



Charlemagne

Johannes Fried

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When Charlemagne died in 814 CE, he left behind a dominion and a legacy unlike anything seen in Western Europe since the fall of Rome. Distinguished historian and author of *The Middle Ages* Johannes Fried presents a new biographical study of the legendary Frankish king and emperor, illuminating the life and reign of a ruler who shaped Europe's destiny in ways few figures, before or since, have equaled.

Living in an age of faith, Charlemagne was above all a Christian king, Fried says. He made his court in Aix-la-Chapelle the center of a religious and intellectual renaissance, enlisting the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin of York to be his personal tutor, and insisting that monks be literate and versed in rhetoric and logic. He erected a magnificent cathedral in his capital, decorating it lavishly while also dutifully attending Mass every morning and evening. And to an extent greater than any ruler before him, Charlemagne enhanced the papacy's influence, becoming the first king to enact the legal principle that the pope was beyond the reach of temporal justice—a decision with fateful consequences for European politics for centuries afterward.

Though devout, Charlemagne was not saintly. He was a warrior-king, intimately familiar with violence and bloodshed. And he enjoyed worldly pleasures, including physical love. Though there are aspects of his personality we can never know with certainty, Fried paints a compelling portrait of a ruler, a time, and a kingdom that deepens our understanding of the man often called “the father of Europe.”

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