

EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

600 TO 1650

RISE OF THE FRANKS TO THIRTY YEARS WAR

ERA SUMMARY – EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

Christian Conversion—The central organizing principle of Europe during its rise from the remnants of the Roman Empire to the modern nations of Europe was the Christian religion. The barbarian tribes of Hispania and Gaul had been Christianized to some extent during Roman times, but many of the Germanic and Slavic tribes in the north of Europe were not brought under the influence of Christianity until much later. With the "conversion" of a country to Christianity came many trappings of Christian civilization, including an educated class of clerics, Roman legal institutions, Christian teachings on morals, and most importantly for regional kings—the recognition of their legitimacy. That is, a local ruler who paid homage to the Church and other Christian overlords could be recognized as a legitimate ruler throughout all of Christendom and had less to fear from both internal rebellions and external invasions. Becoming part of the Christian family of nations did not eliminate these threats, but it enhanced the stability of the ruling classes of Europe and helped create the conditions necessarily for peace, commerce, and progress.

Charlemagne and the Franks—Many important milestones of the early years of the European Middle Ages relate to the conversion of barbarian tribes to Catholic Christianity, and the defense of already Christian territories from pagan hosts. The conversion of Clovis, king of the Franks, to Catholic Christianity was of utmost importance. During the 7th and 8th centuries, the Franks kept the Moors of Spain at bay, defended Catholic interests in Western Europe, and converted pagan tribes to the Christian cause. In 800 A. D., the greatest of the Frankish kings, Charlemagne, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope. Charlemagne not only helped fend off the Moslems in the Iberian Peninsula, but also conquered Northern Italy from the pagan Lombards, and forcibly converted great swaths of Saxony to Christianity. The territory he controlled consisted mainly of modern day France, Germany, and Italy, the central territories of Western Europe.

Once the Holy Roman Empire was established, it faced several long-term threats. First, the threat of Vikings or barbarian invasion from the North; second, the growing threat of Moslem aggression in the Mediterranean regions; and third, strife between the Church and various princes. Although specific conflicts related were regional, the overall threats were common to all of Christian Europe.

Vikings and Normans—Between the years 900 and 1200 A. D., a hardy race of pagan Norsemen over-ran much of Northern Europe. After decades of plunder and rampage, the Vikings were won over the Christian cause, less by armed resistance than by acculturation. They frequently

conquered Christian lands but ended up marrying Christian women, ruling over Christian subjects, and raising Christian children. As second and third generation Viking rulers became Christianized, their adopted religion spread to their native lands, and eventually all of Scandinavia became Christian. The most important of the Viking rulers were the Normans, who ruled over Northern France and eventually conquered all of Britain and much of Italy. The Norsemen even formed several "crusader kingdoms" in the Middle East, and founded a dynasty in Russia.

During this same period, Christianity was spreading to the Slavic regions of eastern Europe. Poland, Russia, Hungary, Bohemia, and Lithuania were converted to Christianity by both Catholic and Orthodox missionaries. These regions had never been influenced by Roman civilization, and did not have written languages until they were converted to Christianity. Even though they were late to adopt the customs and culture of Western Europe, they were important Christian bulwarks against the advancing Mohammed and Mongol threats from the east.

The Islamic Threat—The Christian church had been fighting off schisms and heresies for hundreds of years when the Islamic threat took hold in the outermost regions of Christendom. Within fifty years of the death of Mohammed the new religion had swept all of the Middle East, Egypt and North Africa. Soon after the Moors conquered most of the Iberian Peninsula and threatened all of Europe. The Franks were key in turning the Mohammedan tide in Spain, and the Eastern Empire, centered in Constantinople, provided a buffer-state between the Moslem states of the Middle East and southeast Europe. Without these bulwarks, Europe almost certainly would have been over-run.

The Mohammedan Abbasid dynasty (750 to 1258 A.D.) was centered in Baghdad and ruled over a highly civilized region. The Abbasids tolerated Christian travelers, so for hundreds of years commerce and religious pilgrimages to the holy land continued unhindered. Eventually, however, the Abbasids lost ground to a more radical, less civilized tribe from central Asia. The "Turkish" Moslems conquered both Christian and Abbasid territories and eventually formed the Ottoman Empire. It was this branch of Islam which threatened Europe from the south and East for much of the Middle Ages.

The Crusades, which occurred during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, were a series of campaigns by Christian Europeans intended to reclaim the Holy Lands from Turkish Moslems. When these campaigns failed, the Turks were able to consolidate their territories in Asia Minor and invade southern Europe. Much of the Balkans fell to the Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries, and Constantinople fell in 1453. The Ottoman Turks continued to threaten Eastern Europe throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, and were not driven from the Balkan Peninsula until the 19th century. Many Christian heroes of the Middle Ages gained their renown from fighting to drive back the Mohammedans and maintain a Christian culture within Europe.

Church vs. State—The Christian religion sees the world as having both a spiritual realm and a material realm, and the mediaeval Church claimed the "spiritual" realm as its domain, while

acknowledging the rights of princes over their earthly kingdoms. The border between material and spiritual reality, however, has ever been a messy one. From the princes' point of view, the church provided important services, but should be made to serve the interests of the state. From the Church's point of view, the princes ruled by the grace of God and were beholden to promote the interests of the Church. This conflict of interests has existed throughout the life of the church, but in the Middle Ages when the church held so much influence that an *excommunicated* prince could not command the allegiance of his subjects, the controversy raged in many forms.

In Germany and Italy, the *investiture controversy* was essentially a conflict about who should control church property. Princes thought that since their armies were needed to protect church properties, they should be allowed to appoint bishops that would serve their interests. The church thought that it should be able to appoint bishops that were faithful to the papacy and Christian interests. Since church properties generated a great deal of income, this was more than a philosophical disagreement and many wars were fought over the issue. In France the same pressures applied, but the conflict was resolved for a long time by outright theft of the papacy. The *Avignon Papacy* was a hundred year period during which the King of France selected and maintained the Pope in his own domains, and even when the papacy was restored to Rome, it became largely a pawn of the Italian princes.

The result of princes appointing and controlling bishops was inevitable corruption. Church offices and their revenues became tools of the government, and a great deal of the money and land donated to the church for charitable purposes fell under the control of feckless nobles. The astounding factor in this situation was not the deplorable state of morals within the church hierarchy but the fact that in local parishes so much charitable work continued to get done, and so many pious and faithful servants of God were still attached to the religious life.

The Reformation—The widespread corruption within the church was in blatant conflict with the dogmas the church was bound to uphold. Sincere reformers from both inside and outside the church arose, but the extreme wealth of the church was a magnet but for opportunists of all stripes. The manner in which the reformation of the Catholic church occurred, therefore, varied by region, and had a great deal to do with local politics as well as theology.

In Germany, where Luther held sway, the church properties of kingdoms that broke away from Rome fell under the control of the princes, but much of the Church organization remained intact. In the Netherlands, the Calvinist variety of Christianity became a rallying point against the oppressions of Hapsburg Spain. Calvinism was especially popular with the merchant classes in independent cities throughout Europe, where local leaders opposed all hierarchy and rituals of the "papists" and sought to appoint church elders by popular election. In France, the Huguenot movement was almost crushed by the clever machinations of the mastermind, Richelieu, who sought to promote religious unity at home, while he sowed discord among his enemies by promoting Protestant causes in Germany.

The devastating Thirty Years War resulted in the Peace of Westphalia, which granted legitimacy and recognition to many of the Protestant governments of Europe. Its primary effect, however, was political: it resulted in a strengthened Bourbon France and a greatly weakened Hapsburg Empire. From this point on, the Hapsburg Empire was no longer the predominant power in Europe. Politics were driven by "balance of power" considerations, as Austria, France, Russia, Russia, and England maneuvered to protect their political interests in a continent where the ideal of religious unity could no longer serve as an effective break on nationalistic ambition.

CHARACTERS – EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

CHRISTIAN CONVERSION OF EUROPE

Clovis	466–511	Founder of the Frankish Kingdom. Converted to Christianity by his wife Clotilda.
Charlemagne	742–814	First Holy Roman Emperor. Unified most of Western Europe into a Frankish Empire.
Wittekind the Saxon	~ 780	Leader of Saxon resistance to Charlemagne. After years of struggle, converted to Christianity.
Saint Stephen	975–1038	Christian King of Hungary who defeated pagans and united Magyar clans.
Henry I of Germany	876–936	United Rival German duchies in a confederation to resist the Magyars.

VIKINGS AND NORSEMEN

Rollo the Viking	d. 931	Viking Leader who was granted the Dukedom of Normandy if he became Christian.
Rurik the Norseman	830–879	Norseman who was invited by a Slavic tribe to rule over the region of Ukraine.

MOSLEM THREAT AND THE CRUSADES

Charles Martel	686–741	Frankish King who defeated the Moors at the <i>Battle of Tours</i> .
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Frederick Barbarossa	1122–1190	Well-known warrior. Campaigned in Italy many years, but to no avail. Died on Third Crusade.
Saint Louis IX	1214–1270	Crusading king. Canonized as a saint for his concern and compassion for the poor.
Don John of Austria	1545–1578	Son of Charles V. Hero of the naval <i>Battle of Lepanto</i> . Briefly governed Spanish Netherlands.
Mohammed II	1432–1481	Sultan of the early Ottoman Empire who conquered Constantinople and much of the Balkans.
Solyman the Magnificent	1494–1566	Most famous of the Ottoman Emperors. Extended the empire to the Balkans and North Africa.
Prince Eugene of Savoy	1663–1736	One of the Greatest generals of the Hapsburg Empire. Led HRE during the War of Spanish Succession.

CHURCH STATE CONFLICTS

Saint Benedict	480–547	Established the Benedictine order of monks. Founded the monastic movement in Europe.
Pope Gregory VII	1020–1085	Tested wills with Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV over 'investiture' issues.
Saint Catherine of Siena	1347–1380	Saint who helped resolve the Papal schism of the 14th century.
Joan of Arc	1412–1431	Led the French Army to Victory at the Siege of New Orleans. Burned at the stake by English.

RENAISSANCE

John Gutenberg	1400–1468	Invented printing press. Made improvements over many years on types, inks and methods.
Lorenzo de Medici	1449–1492	Great power broker Renaissance Florence. Great Patron of the Arts.

REFORMATION

Martin Luther	1483–1546	Leader of the Protestant Reformation. Excommunicated by Catholic Church.
Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor	1500–1558	Holy Roman Emperor. Ruled Hapsburg Austria, the Low Countries, Spain and parts of Italy.
Cardinal Richelieu	1585–1682	Very influential Minister of Louis XIII. Consolidated royal power and crushed dissenters.
William the Silent	1533–1584	Hero of the Dutch Revolt. Led resistance to the Inquisition and Spanish tyranny.
Henry IV of France	1553–1610	Popular Huguenot King who converted to Catholicism, but decreed religious toleration.
Gustavus Adolphus	1594–1632	Renowned Protestant General during the thirty Years War. King of Sweden.

WORLD EXPLORATION

Marco Polo	1254–1324	Traveler from Venice who spent 30 years at the court of Kublai Khan in China.
Christopher Columbus	1451–1506	Sailed across Atlantic Ocean and discovered the Americas.
Vasco da Gama	1460–1524	Sailed from Europe to the Orient by sailing around the Cape of Good Hope.
Ferdinand Magellan	1480–1521	Captain of first fleet to circumnavigate the globe. Died in Philippines.

TIMELINE – EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

- 500 Conversion of [Clovis](#) to Catholic Christianity.
- 520 [Saint Benedict](#) founds Western Monasticism.
- 785 Baptism of [Wittekind the Saxon](#), chief of the Saxons.
- 865 Cyril and Methodius convert Slavs to Christianity.
- 1000 [Olaf I of Norway](#) converts Vikings to Christianity.
- 1000 Steven of Hungary converts Hungarians to Christianity.

THE VIKING MENACE

- 885 Vikings [Besiege Paris](#).
- 911 [Rollo the Viking](#) becomes the first Duke of Normandy.

THE MOSLEM THREAT AND THE CRUSADES

- 732 [Charles Martel](#) stops the Mohammedan invasion at the [Battle of Tours](#).
- 1096 [Peter the Hermit](#) organizes the [First Crusade](#).
- 1270 [Saint Louis IX](#) dies on his final *Crusade* in Tunis.
- 1453 [Mohammed II](#) [Conquers Constantinople](#), expands Turkish empire in Balkans.
- 1492 [Ferdinand of Aragon](#) [Conquers Granada](#), last of the Moors are driven from Spain.
- 1517 [Don John of Austria](#) defeats Turkish Army at the [Battle of Lepanto](#).
- 1683 Second [Siege of Vienna](#) relieved by Polish king [Jan III Sobieski of Poland](#).

CHURCH-STATE CONFLICTS

- 800 [Charlemagne](#) is crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome.
- 1076 [Pope Gregory VII](#) seeks to reform lay bishoprics; excommunicates Henry IV.
- 1303-1378 "Avignon Papacy" is captive of the French Crown.
- 1378-1417 Western Schism. Multiple claimants for the office of pope.

NEW WORLD EXPLORATION

- 1492 [Christopher Columbus](#) discovers America.
- 1498 [Vasco da Gama](#) opens up a trade route to Asia.
- 1521 [Ferdinand Magellan](#) circumnavigating the globe.

THE REFORMATION

- 1450 [John Gutenberg](#) publishes the first Bible.
- 1517 [Martin Luther](#) initiates Protestant Reformation in Germany.
- 1572 St. Bartholomew Day's [Massacre of Huguenots](#) in France.
- 1568 [Revolt of the Netherlands](#) led by [William the Silent](#)
- 1598 [Henry IV of France](#) issues edict of Nantes, granting rights to Protestants.
- 1620-1650 The [Thirty Years War](#) devastates Germany, and reduces power of the Catholic Hapsburgs.

RECOMMENDED READING – EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

- Haaren - [Famous Men of the Middle Ages](#) *entire book*
- Haaren - [Famous Men of Modern Times](#) *entire book*
- Marshall - [The Story of Europe](#) *entire book*
- Synge - [Discovery of New Worlds](#) *entire book*
- Synge - [Awakening of Europe](#) *entire book*
- Synge - [Brave Men and Brave Deeds](#) [The Knight Kept the Bridge](#) to [Garibaldi's Sicilian Campaign](#) (12)
- Wood - [Boy's Book of Battles](#) [Tours to Vionville-Mars-la-tour](#) (15)