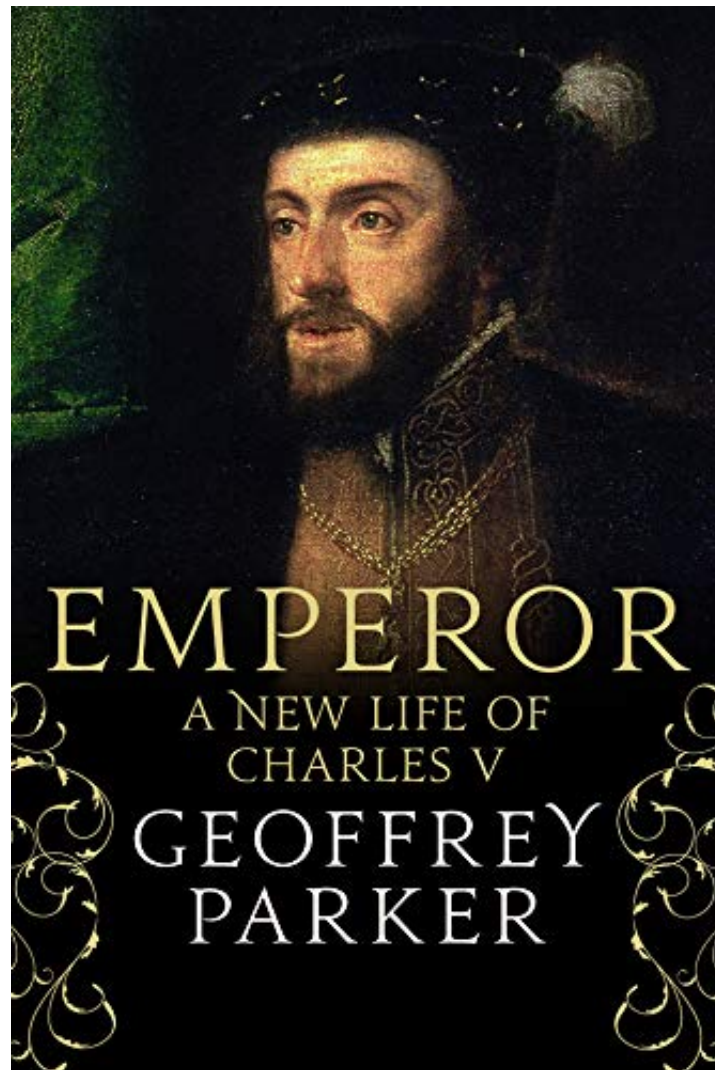


# Emperor: A New Life of Charles V

*by*

**Geoffrey Parker**



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## Synopsis

Drawing on vital new evidence, a top historian dramatically reinterprets the ruler of the world's first transatlantic empire. The life of Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), ruler of Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and much of Italy and Central and South America, has long intrigued biographers. But the elusive nature of the man (despite an abundance of documentation), his relentless travel and the control of his own image, together with the complexity of governing the world's first transatlantic empire, complicate the task. Geoffrey Parker, one of the world's leading historians of early modern Europe, has examined the surviving written sources in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish, as well as visual and material evidence. He explores the crucial decisions that created and preserved this vast empire, analyzes Charles's achievements within the context of both personal and structural factors, and scrutinizes the intimate details of the ruler's life for clues to his character and inclinations. The result is a unique biography that interrogates every dimension of Charles's reign and views the world through the emperor's own eyes.

## Sort review

"Masterly."—William Anthony Hay, *Wall Street Journal* "An extraordinary man who achieves extraordinary things' requires an extraordinary biographer. In Parker, he has one. Seldom does one find a work of such profound scholarship delivered in such elegant and engaging prose. Drawing deftly on an astonishing volume of documentary evidence, Parker has produced a masterpiece: an epic, detailed and vivid life of this complex man and his impossibly large empire"—Susannah Lipscomb, *Financial Times* "This is a beautifully written and accessible work, presumably pitched for general as well as academic readers."—Susan Broomhall, *Parergon* "No other scholar now has such a deep impact on the writing of the history of 16th-century European history."—Wim Blockmans, Rector Emeritus of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study "Parker's biography offers an impressive interweaving of narrative and analysis."—Carlos M. N. Eire, *Journal of Modern History* "Thought-provoking, deeply learned. . . . A well-rounded, deeply researched, and exhaustive portrait of an iconic ruler that captivates the reader's attention throughout. . . . An instant classic that will become the definitive analysis of one of sixteenth-century Europe's most famous rulers."—Christopher W. Close, *The Historian* "An exhaustive biography of the remarkable Habsburg ruler coupled with important insights into the birth of the modern state system of Europe."—Francis P. Sempa, *NY Journal of Books* "An extremely impressive biography.... A work of intellectual force and power.... Fascinating and brilliant—it will be of enormous interest to historians of the period, but also would be of interest to non-specialists."—Jon Balserak, *Reading Religion* "Parker has given us a very impressive look at the greatest of the Hapsburgs, one which will certainly be the standard work on Charles for a long time to come."—*NYMAS Review* "A magnum opus of what Marc Bloch called 'the historian's

craft', both in terms of archival research . . . and, above all, in its narrative power. . . . Parker narrates with refreshing ease and in gripping detail a vast array of events, details and stages of the life of Charles V, from his early years to his legacy, covering the global geographies and local complexities of the Habsburg Empire."—Stefan Hanss, *History: Review of New Books*"A new landmark biography of the sovereign whose power and influence reached five continents and around whom the major events of Europe's high politics in the first half of the sixteenth century turned."—Kurt Stadtwald, *Lutheran Quarterly*"Parker employs his encyclopedic knowledge, archival know-how, and new primary sources to bring the first half of the sixteenth century alive for us—giving the starring role to a very human, harried, yet extraordinary Charles V."—Elizabeth A. Terry-Roisin, *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* "Researching the personality and reign of a 'European' ruler like Charles V presents serious challenges: the need to engage with a multitude of archives in different countries as well as primary source evidence in a wide variety of languages. Fortunately, Parker is uniquely qualified to undertake such a herculean task."—Francois Soyer, *The Court Historian*CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, 2020"A remarkable book, a panorama full of astounding and memorable details, and a gripping read. No other living scholar could have organised and analysed the vast and dizzying array of source materials. Parker is both psychologically astute and sets Charles in the huge canvas against which he operated, always presenting the diplomatic, religious, structural and systemic contexts of the decisions he had to make. A monumental achievement."—Lyndal Roper, author of *Martin Luther*"This is a splendid book. It's well-written, engaging the reader, even while marshalling to good use a truly impressive erudition . . . [T]his is the only book I know that stands comparison with Brandi in that respect, and Parker covers a lot more ground."—James D. Tracy, author of *Emperor Charles V*"Emperor leaves me in awe. It is an unprecedentedly thorough imperial, and indeed, global, biography. The book marshals a breath-taking quantity of evidence, while paying meticulous attention to its quality. Brilliant."—Bethany Aram, author of *Juana the Mad*, professor of modern history at Pablo de Olavide University, Spain, and principal investigator of the interdisciplinary project *An Artery of Empire: Conquest, Commerce, Crisis, Culture and the Panamanian Junction 1513-1671*"No one has understood the Habsburg emperor better than the master historian Geoffrey Parker. In this meticulously- researched and brilliantly- narrated account, Parker strikes a perfect balance, highlighting Charles's strengths as a warrior-king together with his personal weaknesses as a family man. A tour-de-force."—Richard L. Kagan, author of *Clio and the Crown*"Geoffrey Parker's biography of Charles V immediately takes its place as the premier study of the emperor available in English. Its significance, however, like the research that supports it, is global. I cannot remember reading anything that offered so much depth of perspective on both the emperor as a ruler and the age as a whole, the work of Karl Brandi included. It is a masterpiece of historical reconstruction."—C. Scott Dixon, author of *The Church in the Early Modern Age*--This text refers to the paperback edition.About the AuthorGeoffrey Parker teaches history at The Ohio State University. He has published forty books, including *Global Crisis and Imprudent King* for Yale University Press. --

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## What people say about this book

P. Graham, "Excellent Biography -- One Major Blemish. Geoffrey Parker's biography of Charles V is, generally speaking, excellent. Professor Parker's assessment of the man, his reign, and his impact is, broadly speaking, fair, even if one cannot agree with it all. It is well-organized and it is, for the most part, well-written -- with one major exception: The practice of quoting English contemporaries in their contemporary vernacular. Translating from Latin, French, Spanish and other sources who wrote in foreign languages is done in modern English language publications without a second thought, and without any suggestion that the work is somehow less for it. Why authors and editors choose not to apply the same standard to early forms of English, which is almost always a burden to the modern reader, is incomprehensible. And, in the case of this work, it really diminishes the pleasure of reading."

jose c, "Highest level biography of the most powerful man of his time. It is a long, serious, detailed biography, of this singular man, so high profiled and so introspected at the same time, orphan of father and of a "living" mentally disturbed distant mother, who got , still very young, by inheritance and several family successive deaths, an enormous Empire and became the ruler of Europe . Since the beginning, he had to deal, directly, with the consequences of the successful birth of protestantism in his own lands, , to fight the Turks, to govern by distance his new America empires ( Mexico and Peru) and to face, keeping "comand", the other political players of the time, such as France and the several Popes ."

Arod1571, "The Definitive Biography of Emperor Charles V - A True Masterpiece!. Geoffrey Parker, one of the premier (and most prolific) historians on the Early Modern Period and Hapsburg Spain, has undertaken the Herculean task of writing the definitive biography of Emperor Charles V. The book is quite comprehensive and presents many unique insights regarding the Emperor's personal and political life. The quality of Parker's prose is exceptional and each chapter reads seamlessly. I very much enjoyed reading it. This biography also nicely complements Parker's biography of the Emperor's son, Philip II. A job well done, Geoffrey Parker!P.S. I write this review on February 24 - Emperor Charles V's birthday, the day of the Battle of Pavia (one of his greatest victories), and the day of his coronation by Pope Clement VII in Bologna. A momentous day in his life!"

frank kelly, "An extraordinary biography of an extraordinary man. A magnificent, sweeping and utterly fascinating biography of Charles V, ruler of Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands. The author, Geoffrey Parker, proves himself once again to be a master historian as he delves into every corner of Charles' life - a life that Charles' helped illustrate himself with more than 100,000 signed documents. To read what King Charles thought himself via the many written letters, decrees, notes, etc. is brought to life by Parker's superb writing. If you are interested in this period of time(the 1500's), this is a must-read."

Robert Reitter, "Lots of facts but also highly interesting. Charles V was a complex character. He was selfish and arrogant but also loving and lovable. The story of his life is full of interest and importance."

Justin, "A good description of a complex life. Geoffrey Parker is very learned about this period and the book is well-written. The book is a narrative rather than thematic one. It would have been nice to see a comparison with the challenges of Henry VIII and Francis I (even if Charles faced unique issues), but that is a quibble."

Charlie, "Magnificent. Extraordinarily good, fresh, look at the greatest ruler of his age - and, though full of detail, the book is never ponderous in tone. The author is of course careful not to let us think of Charles V in contemporary terms - the Emperor's treatment of his mother, a reigning Queen in her own right, was manipulative and self-serving. On the other hand, his ability to use people - often his relatives - to keep the Habsburg family "show on the road" was shrewd and successful. He was cultured and refined, high-handed and brutal; all of this is carefully diagnosed and articulated - a superb read for the historian and others interested in the history of this era."

Peter Pearson, "Get to know Charles V. This is a history book with a difference. Because of the tremendous amount of research done by the author, you really get to know and understand Charles V and all the other personalities of his era. There are constant quotes from letters and official documents as well as testimonies relating to Charles and his entourage. This is a very large book and requires a certain amount of commitment to read it all, but on so many levels it is really worth it."

David K. Warner, "A magnificent and well researched biography of Charles V. Geoffrey Parker's magnificent biography of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V is an exemplary work of fine scholarship, supported by full references, and written in clear, fluent prose, which in a fast moving narrative tells how the young heir to the German empire, the kingdoms of Spain and Castile's American settlements, Naples and Milan, and the Netherlands, where he was born, a Habsburg archduke in 1500, became, by his multiple inheritances, the ruler of Europe's largest empire, and how he ultimately, despite his admirable efforts and personal charisma, failed to reconcile the several parts of this whole, leaving at his abdication in January 1556 an impossible inheritance for his son, Phillip II, in Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy, and to his brother Ferdinand in Germany a nation permanently divided upon confessional lines. Charles V was a product of his inheritances, and throughout his long reign, from his emancipation by his grandfather in 1515 to his abdication forty years later, everything he did was conditioned by the dynastic imperative of holding onto that to which he was born, and, accordingly, he must be regarded, along with his contemporaries Francis I and Henry VIII, as at heart a medieval king,

who regarded his subjects bound to him by his family title and personal bonds and not national identity, rather than an exemplar of the administrative, national kingship which was to develop later in the early modern period, and towards which his son Philip provides a failed transitional figure, unable to reconcile his Spanish, Netherlandish, and Italian dominions or accept the emergence of national, confessional states. Philip II, while not, as Henry Kamen has shown, the recluse of El Escorial of popular belief, did however become the prisoner of an increasingly unwieldy bureaucratic monarchy largely because he could not manage the multiple inheritances his father left him, nor his enormous debts, and it is that which provides the evidence of the ultimate failure of Charles V's imperial vision, although that it lasted so long can in part be explained by the personal settlement upon his inheritances that the emperor spent much of his reign imposing. However, that settlement was a hark back to the Middle Ages and one soon shown to be out of date by the aspirations of the Habsburgs' subjects. Charles V's character lies somewhat between those of his more politically and religiously adaptive imperial predecessor and grandfather, Maximilian, and brother, Ferdinand, who succeeded him as emperor, and his more stubborn and doctrinaire son, and while he was capable of more politique actions than Philip, particularly in his preparedness to reach temporary accommodations with Lutherans for short term imperial aims, he, like his Spanish successor, was too willing to support the Inquisition and exploit the financial resources of Spain to its long term detriment, while clinging to a too narrow late medieval Catholicism and dogmatism that precluded the compromises with Protestants in Germany that were necessary to maintain the Empire, and which Ferdinand sensibly recognised at Augsburg in 1555. However, unlike Philip, who was born in Valladolid and educated as a Spanish Infanta, Charles was born and brought up in the Netherlands as a French speaker in the tradition of the great fifteenth century duchy of Burgundy to which, after his father's early death, he was heir. And so, while Philip II is easily identified within the narrow framework of sixteenth century Spanish, inquisitional Catholicism, his father, despite his retirement to and burial in Yuste, remained a more Burgundian, indeed European, figure, always recognising that his primary inheritance was the Burgundian Netherlands (and never ceasing to claim French Burgundy, lost in 1477), with a chivalric and cultural loyalty to that great late 'middle kingdom', exemplified by the seriousness with which he took the Order of the Golden Fleece, while, as he succeeded to the rule of the Spanish kingdoms, the Empire, and Naples and Milan, unlike the more narrow Philip, he was also successful in broadening his cultural and linguistic understanding. His vision, for all its faults, was both more attractive and more realistic than that of his son. If there is one major difference between Charles and Philip, it is that the former always understood that the Netherlands remained the key to maintaining his empire, while his son's failure to understand this, and his spending insufficient time in the north learning about his Dutch and Flemish subjects, was a principal cause of the Revolt of the Netherlands, which was to ultimately destroy Habsburg Spain's pretensions as a great power. Of course, it is historically nonsensical to blame Charles for events after his death, but it was his decision to make of his surviving son a Castilian prince, and, while himself considering that the dynastic union of Spain



and the Netherlands might not be sustainable after his death, to never make provision for separation of the two or put in place a devolved structure of government in the Netherlands, which would satisfy the local needs of the people, while maintaining their loyalty to a Habsburg emperor or king absent in Spain (or Germany or Italy). Charles, in his unwillingness to deal with the existential threats to his empire, failed to construct a political settlement which would outlast him, and built an empire whose only real union was in its dynastic connection through his personal rule, which meant that when he died, and with him died his charismatic leadership, bolstered by the Imperial title as the recognised leader of Catholic Christendom, so too did the Habsburg imperial condominium, regardless of Philip's efforts, who from the very beginning in 1558 did not even attempt to contest his uncle's claim to the Empire or his right of succession thereto (he never sought election as King of the Romans, for which the Family Compact provided). The empire of Charles V was, therefore, always a temporary political construct built upon the inheritance and the agency of the emperor himself, without structural permanence, and his reign was not just the apogee of Habsburg power, but also the point of hubris from which nemesis would ensue, slowly during the reign of his hardworking son, but quickly thereafter. However, despite all these structural flaws, Charles V was successful in managing his empire as long as he was in charge: his failures were more historical than personal, and due to his need, and indeed preference, to seek temporary solutions to what were permanent problems. Parker's Charles is an attractive and engaging personality, when considered within the mores of his age, but in the end the task which he inherited and to which he dedicated his active life was beyond him, yet that is because it was almost certainly beyond any man, since no ruler of his time could have permanently maintained Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and large parts of Italy within a single political structure, while the confessional disputes caused by the Reformation would take two centuries, and huge political, social, and intellectual change, to be settled. Charles V as a man and emperor was a man of great flaws and ultimate failures, but, nonetheless, as Parker's superb biography reveals, he was also one of the great figures of European history, and the towering figure of his age, eclipsing popes, Francis I and Henry VIII, and, unfortunately for Spain and the Netherlands, Philip II."

Thomas McNally, "Well-researched yet accessible.. I study Early Modern History at a postgraduate level and Parker's book is the perfect equilibrium between a well-researched piece of writing and accessible to the general audience. Despite what Parker mentions in his introduction Charles V is not a mainstream personality nor is there much attention in popular publishing to any of his contemporaries except Henry VIII. It is difficult to compile a biography of Charles V; the geographic and linguistic diversity of sources does add a huge task to the author and this should be congratulated. Compared to another biography of Charles V I recently read Parker goes beyond Charles V's activities during the Reformation and his dynastic politics - essentially this is a comprehensive biography with a fairly equal weight given to the duration of his life. Probably the best was his work on Charles V's childhood and early years. Overall a good

book!"

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