



Frederick the Great: King of Prussia

Tim Blanning

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The definitive biography of the legendary autocrat whose enlightened rule transformed the map of Europe and changed the course of history

Few figures loom as large in European history as Frederick the Great. When he inherited the Prussian crown in 1740, he ruled over a kingdom of scattered territories, a minor Germanic backwater. By the end of his reign, the much larger and consolidated Prussia ranked among the continent's great powers. In this magisterial biography, award-winning historian Tim Blanning gives us an intimate, in-depth portrait of a king who dominated the political, military, and cultural life of Europe half a century before Napoleon.

A brilliant, ambitious, sometimes ruthless monarch, Frederick was a man of immense contradictions. This consummate conqueror was also an ardent patron of the arts who attracted painters, architects, musicians, playwrights, and intellectuals to his court. Like his fellow autocrat Catherine the Great of Russia, Frederick was captivated by the ideals of the Enlightenment—for many years he kept up lively correspondence with Voltaire and other leading thinkers of the age. Yet, like Catherine, Frederick drew the line when it came to implementing Enlightenment principles that might curtail his royal authority.

Frederick's terrifying father instilled in him a stern military discipline that would make the future king one of the most fearsome battlefield commanders of his day, while deriding as effeminate his son's passion for modern ideas and fine art. Frederick, driven to surpass his father's legacy, challenged the dominant German-speaking powers, including Saxony, Bavaria, and the Habsburg Monarchy. It was an audacious foreign policy gambit, one at which Frederick, against the expectations of his rivals, succeeded.

In examining Frederick's private life, Blanning also carefully considers the long-debated question of Frederick's sexuality, finding evidence that Frederick lavished gifts on his male friends and maintained homosexual relationships throughout his life, while limiting contact with his estranged, unloved queen to visits that were few and far between.

The story of one man's life and the complete political and cultural transformation of a nation, Tim Blanning's sweeping biography takes readers inside the mind of the monarch, giving us a fresh understanding of Frederick the Great's remarkable reign.

Praise for *Frederick the Great*

"Writing Frederick's biography . . . requires a diverse set of skills: expertise in eighteenth-century diplomatic and military history, including the intricacies of the Holy Roman Empire; a familiarity with the music, architecture and intellectual traditions of Northern Europe; and, not least, a profound sense of human psychology, the better to grasp the makeup of this complex and tormented man. Fortunately, Tim Blanning . . . has all of these skills in abundance."—*The Wall Street Journal*

"At once scholarly and highly readable . . . [Blanning] has given us a superb portrait of an enlightened despot, equally at home on the battlefield and in the opera house, both utterly ruthless and culturally refined."—*Commentary*

“Blanning, in clear thinking and prose, investigates all aspects of Frederick’s personality and reign. . . . The last word on this significant king, for years to come.”—*Booklist* (starred review)

“Masterly . . . Blanning brilliantly brings to life one of the most complex characters of modern European history.”—*The Telegraph* (five stars)

“A supremely nuanced account . . . This biography finds [Blanning] at the height of his powers.”—*Literary Review*

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