

### Student Handout #3 – Charlemagne through a Primary Source Document

<u>Einhard on the Life of Charlemagne</u>		
<p>Charlemagne [i.e. Charles the Great] is one of the most famous rulers of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. He controlled a large portion of western Europe and took the title of Roman Emperor, even though his territory came nowhere near the extent of the original Roman Empire. His friend and associate Einhard wrote extensively about his life and his rule. The excerpts below are from Einhard’s accounts of Charlemagne (or “Charles the Great” in translation).</p>		
<p>Why do you think Einhard included these details in this section? What do you think his purpose was? How did he want Charlemagne to be remembered?</p>	<p><i>Excerpts describing Charlemagne</i></p>	<p>What is most surprising or interesting to you in this section?</p>
	<p>Charles was large and strong, and of lofty stature, though not disproportionately tall (his height is well known to have been seven times the length of his foot); the upper part of his head was round, his eyes very large and animated, nose a little long, hair fair, and face laughing and merry. Thus his appearance was always stately and dignified, whether he was standing or sitting; although his neck was thick and somewhat short, and his belly rather prominent; but the symmetry of the rest of his body concealed these defects.</p>	
	<p>His gait was firm, his whole carriage manly, and his voice clear, but not so strong as his size led one to expect. His health was excellent, except during the four years preceding his death, when he was subject to frequent fevers; at the last he even limped a little with one foot. Even in those years he consulted rather his own inclinations than the advice of physicians, who were almost hateful to him, because they wanted him to give up roasts, to which he was accustomed, and to eat boiled meat instead.</p>	
	<p>In accordance with the national custom, he took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase, accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks. He enjoyed the exhalations from natural warm springs, and often practiced swimming, in which he was such an adept that none could surpass him; and hence it was that he built his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, and lived there constantly during his later years until his death. He used not only to invite his sons to his bath, but his nobles and friends, and now and then a troop of his retinue or body guard, so that a hundred or more persons sometimes bathed with him.</p>	

	<p>Charles had the gift of ready and fluent speech, and could express whatever he had to say with the utmost clearness. He was not satisfied with command of his native language merely, but gave attention to the study of foreign ones, and in particular was such a master of Latin that he could speak it as well as his native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could speak it. He was so eloquent, indeed, that he might have passed for a teacher of eloquence. He most zealously cultivated the liberal arts, held those who taught them in great esteem, and conferred great honors upon them. ... The King spent much time ... studying rhetoric, dialectics, and especially astronomy; he learned to reckon, and used to investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies most curiously, with an intelligent scrutiny. He also tried to write, and used to keep tablets and blanks in bed under his pillow, that at leisure hours he might accustom his hand to form the letters; however, as he did not begin his efforts in due season, but late in life, they met with ill success.</p>	
--	--	--

<p><b>Reflection:</b>          What do we learn about life in Carolingian Europe from this text? What inferences can you make about leadership, education, and recreation?</p>	
--	--

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/einhard1.asp>

**Visualize!!**

What did you visualize (see in your mind) when you read this text? Sketch an image from the text: