# Frederick II ("the Great") (1781)

## Abstract

Frederick II ("the Great") (1712-86) acceded to the Prussian throne in 1740 and immediately plunged into war with Austria over the conquest of Silesia. The war lasted until 1763, with eleven years of intermittent peace. Despite the pressures of various wars, Frederick initiated fundamental administrative and judicial reforms during his forty-six-year reign (1740-86), as well as ambitious cultural projects. He was considered a major representative of European "enlightened absolutism." A gifted intellectual and writer, he sustained long correspondences with the French philosophers and leading thinkers of the time, notably the mathematician Pierre-Louis Moureau de Maupertuis and the philosopher Voltaire, both of whom became part of his circle. Frederick's judicial reforms – which included, for example, opening royal appeals courts to villagers embroiled in conflict with their noble lordships – were of great significance, as was his abolition of judicial torture. He successfully extended his father's state-funded economic projects, particularly in luxury goods and armaments, and he oversaw the imposition of high standards of professional preparation in the judiciary and civil bureaucracy. Like his father, he was often high-handed and, in his advanced years, his attitude toward "unenlightened" human nature frequently turned into outright misanthropy and obstinacy. This portrait by Anton Graff, a Swiss painter whose sitters included Friedrich Schiller and Heinrich von Kleist, shows Frederick five years before his death. It captures something of the price he paid for a lifetime of royal responsibilities and aggressive military action.

## Source



Source: Anton Graff, Frederick II, oil on canvas, 1781.
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