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Einhard

*Collected Works*



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*The Collected Works of*  
**EINHARD**

(c. 775-840)



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**EINHARD**



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# COPYRIGHT

## *Collected Works of Einhard*



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## The Translations



*During the time of the Franconian Empire, the Maingau, Einhard's birthplace, was the settlement area in the curve of the Main east of Frankfurt am Main and in the northern Odenwald around the Main tributaries Rodau, Gersprenz and Mümling, as well as to the right of the Main around Aschaffenburg.*

## Life of Charlemagne



*Translated by A. J. Grant, 1905*

The ninth century Frankish scholar and courtier Einhard was a dedicated servant of the Emperor Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious. Einhard's principle work is a biography of Charlemagne, the *Vita Karoli Magni*, regarded by many as one of the most precious literary bequests of the early Middle Ages.

Einhard was from the eastern German-speaking part of the Frankish Kingdom. Born into a family of landowners of some importance, his parents had sent him to be educated by the monks of Fulda, one of the most important centres of learning in the Frank lands. Due to his small stature, which restricted his riding and sword-fighting ability, Einhard concentrated on scholarship, especially the mastering of Latin. He was accepted into the wealthy court of Charlemagne in c. 791. At that time, Charlemagne was actively seeking scholarly men to join his circle, having established a royal school led by the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin. Einhard was evidently a talented builder and construction manager, as Charlemagne put him in charge of the completion of several palace complexes, including Aachen and Ingelheim. Despite the fact that Einhard was on intimate terms with the emperor, he never achieved office in his reign. In 814, on Charlemagne's death, Louis the Pious made Einhard his private secretary. Einhard retired from court during the time of the disputes between Louis and his sons in the spring of 830.

The *Vita Karoli Magni* comprises 33 chapters, starting with the full genealogy of the Merovingian family, going through the rise of the Carolingian dynasty, and then detailing the exploits and temperament of King Charles. It has long been seen as one of the key sources for the reign of Charlemagne and provides insight into his court and the events that surrounded him. The text opens with a preface explaining why the author is writing the book, highlighting that he felt it was his duty and that he had such love for Charles that he felt it would be a tragedy if he was forgotten. The biography then charts the fall of the Merovingian family and how the Carolingian came to power, briefly describing the kingship of Pippin and the years of joint rule between Charlemagne and Carloman.

A large section of the text is then dedicated to chronicling Charlemagne's many conquests and military campaigns. Einhard takes great efforts to frame all of the conquests as justified and even righteous; in most cases, however, he is vague on the details of how the wars went and simply summarises the reasons for why they started and what the outcome was.

Einhard then describes at length both Charlemagne's physical appearance and his personality, making sure to highlight all the good qualities, especially his piety and moderation in all worldly pleasures. In this section, Einhard also comments on some of the emperor's many children and seemingly tries to explain the reason that Charlemagne never let his daughters marry, suggesting that he simply loved them too much to be parted from them. However, it is Einhard's very brief description of the rebellion of Pippin the Hunchback that is of great importance, as we know much more about Pippin than what Einhard tells us and many historians regard this section as a blatant historical revisionism.

The final part of the biography deals chiefly with Charlemagne being crowned Roman Emperor on Christmas day of the year 800 and it also describes his death and

will, followed by the ascension of his son Louis the Pious. The text claims that Charles had no idea that he was to be crowned emperor, even going so far as to state that:

“He at first had such an aversion that he declared that he would not have set foot in the Church the day that they [the imperial titles] were conferred, although it was a great feast-day, if he could have foreseen the design of the Pope”.

There has been a great debate as to whether this viewpoint is correct, with most modern historians arguing that Charlemagne must have definitely known about the Pope's plans long before it happened. The work ends with a copy of Charlemagne's will and a description of his burial, bringing the biography to a close on a rather sombre note.

Historians have traditionally described the text as the first example of a biography of a European king. The author tried to imitate the style of that of the Latin biographer Suetonius and his *Lives of the Caesars*. It especially borrows from the model of the biography of Emperor Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire.

The date of Einhard's work is uncertain, and a number of theories have been put forward. The inclusion of Charlemagne's will at the end makes it fairly clear that it was written after 814. The first reference to the work, however, comes in a letter to Einhard from Lupus of Ferrieres, which is dated to the mid-ninth century. Dates have been suggested ranging from about 817 to 833, usually based on interpretations of the text in the political context of the first years of the reign of Louis the Pious and Louis' attitude to his father. No theory has yet emerged as an obvious frontrunner and it is likely that the debate will continue.



*A denarius of Charlemagne, dated c. 812-814, with the inscription KAROLVS IMP AVG  
(Karolus Imperator Augustus)*





*The Bust of Charlemagne, an idealised portrayal and reliquary said to contain Charlemagne's skull cap, fourteenth century*



*Sketch thought to be of Charlemagne, c. 800*



*Pope Leo III crowning Charlemagne from 'Chroniques de France ou de Saint Denis', vol. 1; France, second quarter of fourteenth century*

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## INTRODUCTION



THE TWO "LIVES" contrasted. — This volume contains two lives of Charles the Great, or Charlemagne (for both forms of the name will be used indifferently in this introduction); both written within a century after his death; both full of admiration for the hero of whom they treat; both written by ecclesiastics; but resembling one another in hardly any other particular. It is not merely the value which each in its different way possesses, but also the great contrast between them, that makes it seem useful to present them together in a single volume. Professor Bury remarked in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge: "It would be a most fruitful investigation to trace from the earliest ages the history of public opinion in regard to the meaning of falsehood and the obligation of veracity"; and these two lives would form an interesting text for the illustration of such a treatise. The restrained, positive, well-arranged narrative of Eginhard seems to belong to a different age from the garrulous, credulous, and hopelessly jumbled story of the Monk of Saint Gall. And yet the two narratives were divided from one another by no long interval of time. It is impossible to fix with any certainty the date of the composition of Eginhard's life, but there are various indications which make 820 a not impossible date. An incident mentioned by the Monk of Saint Gall makes the task of dating his work within limits an easier one. The work was suggested to him, he tells us, by Charles III. when he stayed for three days at the Monastery of Saint Gall, and it is possible to fix this event, with precision, to the year 883. We may think, therefore, of the Monk's narrative as being separated from that of Eginhard by more than sixty years, and by about seventy from the death of its hero. But in the ninth century the mist of legend and myth steamed up rapidly from the grave of a well-known figure; there were few documents ready to the hand of a monk writing in the cloister of Saint Gall to assist him in writing an accurate narrative; there was no publicity of publication and no critical public to detect the errors of his work; above all, there was not in his own conscience the slightest possibility of reproach even if, with full consciousness of what he was doing, he changed the facts of history or interpolated the dreams of fancy, provided it were done in such a manner as "to point a moral or adorn a tale."

And so it is that, whereas through Eginhard's narrative we look at the life of the great Charles in a clear white light, through a medium which, despite a few inaccuracies, distorts the facts of history wonderfully little, when we take up the narrative of the Monk, on the other hand, we are at once among the clouds of dreamland; and only occasionally does the unsubstantial fabric fade, and allow us to get a glimpse of reality and actual occurrence. But now each of these narratives demands a somewhat more careful scrutiny.

**Eginhard's Life of Charlemagne** is a document of the first importance for the study of the epoch-making reign of his hero. Short as it is, we have often to confess that in the chronicles of the same period by other hands we can feel confidence only in such parts as are corroborated or supported by Eginhard. Its chief fault is that it is all too short — a fault which biographers rarely allow their readers to complain of. But when we consider how admirably fitted Eginhard was for the task which he undertook — by his close proximity to Charlemagne, by his intimate acquaintance with him, by his literary studies and sober and well-balanced mind; when we remember that he lived in a brief period of literary activity between two long stretches

of darkness — it is tantalising to find him complaining of the multiplicity of books and restraining himself with a quotation from Cicero from writing at greater length.

**The Career of Eginhard.** — A sketch of Eginhard's career will show how well qualified he was to deal with his subject. He was born about 770, in the eastern half of the territories belonging to the great Charles, in a village situate on the lower course of the river Main. His father Eginhard and his mother Engilfrita were landowners of some importance, and endowed by will the monastery of Fulda with lands and gold. It was to this monastery that the young Eginhard was sent for education. The monastery of Fulda was founded under the influence of Boniface, the great Englishman, whose zeal had driven him from Crediton, in Devonshire, to co-operate with the early Frankish kings in the conversion and conquest of Germany. The monastic movement was strong and vigorous in the eighth century, and nowhere more so than in the eastern half of the Frankish dominions. Eginhard was trained under the Abbot Baugulfus, and showed himself so apt and promising a pupil that the Abbot recommended him for a post at the Court of Charles (? 791).

The imperial crown was still nearly ten years distant, but Charles was already the most glorious and powerful of European rulers. In spite of all his constant fighting and travelling his extraordinary energy found place for interest in calmer subjects, and he gathered round him in his Court at Aix the best of what the age had to show in culture, knowledge, and eloquence. In this circle the most striking figure was Alcuin of York; but Eginhard soon made for himself a position of importance. Charles lived familiarly and genially with the scholars and writers of his palace, calling them by pet names and nicknames, and receiving the like in return. The King himself was David; Alcuin, Flaccus; Eginhard is called Bezaleel, after the man of whom we are told in Exodus, chapter xxxi., that he was "filled with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, and in carving of timber." As the allusion implies, Eginhard was no mere book-learned scholar, but had brought from his monastery school much technical and artistic knowledge. He has been called an architect, and many great buildings have been ascribed to him, but with more than doubtful probability. The minor arts were rather Eginhard's forte, though it seems impossible to define them. Contemporaries speak of his carefully-wrought works, of the many tasks in which he was useful to Charles, but without exact specification. A contemporary document speaks of him as supervising the palace works at Aix; or rather, one Ansegisus is described as "the executant of the royal works in the royal palace at Aix, under the direction of the Abbot Eginhard, a man possessed of every kind of learning."

He was of small stature, and this is often made good-humoured fun of by his fellow-scholars. He is called the dwarf, the midget, the mannikin. Theodulf describes him as running about with the activity of an ant, and his body is spoken of as a small house with a great tenant. He married Imma, a Frankish lady of good family. (It is merely a stupid legend that makes of her a daughter of Charlemagne.) He lived with her happily, and was inconsolable after her death. Before his wife's death and without putting her away from him, he had embraced the monastic life — a proceeding which in no way scandalised the ideas of that century. He was the abbot of many monasteries, which he held, in spite of the canonical prohibition, at the same time. Saint Peter of Ghent and Saint Wandrille, near Rouen, are those with which he is specially associated. He was on several occasions employed by Charles on important embassies, but was for the most part rather his secretary and confidant than his minister.



His great master died in 814, and Eginhard survived him for twenty-nine years, having lived long enough to see the mighty fabric of Charles's empire show signs of the rapid ruin that was soon to overtake it. He received from Lewis the Pious further ecclesiastical promotion, but still lived at the Court until 830. After that year his devotion to the Church mastered all other interests. He built a church at Mulinheim, and procured for it with great pains the relics of Saint Peter and Saint Marcellinus from Rome; and it was at Mulinheim, renamed Seligenstadt (the city of the saints), far from the intrigues of courts, that he passed most of the rest of his life. His wife Imma ("once my faithful wife, and later my dear sister and companion") died in 836, and Eginhard's deep sorrow at her loss finds pathetic expression in letters still extant. The political confusion and the utter failure of Charlemagne's plans must have increased Eginhard's distaste for public affairs. He died at Seligenstadt (probably in 844). His epitaph gave as his two titles to fame his services to Charlemagne and his acquisition of the precious relics.

*The Writings of Eginhard* that have come down to us are — (1) the Life of Charlemagne; (2) the Annals; (3) Letters; (4) the History of the Translation of the Relics of Saint Peter and Saint Marcellinus; (5) a short poem on the martyrdom of these two saints. These writings are all, with the possible exception of the last mentioned, of high value and interest, but the Life of Charlemagne is by far the most celebrated and important.

*The Life of Charlemagne* is the most striking result of the Classical Renaissance so diligently fostered at the Court of Charlemagne by the Emperor himself. Its form is directly copied from the Lives of the Cæsars by Suetonius, and especially from the Life of Augustus in that series. Phrases are constantly borrowed, and in some cases whole sentences. This imitation of Suetonius has its good and its bad results. It necessarily removed Eginhard's work from the category of mediæval chronicles, with their garrulity, their reckless inventions, their humour, their desire to please, to amuse, and to glorify their hero, their order, or their monastery. Eginhard's Life is not without mistakes, some of which are pointed out in the notes; but it is an honest, direct record of facts, and for these characteristics we are, doubtless, largely indebted to Suetonius' influence. On the other hand, it was the example of his classical model that induced him to keep his work within such narrow limits. Compression was forced upon the Roman historian by the scope of his work, which embraced the lives of twelve emperors; and the life and reign of Augustus had already been fully handled by other historians. But Eginhard knew so much, and so little of equal value is written about his hero elsewhere, that his brevity is, for once, a quality hardly pardonable. Along with Asser's Alfred and Boccaccio's Dante it gives us an instance of a biographer who did not sufficiently magnify his office and his subject.

No other account of the Life and Reign of Charlemagne can find a place here. For some time English readers had reason to complain that there was no good and popular book dealing with the great Charles, for Gibbon's chapter is admittedly not among the best parts of his history. But of late this reproach has been taken away. The two concluding volumes of Dr Hodgkin's great work, entitled "Italy and her Invaders," deal with Charles and his relations with Italy (vols. vii. and viii. "The Frankish Invasions" and "The Frankish Empire"). Dr Hodgkin has also written a general sketch of the whole of Charles's career ("Charles the Great." Foreign Statesmen Series. Macmillan). More recently, Mr Carless Davis has written a "Life of Charlemagne" for the Heroes of the Nations Series.

It is in works such as these (to mention no others) and not in Eginhard that the real historical significance of Charlemagne's life-work appears. Eginhard stood too near to his hero, and had too little sense of historical perspective to realise the abiding greatness of what Charles accomplished. It is the lapse of 1100 years that has brought into increasing clearness the importance of those years which lie like a great watershed between the ancient and the mediæval world. Of him, as of most great rulers, it is true that he "builded better than he knew." His empire soon became a tradition, his intellectual revival was eclipsed by a further plunge into the "Dark Ages," but all that he did was not swept away. With him ends the ruin of the ancient world, and with him begins the building up of the mediæval and modern world.

He did not find in Eginhard an entirely worthy biographer; but the "mannikin's" work has received unstinted praise since the time when it was written. It was praised by a contemporary as recalling the elegance of the classical authors; its popularity during the Middle Ages is attested to by the existence of sixty manuscript copies; and a French editor has declared that we have to go on to the thirteenth century, and to Joinville's *Life of St Louis*, before we find a rival in importance to Eginhard's *Life of Charlemagne*.

*The Monk of Saint Gall*, it seems, must remain anonymous, for the attempt to identify him with Notker rests on no better foundation than the fact, or supposition, that both stammered. And this seems to be supposition rather than fact. We are, indeed, told on good authority that Notker stammered; but the view that the Monk of Saint Gall suffered from the same defect rests only on a sentence in Chapter XVII., where he contrasts the swift, direct glance of others with his own slow and rambling narrative— "Which I have been trying to unfold, though a stammerer, and toothless" ("quæ ego *balbus et edentalus* explicare tentavi"). It seems impossible to think that the words here must be taken in their literal sense. As the author is writing, not speaking, any defect of voice or teeth would in no way hinder his narrative: it is clear that the words are a piece of conventional and metaphorical depreciation.

We know, then, nothing of the author beyond what he tells us in his narrative; and he tells us little, except that he was a German, and a monk in the Monastery of Saint Gall when Grimald and Hartmuth were abbots; that he had never himself been in Western Frankland, but had seen the Emperor Charles III. during his three days' stay in the monastery, and at his bidding had written an account of Charles the Great, and his deeds and ways.

The monastery in which he wrote has a special interest for our islands; for Saint Gall was an Irishman of noble family, and an inmate of a monastery in County Down, which was at that time governed by Saint Comgel. He was one of the twelve monks who in 585 followed Saint Columban into Frankland. Switzerland was the great scene of his evangelical labours. The Catholic Church celebrates his death on the 16th October; and tells in the *Lectiones* of that day how he destroyed the idols of the heathen; how he turned many to Christianity, and, even to the monastic life; how he founded the Monastery of Saint Gall in his eighty-fifth year, and died at the age of ninety-five, having previously been warned in a dream of the death of his master, Saint Columban; and how at once miracles declared that a saint had passed away. His monastery for a century followed the rule of Saint Columban, and then, in common with most monastic institutions of Western Europe, adopted the rule of Saint Benedict.

It was in the famous abbey, that owed its foundation to this Irish missionary, that this account of the deeds of Charlemagne — the *Gesta Karoli* — was written. The author is at more pains than we should expect to tell us from what sources he derived

his information. The preface to the work is lost; but at the end of the first book he repeats some of the information that he had inserted in it. It was his intention, he informs us, to follow three authorities, and three authorities only; but of these three he seems to mention two only — Werinbert, a monk of Saint Gall, who died just as he was completing the first part; and Adalbert, the father of Werinbert, who followed Kerold, the brother of Queen Hildigard, in the wars that were fought, under Charlemagne's banner, against the Huns and the Saxons and Slavs. It is an amusing picture that he gives us, at the end of the first book, of Adalbert's anxiety to tell him of Charles's exploits and his own unwillingness to hear. It is to be presumed that the stories were often repeated, for not only facts but words seem to have remained in the mind of the unwilling listener. The third authority does not seem to be mentioned, unless he means to imply that Kerold himself (who was killed in an expedition against the Avars in 799) is one of his sources of information.

The whole of what the Monk of Saint Gall wrote is not left to us. The preface, as we have seen, is missing, and also, perhaps, a third book; for in the sixteenth chapter of the second book it seems that our author promises us an account of the habits of Charles, his *cotidiana conversatio*, when the story of his military exploits has been finished. But this may easily be a misunderstanding of his meaning; or, rather, it may be giving too great a precision to it. The good Monk is so little able to follow out any line of thought, or to maintain any arrangement, that it may well be that the "daily conversation" of Charles never received any separate treatment.

No attempt will be made here to estimate the historical value of the narrative, though it would be a matter of curious speculation to consider whether the critical historian can employ any method whereby a residuum of objective fact can be separated from the mass of legend, saga, invention, and reckless blundering of which the greater part of the book is made up. But, apart from any value which it may possess as a historical document, the Monk's story is of great interest for the light which it throws on the methods and outlook of a monk of the early Middle Ages. Charles has been dead not much more than half-a-century; the author has talked familiarly with those who knew him and fought under him; and yet the Charlemagne legend has already begun. Charles is already, if not inspired, at least supernaturally wise; if he does not work miracles, miracles are wrought in his presence, and on his behalf; if he does not yet lead the armies of Christendom to Jerusalem, he is already the specially recognised protector of the Holy City. There are passages too, as, for instance, the account of the visit of the envoys of the Greek Emperor, and Charles's "iron-march to Pavia," where we seem to detect the existence of a popular saga — a poem — underlying the prose narrative. With the help of M. Gaston Paris's "*Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*," we can trace the further development of the legend. By the eleventh century Charles was already a martyr for the faith, and the Crusaders believed themselves to be passing along his route to Jerusalem. "Turpin's" chronicle, in the eleventh century, shows the vast extension of the legend, which now loses all but the vaguest relation to the actual events of history and the real characteristics of Charles. In the twelfth century (1165) Charles was solemnly canonised; and thenceforward the story spread into all lands, and received its last stroke in the time of the Renaissance, at the hands of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto. These poets chiefly concern themselves, however, with the paladins of Charles; and the King himself forms the dimly-conceived centre, round whom the whole story revolves, deciding disputes, besieging the Turks in Paris, priest-like rather than royal in his main features, and by Ariosto treated with some irony and banter. These mediæval legends of Charlemagne may well be compared to those which deal with Virgil, whose

transformation into a magician is not less remarkable than Charles's development into a saint. If the Charlemagne legend ends with Ariosto, Dante may be said to have given the last shape to the many transformations of Virgil, when, more than two centuries before Ariosto's "Orlando," Virgil acted as guide to Dante through the "lost folk" of the Inferno, and the toilsome ascent of Purgatory, until he handed him over at last into the keeping of Beatrice at the gate of the earthly Paradise.

Story and myth naturally attach themselves only to the greatest figures; and the Monk of Saint Gall's narrative becomes then, even by virtue of its inventions and unrealities, a testimony to the effect produced on the mind of his century by the career of Charles.

Both the life of Eginhard and the Monk's narrative have been translated from Jaffe's "Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum"; which, both in its reading and arrangement, differs at times considerably from the text given in Pertz's "Monumenta Germaniæ Historica."

# THE PROLOGUE OF WALAFRID<sup>1</sup>



THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT of that most glorious Emperor Charles was written, as is well known, by Eginhard, who amongst all the palace officials of that time had the highest praise not only for learning but also for his generally high character; and, as he was himself present at nearly all the events that he describes, his account has the further advantage of the strictest accuracy.

He was born in eastern Frankland, in the district that is called Moingewi, and it was in the monastery of Fulda, in the school of Saint Boniface the Martyr, that his boyhood received its first training. Thence he was sent by Baugolf, the abbot of the monastery, to the palace of Charles, rather on account of his remarkable talents and intelligence, which even then gave bright promise of his wisdom that was to be so famous in later days, than because of any advantage of birth. Now, Charles was beyond all kings most eager in making search for wise men and in giving them such entertainment that they might pursue philosophy in all comfort. Whereby, with the help of God, he rendered his kingdom, which, when God committed it to him, was dark and almost wholly blind (if I may use such an expression), radiant with the blaze of fresh learning, hitherto unknown to our barbarism. But now once more men's interests are turning in an opposite direction, and the light of wisdom is less loved, and in most men is dying out.

And so this little man — for he was mean of stature — gained so much glory at the Court of the wisdom-loving Charles by reason of his knowledge and high character that among all the ministers of his royal Majesty there was scarce anyone at that time with whom that most powerful and wise King discussed his private affairs more willingly. And, indeed, he deserved such favour, for not only in the time of Charles, but even more remarkably in the reign of the Emperor Lewis,<sup>2</sup> when the commonwealth of the Franks was shaken with many and various troubles, and in some parts was falling into ruin, he so wonderfully and providentially balanced his conduct, and, with the protection of God, kept such a watch over himself, that his reputation for cleverness, which many had envied and many had mocked at, did not untimely desert him nor plunge him into irremediable dangers.

This I have said that all men may read his words without doubting, and may know that, while he has given great glory to his great leader, he has also provided the curious reader with the most unsullied truth.

I, Strabo, have inserted the headings and the decorations<sup>3</sup> as seemed well to my own judgement that he who seeks for any point may the more easily find what he desires.

*Here ends the Prologue*

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*End of Sample*