

## Charlemagne: Brutal Conqueror or Enlightened Ruler?

### Introduction

While there may have been thousands of kings across history, few kings are truly feared, fewer still are loved and just a handful have managed to be both feared and loved. Charlemagne was one such king and it can be shown that he was both feared and loved because he was a brutal conqueror as well as an enlightened ruler. However, the selection between one and the other as the primary facet of his rule is a difficult yet important question since by answering that we can understand how his rule over Europe affected the course of history.

At first sight and going by popular lore about the character, he certainly seems like a king who would command the love and respect of the people. The first emperor of Europe, a member of the nine worthies, the reviver of art and education in Europe and as the initiator of the Carolingian Renaissance and many other titles are attributed to him (Innes, 1997). Others call him a slave owner, a despotic king, genocidal murderer and “founder of the First German Reich which inspired the third (Story, 2005, Pg. 2)”. In fact, like Arthur, his name still brings a myth to life and this is certainly reaffirmed by the Charlemagne building in Brussels which is the seat of the government of the EU.

However, if we go deeper into his life we find that for most of his life he waged war and continually sought to expand the frontiers of his government. He had thousands killed in a single day if they dared to rise up against him and killed thousands more with his armies that swept across Europe in the Middle Ages. The king certainly became an emperor to be reckoned but his empire was built, like many other empires of the time, with the blood of his enemies. At the same time, he was known for his public works, charity and other good deeds which seem to give a very different image of the man (Story, 2005). The picture might become clearer if we examine his life and the relevant evidence presented about his actions and deeds.

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