 cm broad, made of Carrara marble in the third century AD, and carved with a bas-relief sculpture depicting the Rape of Proserpina and her descent into the Underworld.[12]

Statues and paintings of Charlemagne abound in many of the cities of Europe, whether major capitals such as Paris or towns that have often long since lost their political pre-eminence. Thus Charlemagne graces the market place in Aachen itself (the venue for no fewer than thirty-eight coronations of German kings between 813 and 1531),[13] and the cathedrals of Bremen, Frankfurt and Halberstadt. He surveys the cities of Zürich, Dinant and Liège, and he sits astride his horse in front of Notre Dame in Paris.[14] In the frescoes by Melchior Steidl in the Kaisersaal of the Neue Residenz in Bamberg, completed in 1707–9, Charlemagne assumes a place alongside other Roman and German emperors, such as Julius Caesar and Constantine, and Henry II, Rudolf II, Joseph I and Leopold I. Just as Julius Caesar has the famous quotation attributed to him – *veni vidi vici* – in the

[10] S. Tanz, 'Aspekte der Karlsrezeption im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Das Mittelalter* 4/2 (1999), pp. 55–64 at p. 58.

[11] Anon., *Charlemagne* (Brussels, 1848). See also T. Verschaffel, *Beeld en geschiedenis: het Belgische en Vlaamse verleden in de romantische boekillustraties* (Turnhout, 1987), p. 59 (Charlemagne crossing the Alps).

[12] *799 Kunst und Kultur*, II, X.41, pp. 758–63: 'mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit im Jahr 814 als Grablege für Karl den Großen verwendet'. Such iconography was a common feature of late antique sarcophagi; a very similar sarcophagus, in date and decoration, albeit somewhat smaller, for example, is to be found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Griechische-Römische Antiquitäten-Abteilung, Inv. Nr. I 1126.

[13] *Krönungen Könige in Aachen: Geschichte und Mythos*, Austellungs Katalog (Mainz, 2000).

[14] D. Kötzsche, 'Darstellungen Karls des Großen in der lokalen Verehrung des Mittelalters', *KdG* IV, pp. 155–214; E. G. Grimme, 'Karl der Große in seiner Stadt', *KdG* IV, pp. 228–73.

inscription under the painting, so under Charlemagne the text displayed is that of the imperial *laudes* of the medieval coronation liturgy: *Christus regnat. Christus vincit. Christus triumphat.*[15] In the memorial of the heroes of the French nation in the Panthéon in Paris, the huge frescoes by Puvis de Chavannes include the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor alongside other medieval events perceived as formative in French history, namely, the baptism of Clovis and his victory at Tolbiac, and the careers of Sainte Geneviève and Jeanne d'Arc.

At a more local level, Alfred Rethel's Charlemagne frescoes in the Aachen Rathaus, regarded as one of the most important examples of nineteenth-century German monumental art, were originally planned by him in 1840 as a result of his reading of the eighth- and ninth-century sources, to depict Charlemagne above all as a Christian emperor.[16] Thus his chosen scenes, of which he completed only five, were the destruction of the Saxon Irminsul, the battle at Cordoba against the Saracens, the baptism of Widukind, the Synod of Frankfurt, the imperial coronation in Rome, the coronation of Louis the Pious by Charlemagne in 813, and the visit paid by Otto III to the grave of Charlemagne in 1000. Rethel later added Charlemagne's capture of Pavia in 774 and the building of the chapel at Aachen.

In Rome, on the other hand, the emphasis was on the papal coronation of Charlemagne and the special relationship between pope and emperor. The latter was proclaimed in the association between Pope Hadrian VI and the Emperor Charles V, and their preservation of the wonderful late eighth-century epitaph for Pope Hadrian I commissioned by Charlemagne in Francia after the pope's death in 795. It was saved from the destruction of Old St Peter's in Rome and is now to be found above the left portico of the new basilica.[17] Raphael's painting of the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III, moreover, adorns the walls of the Stanza dell'Incendeio di Borgo (1514–17) in the Stanze di Rafaello in the Vatican.

The imaginations of rulers, artists, sculptors and poets alike have been fired by Charlemagne. Yet he is not simply the Charlemagne of legend, for

[15] L. E. Saurma-Jeltsch (ed.), *Karl der Große als vielberufener Vorfahr: sein Bild in der Kunst der Fürsten, Kirchen und Städte*, Schriften des historischen Museums: im Auftrag des Dezernats für Kultur und Freizeit 19 (Sigmaringen, 1994). See also the essays in the section on 'Rezeption und Wirkungen' in F.-R. Erkens (ed.), *Karl der Große und das Erbe der Kulturen* (Berlin, 2001).

[16] H. von Erinem, 'Die Tragödie der Karlsfresken Alfred Rethels', *KdG* IV, pp. 306–25.

[17] It was remounted there on the orders of Pope Gregory XIII in 1574. J. Story, *Charlemagne and Rome: the epitaph of Pope Hadrian I* (Oxford, forthcoming); and see J. Story, J. Bunbury, A. C. Felici, G. Fronterotta, M. Piacentini, C. Nicolais, D. Scacciatelli, S. Sciuti and M. Vendittelli, 'Charlemagne's black marble: the origins of the Epitaph of Pope Hadrian I', *Papers of the British School at Rome* (2005), pp. 157–90.

historians have played a crucial role in establishing the contours of this stereotype. Thus scholars too have highlighted his exploits, painstakingly reconstructed the possible limits of his power, elucidated the ideological significance of his reign, and used him to serve particular political purposes. With 1,200 years of storytelling and myth-making as well as of serious and productive scholarship about Charlemagne, not least that of the decades since the Council of Europe's Charlemagne exhibition in 1965,[18] the Paderborn exhibition in 1999,[19] the spate of popularizing biographies[20] and scholarly essay collections issued to mark the 1,200th anniversary of the imperial coronation,[21] it may seem superfluous to present yet another study of his reign. But it is precisely because the stereotype of him is so dominant and his role in relation to a sense of European identity is so pervasive that a fresh look can be justified.

Charlemagne, in short, has been the object of commentary and study for the past 1,200 years, some of it very nationalistic and celebratory in tone.[22] On the one hand there are contemporary or near contemporary representations of the ruler and, on the other, as we have seen, Charlemagne has come to symbolize the common roots of European political and legal culture, with an impact on ideology and imagination that can be traced across the 1,200 years since he died. Yet both aspects demonstrate that among the formative elements of political identity, as well as the means of articulating it, are a people's knowledge and use of the past. This has been amply demonstrated in contexts as widely separated as the writing of deuteronomic history and exile in ancient Israel,[23] the mixing of cultures

---

[18] Council of Europe exhibition catalogue: W. Braunfels (ed.), *Karl der Große / Charlemagne* (Aachen, 1965).

[19] C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), *799 Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Große und Papst Leo in Paderborn*, 3 vols. (Mainz, 1999).

[20] The best of these is M. Becher, *Karl der Große* (Munich, 1999), English trans. D. Bachrach (New Haven, 2003). See also, for example, R. Collins, *Charlemagne* (London, 1998); A. Barbero, *Charlemagne: father of a continent* (New Haven, 2004), trans. from the Italian edn of 2000 by A. Cameron, D. Hägermann, *Karl der Große: Herrscher des Abendlandes. Biographie* (Berlin, 2000); J. Favier, *Charlemagne* (Paris, 2000).

[21] F.-R. Erkens (ed.), *Karl der Große und das Erbe der Kulturen* (Berlin, 2001*)*; P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek (eds.), *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung: "Das Epos Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa" und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799* (Berlin, 2002); R. Schieffer (ed.), *Schriftkultur und Reichsverwaltung unter den Karolingern* (Opladen, 1996); J. Story (ed.), *Charlemagne: empire and society* (Manchester, 2005).

[22] See, for example, *Karl der Große oder Charlemagne? Acht Antworten deutscher Geschichtsforscher* (Berlin, 1935); and the review by P. E. Schramm, 'Karl der Große oder Charlemagne? Stellungnahme Deutscher Historiker in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus', in P. E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, I (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 342–4.

[23] E. T. Mullen, *Narrative history and ethnic boundaries: the deuteronomistic historian and the creation of Israelite national identity* (Atlanta, Georgia, 1993).

in Hellenic Palestine,[24] the processes of ethnogenesis in Latin America,[25] the dynamic reworkings of the court's historical knowledge in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Qing empire in China,[26] the Irish-origin legends which furnished kingship in medieval Scotland with a legitimating antiquity,[27] the imperial expansion of early modern Britain,[28] competing discourses on national history and the efforts to disseminate them through the medium of the schools in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain,[29] and the politics of identity in modern Germany since reunification.[30] The degrees to which a people communicates with the past in order to form or to inform its own contemporary concerns, to heighten its sense of identity and cultural affiliations, and to shape its political purpose, are therefore among the underlying themes of this book.[31]

I aim to chart the formation of Frankish political identity during the reign of Charlemagne. I shall explore the interaction between the practical consequences of the expansion of the Frankish empire into totally new territory and Frankish perceptions and uses of the past.[32] I shall take a fresh look at the development of the Carolingian empire from its beginnings and attempt to free the reign of Charlemagne from the clutter of accumulated arguments and of hypotheses that have somehow become facts. Many

[24] D. Mendels, *Identity, religion and historiography: studies in Hellenistic history*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement series 24 (Sheffield, 1998), pp. 13–34.

[25] J. D. Hill (ed.), *History, power and identity: ethnogenesis in the Americas, 1492–1992* (Iowa City, 1996).

[26] P. Kyle Crossley, *A translucent mirror: history and identity in Qing imperial ideology* (Berkeley, 1999) (the entire Qing period is 1636–1912).

[27] D. Broun, *The Irish identity of the kingdom of the Scots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, Studies in Celtic History (Woodbridge, 1999), which focusses in particular on John of Fordun's Chronicle. See also Bruce Webster, *Medieval Scotland: the making of an identity* (London, 1997).

[28] K. Wilson (ed.), *A new imperial history: culture, identity and modernity in Britain and the empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004).

[29] C. P. Boyd, *Historia patria: politics, history, and national identity in Spain, 1875–1975* (Princeton, 1997).

[30] See K. Jarausch, 'Normalization or renationalization? On reinterpreting the German past', in R. Alter and P. Monteath (eds.), *Rewriting the German past: history and identity in the new Germany* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1997). See also M. Fulbrook and M. Swales (eds.), *Representing the German nation: history and identity in twentieth-century Germany* (Manchester, 2000).

[31] In addition to my own *History and memory in the Carolingian world*, (Cambridge, 2004), see more generally J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1999–2003), esp. 'Prelude: the varieties of early modern historiography', II, pp. 7–25; B. Lewis, *History remembered, recovered, invented* (Princeton, 1975); A. D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford, 1986); P. Geary, *The myth of nations: the medieval origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002); and E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[32] For discussions of this see also my *History and memory* and *Perceptions of the past*; and more generally Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The uses of the past in the early middle ages* (Cambridge, 2000); and A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichischen Geschichtsforschung 32 (Vienna and Munich, 1994).

of our inherited certainties about it may thereby be undermined.[33] Charlemagne himself, as we shall see, becomes far less solid and more elusive. The reign of Charlemagne needs to be stripped right down to what we can know or might be able to reconstruct from contemporary sources. I shall, therefore, examine the primary evidence anew. I shall discard the prevalent and somewhat static picture of a forty-six-year reign still understood to too great an extent in terms both of the situation prevailing at the end of Charlemagne's reign and of far too narrow a preoccupation with the coronation of 800. Instead, I shall attempt to capture the dynamism of the reign and to chart the pace of change, for so much was developed on the hoof in order to cope with the opportunities and problems created by both the peculiar position of the Carolingian family within the Frankish kingdom and such rapid, and often unplanned, expansion of the realm.

NINTH-CENTURY NARRATIVE IMAGES OF CHARLEMAGNE: EINHARD, THE ASTRONOMER AND THE POETA SAXO

Ninth-century accounts of Charlemagne played a major role in shaping the subsequent knowledge and simplified understanding alluded to above. Of the many such narratives constructed after Charlemagne's death, I take three representative examples, one from soon after his death in 814, one from the middle of the ninth century, and one from the end of the ninth century.

Einhard's Vita Karoli

Perhaps the most seductive and influential of the representations of Charlemagne has proven to be that created by his courtier Einhard within a few years of Charlemagne's death. Its eloquence and Ciceronian Latin were a major factor in securing both its success and the fame of its subject; the *Vita Karoli* has had a remarkably wide and prolonged history of dissemination in manuscript and printed versions from the time of its initial production.[34]

---

[33] I. N. Wood, 'In praise of uncertainty', in W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (eds.), *Integration und Herrschaft: ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter* (Vienna, 2002), pp. 303–14.

[34] M. Tischler, *Einharts Vita Karoli: Studien zur Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption*, MGH Schriften 48 (Hanover, 2002).

The *Vita Karoli* was written, or so Einhard tells us, in order to celebrate
the king's life, his way of life (*vita et conversatio*), his many accomplish-
ments (*res gestas*), his deeds and his habits (*actus et mores*).[35] Einhard was
moved to write the life 'of the most splendid and greatest of all men' out of
gratitude to the king he regarded as his *nutritor*. Einhard thought it better
to risk criticism for his inadequacies than to neglect the memory of one so
great. He stressed the fact that he knew the king personally and thus gave
his account greater authority. He added to this effect by explaining that by
contrast he knew too little about the king's early life to write about it. That
Einhard was closely involved in royal business, at least in the latter part of
Charlemagne's reign, is suggested by the claim that it was he who took the
Divisio regnorum of 806 to Pope Leo III in Rome so that the pope might
subscribe it.[36]

The life starts with a short sketch of how the Carolingian family
members had once served as mayors of the palace to the Merovingian
kings and how Charles succeeded to the kingship secured by his father
Pippin from the Merovingians. Einhard then outlines the structure of his
book, stating that he would write about Charlemagne's deeds within and
without the kingdom, his habits and interests, his administration of the
kingdom and his death. There is a long section in which the various wars
and conquests of Charlemagne against the Aquitainians, Lombards,
Saxons, Saracens, Bretons, Bavarians, Slavs, Avars and Danes are set out
in the chronological order of their completion. This is rounded out with an
expansive ethno-geographical account of the huge area now ruled by
Charlemagne, as if to echo the formulation of the poet of the 'Paderborn
epic' in *c.* 799 of Charlemagne as the 'Father of Europe'.[37] The impressive-
ness of these conquests is then further enhanced by Einhard's stress on the
recognition Charlemagne received from other rulers in the far west, the
south and the east – from Ireland, the Asturias in Spain, the Persians and
Byzantium. Some of the building work Charlemagne undertook to
'improve and beautify the kingdom' is described, such as the chapel at
Aachen, the bridge at Mainz and the two great palaces at Ingelheim and
Nijmegen, the construction of a fleet and of the defences against Danes and

---

[35] Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SRG* 25 (Hanover, 1911); ed. L. Halphen; and
Eginhard: vie de Charlemagne (Paris, 1947), trans. P. Dutton, *Charlemagne's courtier: the complete
Einhard* (Peterborough, ON, 1998). A new Penguin translation by David Ganz is in preparation.

[36] 'Atque haec omnia litteris mandata sunt et leoni papae, ut his sua manu subscriberet, per Einhardum
missa.' Kurze notes that Einhard would appear to be the author of the annals from 795 to 820: *ARF*,
ed. Kurze, p. vii.

[37] D. Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne: the characterization of greatness', in Story (ed.), *Charlemagne*,
pp. 38–51, makes this point.

Saracens. Thus to the image of the mighty and successful conqueror is added that of the protector of his people.

From this military portrait, Einhard turned to more personal matters. High praise is offered of Charlemagne's character, his family life, his religious devotion and friendship with Pope Hadrian, and his interest in learning and the scholars who served as his teachers. Einhard reports the king's knowledge of Latin and Greek as well as his native Frankish, and that his favourite reading was Augustine's *City of God*. In a disarming sketch provided of Charlemagne's appearance, we are told of the king's great height, incipient pot belly, small head and high-pitched voice, of the lameness in one foot he developed in old age, his love of swimming in the hot springs at Aachen, his preference for simple Frankish clothes, and his personal habits. These included his wakefulness at night and his fondness for red meat. Even within the household he gave his attention to ruling and the administration of justice.

Einhard then referred briefly to the king's attempt to remedy the defects of the laws of the realm, his move to have ancient poems of his kingdom written down, and his fostering of a grammar of his own language with new names for the months and the winds. The paragraphs on the king's personal piety and interest in education is augmented further by sections on almsgiving, his devotion to St Peter and his visits to Rome. According to the concluding portions of the *Vita*, Charlemagne made his sole surviving son Louis (the Pious) his heir, and crowned him emperor at Aachen. Finally, Charlemagne's last illness, death and burial are described. This is followed by an account of the portents of his death and full details of his will, including a list of the magnates who witnessed it. The *Vita* ends with an assurance of the faithfulness with which his son Louis discharged the provisions of the will.[38]

From this short summary it should be clear that Einhard certainly provided an effective and comprehensive biography of the ruler in terms of topics covered, even if the treatment of each topic is brief and omissions and silences have been detected in relation to other information we possess. We should remind ourselves, however, that what we now perceive as omissions and silences would not necessarily have appeared so at the time, for the life's immediate and contemporary audiences would have been able to supplement Einhard's interpretative celebration of the ruler from their own memory and documentation, whether relating to details of

---

[38] See M. Innes, 'Charlemagne's will: piety, politics and the imperial succession', *English Historical Review* 112 (1997), pp. 833–55.

the wars, what it was like to cross the Alps, life at court, or the huge amount
of administrative communications and legislation associated with the ruler.
Einhard himself clearly exploited the other written information and narrat-
ive sources which will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is also very
likely that he simply drew on his memory of what he had seen or what he
had been told. It is odd to criticize Einhard for failing to omit detail we find
in contemporary sources of information on which he undoubtedly drew,
for these were also available in principle to his readers. What he did was to
provide a digested, carefully crafted, interpretative essay from an historical
perspective. To some extent, therefore, Einhard's account could have
served as a mnemonic in that it addressed its immediate audience on a
subject they knew.

Einhard, nevertheless, began a process of distortion simply by writing
from hindsight, after the king's death. His strongest memories are inevi-
tably of the king in his latter years, and much is presented as having been
brought to a conclusion. His literary skill has rounded the life out, imposed
order upon it, and offered a considered assessment. Einhard thus followed,
to a greater or lesser extent, the ideal form of history implied at various
points by Cicero in his *Orator* and *De oratore*: chronological arrangement,
geographical precision, a clear narrative of doings and sayings, an exposi-
tion of causes and consequences, biographical details about the character's
life and a notion of what the author himself approved.[39]

The scholarly reaction to Einhard's account has ranged from uncritical
acceptance to outright rejection of its historical validity.[40] As a response to
Charlemagne's personality and achievement, and as a reflection of percep-
tions of Charlemagne and knowledge available about him at the time
Einhard wrote, however, it is immensely valuable. This is not the place
to engage fully with the great diversity of discussion about Einhard's *Vita
Karoli* or Einhard himself, and he has become in any case the focus of
renewed attention from a number of different perspectives.[41] A few com-
ments on the date, on the character of the work as 'secular biography', and
on its sources and models of inspiration are nevertheless necessary.

[39] See, for example, Cicero, *Orator*, XIX.66 and XXXIV.120, ed. H. M. Hubbell, in *Cicero, Brutus,
Orator*, ed. and trans. G. L. Henderson and H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 354 and
394. On the Carolingian witnesses to Cicero's texts on rhetoric see L. R. Reynolds, *Texts and
transmission: a survey of the Latin classics* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 102–9.
[40] Halphen, for example, rejected it. See Halphen (ed.) *Eginhard*, especially pp. ix–x and xiii.
[41] Tischler, *Einharts Vita Karoli*; Dutton, *Charlemagne's courtier*, J. M. H. Smith, 'Einhard: the sinner
and the saints', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series 13 (2003), pp. 55–77; H. Schefers
(ed.), *Einhard: Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Darmstadt, 1997); D. Ganz, *Einhard*, forthcoming.