

**Chapter 8 Primary Source Activity**

The empire of Charlemagne was a turning point in European history (textbook pages 188–191). A monk named Einhard, who lived at Charlemagne’s court, wrote a biography that gives many everyday details about this leader. Einhard admired the king and, in the introduction to the book, calls him “my lord and foster father.” He began his book a few years after Charlemagne’s death, and it soon was very popular. Many copies—copied by hand— were circulated. ♦ *As you read, think about the impact one person can have on history. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**A Personal Portrait of Charlemagne**

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. His gait was firm, his whole carriage manly, and his voice clear, but not so strong as his size led one to expect. . . .

In accordance with the national custom, he took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase [hunting], accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks. He enjoyed the exhalations [warm air] 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 [Aachen, site of natural hot



springs], and lived there constantly during his latter years until his death. . . . He used to wear the national, that is to say, the Frank, dress—next to his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches, and above these a tunic fringed with silk; while hose fastened by bands covered his lower limbs, and shoes his feet, and he protected his shoulders and chest in winter by a close-fitting coat of otter or marten skins. Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt about him, usually one with a gold or silver hilt and belt; he sometimes carried a jeweled sword. . . . On great feastsdays. . . he appeared crowned with a diadem of gold and gems, but on other days his dress varied little from the common dress of the people.

. . . He very rarely gave entertainments, only on great feastsdays, and then to large numbers of people. His meals ordinarily consisted of four courses, not counting the roast. . . . While at table, he listened to reading or music.

Source: Einhard’s *The Life of Charlemagne*, trans. Samuel Epes Turner (University of Michigan Press, 1960).

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**Questions to Think About**

1. According to Einhard, what was Charlemagne like in person? What things did he enjoy?
2. What impression does this selection give of the Frankish people in general?
3. **Recognizing Bias** From this excerpt, what do you think was Einhard’s personal opinion of Charlemagne? Do you think his view was realistic?
4. **Activity** Einhard wrote his biography of Charlemagne from his personal experience at the court. If you were writing about Charlemagne, what other information would you like to know? Make a list of questions to get ready for a “celebrity interview” with Charlemagne.