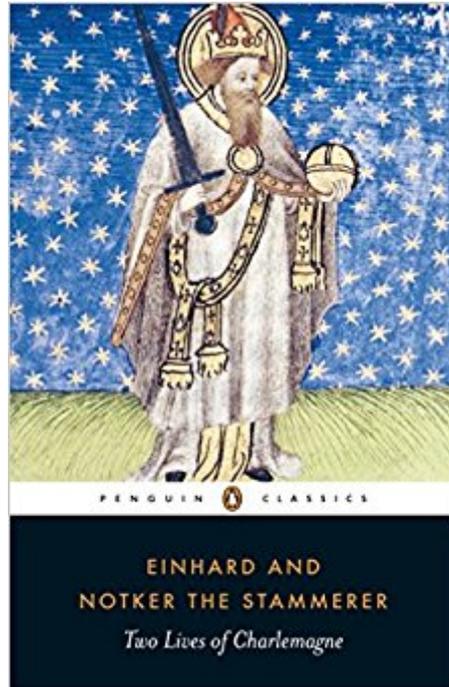# Two Lives Of Charlemagne (Penguin Classics)

Synopsis

Two revealingly different accounts of the life of the most important figure of the Roman EmpireCharlemage ?known as the father of Europe?was one of the most powerful and dynamic of all medieval rulers. The biographies brought together here provide a rich and varied portrait of the king from two perspectives: that of Einhard, a close friend and adviser, and of Notker, a monastic scholar and musician writing fifty years after Charlemagne?s death.

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Customer Reviews

Looking at the three 'one-star' reviews this book has received, I would point out they are all written in the same style, are close in date and look suspiciously like they were all written by the same person.Yes, this is a wonderful primary source.With Einhard's story you are actually reading the work of a person who knew Charlemagne (who lived approx. 742-814AD).Prior to Charlemagne there basically was no Germanic literature. Charlemagne encouraged book learning and the writing of what had before then been either purely oral or simply not remembered. We are looking at the birth of Germanic Literature and also the birth of Germanic recorded history. Before this, (apart from a few glosses in the 7th Century) there is only the archaeological record and the writings of neighbouring literate cultures like the Romans about their Germanic neighbours to turn to for illumination.These glimpses into the minds of people whose culture and outlook on the world are both so different to our own but also has so profoundly impacted the development of our modern day life are fascinating.Charlemagne after all followed in the footsteps of the Roman Caesars in his

attempt to create a great and literate civilisation and by doing so deeply influenced the Anglo-Saxons in England. Some of the earliest Saxon writings were commissioned by Charlemagne and his son, Louis the Pious. Alfred the Great was deeply influenced by his example. It was Alfred the Greats encouragement of Anglo-Saxon literature that established sound foundations for later developments in English literature.I preferred Einhard as I think he succeeded in showing Charlemagne the man to a greater degree than Notker writing a hundred years later.

The pairing of these vastly different accounts of the life and deeds of Charlemagne presents the reader with information about change of perception of the great emperor overtime. Charlemagne, in the many centuries after his death in 814, changes from a historical person into a legendary King Arthur-esque figure, a model chivalric knight and one of the Nine Worthies (a Medieval list of the most chivalric knights of all time), his paladins analogous to Arthur's Knights, and the subject of the first chansons de geste.The first source, commissioned the request of Louis the Pious one of Charlemagne's successors, was written by Einhard, a monk, historian, and a dedicated servant of Charlemagne. His Life of Charlemagne, written between 817-830 is clearly in the vein of the famous Roman historian Suetonius' The Twelve Caesars (a text that existed at the monastery where the author worked). The work is brief, to the point, and for the most part does not include tangential information, and is biased. The bias is completely understandable and the introduction to the text points out where and why. His chronicle was written to make Louis the Pious' famous father look good. For example, one of the morally stained aspects of the Charlemagne's reign were the actions of his unmoral daughters, which Einhard carefully does not tell us about. Einhard, in short, sometimes deliberately obscures the truth. However, what is so appealing about Einhard's text is the fact that his most of his information was based off of 26 years as a servant of Charlemagne and his court, and information that he includes of actions before Charlemagne's reign most likely was gathered from sources and documents which he had access to.

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