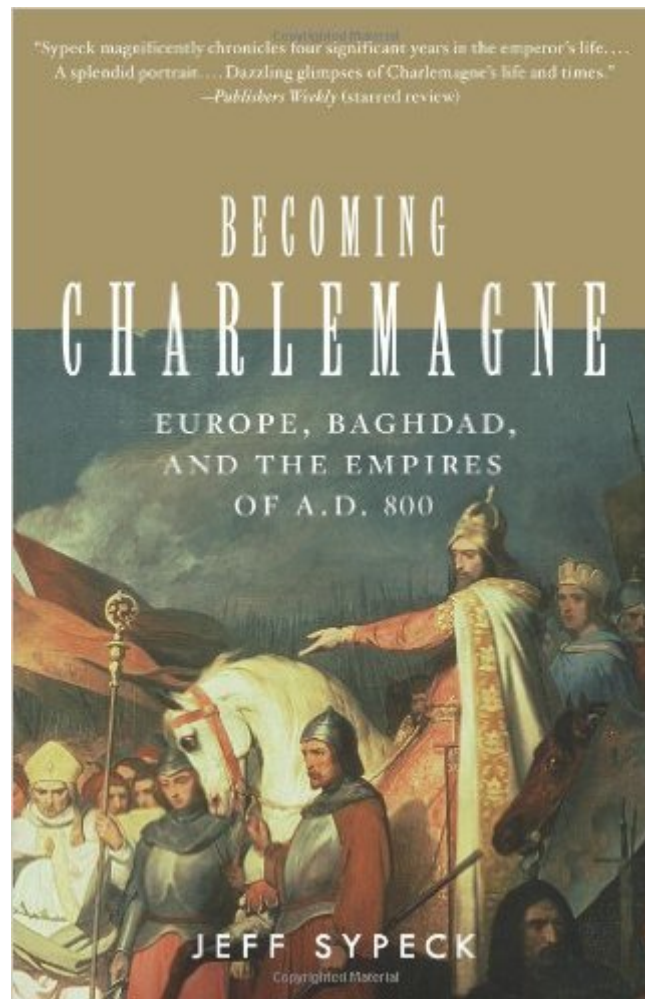


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# Becoming Charlemagne: Europe, Baghdad, And The Empires Of A.D. 800



## Synopsis

On Christmas morning in the year 800, Pope Leo III placed the crown of imperial Rome on the brow of a Germanic king named Karl. With one gesture, the man later hailed as Charlemagne claimed his empire and forever shaped the destiny of Europe. *Becoming Charlemagne* tells the story of the international power struggle that led to this world-changing event. Illuminating an era that has long been overshadowed by legend, this far-ranging book shows how the Frankish king and his wise counselors built an empire not only through warfare but also by careful diplomacy. With consummate political skill, Charlemagne partnered with a scandal-ridden pope, fended off a ruthless Byzantine empress, nurtured Jewish communities in his empire, and fostered ties with a famous Islamic caliph. For 1,200 years, the deeds of Charlemagne captured the imagination of his descendants, inspiring kings and crusaders, the conquests of Napoleon and Hitler, and the optimistic architects of the European Union. In this engaging narrative, Jeff Sypeck crafts a vivid portrait of Karl, the ruler who became a legend, while transporting readers far beyond Europe to the glittering palaces of Constantinople and the streets of medieval Baghdad. Evoking a long-ago world of kings, caliphs, merchants, and monks, *Becoming Charlemagne* brings alive an age of empire building that continues to resonate today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The scene is set in the opening paragraph, with the author's description of the coronation of the Frankish king who would become known as Charlemagne, an event, he claims, that would not have been possible without "a Saxon abbot; a Greek empress; an Islamic caliph and a Jew named Isaac who was slowly making his way home to Western Europe from Baghdad, accompanied by an elephant named Abul Abaz." That sentence also captures the book's tone: it is an engaging and lively survey of Charlemagne's evolution as the one of the first of the Holy Roman Emperors (a title that would last, more or less, for some nine hundred years until 1806) which makes a fascinating and ultra-accessible introduction to the man and his times for the general reader. (It's not likely to be of interest to someone with a scholarly interest in the Frankish kings, for instance.) Why read this today? Charlemagne was the first to conceive of a Europe that was broader than any single small kingdom or fiefdom since the disappearance of the Romans (who thought in larger terms still); indeed, the European Union's buildings, etc. pay tribute to him by using his name. He was a patron of the arts and while people focus more on the Renaissance that began in the 14th century in Italy, the emperor oversaw an earlier "Carolingian renaissance." Sypek leaps effortlessly from the bloody battles over the use of icons in the Byzantine court to the fascinating personality of Haroun al-Rashid in Baghdad, and shows a skill for reading between the few lines that history has in the passage of more than a millennium.

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