This first paper from a 100 level class received a 4.0.

Why is this an “A” paper?

- It has a strong thesis. The writer clearly articulates the argument they will make in the paper in their thesis statement.
- The argument is complex, clear, and carefully arranged.
- The writer introduces their sources.
- The writer is critical of their sources, aware of their biases, and careful to distinguish between “facts” and authorial assertions (what the author says happened).
- The writer has provided evidence from the primary sources to support all of their assertions, and provided analysis for each piece of evidence presented.
- The writer has paraphrased most of their material (being careful to cite sources even when they are paraphrasing) and used direct quotes sparingly. When they are used, the direct quotes are brief and integrated into sentences.
- Each paragraph has a specific purpose/topic and supports the larger argument of the paper.
- The conclusion is strong and compelling, and reiterates the writer’s argument.
- The paper has been carefully proofread and spell-checked. The grammar, spelling, punctuation, and footnotes are impeccable.

Paper topic: Gregory of Tours and Einhard both reveal bias in their accounts of Clovis and Charlemagne. Compare their portrayals of Clovis and Charlemagne and consider how their biases affect their credibility. Which source do you find more credible and why?
When reading a historical document, it is important to be aware of the author’s personal bias in order to evaluate the credibility of the source. Such is the case with Gregory of Tours, a bishop who wrote *History of Franks*, an important source for early Frankish history.¹ Of particular note in Gregory’s *History of Franks* is his account of Clovis, king of the Franks, who was the first Frankish king to convert from paganism to Catholicism.² Another important source for Frankish history is Einhard’s *The Life of Charlemagne*. Einhard was raised in Charlemagne’s palace school and developed deep personal ties to him, going on to be his trusted advisor.³ While Gregory of Tours and Einhard both tell biased accounts of Clovis and Charlemagne, Gregory of Tours’ account of Clovis in *History of Franks* is more credible because Einhard was personally tied to Charlemagne, his foster-father, and makes sure throughout *The Life of Charlemagne* to portray him as positively as possible, revealing his complete lack of neutrality.

Einhard’s personal bias in favor of Charlemagne in *The Life of Charlemagne* lowers his credibility in that he likely intentionally spins various scenarios throughout the biography in a manner that reflects most positively on Charlemagne; therefore, his portrayal of Charlemagne cannot be completely trusted, as human beings are innately complex and flawed. Einhard begins his preface by stating that Charlemagne was his lord and foster-father, and goes on to describe how Charlemagne “strongly endeared [Einhard] to himself,” and “made him greatly his debtor as

² Urbanski, Lecture, 1/14/2022
Einhard clearly demonstrates his bias in explaining his personal connection to Charlemagne and feelings of endearment and gratitude to him. Furthermore, the fact that Einhard mentions how he feels indebted to Charlemagne even in death implies that he is writing this biography of Charlemagne not just as a factual account of his life, but as a way of repaying Charlemagne. In other words, he is writing with Charlemagne and his personal relationship with him in mind, rather than attempting to tell a neutral and factual account of Charlemagne’s life. Einhard’s bias can be further seen through the manner in which he presents situations in Charlemagne’s life, as well as Charlemagne himself and his role in said situations. For example, when Einhard is describing the Saxon War he mentions Charlemagne “conquering” and “subduing” Saxons who had resisted. In this context, “conquering” and “subduing” essentially mean killing anyone who resisted. However, Einhard specifically chooses less direct and violent wording in order to maintain a positive image of Charlemagne. He then goes on to describe how Charlemagne takes ten thousand Saxons and settles them “with their wives and children” in various areas of land. In doing this, Einhard removes the focus from Charlemagne killing, and places it on Charlemagne succeeding in a military pursuit and then doing something generous. Einhard is clearly manipulating the wording and organization of the stories he tells in order to make Charlemagne look good, as no human being can always act completely virtuously.

Gregory of Tours’ bias in his account of Clovis is less about Clovis himself and more about how he portrays Christianity as a fact and as a central acting force in the events he describes, which lowers his credibility in that he may be ignoring other factors at play in favor of a Christian explanation of events. For example, when he is describing how, after losing her first son, Clotild bears a second son who falls ill, Gregory states that Clotild prays to God and “at His

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4 Einhard, p. 3, p. 4  
5 Einhard p. 8  
6 Einhard, p. 8
command” the baby recovers. The baby likely recovered due to a variety of reasons, however Gregory portrays the baby’s recovery as being directly caused by God’s will. The fact that Gregory omits relevant factors and details in favor of his Christian agenda lowers his credibility. Gregory’s bias can be further seen in how he portrays Clovis’ conversion to Catholicism. Throughout Queen Clotild’s attempts to convince Clovis to convert, Gregory depicts her as being in the right, and Clovis as being too stubborn to believe her. For example, Gregory states that Clotild continued to pray that Clovis would “recognize the true God and give up his idol-worship.” Referring to the Christian God as the “true God,” as well as referring to pagan religious practice as “idol-worship” clearly illustrates the fact that Gregory is writing from his own Catholic perspective and embedding his religious beliefs into his account of Clovis. Furthermore, when Clovis decides to pray to Christ during a battle against the Alamanni, asking him to help the Franks emerge victorious, Gregory describes Clovis raising his eyes to the sky, feeling “compunction in his heart,” and being “moved to tears.” Gregory states that after Clovis prays to Christ the Alamanni surrender. The dramatic and emotionally charged way in which Gregory depicts Clovis, in addition to how he depicts Christ as being the sole reason the Franks win the battle, are examples of how Gregory’s Catholic bias affects how he writes his account of historical events. At times like these, his account of Clovis feels like an attempt to exhibit the miraculous power of Catholicism rather than a purely historical account of Clovis’ life.

Despite his Catholic bias, Gregory of Tours’ account of Clovis is more credible than Einhard’s account of Charlemagne because he takes a more neutral stance in regard to Clovis than Einhard, who explicitly praises Charlemagne and only portrays him positively. Gregory is

7 Gregory of Tours, p. 146
8 Gregory of Tours, p. 146
9 Gregory of Tours, p. 146
10 Gregory of Tours, p. 146
willing to show Clovis’ flaws, for example his stubbornness in refusing to convert to Catholicism, and how quick he is to blame Clotild for the death of their first son, since she had him baptized. In contrast, Einhard primarily focuses on Charlemagne’s successes, feats, and admirable qualities, and if he says anything that might reflect poorly on Charlemagne or call into question all of the admirable traits he has described Charlemagne as having, Einhard makes sure to defend him. For example, Einhard describes several conspiracies made against Charlemagne, including one involving one of his sons; however, he addresses the cause of these conspiracies as being the “cruelty” of Charlemagne’s wife Queen Fastrada, which he treated with “apparent acquiescence,” deviating from “the usual kindness and gentleness of his disposition.” Einhard describes Charlemagne as having a very passive role in the formation of these conspiracies – conspiracies against his rule – and blames it primarily on Queen Fastrada. Rather than stating outright that Charlemagne allowed Queen Fastrada’s cruelty, Einhard specifically describes it as “apparent acquiescence” on Charlemagne’s part and highlights that he was usually gentle and kind so that he does not appear to be at fault or responsible. Einhard does not even try to appear neutral in his account of Charlemagne and praises him outrightly throughout the text. For example, before going on to describe Charlemagne’s private and family life, Einhard first expresses his “admiration for [Charlemagne’s] great qualities.” While Gregory exhibits bias in how he portrays the role of religion in the events of Clovis’ life, his general tone is more neutral and is not so actively and continuously embellished as Einhard’s.

Einhard’s account of Charlemagne in *The Life of Charlemagne* may be reliable due to the fact that Einhard was close to Charlemagne and witnessed much of what he discusses in the biography himself; however, it is this closeness to Charlemagne that causes Einhard to lose

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11 Gregory of Tours, p. 146
12 Einhard, p. 16
13 Einhard, p. 14
credibility. Einhard was too closely tied to Charlemagne to be able to take a neutral stance in portraying him. He cannot, and does not, separate his own personal feelings from the historical events he describes, and therefore his view of Charlemagne may be wildly different from the view of someone less personally tied to him. Gregory of Tours, on the other hand, exhibits clear bias in his account of Clovis in *History of Franks* in terms of how he portrays religion and its role. However, he was not personally linked to Clovis in the way that Einhard was to Charlemagne, so his depiction of Clovis is less emotionally charged and therefore more credible.