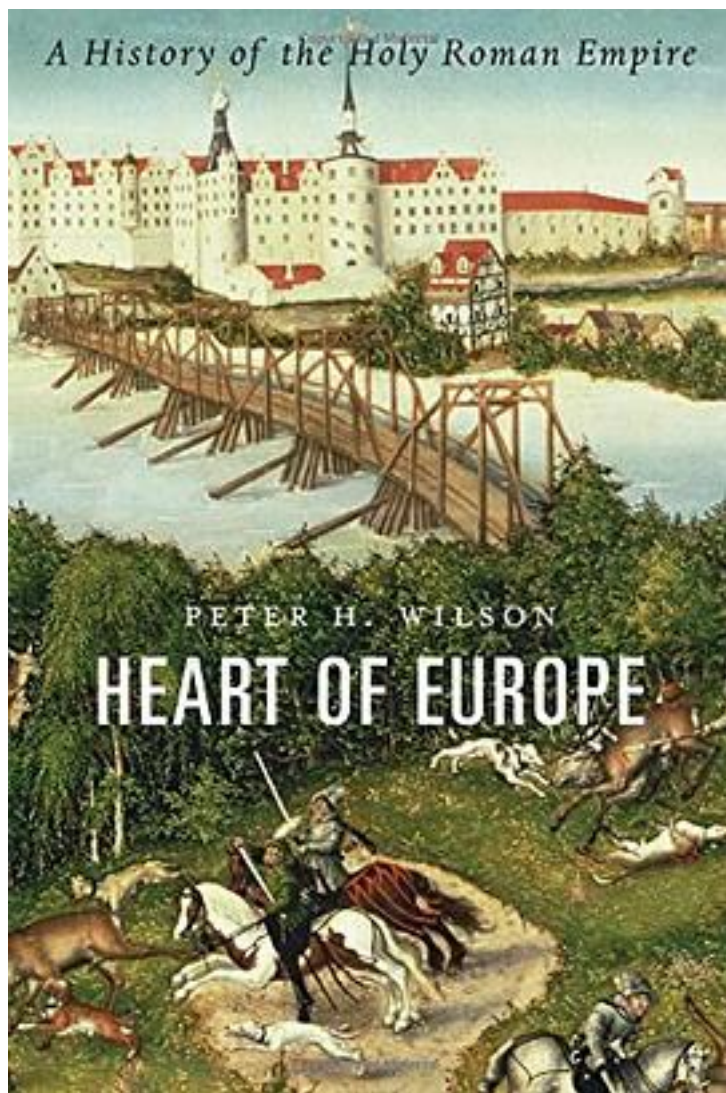


# Heart of Europe



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The Holy Roman Empire lasted a thousand years, far longer than ancient Rome. Yet this formidable dominion never inspired the awe of its predecessor. Voltaire distilled the disdain of generations when he quipped it was neither holy, Roman, nor an empire. Yet as Peter Wilson shows, the Holy Roman Empire tells a millennial story of Europe better than the histories of individual nation-states. And its legacy can be seen today in debates over the nature of the European Union.

Heart of Europe traces the Empire from its origins within Charlemagne's kingdom in 800 to its demise in 1806. By the mid-tenth century its core rested in the German kingdom, and ultimately its territory stretched from France and Denmark to Italy and Poland. Yet the Empire remained stubbornly abstract, with no fixed capital and no common language or culture. The source of its continuity and legitimacy was the ideal of a unified Christian civilization, but this did not prevent emperors from clashing with the pope over supremacy—the nadir being the sack of Rome in 1527 that killed 147 Vatican soldiers.

Though the title of Holy Roman Emperor retained prestige, rising states such as Austria and Prussia wielded power in a way the Empire could not. While it gradually lost the flexibility to cope with political, economic, and social changes, the Empire was far from being in crisis until the onslaught of the French revolutionary wars, when a crushing defeat by Napoleon at Austerlitz compelled Francis II to dissolve his realm.

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目录: List of Illustrations\*

List of Tables\*\*

Maps

1. The Empire in 800
2. Frankish Partitions
3. Ottonians: The Empire in 962
4. Salians: The Empire around 1050
5. Staufer: The Empire in 1195
6. From Little Kings to Big Dynasties: The Empire in 1378
7. The Empire in 1512 (showing the Kreise)
8. The Empire in 1555
9. The Empire in 1648
10. The Empire in 1792
11. The Empire in 1803
12. The Empire in 1806
13. The Imperial Church, c. 1020
14. Royal Palaces (showing Conrad II's Royal Progress, 1024–5)
15. Ducal Burgundy in 1471
16. The Swiss Confederation in 1540
17. Mainz and Hessian Territorial Development (possessions in the eighteenth century)
18. The Swabian League (membership after 1523)
19. Protestant Union and Catholic League Membership
20. The Rhenish Civic League of 1254
21. The Hansa and the Teutonic Order in 1370
22. Communal Regimes in Northern Germany, c. 1500

Family Trees

1. Carolingians
2. Ottonians
3. Salians
4. Staufers and Welfs
5. Luxembourgs
6. Habsburgs part 1
7. Habsburgs part 2

Note on Form

Acknowledgements

Introduction

I. Ideal

1. Two Swords
2. Christendom
3. Sovereignty

II. Belonging

4. Lands
5. Identities

6. Nation

III. Governance

7. Kingship
8. Territory

9. Dynasty

IV. Society

10. Authority
11. Association

12. Justice

13. Afterlife

Glossary

Appendix 1: Emperors 800–1806

Appendix 2: German Kings to 1519

Appendix 3: Kings of Italy 774–962

Chronology

List of Abbreviations

Endnotes

Index

\* Illustrations

1. St Peter, Pope Leo III and Charlemagne. Detail from the Triclinium mosaic in the Lateran Palace, Rome. 1743 copy after 798/9 original.
2. Charlemagne, portrait by Albrecht Dürer, c. 1512. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.
3. Napoleon in Aachen, painting by Henri-Paul Motte, 1798.
4. Carolingian troops besieging towns, illumination from *Evangelium Aureum Sancti Gallen*, c. 883. Stiftsbibliothek, St Gallen, Cod. Sang. 22, p. 141.
5. The Act of Canossa in 1077, illumination from *Vita Mathildis* by Donizone, Italian school, twelfth century. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms Lat 4922, fol.49.
6. Henry VII's Roman expedition in 1312, illumination from *Codex Balduini trevirensis*, c. 1340. Landeshauptstaatsarchiv, Koblenz, Best. 1 C Nr. 1 fol. 22.
7. Charles V and Clement VII at the last imperial coronation by a pope in 1530, engraving by Nicolas Hogenberg, with later handcolouring, from the *Einzugsfolge*, 1532.
8. Charles V as victor at the battle of Mühlberg in 1547, portrait by Titian, 1548. Prado, Madrid.
9. Tefillin bag in green velvet, embroidered with the imperial coat of arms, Jewish, c. 1700.

10. Charles V, woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Younger, c. 1550.
11. Charles VI, portrait by Martin van Meytens, eighteenth century.
12. Joseph II's Coronation Banquet in the Frankfurt Römer on 3 April 1764, painting by Martin von Meytens the Younger, 1764. Bundesmobilienvverwaltung, Vienna.
13. The three ecclesiastical electors, detail from The Coronation of Joseph II in the Bartholomäusdom in Frankfurt in 1764 by the studio of Martin von Meytens the Younger, 1764. Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv.-Nr. GG 7468.
14. Francis II, portrait by Friedrich von Amerling, 1832. Weltliche und Geistliche Schatzkammer, Vienna.
15. Figures representing the Slavs, Germans, Gauls and Romans pay homage to Emperor Otto III, illumination from the Luithar Gospels, produced in Reichenau, late tenth century.
16. Salian monarchs and abbots of St Emmeram monastery, illumination from the Evangelary of St Emmeram in Regensburg, 1105/6.
17. Map of Europe as a single empire, by Johannes Patsch, 1537. From Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia*, 1556.
18. Woman from Metz, illustration from Hans Weigel (attr.), *Habitus praeceptorum populi*, Nuremberg, 1577. Trinity College Library, Cambridge, L.11.33, plate XCIX. By courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.
19. The Quaternionenadler by Hans Burgkmaier the Elder, 1510.
20. Regensburg's two town halls, painting by an anonymous artist, eighteenth century.
21. Maximilian II and the Seven Electors, coloured woodcut, Nuremberg school, 1564.
22. Christ crowning and blessing Otto II and his wife Theopanu, ivory relief, Byzantine school, c.982/983. Musée National du Moyen Age et des Thermes de Cluny, Paris.
23. Frederick II enfeoffing Hohenzollern with Brandenburg in 1417, coloured woodcut from a coetaneous copy of the Chronicle of the Council of Constance by Ulrich von Richental, Augsburg, 1485. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.
24. Nicolas of Cusa, portrait by Dr Winard von Steeg, fifteenth century.
25. Reliquary bust of Frederick I, gilded bronze, produced in Aachen, 1155–71. Church of St Johannes, Cappenberg.
26. The Reichstag in plenary session in Regensburg in June 1653, print published in Nuremberg, 1653.
27. Carolingian peasants, illumination from a calendar of the abbey of St Peter in Salzburg, 818. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Vienna, Cod.387, fol.90v.
28. Annual oath ceremony in Ulm, 1650.
29. Charlemagne with his son Pippin and a scribe, copy of 991 after an original illumination from Lupus of Ferrières, *Leges Barbarorum*, c.829–32. Biblioteca Capitalare, Modena.
30. The Reichskammergericht in session, engraving after Hermann Bols in Wilhelm Roding, *Pandectae Juris Cameralis*, 1688.
31. Carl von Dalberg receiving Napoleon in front of the Aschaffenburg palace in 1806, detail from a painting by Florent Fidèle Constant Bourgeois and Jean-Baptiste Debret, 1812: *Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon*, Versailles.
32. Barbarossa Awakes in the Kyffhäuser Hills, mural by Hermann Wislicensus, 1879–97. Imperial Palace, Goslar.
33. Himmler laying a wreath on the first Heinrichsfeier, 1 July 1936.
34. Sergeant Babcock wearing the Aachen copy of the imperial crown which had been hidden in a mine near Siegen, 13 June 1945.
35. Imperia, statue erected in the harbour of Konstanz, by Peter Lenk, 1993.

## \*\* Tables

1. Imperial Reigns and German Kings
2. Anti-Kings
3. Co-Kings and Emperors

- 4. The Growth of Writing in Imperial Governance
- 5. New Ducal Titles
- 6. Changes in the Electoral College
- 7. Reichstag Participation Rates, 1521
- 8. Territory and Formal Status in 1792
- 9. Annual Revenue Derived from Imperial Prerogatives, c. 1780
- 10. Imperial Taxation, 1521–1613
- 11. War Funding Raised during the Long Turkish War, 1593–1606
- 12. Tax Grants during the Permanent Reichstag, 1663–1742
- 13. Imperial Defence, 1664–1714 (annual averages)
- 14. Revenue and Debt in Selected Principalities, c. 1500
- 15. The Removal of Immediate Vassals
- 16. Official Reichskammergericht Staff Levels
- • • • • [\(收起\)](#)

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