

Charles, IV Biography

Charles, IV

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Biography

Charles IV (1748-1819), who was king of Spain from 1788 to 1808, was a weak and good-natured monarch who preferred hunting to governing.

Born in Naples on Nov. 11, 1748, Charles IV was the second son of Charles, King of Naples and Sicily, and Maria Amalia of Saxony. His education was not a particularly good one; he was more interested in riding and hunting than in reading. In 1759 the childless Ferdinand VI of Spain died after naming as his heir his half brother Charles of Naples. The new king arrived in Spain a few months later. On his death in 1788 his son Charles ascended the throne of Spain as Charles IV.

When he became king, Charles was 40 years old and had had no experience in the art of government. Furthermore, the somewhat timid monarch was almost completely dominated by his wife, Maria Luisa of Parma, whom he had married in 1756. She in turn was infatuated with Manuel de Godoy, a young and handsome officer of the Royal Guards. Charles too became very fond of Godoy; he made him Duke of Alcudia and in 1792 named him head of the government. While Godoy governed, Charles busied himself with his two favorite pastimes: hunting and collecting clocks. A sizable part of his clock collection is still to be seen at the royal palace in Aranjuez.

Godoy's alliance with France in 1796 and the subsequent war with Britain damaged Spain and made him, as well as the monarch who kept him in power, very unpopular. In March 1808 Godoy's enemies forced Charles to dismiss Godoy and abdicate in favor of his son Ferdinand VII.

By this time Napoleon had decided to replace the Spanish Bourbons, his allies, with a member of his own family, and in April 1808 he lured Ferdinand to Bayonne. Soon Charles, Maria Luisa, and Godoy also arrived there. Napoleon forced the Spanish royal house to abdicate, and a few months later his younger brother entered Spain as Joseph I.

Ferdinand returned to Spain as king in 1814. But his father and mother and Godoy never again played roles in Spanish history. After the events in Bayonne the royal couple and their favorite lived in France and then settled in Italy. On Jan. 2, 1819, Maria Luisa died in Rome. Charles died in Naples on January 29. Godoy was with him until the end.