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## THE BRAVERY OF LEADERSHIP

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When examining primary sources from medieval civilization, certain societal assumptions present at that time become clear. Many sources include accounts of the deeds and characteristics of political leaders. Through these accounts one can surmise that bravery was the quality most sought for in a leader. The nobility, (known as 'those who fight') were considered to be the most prominent and powerful people of the eighth and ninth centuries. (Lecture, Herrick 1/16/07) That is not to say that courage was the only trait desired in a leader, as it was preferred that a warrior-like mentality was tempered by piety and mercy. Still, bravery was the most important. Three very different documents from different times throughout the ninth century clearly demonstrate the importance of bravery in a political leader.

Chronologically, the first document is from approximately 826, written twelve years after its subject's demise. (Lecture, Herrick 1/18/07) For this reason, Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* may not claim total accuracy, as memories fade over time. Accuracy may also be called into question because of the bias of the author, who was very close to Charlemagne (who ruled as a Frankish king for almost fifty years in the late eighth and early ninth centuries) when the latter was alive, and owed him a great debt. He was educated by Charlemagne, and even admitted that his work's purpose was to prove that he was not ungrateful for all of the care he had been given. (Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, Preface) This bias towards Charlemagne indicates that the entire work, while detailed and informative, is most likely slanted in favor of the king, and the characteristics and deeds attributed to him are meant to be very positive ones, cherished by the people of the time. This work was also essentially written for Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, which was another incentive to portray Charlemagne favorably. It may also have served as a lesson to Louis, as Einhard had been his advisor at one point. (Lecture, Herrick 1/18/07) The document is divided into sections regarding these different characteristics and deeds, and therefore can serve as a point-by-point guide to the ideal leadership traits in the early ninth century.

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A good third of the *Life* concerns war and conquest. No other single topic receives as much description throughout the work. While it is true that Charlemagne accomplished many conquests it is clear that they are especially emphasized here. Throughout these accounts of fighting (there are ten and then a subsequent summation of the conquests) Charlemagne is praised for many qualities, such as "patience and firmness", "steadfastness", and "wisdom and greatness of soul" (Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, sections 5, 7, and 8). Still, he is praised for these only after it is established that he is a brave warrior. He is virtually never directly described as being brave or courageous, but those qualities are clearly shown through the accounts of his conquests. The conquests themselves prove his bravery, and it does not need to be further explained by Einhard.

Bravery was a quality that was expected of political leaders, and it was measured in the battles they won and the peoples they conquered. Any reference to Charlemagne's "wisdom and greatness of soul" (Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, section 8) is referring to his performance and skill in regards to battle. Fighting wars was so ingrained in political leadership that in the fourth section, "Plan of This Work", no mention of warring was made. He instead referred to his plan for the document as "an account of his deed at home and abroad, then of his character and pursuits, and lastly of his administration and death, omitting nothing worth knowing or necessary to know" (Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, section 4). Charlemagne's wars and conquests were seen as general achievements and accomplishments to which a king should be suited. In the subsequent sections, describing Charlemagne's character and pursuits, bravery does not have a section. It was not seen as a part of his character, but rather of his office. The other traits described, such as his piety and generosity, were certainly considered admirable, but not absolutely central to being a successful ruler.

The second document worth examining is Abbo of Fleury's *The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia*. This document was actually recorded around the late tenth century, but it concerns the period of the late ninth century, particularly before and around the year 870. The basic plot of the document had been known for years before it was actually recorded. This immediately calls the accuracy of the work into question, as it is expressed at the beginning that Abbo (a monk) heard the account from Archbishop Dunstan, who himself had heard it from King Aethelstan, who had received the story from Edmund's sword-bearer. (Abbo of Fleury, *The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia*, p.1) When oral tales are passed through different people, it is expected that details will be altered, and the story may change drastically over a long period of time. In this case, only a few people seem to be involved, but just from this information the account is likely to be less accurate than Einhard's document.

There are mystical elements in this document as well, suggesting it was more folklore than fact, and that it relied on belief in miracles. At one point a detached head calls out to the local people searching for it. (Abbo of Fleury, *The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia*, p.2) The mystical and religious elements may also have been emphasized because Abbo was a monk, but that is not certain. This document may have been geared towards any literate subjects of East Anglia or possible future leaders, and was most likely ultimately recorded as an inspirational tale.

At first glance the most important leadership trait championed by this document might appear to be piety, as the title indicates. It is true that the people known as 'those who pray' were very highly regarded and it was admirable for a political leader to be a good Christian as well. Piety seemed to be often attached to bravery when the facets of good leadership were described, in both this document and the previous one, but bravery was still at the core. While King Edmund is martyred and does become a saint, this document in many ways actually points out the *separation* of temporal and spiritual matters. When Ivar and the Danes arrive and it is demanded that Edmund become Ivar's vassal-king, he discusses the matter with a bishop. The bishop represents the spiritual side of the matter, and advises Edmund to submit to Ivar. Edmund, the political leader, refuses to do so, and the reason he does so is to protect his people. (Abbo of Fleury, *The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia*, p.1) He is described as humble and moral, but his duty as a king is to his people, and humility and morality were considered good traits for a political leader as long as they did not compromise his bravery.

Edmund is comforted by his love and worship of Christ at his time of martyrdom, but that is not the reason he chooses to die. "It was never my way to flee. I would rather die for my country if I need to". (Abbo of Fleury, *The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia*, p.2) The miraculous things that happen later regarding the burial and the binding of the thieves were because of his faith, but the main action, the main catalyst for all of this was his decision to be brave and die for his people. The separation of the temporal and spiritual in terms of official duties is further mentioned after the thieves are caught and Bishop Theodred regrets punishing them, "because it isn't fitting for those who are chosen to the service of God to consent to any man's death, especially if the criminals are Christians" (Abbo of Fleury, *The Martyrdom of St Edmund, King of East Anglia*, p.3). This document ultimately portrays the opinion that bravery and the ability to fight one's enemies (or the enemies of one's kingdom) lay on the shoulders of the political leaders, and while it is good if they are pious as well, they are the only ones who are expected to be brave; it is their chief duty.

Like Abbo of Fleury's work, the third document was also written about events that occurred in the late ninth century. Abbo of Saint-Germain's *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen* recounts the Norse assaults on Paris in 885. Since Abbo of Saint-Germain stood witness to the siege, his account is most likely more factually accurate than that of Abbo of Fleury. However, it is not clear when the account was actually recorded, thus complete accuracy is not a certainty. That he was a monk might suggest that he had a bias regarding the importance of morality and piety, like Abbo of Fleury, but it does not come through in an obvious way. If anything there could have been a bias against Charles the Fat, but the account is more descriptive and less openly geared towards a particular point. Abbo of Saint-Germain was not making an overt argument, but instead presenting what he saw with a possible slant but ultimately trying to inform rather than persuade and direct the intended audience. That audience may have been any of the king's subjects who could read, of course including some of the nobility.

While this document differs from the other two in that the king is not extolled for his bravery but rather barely mentioned, it is still clear that the notion of bravery was expected of political leaders. When the Norseman Sigfried came to ask Bishop Gauzelin to submit, the latter refused on the grounds that he and Count Odo had been entrusted with their land by the king. (Abbo of Saint-Germain, *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen*, p.1) He (Gauzelin) does not mention any bravery on the part of King Charles, but rather declares that he himself will be brave out of a sense of duty to the king. In this account, it is not the man in particular (in this case Charles the Fat) who possesses courage; the office he holds represents courage.

It is made clear in the document that at this point Charles is no longer worthy of the office of political leadership that he holds. He only shows up at the very end to delegate land and monetary compensation to the Norsemen, having no part in the brave battles that were fought on his behalf. (Abbo of Saint-Germain, *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen*, p.3) Because of his lack of bravery and failure to participate in battle, he is no longer suited for political leadership, which is confirmed in the last line. "Then Charles returned [home]; he was not to live long" (Abbo of Saint-Germain, *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen*, p.3). The main brave heroic figure of the account is Count Odo, the defender of the city. He is already a courageous warrior, and it is not necessary for him to have total mercy and kindness as well while he is protecting his city, as is proven when he tore the scalps of the Danes with heated oil, wax and pitch. (Abbo of Saint-Germain, *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen*, p.2) It is expressed that he later became king, (Abbo of Saint-Germain, *Account of the Siege of Paris by the Northmen*, p.1) which proves that a political leader was still first and foremost expected to be brave.

These three works were written by different people, at different times, and for different purposes, but they still all expressed a similar notion. Political leaders were expected to be brave, and while piety was important as well, bravery was non-negotiable. The fact that these works are so different proves that this notion was widespread and held firmly throughout the ninth century, and 'those who fight' remained in charge.

## References

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