

Foreign Embassies and Roman Universality in Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*

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In his *Life of Charlemagne*, Einhard writes,

He also increased the glory of his kingdom by winning over kings and peoples through friendly means. In this way he so completely won over Alfonso [II], the king of Galicia and Asturias, that when he sent letters or emissaries to Charles, he ordered that in Charles' presence he was only to be referred to as his subject. By his generosity he had so inclined the Irish kings to his will, that they publicly declared that he was certainly their lord and they were his subjects and servants. Some letters they sent to [Charles] still survive and they testify to this sort of feeling toward him.

He had such friendly relations with Harun-al-Rachid, the king of the Persians, who held almost all of the east except India, that [Harun] counted the favour of his friendship as more valuable than that of all the kings and rulers in the world and thought that only [Charles] was worthy of receiving his honor and generosity. Indeed, when [Charles'] representatives, whom he had sent loaded with offerings for the most Holy Sepulchre of our Lord and Saviour [in Jerusalem] and for the place of his resurrection, came before [Harun] and informed him of their lord's wishes, he not only allowed them to complete their mission, but even handed over the sacred and salvific place, so that it might be considered as under Charles' control. [Harun] sent his own representatives back with [Charles'] and he sent magnificent gifts for him, among which were robes, spices, and other riches of the east. A few years before this he had sent an elephant, the only one he then possessed, to Charles, who had asked him [for such an animal].

The emperors of Constantinople, Nicephorus [I], Michael [I], and Leo [V], who were voluntarily seeking friendship and an alliance with Charles, sent many representatives to him. But when he took up the title of emperor [it seemed] to them that he might

want to seize their empire. Thus, [Charles] struck a very strong treaty [with them], so that no [potential] source of trouble of any sort might remain between them. For the Romans and Greeks are always suspicious of Frankish power; hence that Greek proverb which still circulates: ‘Have a Frank as a friend, never as a neighbor.’¹

In this famous passage, which is chapter sixteen according to Walafrid Strabo’s divisions, the biographer celebrates the way in which foreign princes sought the friendship of Charlemagne and willingly offered to be his subjects.² In his presentation of the Abbasid Caliph Harun-al-Rachid, Einhard makes the frustratingly oblique suggestion that Harun had given Charlemagne dominion over unnamed sites in the Holy Lands. He then completes his portrait of post-coronation diplomacy with foreign leaders by relating that the Greek emperors had sought a treaty to allay their fears of Charles’ desire to annex their empire.

1 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* 16, ed. O. Holder-Egger (MGH SRG 25), 19. The translation is largely based on Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Courtier*, 25-26. “Auxit etiam gloriam regni sui quibusdam regibus ac gentibus per amicitiam sibi conciliatis. Adeo namque Hedefonsum Galleciae atque Asturicae regem sibi societate devinxit, ut is, cum ad eum vel litteras vel legatos mitteret, non aliter se apud illum quam proprium suum appellari iuberet. Scottorum quoque reges sic habuit ad suam voluntatem per munificentiam inclinatos, ut eum numquam aliter nisi dominum seque subditos et servos eius pronuntiant. Extant—epistolae ab eis ad illum missae, quibus huiusmodi affectus eorum erga illum indicatur. Cum Aaron rege Persarum, qui excepta India totum poene tenebat orientem, talem habuit in amicitia concordiam, ut is gratiam eius omnium, qui in toto orbe terrarum erant, regum ac principum amicitiae praeponeret solumque illum honore ac munificentia sibi colendum iudicaret. Ac proinde, cum legati eius, quos cum donariis ad sacratissimum Domini ac salvatoris nostri sepulchrum locumque resurrectionis miserat, ad eum venissent et ei domini sui voluntatem indicassent, non solum quae petebantur fieri permisit, sed etiam sacrum illum et salutarem locum, ut illius potestati adscriberetur concessit; et revertentibus legatis suos adiungens inter vestes et aromata et ceteras orientalium terrarum opes ingentia illi dona direxit, cum ei ante paucos annos eum, quem tunc solum habebat, roganti mitteret elephantum. Imperatores etiam Constantinopolitani, Niciforus, Michahel et Leo, ultro amicitiam et societatem eius expetentes complures ad eum misere legatos. Cum quibus tamen propter susceptum a se imperatoris nomen et ob hoc [eis], quasi qui imperium eis eripere vellet, valde suspectum foedus firmissimum statuit, ut nulla inter partes cuiuslibet scandali remaneret occasio. Erat enim semper Romanis et Grecis Francorum suspecta potentia. Unde et illud Grecum extat proverbium: ΤΟΝ ΦΡΑΝΚΟΝ ΦΙΛΟΝ ΕΧΙΣ, ΓΙΤΟΝΑ ΟΥΚ ΕΧΙΣ.” Michael McCormick translates the proverb as “If you have a Frank who is a friend, you don’t have him for a neighbor,” and suggests that it was a version coined by Byzantines in Rome. McCormick, “Diplomacy and the Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium,” 22.

2 The biography circulated anonymously from the 820s to the 840s until Walafrid Strabo, tutor of the young Charles the Bald, added a praise-filled introduction and divided the work into chapters. See Innes and McKitterick, “The Writing of History,” 213.

The harmonious relationship between Charlemagne and Harun-al-Rachid has long been a prized piece of Carolingian historical memory, one made more fascinating, no doubt, by the story of Harun's highly symbolic gift of an elephant named Abul Abbas. For centuries, the tale of Harun's concession to Charlemagne of jurisdiction of holy sites in Jerusalem was borne along by the popularity of the Frankish sources and Einhard's biography, as well as by the more explicit articulations of the story found in such works as the versified Frankish annals of the *Poeta Saxo* and Notker the Stammerer's *Deeds of Charlemagne*.³ The *Royal Frankish Annals* made no mention of such a concession, but furnished instead the now deeply-engrained account of how the Patriarch of Jerusalem sent keys to the Holy Sepulchre and a banner to the newly-invested Frankish emperor.⁴

While Charlemagne does indeed seem to have received an elephant from Harun, the claims of a jurisdictional transfer over sites in Jerusalem have, in large measure, failed to pass historical muster. Some noted scholars, such as Louis Bréhier, mounted valiant efforts in the early twentieth century to verify the protectorate story.⁵ But in a 1921 assessment of Einhard's biography as a source for the historical life of Charlemagne, Louis Halphen, in stark contrast with Bréhier, puzzled over the "caractère tendancieux" of chapter sixteen and wondered whether Einhard was not guilty of mixing up a collection of rather vague memories.⁶ Halphen even questioned the existence of the letters from the Spanish and Irish kings and raised grave doubts about the presentation of relations with Harun.⁷ The 1930s saw a flurry of scholarly debate over the concession of territory in Palestine, and scholars tended to concur, with some exceptions, such as Buckler in 1931, that the protectorate story was a legend.⁸ Fifty years later, Aryeh Grabois offered a useful summary of the debate, noting that scholars had yet to reach agreement about the "goals and meanings" of the information in the Frankish sources concerning the Frankish relationship to Baghdad.⁹ While

3 *Poeta Saxo*, "Annalium de Gestis B. Caroli Magni," 802 (Migne *PL* 718C). "Ascribique locum sanctum Hierosolimorum / Concessit propriae Caroli semper dicioni."

4 *Royal Frankish Annals* (hereafter *RFA*), 799 and 800, trans. Scholz and Rogers, 78-81.

5 Bréhier, "Les origines des rapports entre les Francs et la Syrie." Another major proponent was Buckler, *Harunu'l-Rashid and Charles the Great* (1931).

6 "Mais il est difficile d'expliquer les dires étranges d'Éginhard autrement que par toute une série de confusions." Halphen, *Études critiques*, 97.

7 Halphen, *Études critiques*, 96-98.

8 In addition to Buckler, see Joranson, "The Alleged Frankish Protectorate"; Kleinclausz, "La légende du protectorat de Charlemagne"; Runciman, "Charlemagne and Palestine."

9 Grabois, "Charlemagne, Rome and Jerusalem," 792-95. For other modern discussions of the debate, see Borgolte, *Der Gesandtenaustausch der Karolinger*; Schmid, "Aachen und Jerusalem: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Personenforschung der Karolingerzeit," 140-42.

Graboïs did not explicitly choose sides, he did note that Buckler's theory raised new questions without providing any new evidence. He also cited Runciman extensively in the notes, including the latter's forceful final proclamation on the protectorate controversy: "It is time that its ghost were laid."¹⁰ More recently, critics have suggested that if the concession was made at all, it was merely a gesture without the implication of an actual transfer of authority; instead it would have served to symbolically cement the friendly alliance between Charlemagne and the Caliph.¹¹

In the last decade, coincident with the twelve-hundred-year anniversary of the events of the year 800, Charlemagne enthusiasts have enjoyed the arrival of a spate of new biographies. The works, which contain varying degrees of source documentation, all in some way address the relations between the Franks and the Holy Land in the years around the coronation. Most of these modern narratives of the life of the Frankish king mention some transfer of authority in the Holy Lands, although most present the concession as a symbolic one. None, however, has brought any new evidence to bear. Becher, for instance, states unequivocally that Harun transferred administrative control of the Holy Sepulchre to Charlemagne (*Verfügungsgewalt über das Grab Christi*) in 802.¹² Barbero, who released a biography of Charlemagne in 2000, also depicts the transfer as a symbolic gift, although he states more specifically that the passage referred to the land on which the Holy Sepulchre stood.¹³ Thus, many decades after its pronouncement in 1935, Runciman's call for the ghost of the protectorate story to be laid to rest has clearly gone unanswered. In response to the decision on the part of modern biographers to reiterate the Holy Land protectorate story, it is time to revive the concerns of the skeptical Louis Halphen and to address his charge that chapter sixteen constitutes a confused jumble of unverifiable facts.¹⁴

Einhard's presentation of Charlemagne's friendly relations with Irish and Spanish kings, the Persian Harun, and the three Greek emperors is typical of the kind of creative adaptation of material from the *Royal Frankish Annals* that characterizes the *Life of Charlemagne*. Although the biography has certainly not been altogether abandoned as

10 Graboïs, "Charlemagne, Rome and Jerusalem," 795; Runciman, "Charlemagne and Palestine," 619.

11 See Borgolte, *Der Gesandtenaustausch der Karolinger*, 82-83; Hägermann refers to the "angeblichen Übergabe" in his *Karl der Grosse*, 409 and 518.

12 Becher, *Karl der Grosse*, 88.

13 Barbero, *Charlemagne*, 100-101. Roger Collins is a notable exception. In his 1998 biography, he discusses the embassies back and forth to the east and the gift of the elephant, but makes no mention of the protectorate story. Collins, *Charlemagne*, 152.

14 Halphen, *Éginhard: Vie de Charlemagne*, 49.

a source for historians, the more literary aspects of the work now enjoy significant attention. Recent discussions have focussed, for instance, on the problematic concept of biography as it relates to Einhard's work, on the levels of influence of his Christian and pagan sources, and finally on the complex rhetorical underpinnings of this often elusive portrait of the Frankish king.¹⁵ Despite this shift in scholarly focus, the description of Charlemagne's peaceful relations with foreign princes has yet to benefit from similar analysis. This present study investigates Einhard's spare, even enigmatic, passages in chapter sixteen as a meticulously constructed biographical episode rich in the rhetoric of Roman panegyric, where the presentation of diplomatic exchanges with various rulers constitutes a refashioning of the Frankish historiographical materials to conform to a classical and late antique encomiastic *topos* that symbolized the restoration of Roman universality. Far from throwing together confused facts of questionable value, Einhard presented a series of events which he had carefully selected and deliberately assembled. His celebration of foreign alliances, when considered as a uniquely Carolingian reconstruction of a recognizable Roman biographical *topos*, proves to be a rich source of insight into the biographer's relationship to his sources and his subject. Such an approach also opens the door to fresh interpretations of later iterations of the story of Charlemagne's relations with eastern princes, in particular the retelling by Notker the Stammerer.

Medieval biographical writing, whether secular or hagiographical, was built not on a series of facts but on rhetorical *topoi*, the recognizable commonplaces that functioned as building blocks of the genre. Biographers wrote by compiling scenes and stories with the expectation that readers would recognize the *topoi* they employed, and compare them to other instances of their usage. Ruth Morse has studied the patterned nature of medieval biography, and explains that the units of composition were often altered, transformed, and amplified, while still claiming to represent the essential narrative of the life of the subject.¹⁶ Written lives were constructed according to episodes, and, more often than not, the value of a particular episode lay in its rhetorical pertinence. The importance of historical truth was often secondary to rhetorical styling and intertextual play. And, given the nature of biographical *topoi*, the events in the life of a subject regularly pointed outward to similar episodes in other biographies rather than inward to the personality and actual life of the subject.¹⁷ Einhard's presentation of Charlemagne's

15 See Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, 3: 199-219; Ganz, "Einhard's Charlemagne," 41-42, and his "The Preface to Einhard's 'Vita Karoli,'" 299-310; Kempshall, "Some Ciceronian Models," 11-37; Wolter, "Intention und Herrscherbild," 317; Nees, *A Tainted Mantle*, 114.

16 See generally Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*.

17 Morse, *Truth and Convention*, 128.

alliances with foreign princes lends itself very well to interpretation as a biographical episode, for it constitutes a narrative unit composed of events of questionable accuracy built upon a rhetorical framework. Moreover, the reading of Charlemagne's encounters with Harun and the Greeks against parallel biographical episodes, both those which may have influenced Einhard and those which were inspired by his version, offers a basis for reconfiguring the Holy Land protectorate debate along more productive lines.

Although Einhard provides no dates for Charlemagne's diplomatic relations with foreign princes, the passage is meant to be understood as a series of events which occurred in reaction to the imperial coronation.¹⁸ His celebration of the Frankish leader's ability to elicit requests for friendly alliance should be considered, then, as praise of his qualities as an emperor rather than as narrative of events in a royal life. Presenting a unique version of a crucial episode in his imperial career, chapter sixteen of the *Life of Charlemagne* participates in the tradition of Roman imperial biography. Einhard constructed this episode to evoke parallel chapters in the lives of other Roman emperors, in particular those lives which held providential meaning for the history of the Christian Roman Empire.

The Roman *topos* of submitting foreign nations is most famously illustrated at the end of *Aeneid* 8, where Vergil describes the shield given to Aeneas. The poet presents a parade of vanquished nations, as diverse in their languages as in their dress, processing before an enthroned Caesar of triumphant Rome.¹⁹ Numerous other instances of the *topos* occur in the works of authors who either would or could have been known to Einhard, including Suetonius, Florus, Eutropius, and Paul the Deacon. Versions of it also exist in praise of Constantine in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* and in the late antique *XII Panegyrici Latini*; although their influence on Einhard cannot be asserted, both are nonetheless worthy of consideration for understanding the Christianization of this classical rhetorical construction. And finally, the biography of the Emperor Aurelian in the late fourth-century *Historia Augusta* offers an extravagant example of the rhetoric of universality in imperial biography in a work which parodies the Suetonian model. The use of the foreign embassy *topos* functions as a celebration of an empire at peace under the sole emperor and panegyric subject. By listing the embassies of nations that have

18 The connection between diplomatic exchanges with the Caliph and Charles' journey to Rome in 800 is well established by the *RFA* in the entry for 801. Einhard specifically describes the treaty sought by the Greek emperors as a reaction to Charles' assumption of the title.

19 Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.720-23. The Emperor Augustus adopted the *topos* for his own self-celebratory inscriptions in his *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 31-32. See also Sextus Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 1 (c. 361 CE).

come, for instance, from India, Britain, or Scythia, the author signifies that the emperor's dominion now stretches as far to the east, west, or north as possible. The commonplace also functions as a celebration of imperial victories gained without war, and provides a rhetorical device designed to praise the emperor for his ability to elicit the willing submission of distant nations through the power of his worldwide reputation. The foreign embassies that come seeking friendship alliance do so, in most cases, with gifts in hand, often sumptuous gifts and exotic beasts representing their native lands.

Augustus

Suetonius is the most likely source for Einhard's adaptation of this *topos*, but, as this study will demonstrate, cannot have been the only one.²⁰ Given the famous relationship between *The Life of Charlemagne* and *The Lives of the Caesars*, one might readily suggest that Einhard was simply absorbing, unconsciously or otherwise, the Suetonian usage of the Roman biographical commonplace. But Einhard was not slavish in his borrowing from Suetonius, and the passages in chapter sixteen attest to ample independence, although not excessive divergence, from the Roman model. Suetonius' version of the Roman universality *topos*, is found, not surprisingly, in the *Life of Augustus*:

The reputation for prowess and moderation which he thus gained led even the Indians and the Scythians, nations known to us only by hearsay, to send envoys of their own free will and sue for his friendship and that of the Roman people.²¹

Just prior to this passage Suetonius offers an enumeration of conquests, but then duly tempers it with a discussion of the far-off nations which sought the friendship of the emperor. This sequence, which places a catalogue of "deeds in war" just prior to a list of "deeds in peace," is designed to illustrate the vastness of the emperor's domain, and corresponds to the conventional sequence of biographical themes in a panegyric work.²² As critics have noted, biography and panegyric are terms with slippery boundaries and

20 For Einhard's use of Suetonius, see Beumann, "Topos und Gedankengefüge bei Einhard," 337-50; Hellmann, "Einhard's literarische Stellung," 81-82; Innes, "The Classical Tradition in the Carolingian Renaissance," 265-82; Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, 9; Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, 212-19.

21 Suetonius, *Aug.* 21.3, ed. and trans. Rolfe, *Suetonius*, 1: 178-79: "Qua virtutis moderationisque fama Indos etiam ac Scythas auditu modo cognitos pellexit ad amicitiam suam populique Romani ultro per legatos petendam."

22 For the conventions of panegyric, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, eds. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, 11-12; Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, eds. Cameron and Hall, 191.

the two genres tend to overlap.²³ In Suetonius, and then in Einhard, we find two key elements of panegyric, namely, the primacy of encomiastic function and the ordered sequence of themes.

Einhard follows his own lengthy enumeration of conquests with a transition to discussion of peaceful alliances made with submitting foreign nations. At the end of chapter fifteen, he closes his extensive cataloguing of military victories with the assertion that, despite Charles' many conquests, "Other peoples [living there], who far outnumbered them, simply surrendered."²⁴ Chapter sixteen then begins with the statement "He also increased the glory of his kingdom by winning over kings and peoples through friendly means."²⁵ The proclamation that Charlemagne glorified his reign through friendship introduces the section which celebrates his peaceful relations with submissive foreign rulers. These statements about Charles' dominion gained through submission and through alliances made in friendship reflect Einhard's adherence to the panegyric convention of "deeds in peace," which he clearly demarcates, even without the benefit of Walafrid's headings, as distinct from the previous section which is devoted to territory gained through conquest.²⁶

Einhard also shares with Suetonius an apologetic attitude concerning his subject's engagements in war. Earlier, in his long inventory of military victories in chapter six, Einhard protests that his aim in writing about Charles was to speak of his way of life and not of the details of war.²⁷ This statement of the aims of his biography echoes a similar claim by Suetonius in chapter twenty-one on foreign wars in his *Life of Augustus*, where the Roman biographer states, also apologetically and in the context of the catalogue of conquests, that Augustus did not aim to expand the empire or increase his glory through war.

The submission of foreign nations in Suetonius highlights the importance of reputation in fostering the bloodless peace brought about by the emperor. Augustus' worldwide renown, the reader should infer, intimidates rulers of distant nations, men who have never seen him, and, as a result, friendly legations travel the globe to seek his clement friendship. Eutropius, whose history was the source for Paul the Deacon's late

23 For the complex "interaction and coalescence" of the terms "biography" and "panegyric," see Hägg and Rousseau, eds., *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, 1-5.

24 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* 15: "ceteras, quarum multo maior est numerus, in deditionem susceperit"; trans. by Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 25.

25 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* 16, trans. by Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 25.

26 For Walafrid Strabo's contribution, see Innes and McKitterick, "The Writing of History," 213.

27 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* 6.

eighth-century *Historia Romana*, offers a fourth-century version of the *topos* ultimately derived from Suetonius. He emphasizes that until Augustus, the name of “Romans” had been unknown to the Scythians and the Indians, who sent envoys and gifts.²⁸ Einhard also establishes his “deeds in peace” section as a series of relationships of letters and embassies sent to Charles from leaders who submissively solicit his friendship, with the Greeks doing so out of fear. Paul the Deacon, who came to the court of Charlemagne in 782,²⁹ expands the version penned by Eutropius in his own narration of the life of Augustus in his *Historia Romana*, written in 786:

Meanwhile, envoys of the Indians and the Scythians came to Tarracona in Nearer Spain, and, having traveled the whole world, they discovered the point beyond which they could seek no further: and they returned unto Caesar the glory of Alexander the Great, to whom an embassy of Spaniards and Gauls had once come, in Babylon in the Middle East, seeking peace. And so here, in Spain, in the Far West, pleads the supplicant Easterner, the Indian, and the Northern Scythian, bearing gifts from his native land.³⁰

In his celebration of the vast dominion of Augustus, Paul tells of the arrival of envoys from Scythia and India. The starting points of their lengthy journeys symbolize here the far reaches of the North and the East. The Roman emperor greets the weary travellers in Spain, the symbol of the Far West in the language of praise for a ruler's vast dominion.

Einhard uses a similar device when he reports the submission of Alfonso, King of Asturias and Galicia, and the Irish kings (*reges Scottorum*) by means of letters. As with the Holy Land protectorate story, here too, in the case of more neighbouring kings, historians have been unable to substantiate Einhard's claims about offers of submission. Alfonso dominates the entry for 798 in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, for instance, but does

28 Eutropius, *Breviarium ab urbe condita* 7.10.1, ed. and trans. Hellegouarc'h, 89: “Scythae et Indi, quibus antea Romanorum nomen incognitum fuerat, munera et legatos ad eum miserunt.” See also Sextus Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 1.7: “Felix adeo (absque liberis tamen simulque coniugio), ut Indi, Scythae, Garamantes ac Bactri legatos mitterent orando foederi.”

29 Bullough, “Charlemagne's Court Library Revisited,” 346.

30 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana* (Migne, *PL* 95.859B). Translation is mine. “Interea Caesarem apud Tarraconem citerioris Hispaniae legati Indorum et Scytharum, toto orbe transmissis, tandem ibi inveniunt, ultra quod quaerere jam non possent; refuderuntque in Caesarem Magni Alexandri gloriam, quem sicut Hispanorum, Gallorumque legatio in medio Oriente apud Babyloniam contemplatione pacis adiit, ita hunc apud Hispaniam in Occidentis ultimis supplex cum gentilico munere Eous, Indus et Boreus Scythia oravit.”

not appear again.³¹ In response to the lack of evidence for the so-called “extant” letters, Ganshof advanced the “likely hypothesis” that information about the relationships with Alfonso and the Irish “could” have been gleaned from the archives with access granted under Louis the Pious.³² If, instead, Alfonso of Asturias and the Irish kings are read metonymically, as symbolic of Spain and Britain, both shorthand for the extremes of the Far West, then the content as well as the rhetorical intention of the passage come into much sharper focus. Einhard is not inventing history out of whole cloth, but is rearranging the material from the annals to fit a predetermined classical pattern. After this creative establishment of the western extreme of his geography, the biographer does the same for the east by introducing Harun, king of the Persians, followed by the Greeks, all representatives from the East who seek alliance. Harun, like Paul the Deacon’s submitting rulers, even sends gifts of his native land.

The second-century historian Florus, whose abbreviated history of Rome has been identified as a source for the *Royal Frankish Annals*,³³ provides an expanded version of the *topos* of Roman universality with the panegyric finale to his history:

Now that all the races of the west and south were subjugated, and also the races of the north, those at least between the Rhine and the Danube, and of the east between the Cyrus and Euphrates, the other nations too, who were not under the rule of the empire, yet felt the greatness of Rome and revered its people as the conqueror of the world. For the Scythians and the Sarmatians sent ambassadors seeking friendship; the Seres too and the Indians, who live immediately beneath the sun, though they brought elephants amongst their gifts as well as precious stones and pearls, regarded their long journey, in the accomplishment of which they had spent four years, as the greatest tribute which they rendered.³⁴

Florus’ version offers several points of comparison, most notably the obvious amplification of the Suetonian version. The passage also provides a textual precedent in the Latin tradition for the inclusion of elephants in the gift package sent from the East. And, finally, just prior to celebrating the arrival of foreign embassies, Florus details Augustus’ conquest of Spain. He specifically names the *Astures*, who are the surrendering people led by King Alfonso in Einhard’s version.³⁵

31 *RFA*, 798, trans. Scholz and Rogers, 76-77. Collins states that there is no evidence for diplomatic activity with Alfonso after 797; Collins, *Charlemagne*, 74.

32 Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, 3.

33 Collins, “The ‘Reviser’ Revisited,” 206.

34 Florus, *Epitome of Roman History* 2.34, ed. and trans. Forster, 348-51.

35 Florus, *Epitome of Roman History* 2.33, ed. and trans. Forster, 346-47.

Florus' addition of gems and elephants represents a minimal elaboration compared to the outlandish and parodic rendition of the foreign embassies *topos* composed by the author of the late fourth-century series of imperial *vitae* known as the *Historia Augusta*. This fraudulent and satirical compilation of imperial biographies is a late antique Latin source whose availability in Carolingian circles in the ninth century and potential influence on Carolingian biography have both been strongly suggested.³⁶ The great procession of vanquished peoples bearing gifts to a universal emperor appears in the life of Aurelian, by whom, we learn, the world was restored, *orbis est restitutus*.³⁷ The *topos* of Roman universality is satirized in this version through the description of an exaggerated profusion of foreign nations, gifts, and exotic animals, as well as an obvious subversion of the imperial virtues celebrated in Suetonius' praise of Augustus. The scene requires some exposition. In a letter to his archenemy, Zenobia, Queen of the East, Aurelian identifies himself as *receptor orientis*—Emperor of Rome and “recoverer of the East.”³⁸ In an upside-down version of the Suetonian model of willing submission and sumptuous gifts, Aurelian scolds Zenobia in his letter, telling her that she should have surrendered willingly and commanding her to hand over to the Roman treasury her jewels, gold, silver, horses, camels, and silks.³⁹ Zenobia refuses, claiming that reinforcements are on their way from Persia, so the angered Roman emperor conquers her, and, in so doing, reclaims the entire East.⁴⁰ As part of the spoils, Aurelian receives a purple cloak (*pallium*) from the King of the Persians, who hails from the farthest Indies.⁴¹

When Aurelian returns to Rome in triumph with the East subdued, the parade of vanquished Eastern nations commences in an exaggerated parody of the motif of the parade of foreign nations as symbol of Roman universality:

36 Chastagnol notes that two ninth-century manuscripts are extant, of which the *Palatinus Latinus 899* now in the Vatican Library is thought to have been written at Lorsch; Chastagnol, *Histoire Auguste*, clxxvi. See also Marshall, “*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*,” 354-55. Berschin cites evidence of the *Historia Augusta* in Thegan's biography of Louis the Pious; see Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, 386.

37 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 1.5, ed. and trans. Magie, 194.

38 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 26.7, ed. and trans. Magie, 246-47: “imperator Romani orbis et receptor orientis.”

39 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 26.7-9, ed. and trans. Magie, 246-47.

40 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 28.4, ed. and trans. Magie, 250: “Victor itaque Aurelianus totiusque iam orientis possessor.”

41 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 29.2, ed. and trans. Magie, 250: “hoc munus rex Persarum ab Indis interioribus.”

And so Aurelian, now ruler over the entire world, having subdued both the East and the Gauls, and victor in all lands, turned his march toward Rome, that he might present to the gaze of the Romans a triumph over both Zenobia and Tetricus, that is, over both the East and the West.

It is not without advantage to know what manner of triumph Aurelian had, for it was a most brilliant spectacle. There were three royal chariots, of which the first, carefully wrought and adorned with silver and gold and jewels, had belonged to Odaenathus, the second, also wrought with similar care, had been given to Aurelian by the king of the Persians, and the third Zenobia had made for herself, hoping in it to visit the city of Rome. [...] There advanced, moreover, twenty elephants, and two hundred tamed beasts of divers kinds from Libya and Palestine, which Aurelian at once presented to private citizens, that the privy-purse might not be burdened with the cost of their food; furthermore, there were led along in order four tigers and also giraffes and elks and other such animals, also eight hundred pairs of gladiators besides the captives from the barbarian tribes. There were Blemmyes, Axomites, Arabs from Arabia Felix, Indians, Bactrians, Hiberians, Saracens and Persians, all bearing their gifts; there were Goths, Alans, Roxolani, Sarmatians, Franks, Suebians, Vandals and Germans—all captive, with their hands bound fast.⁴²

After conquering Zenobia, Aurelian is described variously as master of the whole world, and unifier of East and West. His triumphal procession contains multiple subversions of the traditional deployment of the *topos* of Roman universality. The main components are all present, but the rhetoric is turned on its head, and the themes embodied in the Suetonian version are so exaggerated as to constitute parody. The list of nations is humorously amplified, and the catalogue of beasts that Aurelian is too cheap to feed with funds from the imperial fisc elicits a laugh as well. Nor do the vanquished peoples in Aurelian's parade of foreign nations arrive willingly but are in chains, and although Aurelian has spared Zenobia's life, he has killed all her advisors, in a clear display of lack of mercy. The play of allusion makes this portrayal of the harsh, stingy, and overly proud Aurelian, who is *severus*, *truculentus*, and *sanguinarius*, a travesty of the received image of the clement Augustus who did not seek to expand his empire through war but achieved the willing surrender of many nations.⁴³ The author of the *Historia Augusta* is ever at play with the various recognizable *topoi* from which biographers constructed the lives of Roman emperors. Using encomiastic style, he tells of the odious reputation

42 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 32.4-33.4, ed. and trans. Magie, 257-61.

43 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aur.* 36.2-3, ed. and trans. Magie, 264.

of Aurelian as if in the language of praise, and does so within a *topos* associated with Augustan clemency to playfully subvert the traditional function of the parade of foreign nations. Chastagnol argues that this anonymous biographer worked in the manner of a typical biographer or historian, but that the result was a pastiche of allusions that constituted “un clin d’oeil au lecteur éclairé” (a wink at the enlightened reader).⁴⁴ The example of Aurelian not only offers another potential source for Einhard, and later Carolingian biographers, but also illustrates the existence of conscious interplay of rhetorically charged episodes within the world of Roman imperial biography.

Constantine

The biographical *topos* of Roman universality assumes added significance when elaborated in an imperial Christian context. Consideration of Suetonius and his imitators reveals the panegyric structure and primary rhetorical intent of the *topos*, but late antique versions of it in praise of Constantine help to better explain certain essential elements of Einhard's account, such as the evocation of Harun as *Rex Persarum*, the concession of Holy Sites in Jerusalem, and the implied reunification of East and West through the submission of the Greek East. The concept of Roman imperial universality changed with the Christianization of the empire, and Christian theories of kingship came to regard universal peace under a single ruler as a manifestation of the divine will rather than of individual imperial glory. For Eusebius, the first biographer of a Christian emperor, *imperium* and *Pax Romana* were closely connected, and Constantine's universal dominion was a crucial aspect of his teleological conception of human history.⁴⁵ The foreign embassy *topos* in Christian imperial biography became, then, a providential symbol which placed the biographical subject within the progression of sacred history. Orosius, whose work was well known to the Carolingians, viewed a Christian Roman empire everywhere at peace as the culmination of God's plan. For him, the coincidence of the peace under Augustus during the lifetime of Jesus had been established by God for the benefit of Christians.⁴⁶ The evocation of Roman universality, for ninth-century authors familiar with Eusebius and Orosius, was therefore much more than an imitation of Roman biographical form.

44 Chastagnol, *Histoire Auguste*, lxxiv.

45 Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 155-58.

46 Chesnut, “Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius, and the Later Patristic and Medieval Christian Historians,” 698.

The examples provided below for praise of Constantine using the foreign ambassadorial *topos* are drawn from Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* and the *XII Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of late antique panegyric speeches also known as the Gallic corpus. There is no evidence that Einhard was familiar with Eusebius' biography, a circumstance which limits, but need not rule out, discussion of the influence of Christian imperial biography, in particular that of Constantine.⁴⁷ Hagiographic traditions and other historiographic works would have transmitted key episodes in the life of the Christian emperor, especially those related to the Holy Sepulchre, and certainly the essential elements of the life of Constantine loomed large in Christian memory. The *XII Panegyrici Latini* were collected in the fourth century for the study of rhetoric and as guidance for orators in some of the schools of Gaul.⁴⁸ Although we lack evidence that Einhard was familiar with these particular examples of late antique panegyric, it is certainly possible that he gained familiarity with the rhetorical components of Christian imperial praise.

The *topos* of surrendering eastern nations appears three times in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*. In 1.7, Eusebius writes,

as far as the outermost inhabitants of India and those who live round the rim of the whole dial of earth, he held in subjection all the toparchs, ethnarchs, satraps and kings of barbarian nations of every kind. These spontaneously saluted and greeted him, and sent their embassies with gifts and presents, and set such store by his acquaintance and friendship [...].⁴⁹

Then again in 4.50, he illustrates the universality of the Christian empire under Constantine near the time of the emperor's death:

On that occasion embassies from the Indians, who live near the rising sun, presented themselves, bringing gifts. These were all sorts of sparkling jewels, and animals of breeds differing from those known among us. These they brought to the Emperor showing that his power extended as far as the Ocean itself, and also how the rulers of the land of India, by honouring him with painted pictures and the dedication of statues, recognized and confessed him as Sovereign and Emperor. So when he began his reign the first to be subjected to him were the Britons near where the sun sets in the Ocean, and now it was the Indians, whose land lies near the sunrise.⁵⁰

47 Carolingian libraries included works of Eusebius in Rufinus' translation, but the *Life of Constantine* does not seem to have been known to the Carolingians in Latin. See McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 78.

48 *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, eds. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, 3-10.

49 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.7, eds. Cameron and Hall, 70.

50 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4.50, eds. Cameron and Hall, 172.

In their recent critical edition of Eusebius' work, Cameron and Hall signal his evocation of the *topos* of foreign embassies as a communication of a sense of the emperor's universal mission.⁵¹ Carolingian authors also employed this image of peaceful Roman universalism extending from the West to the East as an expression of God's will. We find it, for instance, in Sedulius Scottus' *On Christian Rulers*, in which he recalls the vast empire and peace under Constantine: "Thus Constantine, because he had been the servant of divine will, extended a peaceful reign from the sea of Britain to the lands of the East."⁵² Sedulius reminds his reader that imperial victories were ultimately God's, and that rulers served as his vicars on earth. Writing not long after the breakup of Charlemagne's empire in 855, the poet recalls the peace under Constantine as a reflection of the emperor's submission to God. His recollection of Roman universality and *Pax Romana* serves, in the Carolingian context of division and decline, as a reminder that the victories of Christian kings are part of the larger divine plan.

Harun, Rex Persarum

Both Einhard and the authors of the *Royal Frankish Annals* refer to the Caliph Harun-al-Rachid as *Rex Persarum*. Collins notes that the Franks used this title for him, although they also knew his Arabic title of *Amir al-Mu'minin* or "Commander of the Faithful," and Buckler points out that the Abbasid Caliphs would have seen themselves as the inheritors of the great Persian legacy.⁵³ Whatever the documentary practices might have been in diplomatic exchanges, when it came to situating the two rulers in a biographical context, the pairing of Harun, King of the Persians, with Charlemagne, Emperor of the Romans, usefully recalled the grand-scale Roman-Persian rivalries of the Roman imperial centuries. Of a passage depicting Persian envoys seeking the friendship of Constantine, Cameron and Hall write, "Here Eusebius places Constantine's dealings with Persia within the panegyric *topos* of universal peace and in an apologetic context of Christian universalism."⁵⁴ Einhard would not need to have read Eusebius to recognize this commonplace, and what is more, it seems unlikely that his depiction of Harun the Persian seeking Charlemagne's friendship could have been a coincidence.

Suetonius and his elaborators do not make much, if anything, of the Persians in their versions of the foreign ambassadorial *topos*. The *Rex Persarum* does play a prominent

51 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, eds. Cameron and Hall, 189, 312.

52 Sedulius Scottus, *On Christian Rulers*, trans. Doyle, 51-61, specifically 52-53.

53 Collins, *Charlemagne*, 152; Buckler, *Harunu'L-Rashid and Charles the Great*, 32.

54 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, eds. Cameron and Hall, 313.

role, however, in the fourth-century biography of Aurelian in the *Historia Augusta*, which includes the parade of elephants and the gift of a cloak (*pallium*), something Einhard names as a gift from Harun, although in the plural as *vestes*. The submitting Persian king is also central to instances of praise for Constantine's universal dominion. For example, the panegyricist Nazarius wrote of Constantine,

The barbarian lies prostrate at the side of Gaul or dispersed in the interior of his territory; the Persians themselves, a powerful nation and second on earth after Rome's greatness, have with no less fear than affection sought your friendship, greatest Constantine.⁵⁵

In the commentary on this passage, the authors liken it to similar instances in Eusebius and Suetonius, as well as to *Aeneid* 6.794-800, where Vergil uses India as the symbol of the furthest extent of the universal empire before the land beyond the stars.

India, as these examples in Suetonius, Eutropius, and Paul the Deacon demonstrate, symbolized the furthest extent of the Orient. Einhard also mentions India, remarking, however, that Harun held all of the Orient except for India (*qui excepta India totum poene tenebat orientem*). His mention, albeit in the form of an exclusion, is an enticing demonstration of a conscious manipulation of the Frankish sources to conform, although not fully, to the Roman biographical commonplace. In doing so, the biographer conveys to the reader his own awareness of the allusion he is making. Einhard's version calls to mind other examples, but diverges from tradition in a manner that invites and challenges the discerning reader to consider his ambivalent relationship to the Roman model.

Another sequence from the *Panegyrici Latini* helps to elucidate Einhard's presentation of Harun in the role of the submitting Persian, this time sending gifts including wild beasts. Here the panegyricist writes to Diocletian:

In the same manner the Great King of Persia, who has never before deigned to confess that he is but a man, makes supplication to your brother and throws open the whole of his Kingdom to him, if he should consider it worthy to enter. He offers him, besides, marvelous things of various kinds and sends him wild beasts of extraordinary beauty. Content to request the name of friend, he earns it by his submission.⁵⁶

Acquiescent, the Persian leader offers his dominion and the relationship is established as a submission which wins him friendly peace with the Roman emperor. Harun also seeks Charlemagne's friendship and offers a concession of territory in Jerusalem, one that

⁵⁵ Nazarius, *Panegyric* 4 (of Constantine), 38.3, eds. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, 384.

⁵⁶ *Panegyrici Latini* 10.6-7, eds. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, 68-69.

is limited in scope but crucial to Christian geography. Again, as with the mention of India, Einhard demonstrates adherence to the model and creatively stretches his material, but not beyond recognition. Since the underlying panegyric model contains a clear articulation of Persian submission, whether or not Einhard makes Harun's submission explicit, the allusion to previous models preserves, in itself, the underlying message of surrender. This curious, even coy, relationship to previous models might not constitute a veiled slighting of Charles' Abbasid and Greek rivals, but might, rather, represent a clever shying away from the outrageous fictions and excesses of traditional panegyric rhetoric.

Jerusalem Restored

Charlemagne's empire was not the great empire of Constantine celebrated by Eusebius. The solicitations of friendship by Harun and the Greek emperors represent a literary manoeuvre that constitutes Einhard's best attempt at a reunited Christian *imperium* in a sort of makeshift *Pax Romana*. Charlemagne's reign as emperor takes on providential significance when Einhard engineers the concession of holy sites in Jerusalem in protectorate and the favourable alliance with the fearful Greeks that implies reunification of the Christian imperial East and West. Eusebius famously celebrates Constantine's construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and praises his generosity towards it and other holy sites.⁵⁷ Einhard, for his part, emphasizes Charlemagne's gifts to the Holy Sepulchre sent at the time of his coronation and combines this with Harun's ceding of jurisdiction of holy places. Scholars have noted that Constantine's actual relations with the Persians were unrelated to those described by Eusebius.⁵⁸ And, in the case of Einhard, the generous boundaries of encomiastic biography offer an explanation for this notoriously unverifiable episode in the *Life of Charlemagne*.

Few would dispute that Einhard drew on the *Royal Frankish Annals* for his *Life of Charlemagne*.⁵⁹ A discrepancy in the presentation of embassies to and from Jerusalem in the two works provides further evidence of Einhard's moulding of his version to conform to the imperial universality *topos*. The multiple exchanges of gifts between the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Charles receive significant attention in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, which tell of gifts sent by the Patriarch in 799, followed by Charles' reciprocation of

57 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.25-40, eds. Cameron and Hall, 132-37.

58 Nixon and Rodgers, eds., *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 384.

59 Collins, "The 'Reviser' Revisited," 196-97.

donations sent for the Holy Sepulchre in 800, and finally of more gifts sent from Jerusalem to Charles later in 800, including keys to sacred sites and a *vexillum* (either a banner or a piece of the True Cross).⁶⁰ Strikingly, Einhard removes the Patriarch from the story in favour of listing only Harun's gifts to Charlemagne: robes, spices, other gifts, and the elephant. Einhard is clearly rearranging his material, for these gifts of Harun's do, in fact, appear in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, but in different years: preparations for the sending of the elephant appear in the 801 entry, and the envoy arrives with other presents from Harun in 802, while the arrival of Harun's offerings of silks, perfumes, ointments and balsam, an elaborate brass water clock with details "too numerous to describe" appear under the entry for 807.⁶¹ Einhard's condensation of the entries from the *Royal Frankish Annals* to equate Harun's eastern gifts and the elephant with the friendly ceding of territory by Harun to the new emperor highlights the biographer's deliberate presentation of the Caliph and *Rex Persarum*, rather than the Patriarch, as the giver of gifts. In so doing, he classicizes the story and moulds the material to conform more closely to the model of the Persian emperor who sends embassies bearing lavish gifts in a quest for friendly alliance with the Roman emperor.

Certainly, one can read the mention of Charlemagne's gifts to the Holy Sepulchre historically, as simply the record of offerings which likely did occur. But Charles' gifts to the Holy Sepulchre, when paired with the unlikely transfer of jurisdictions, take on new significance in an imperial biographical context. With Constantine, the special relationship of the Roman emperor to Jerusalem became a significant component of the *vita* of a Christian emperor, one with which, once again, Einhard could easily have been familiar without reading Eusebius. Einhard constructed a parallel episode in the life of Charlemagne by arranging material from the Frankish sources to equate the gifts with the imperial status of Charlemagne, protector of Christendom and especially of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Reuniting East and West

Einhard's task of suggesting Roman universality for the first Carolingian emperor was complicated by the vexing existence of the titular emperors in the Greek east. In the

60 *RFA*, 799 and 800, trans. Scholz and Rogers, 78-81. The *Annals of Lorsch* tell of the arrival of keys and a *vexillum*, "benedictionis causa claves Sepulchri dominici ac loci Calvarie, claves etiam civitatis et montis cum vexillo"; Runciman, "Charlemagne and Palestine," 610.

61 *RFA*, 801, 802, 807, trans. Scholz and Rogers, 81-88. Halphen noted this movement backwards of the gifts from Harun in his 1947 edition of the *Vie de Charlemagne*, 49.

final passage of chapter sixteen, with the presentation of the Greek solicitation of a treaty of friendship, the biographer made his most daring divergence from contemporary history and the *Royal Frankish Annals* to conform to panegyric convention. The most striking evidence of Einhard's lack of concern for historical accuracy appears in the presentation of Nicephorus, Michael, and Leo as if they were co-rulers of the Byzantine Empire. In a further attack on the questionable content of chapter sixteen, a shocked Halphen "on s'étonne," wondered how Einhard could have dared to alter the truth to such an extent (*travestir la vérité à ce point*), given his knowledge of the correspondence which had led to the eventual recognition by the Greeks of Charles' imperial title.⁶² Halphen did not recognize the extent to which the rhetoric of praise had determined Einhard's presentation of events.

Given the composition of previous models of the Roman universality *topos*, the Greek role in the construction of Einhard's own version demanded the depiction of the Byzantine Empire as an eastern nation submissively seeking friendship. The question of submission aside, the representation of a quest for alliance on the part of the Greeks would have required no fabrication. As Michael McCormick poetically describes them, Frankish-Byzantine relations in that period were, "rocky—literally—from near honeymoon idyll to war and back again."⁶³ And, indeed, there were plenty of attempts to settle the festering disputes. Plans for treaties with the Greeks are listed in the *Royal Frankish Annals* in the entries for 802, 809, 811, and finally the pact that was signed in 813.⁶⁴ The passage in the *Life of Charlemagne* is clearly an amalgamation and condensation of these various events, but, given Einhard's assertion that the Greeks were upset at Charles' assumption of the imperial title, it seems to reflect in particular the spirit of the ratification of the peace treaty with Emperor Michael in 813. The peace was concluded after years of war between 806 and 811 over territories in the Adriatic, and gained for Charles some abstract recognition of imperial status from Constantinople, but only as *Imperator Francorum*.⁶⁵

Einhard presents the panegyric "submission" of the Greeks as a sequence. First the two powers enjoyed a relationship of friendly exchange, but the coronation at Rome

62 Halphen, *Études critiques*, 88.

63 McCormick, "Diplomacy and the Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium," 25.

64 *RFA*, 802, 809, 811, 813, trans. Scholz and Rogers, 82-83, 89-90, 93, 95-97. The 802 mention of a treaty sought by Irene may refer to the failed marriage alliance between the empress and Charlemagne. See Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 117-18.

65 See Classen, *Karl der Grosse, das Papsttum und Byzanz*; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 368; Grabois, "Charlemagne, Rome and Jerusalem," 799. See also Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 17-18.

inspired Greek fear of conquest, which led them to seek an alliance with the new emperor.⁶⁶ The underlying implication of the foreign embassy *topos* is clearly conveyed in this episode: the fear of the Roman emperor evoked by his awe-inspiring reputation elicits the submissive behaviour of distant leaders. The degree to which the coronation in 800 actually upset relations with Constantinople is a matter of continuing debate, but the Greeks, for their part, were not anxious to offer their submission to Charlemagne in fear of plans for worldwide domination in the wake of his coronation at Rome.⁶⁷ Constantinople finally granted Charlemagne some recognition of an imperial title at the end of his life, but not one of co-equal rule.

Einhard, writing after 817, would have been well aware of the political wrangling which occurred over the title. His decision to make the treaty appear to be the result of a fearful reaction to the new emperor is an adaptation of events to conform to the commonplace of eastern nations seeking friendly alliance out of fear. For Einhard to simply declare that Harun and the Greeks had offered submission to the new emperor would have been a blatant deformation of events in too recent memory. The use of a model which carried with it a message of subservience offered a more subtle way of conveying the idea of capitulation without requiring direct assertion of it. The biographical model lurks not far beneath the surface, as a rich source of tacit suggestions based on previous usage, while the biographer avoids creating an overly idealized portrait of his subject.

A Tentative Evocation of Universality

Einhard was not the only Carolingian author to place Charlemagne within the Roman foreign embassy *topos* in a celebration of imperial universality. The poet Florus of Lyons provides a rich poetic example of Charlemagne as the bringer of *Pax Romana* in an unabashed deployment of the classical model. In his *Lament on the Division of the Empire*, written during the discord of the 840s, Florus recalls an idealized empire under Charlemagne:

And so the Frankish race became celebrated throughout the world,
and the fame of its achievements reached the ends of the earth,

⁶⁶ In fact, Franco-Byzantine relations had soured well before that, in the mid-eighth century, as a result of the iconoclastic crisis. See Herrin, "Constantinople, Rome and the Franks," 91.

⁶⁷ Muldoon, *Empire and Order*, 46; Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 119-25; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 379-81.

foreign kingdoms everywhere sent their emissaries from afar,
both barbarians and Greeks, to the Latin tribunal.
Even the race of Romulus yielded before this people
and Rome, fine mother of kingdoms, gave place;
there the prince of this realm was crowned
by the gift of the pope, relying on Christ's protection.⁶⁸

Florus idealizes the memory of Charlemagne with the stock conventions of the *topos* of foreign embassies: the worldwide reputation of the emperor reaching to the Far East and beyond, and the subsequent submission of foreign peoples who add their nations to his dominion. He even boldly celebrates the submission of the race of Romulus to Charlemagne, a transfer of power from Rome to the Franks which likely reflects the Frankish image of themselves as sustainers of the glory of Rome, the last of the four kingdoms before the end of time according to the prophecy of Daniel. For Florus, in the aftermath of the division of the empire amongst the sons of Louis the Pious, the evocation of an undivided Roman dominion with Charlemagne at its helm expresses nostalgia and regret. The poet bemoans a world brought low in the dust and looks back with sadness at the loss of an empire under one prince. Decrying the squandering of Charlemagne's great achievement, he explains this loss as divine punishment for loss of faith.⁶⁹

Rather than simply imitating a classical commonplace and injecting Charlemagne's name, Einhard instead moulded Frankish historiographical material to create a unique, if somewhat tentative, evocation of Roman universality under Charlemagne. The fully idealized Carolingian model evident in Florus' verses provides a helpful foil to Einhard's more individualized adaptation. Florus' version is a poetic lamentation written from the safer distance of half a century. For the biographer, especially one writing not long after the death of his subject, the generic constraints, however loose, were still quite different. Einhard's adherence to the *topos* of Roman universality is subtle by comparison with Florus', and deliberately so, given the obvious care with which the work was composed. The production of a *Life of Charlemagne* in the decades following his death required an awkward balance of adhering to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, responding to contemporary political exigencies, and reconciling the competing demands of the disparate available models for biography on which he may have drawn. With their intricate merging of plausible contemporary details and typical statements of praise, the

68 Florus of Lyons, "Lament on the Division of the Empire," ll. 57-64, ed. and trans. Godman, 268-69.

69 Florus of Lyons, "Lament on the Division of the Empire," ed. and trans. Godman, 264-65. Dutton calls the poem a eulogy for the empire; Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 121-23.

passages depicting relations with foreign princes reflect this conflict. For instance, Harun's concession of jurisdiction of holy places is so non-specific in its language as to seem noncommittal, while later elaborations, most notably Notker's, express without ambiguity the claim that Harun gave the Holy Lands over to Charlemagne in protectorate.⁷⁰

Why does Einhard choose such an extreme expression of imperial praise, and then adapt his prose to veil the glorious message traditionally conveyed by the *topos*? Perhaps he feared that the actual memory of Charlemagne might clash uncomfortably with such lofty rhetoric. Paul Dutton has argued that during the decades after his death, Charlemagne's reputation suffered, and that Einhard's biography was more of an apology in the face of criticism than a first and favourable portrait.⁷¹ When viewed in this light, Einhard's reluctance to give way to rhetorical extravagance becomes comprehensible. The question still remains, however, why he would use such a commonplace in the first place and then diffuse its rhetorical power. In placing Charlemagne so tentatively within the lineage of the greatest of Roman emperors, Einhard both glorifies and burdens his subject's memory. Such a comparison of the biographical subject to illustrious predecessors, whether implicit or explicit, necessarily brings to light, for the *lecteur éclairé*, both the parallels and the discrepancies with previous models. The reception of an author's employment of a *topos* is dependent upon various factors, including the reader's familiarity with literary and rhetorical traditions as well as his or her knowledge of the contemporary circumstances to which the author may be alluding. When Einhard imitates Suetonius' portrait of Augustus, he creates an inevitable association between the two biographical subjects. The likening of Charlemagne to Augustus through literary imitation constitutes a well-established form of tacit praise, but, at the same time, the reader may also be reminded of the ways in which the imperial reign of the Frankish leader was unlike that of the Roman emperor.

Any biographer who evoked Roman universality in praise of Charlemagne would have confronted hurdles not faced by the biographers of Augustus, Constantine, and Theodosius. Political reality in the ninth-century Carolingian ambit would have cast dark shadows over any idealized picture of Charlemagne as universal Roman emperor. The Christian Roman empire lacked unity, the Greek East held the imperial title, and the Abbasid Caliphate controlled Jerusalem; and all of these shortfalls are brought into relief by Einhard's fanciful picture of post-coronation relations with foreign nations. The foreign ambassadorial *topos* as it appears in the *Life of Charlemagne* is certainly

70 Notker of St. Gall, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.9, ed. Rau, *Quellen zur Karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, 3: 392.

71 Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 56-57.

encomiastic, but its unusual merging of panegyric structure and historiographical substance makes for a uniquely Carolingian combination of proud *imitatio imperii* and humble Frankish insecurity. Einhard offers ample celebration of his subject, while protecting him from critics who might have scoffed at unbridled praise.

Notker the Stammerer

Notker the Stammerer's late-ninth-century version of Charlemagne's exchanges with Harun in his *Gesta Karoli Magni* provides a fruitful example of an elaboration of Einhard's material which preserves and amplifies the underlying rhetoric of praise.⁷² In the early 880s, Charles the Fat asked the monk of St. Gall to write about the deeds of his illustrious Carolingian ancestors.⁷³ Notker employs a recognizable framework of prose biography and displays strong familiarity with a variety of pagan and Christian written sources while at the same time claiming to be relying on oral sources.⁷⁴ Notker's anecdotes about the life of Charlemagne have recently sparked discussion about the kind of royal portrait they represent, in particular with regard to humour, a topic on which David Ganz and Paul Kershaw have written eloquently.⁷⁵

The *Gesta* open with the oft-quoted announcement of the Frankish inheritance of the Roman Empire. God, in his ordering of the fate of kingdoms, has raised up among the Franks the golden-headed image of Charlemagne to replace the Romans and their feet of iron and clay.⁷⁶ More than an articulation of the Carolingian *renovatio*, Notker's pronouncement places the Franks at the end of the schema of the four kingdoms in the Book of Daniel. With regard to Notker's gleaming portrait of Charlemagne, Dutton allows that while Einhard had faced skepticism about Charlemagne's accomplishments in the 820s, by the 880s, his memory was so idealized that there was, in his words, "no one left to convince."⁷⁷ Notker's fanciful version of Charlemagne's diplomatic encounters with Harun appears, not as simple ambassadorial exchanges, but as

72 Kleinclausz argues for Notker's responsibility for propagating the Holy Land protectorate myth; Kleinclausz, "La légende du protectorat," 227.

73 Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," 751.

74 For analysis of the interplay of oral and written sources in Notker, see Innes, "Memory, Orality and Literacy." Breisach calls the work "a treasury of anecdotes"; Innes, *Historiography*, 100.

75 Ganz, "Humour as History," 176-77; Kershaw, "Laughter after Babel's Fall," 179-202. Campbell calls Notker "demonstrably unreliable, intensely amusing"; see his "Asser's *Life of Alfred*," 119.

76 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 1.1.

77 Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 199.

a pair of hunting expeditions, although Einhard is clearly the underlying source.⁷⁸ The royal hunt is, of course, highly symbolic, and hunting scenes signified authority in the works of Carolingian biographers.⁷⁹ Dutton, in an extensive recent study of the symbolism of animals in the Carolingian world, asserts that it was necessary for kings to demonstrate their superiority over animals.⁸⁰ The transformation of Einhard's own adaptation of the imperial universality *topos* into a pair of hunting scenes makes for material rich in multiple encomiastic traditions though complicated by the merging of straightforward praise and subverted panegyric rhetoric. With the politics of the hunt added to the bloodless conquest of the East, Notker is fully at play with the central components of Einhard's version of imperial universality: worldwide reputation, East-West rivalry, tacit recognition of Charles' superiority, and the concession of Holy Land territory in protectorate.

As he is in Einhard, Caliph Harun is presented as a Persian ruler of a mythic East on a grand scale and as a worthy rival to Rome. In book two, chapter eight, Harun's envoys arrive at the court of Charlemagne. During the visit, the envoys discuss the Frankish leader's reputation in distant eastern nations. The ambassadors explain that those whom they encountered on their way to see Charlemagne, between the East and his own kingdom, were keen to obey him, as if they had been brought up in his palace. As one of the envoys explains,

“We Persians,” they said, “and the Medes, Armenians, Indians, Parthians, Elamites and all the peoples of the East, fear you much more than we do our own leader Harun. As for the Macedonians and all the Greeks, what can we say of them? They fear that your greatness will overwhelm them more than the Ionian Sea.”⁸¹

The visitors then reveal that, by contrast, his own nobles seem to have little regard for him, except when in his immediate presence. Despite his robust reputation in the East, Charles seems, from the perspective of outsiders, to lack respect in his own circles. The distance of the East here paradoxically serves to highlight domestic problems, and the lesson, at first glance, seems to be that it is much easier to maintain a reputation for

78 For the contemporary significance of Charlemagne's hunting misadventure, see MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, 217.

79 Nelson, “Kingship and Empire,” 60; see Godman, “The Poetic Hunt.”

80 Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 49.

81 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.8, ed. Rau, 390; translation based on Lewis Thorpe, *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives of Charlemagne*, 146. Subsequent translations of Notker are mine unless otherwise stated.

might in the eyes of faraway peoples. Notker also manages to turn the Persian envoys' speech into a clever gibe at the expense of the pusillanimous Greeks, ever fearful of Frankish intentions, as Einhard states unequivocally as well. The theme of reputation, now openly available for rhetorical manipulation by Notker, is further enhanced when Harun's envoys prove too timorous to join Charlemagne on a hunt. During the subsequent outing, Charlemagne attempts to kill a wild beast and not only fails to do so, but loses his Gallic boot to the beast. This hunt has not been a glorious demonstration of royal domination of wild beasts, and Charles is, no doubt, fortunate that Harun's envoys had demurred out of fear, losing their chance to witness the debacle.

When it comes time for his own envoys to go to Persia, Charlemagne puts together a gift package for Harun, which includes, among other items, some nimble and ferocious hunting dogs that Harun had requested for hunting and warding off lions and tigers. The Persian leader ignores all of the gifts but the dogs, which he immediately puts to the test on a lion hunt. He reciprocates Charles' gesture and invites the Frankish ambassadors on the hunt, and they, unlike the Persians, eagerly join in. Harun immediately orders the dogs set on the lion. In a moment laden with symbolism, the German dogs easily capture the Persian lion, and the fearless Frankish envoys kill it with their swords.⁸² Notker writes that even with this minimal indication, *ex rebus minimis*, Harun recognizes that Charlemagne is the mightier. The Persian leader then states, in direct discourse, that he now recognizes to be true those things he had heard about Charles; those things are, to be precise, that through much hunting and exercise of mind and body he has acquired the custom of conquering everything.⁸³ Here Charlemagne's dogs and his envoys have successfully killed the Persian lion, but the Frankish king himself has done nothing to prove his might. He is not present since Notker is elaborating a version of a foreign embassy *topos* which is based on the notion that Eastern princes are frightened into submission by the very reputation of an emperor whom they have not seen. Harun merely deduces that Charles merits his reputation for conquest, finding proof of his superior mind and body in the actions of the Frankish envoys and the dogs.

The conclusion that Charlemagne is strong in body and mind based on the performance of his envoys is not logical and, given the playful spirit of Notker's work, is surely meant to be ironic. The reader knows that Charlemagne had failed to kill the beast and lost his boot on his own recent hunting expedition. As a consequence of his envoys' decision not to attend the hunt, Harun is not aware of Charles' misadventure, news of

82 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.9, ed. Rau, 392.

83 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.9, ed. Rau, 392.

which would certainly have sullied Charlemagne's untarnished name in the East. His glorious reputation remains unharmed, however, thanks only to the stereotypical timidity of the eastern envoys. Harun's statement explaining the basis for Charlemagne's reputation plays on the reader's knowledge of the previous hunting failure. When Harun praises Charles' reputation for bodily might, the memory of the recent loss of the boot in the forest makes the exchange with the Persian king all the more ironic and humorous. The sort of laughter one can imagine here is what Paul Kershaw has described, in his discussion of miscommunication and incongruence in ninth-century humour, as a brand of monastic humour derived from the *non sequitur*.⁸⁴ Notker is building upon multiple panegyric conventions in a manner that turns the rhetoric both of the royal hunt and of Roman universality upside down. David Ganz has argued, although not in relation to this episode, that Notker emphasizes a Christian perspective in his anecdotes about Charlemagne. "The disorder is deliberate," he explains, "Notker is playing with Einhard's order, which derives from a pagan model."⁸⁵ In this case, Notker subverts the symbolic power of the royal hunting scene to express an alternate message about imperial authority and the importance of reputation. Reputation for might, a pagan virtue, is based *ex rebus minimis*, we learn, and is thus vulnerable to reinterpretation.

Charles' reputation will not suffer as a consequence of his inglorious hunting incident. Moreover, his reward for symbolic victory on the hunt of the Persian lion will be no less than jurisdiction over the Holy Lands. After witnessing in canine form the display of Frankish superiority, Harun wonders what he can offer to Charles for having honoured him so:⁸⁶

If I give him the land which was promised to Abraham and shown to Joshua, it is so far away that he cannot defend it from the barbarians. If, with his customary courage, he tries to defend it, I am afraid that the provinces bordering on the Kingdom of the Franks may secede from his Empire. All the same I will try to show my gratitude for his generosity in the way which I have said. I will give the land to him, so that he may hold it. I myself will rule over it as his representative. Whenever he wishes and whenever the opportunity offers, he may send his envoys to me. He will find me a most faithful steward of the revenues of that province.⁸⁷

84 See Kershaw, "Laughter after Babel's Fall."

85 Ganz, "Humour as History," 177.

86 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.9, ed. Rau, 392.

87 Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* 2.9, ed. Rau, 392; trans. Thorpe, *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives*, 148. The key phrase about giving over the land and being Charles' representative reads, "Dabo quidem illam in eius potestatem, et ego advocatus eius ero super eam."

When Harun hands over the Holy Land to Charlemagne and offers, given his proximity, to be a steward of the territory for him, the transfer of jurisdiction merely suggested in Einhard emerges in its fullest and most explicit form. Charlemagne regains Jerusalem for the West thanks to the performance of the Frankish embassy, who have proved him worthy of his reputation. Envoys will travel freely from east to west, and the friendly ambassadorial relationship will be based on Frankish ownership and Persian stewardship of the Holy Land. In these Christianized *gesta*, Einhard provides the foundation for Notker's playful parody of the now Carolingian rhetoric of Roman universality.

Benedict and Beyond

Notker was not alone in suggesting that Harun's concession of the Holy Lands was a symbolic victory over the East for Charlemagne. Subsequent versions continued to express the same concerns about reputation, imperial supremacy, and control of the Holy Land. Beginning in the tenth century, the legend of Charlemagne's exchanges with the East began to evolve into a tale of a journey undertaken by Charlemagne himself to Jerusalem and Constantinople, from which he always returned with relics in hand. The first known work to depict Charlemagne travelling to meet with Harun and the Greek emperors is, in essence, a narrative of a relic *translatio* embedded in a monastic chronicle. The *Chronicon* is the work of Benedict, a monk of the monastery of Saint Andrew on Mount Soracte, north of Rome, and was written around 968. Benedict also constructs his narrative using material from Einhard's biography and the *Royal Frankish Annals*, and makes clear that the encounters with Harun and the Greek emperors had indeed signified their submission to Charles and his victory over the East. After receiving a relic from the Greek emperors, Charlemagne returns home: "The victorious, crowned, triumphant king returned to Francia. He remained there, having extended his kingdom so much, and subjugated eastern nations, and focussed assiduously on occupations of this sort."⁸⁸ Charlemagne's dealings with Harun and the Greeks, for Benedict, accomplishes bloodless victory and the subjugation of eastern nations. Hence, by the late tenth century, the exchanges set out in Einhard form a recognizable narrative unit which persists in signifying the gathering in of the East into the empire by inspiring submission to Charlemagne without battle.

⁸⁸ Benedict of Mt. Soracte, in *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* 55, ed. Zucchetti, 116. Translation is mine. "Victor et coronator triumphator rex in Francia est reversus. Qui cum tantus in ampliando regno et subiciens esteris nationibus sisteret, et in eiusmodi occupationibus assidue versaretur."

The memory of Charlemagne's friendly ties with Harun was immortalized by Einhard and kept alive by the popularity of his biography, which, in addition to numerous elaborations, was also consistently included in compilations of the histories of the kings of France.⁸⁹ A late-eleventh-century version of diplomatic exchanges between Charlemagne and the East, known by its abbreviated title as the *Descriptio qualiter*, would alter the friendly alliance with Harun to depict Charlemagne's deliverance of Jerusalem from pagan oppressors. The request for aid comes from the Greek emperor, who learns in a vision that God wants him to call on Charlemagne to be the protector of the Holy City.⁹⁰ The recognition of Charles' imperial supremacy reveals itself in the form of the admission by the Greek emperor that Charlemagne is God's chosen protector of Jerusalem (intelligens iam se a deo ad hoc negotium preelectum esse).⁹¹ Both Einhard's biography and the *Descriptio qualiter* appear in full, despite their conflicting stories, in the 1165 saintly biography of Charlemagne.⁹² The admission by the Greek emperor that God prefers the Frankish king is also the basis for the satirical Anglo-Norman poem of the late twelfth century, the *Voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople*, which dramatizes a fanciful crisis followed by the restoration of Frankish supremacy over a rival leader who rules all of the East. In this poem, a Greek emperor named Hugon cedes his kingdom to Charlemagne and promises to be his vassal after God intervenes to help the Franks carry out superhuman feats which they have promised to accomplish during a drunken boasting game.⁹³ The enigmatic humour of this satirical poem, which continues to pose an interpretive challenge to critics, proves more readily decipherable when one approaches the work as a playful disruption of panegyric rhetoric similar to those effected in the *Historia Augusta* and in Notker's *Deeds of Charlemagne*.

Not long after the death of Charlemagne, his legendary life had already begun, and Einhard's biography would offer a crucial source from which episodes from his life could be drawn and transformed. The story of his exchanges with Harun and the Greek emperors would be retold again and again over the centuries in a variety of historiographical, hagiographical, and poetic works. Moreover, the specifically Carolingian concerns which had emerged quietly from Einhard's version, such as competition for imperial supremacy with the Greeks and jurisdiction of the Holy Lands, would come to the fore in later versions. The exchanges with foreign princes in the *Life of Charlemagne* form a

89 See Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis*.

90 *Descriptio qualiter*, ed. Rauschen, 95-126.

91 *Descriptio qualiter*, ed. Rauschen, 108.

92 *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Rauschen, 2-93.

93 *Le Voyage de Charlemagne*, ed. Tyssens.

rhetorically rich narrative unit whose significance lies both in its mimetic relationship to classical models and in its influence on subsequent works. Einhard, for his part, drew carefully on the Roman biographical tradition, taking from it only what he needed. Moulding his words strategically to compose his own brand of panegyric prose, he challenged his reader to recognize the uniquely Carolingian character of his imperial praise and to appreciate his willing divergence from the classical model.

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