



# Frederick the Great: King of Prussia

*Tim Blanning*

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**Frederick the Great: King of Prussia** Tim Blanning

**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***

"Masterly . . . Blanning brilliantly brings to life one of the most complex characters of modern European history, building up a rich picture of his very active mental life and the strange social setting that he constructed around himself."—*The Telegraph* (five stars)

"Superlative . . . a supremely nuanced account, abounding in novel assessments and insights . . . This biography finds [Blanning] at the height of his powers and offers major reassessments of almost every aspect of Frederick's career."—*Literary Review*

"Frederick has found the ideal biographer. . . . Blanning evokes Old Fritz in all his cold-blooded brilliance, ranging from the king's operatic tastes to his gastronomic and erotic predilections."—*The Sunday Times*

“Sure to be the standard English-language account for many years. It instructs; it entertains; and it surprises. Blanning shows that this hereditary monarch, born in Berlin in 1712, could be more radical than most leaders today.”—*The Spectator*

“[Blanning] has a reach that exceeds that of most of his peers. . . . This book is a rich, dense but accessible work of high scholarship.”—*The Times*

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