**Einhard**

When one thinks of Carolingian reformation, and the people related to it directly the first person that comes to mind is the king Charles the Great, and along with him one involuntarily thinks of his faithful ‘servant’ Einhard because he is the one that introduces him to us. But on top of being a simple biographer Einhard has done far more greater things in life, and today one has the opportunity to study what kind of man Einhard was, what he’d done during his life, and why is he important through his works and documents related to him that survived until our time. 9th century documents presented in *Charlemagne’s Courtier* portray Einhard as a well educated person, a talented poet, writer, and artist in different kinds of arts, religious, humble and faithful man, as well as the most prudent and influential courtiers of his time.

One of the most important and prominent figures of Early Medieval Europe was the persona of Charles the Great. Charlemagne lived between 742 and 814. During the forty-seven years of his kingship, the great warrior king was able, for a short while, to create kingdom of similar in size to that of the Western Roman Empire. The greatness of his kingship, however, was not in the successful war campaigns or his conquest of several kingdoms, but in the vision that he had for his peoples and as well as the other peoples of Europe. Often called ‘an apostle with iron tongue’ Charlemagne had seen himself as King David was for the Jewish nation. His mission and vision were perfectly described in one of his letters to the Pope: “Our task is, with the aid of Divine Piety, to defend the holy church of Christ with arms against the attack of Pagans and devastation by infidels from without, and to fortify it within the knowledge of the catholic faith. Your task most Holy Father, is to lift us your hands to God, like Moses, so as to aid our troops, so that through your intercession, the Christian people may with God as its leader and giver always and everywhere be victorious over the enemies of his hole name, and so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be famous throughout the world”. King Charle’s mission, the Carolingian Reformation, was to Christianize and educate his kingdom by means of military force, the restoration of old church documents, and the creation of educational institutions.[[1]](#endnote-1)

[[2]](#endnote-2)‘One of the instruments of this reformation was the palace school because of the many great European scholars it housed. Their job was to restore and preserve the early church documents, to guide and support the spread of Christianity. One of the noticeable scholars of the court was Einhard’. ‘He was born around 770. Einhard studied the Bible and the classics at the monastery of Fulda. When he was in his twenties he was recommended by his chief abbot Baugulf to serve in Charlemagne’s court. At court Einhard served as a courtier to Charles the Great and his son Louis the Pious. Around the year of 815 Einhard and his wife Emma were granted land at Michelstadt and Mulinheim. As a result of this he became not only a courtier at kings’ courts, but he also was a lay abbot. Some of Einhard’s contemporaries suggest that he had become rich along with other poets of Charlemagne’s court. Therefore it is a reasonable assumption to say that Einhard was a wealthy man. He was a very prominent figure at the court, and it is thanks to this faithful courtier that we have some of the best medieval poetry and writing.’[[3]](#endnote-3)

There is no doubt that Einhard was very well educated. ‘Walahfrid Strabo has these things to say on Einhard’s education and intelligence: “From there Baugulf … sent him to the palace of Charles ….because of the specialness of his capacity for learning and his intelligence. For even in that monastery he had shown great signs of the wisdom that later on shone forth so clearly from him.”[[4]](#endnote-4) While at Fulda, it is believed that he studied the Bible and classics.[[5]](#endnote-5) He new not only Latin, but possibly Greek, the proof of that can be found on one of the letters of Lupus to Einhard in May 836, where Lupus asks for explanation of some Greek words from the book of Boethius.[[6]](#endnote-6)

To understand what Einhard’s interests were one would have to look at the scholarly work he did. Information supplied to us by historians, other royal courtiers, and surviving works of Einhard reveal that he was a poet, a writer, and an artist. Maurus who composed “The Epitaph of Einhard” said: “And he was skillful in the art of many things”. Modoin in his eclogues on poets of his age mentions Nard [Einhard’s nickname] in the poem. This leaves us with no doubt that Einhard was a poet.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In documents provided on Einhard one can see that he was into the visual arts.[[8]](#endnote-8) Paul Dutton raises the question however, of whether Bezaleel(another name for Einhard) was the mere executor of the works accredited to him. It is obvious in the documents provided that in many cases Einhard, just ordered the process. “Einhard moved in a world of painters, reliquary-makers, tile-makers, royal scribes, organ builders, and palace workmen, and he knew how to use them to advantage.” But it is possible that our view on artists is very different from the view of that time. Nevertheless he used his talent, and was accredited for it. Paul Dutton provides a detailed drawing of the arc constructed around the time of Charlemagne that he says “can be connected to Einhard with confidence”. Einhard according to Dutton used his talent of visual arts in the decoration of buildings and churches that were built at the time of Charles the Great.[[9]](#endnote-9)

It is evident that Einhard was an expert in the aforementioned types of arts, but it is the authorship of *Life of Charlemagne*, and *The Translation and Miracles of Marcellinus and Peter* that brought a great deal of popularity for him. In fact *Life of Charlemagne* is thought to be one of the masterpieces of ninth century Europe.[[10]](#endnote-10) This book reveals some of the character traits as well as personality of Einhard. Interestingly enough, *Life of Charlemagne* does not contain a lot of the facts that we know about him. This lack of information has raised many questions around this book. Another interesting issue about this biography is Einhards criticism of Charles on small matters, but he fails to criticize him on big matters like slaying of thousands of people. Overall the portrait of Charles in *Life of Charlemagne* is very positive. It hardly contains any of the bad traits of Charlemagne. This once again proves to us that Einhard was a very prudent courtier. He didn’t want say anything that may threaten him, and his reputation, for he knew that others in court will read the biography.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Einhard displayed his great intellect, and writing talent in his book *The Translation and Miracles of Marcellinus and Peter.* The content of the book contains records about translation of remains of St. Peter and St. Marcellinus, and the events related to this “enterprise”.[[12]](#endnote-12) This book is written very carefully in my opinion. Portrait of Einhard is displayed in contrast to the one of Hilduin who stole the relics of the holy martyrs. ”. In this book a reader could see Einhard being unusually critical, of Hilduin, for a careful and prudent courtier.[[13]](#endnote-13) But when one starts to analyze it in depth it is easy to realize that Einhard had a reason to be, after all Einhard is portrayed a religious man, he spent a fortune on bringing these relics to Fracia. He portrayed Hilduin in highly adverse light. A part of the reason why Einhard wrote this book, as Paul Dutton Suggests, was to address the rumors that relics did not poses real power of saints due to separation.[[14]](#endnote-14) That may explain why there are so many stories of miracles in the book. Thus summing up aforementioned, Einhard using his prudence and the power of the word, which definitely possessed, strengthened his own reputation, as a preserver of the relics, while weakened that of Hilduin, and he also was able to regain people’s trust in martyrs.

Looking at Einhard’s career one can see that he assumed a lot of different roles. Einhard was a high advisor of both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. He was also a lay abbot of properties in Michelstadt, and Seligenstadt. Einhard’s contemporaries describe him to be always busy, and preoccupied with the court’s business, running around with books. “The letters show us Einhard acting as an agent of the emperor, as a local patron, as a lay abbot, as the holder of properties, as an influential referee, as a marriage broker, and as an intellectual friend.”[[15]](#endnote-15) In the court of Charlemagne we see Einhard being involved in different high state affairs. One of those was Charlmange’s partition of the kingdom among his sons. *Royal Frankish Annals* states: “All these things were set down in writing and conveyed by Einhard to Pope Leo III, so that he might assent to them with his own signature”[[16]](#endnote-16) Another time Eihanrd took part in state business with Charles was in 813 at the diet of Aachan when he spoke in favor of elevating of Louis the Pious to co-emperor status. As Ermold the Black recorded it Einhard characterized Louis the Pious as a very able person for king’s throng: “….You have a son with an extremely fine character, who, because of his merits, is able to hold your kingdoms.”[[17]](#endnote-17) These are the two times when Einhard’s officially involved in making of Frankish history, although it wasn’t a big part he played. But if we look at the writing of fellow courtiers it is evident that he and the king were very close.[[18]](#endnote-18) It may be possible that this close friendship that they both shared might have shaped Charlemagne’s decisions. It is only an idea, which is not evident and not necessarily true, but nevertheless should be considered when one’s analyzing position of Einhard in the court of Charles the Great. Thus it may well be a fair assumption to say that Einhard did have a bit of influence and power in that court when compared to other courtiers.

During the reign of Louis the Pious Einhard and his wife Emma received properties from the emperor in the year of 815, as a reward for his services to both emperors.[[19]](#endnote-19) As a lay abbot he was often preoccupied with the maters like building churches and legal issues. One could see him at court only at certain times of the year to perform duties he usually did with the emperor Charles the Great. On top of these duties, it is also believed that Einhard’s writings were done outside of court, most likely when he was at his residences. Perhaps it was the health problems that he had, that made him spent certain times of the year in his residences, but never the less he still participated in Louis the Pious government.[[20]](#endnote-20) Another responsibility of Einhard at Louis the Pious court was to tutor and guard Louis’ son Lothar, though in one of the letters it is clear that the emperor to be wasn’t too happy of this, and thus this tutorship did not prevent the rebuke of Charles’ grandchildren against their father.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Analyzing Einhard’s personality is no easy task. For in his correspondence there are only a few that actually talk about his personal life. Einhard did not trust the communication through letters, one can especially see his position on reporting important information via letters in his message to a certain R. in which Einhard says that letter will reveal all of the information in it if it got into wrong hands, but a loyal messenger will not, even if he’s tortured.[[22]](#endnote-22) Looking at this very trait of Einhard one can conclude that he was a very careful man. But the main characteristic of Einhard is that he was very prudent. The Astronomer calls him “the most prudent man of his time”.[[23]](#endnote-23) The proof of this extraordinary prudence maybe found in the fact that Einhard new how to deal with people. He knew just when to be bold with people, and criticize them, in a way that will profit him and leave him with spotless reputation. Also he knew when to be patient, and not offend people. For example in the documents collected we see just a few cases when he actually does criticize someone, but he has the grounds to do so.

Faithfulness and loyalty was the quality of Einhard that made and still makes people to respect him. When one looks at Einhard’s life, as portrayed by the documents we have, one can’t find even one that suggests the opposite. In fact Einhard first of all demonstrated faithfulness to the kings he served. To show his great loyalty, faithfulness and appreciation to his king, Einhard wrote a beautiful biography called *The Life of Charlemagne.* Einhard also speaks with love, and loyalty to Louis, in one of his letters to Louis’ sons. He says: “I have always equally loved you and my most pious lord, your father, and have always equally wished for the well-being of both of you.” Another point that greatly suggests that Eihard was a faithful man was his strong belief in Christianity and upholding of commandments. Not only did he follow the commandments he also built churches and brought the holy martyrs to Francia.[[24]](#endnote-24)

As was mentioned before Einhard was faithful and loyal to his kings. He spoke with love of both of them. Looking at the documents presented to us, one can argue that Einhard was closer with Charlemagne, it is his biography that he write, and it is his deeds that he praises the most. And Ermold the Black said: “….Einhard, who was much loved by Charles….”[[25]](#endnote-25) We cannot find such kind and warm word to describe relationship of Louis the Pious and Einhard in any of the reflection on Einhard. But that doesn’t mean that they had a bad relationship. They just weren’t as close as with Charles. We can find EInhard praising Louis of his ability to rule the kingdom, and we can also find Einhard claiming to love Louis. And on the part of Louis, he granted lots of land to Einhard, and praised him for his valuable service. Thus there’s no doubt that Einhard had a good and working relationship with both emperors.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Looking at the life of Einhard one gets a sense that the topic of religion in his life became more and more important as he progressed in age. The fact that two of his later works, *Translation and Miracles* and his letter “On the Adoration of the Cross” to Lupus are both on religious topic seem to support that theory. Although it was closer towards the later years of his life that he had much to say about religion, it is certain that he perceived the world as a ‘good Christian’ for the all of his life. But it seems like towards the end of his life he started to spend more time on meditating upon the wonders he saw, and theological questions he might have had. We can find proof of his devotion to religion in his big investment of building churches and transport of relics of saints-which was a costly enterprise. He also paid close attention to the signs and prophecies he received, and whenever was necessary he fasted at times for days. Summing up there’s no doubt that Einhard was a very spiritual man, he was very committed to his faith, and it was a big part of his life.

Summarizing the aforementioned argument indeed 9th Century documents presented in *Charlemagne’s Courtier* portray Einhard as a well educated person, a talented poet, writer, and artist in different kinds of arts, religious, humble and faithful man, as well as the most prudent and influential courtiers of his time. We discussed Einhards personality, his responsibilities at different courts, and what they offered to him, his beliefs, and interests, and his relationship to the two kings he served. Einhard was a person with a wide variety of interests, strong religious beliefs, and faithful character. He is important to the Medieval Europe, because he was one of the faithful courtiers that carried out Carolingian reformation.

**Endnotes:**

1. Dr. Joyce Lorimer, “The Achievements of Charlemagne”, HI 101, Wilfrid Laurier University, October 27, 2004 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dr. Joyce Lorimer, “Carolingian Renaissance”, HI 101, Wilfrid Laurier University, November 1, 2004 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”*, (Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview Press, 2003), pg. xi [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  Pg. 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.xi [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 182 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.63-68 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Paul Edward Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Courtie, r*pg. xiii [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. xx [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.15-62 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 69-130 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  83-89 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.xxiv [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Paul Edward Dutton, Charlemagne’s Courtier, pg. xxxii [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.2 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.6 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 7-8 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 43-45 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  xv-xviii [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 145-147 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg.158 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 7 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 177-175 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 6 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Paul Dutton, *“Charlemagne’s Courtier”,*  pg. 145 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)