



# The Causes of War

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VOLUME 2

1000 CE TO 1400 CE

Alexander Gillespie

B L O O M S B U R Y

# The Causes of War

## Volume II: 1000 CE to 1400 CE

Alexander Gillespie



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## THE CAUSES OF WAR: 1000 CE TO 1400 CE

This is the second volume of a projected five-volume series charting the causes of war from 3000 BCE to the present day, written by a leading international lawyer, and using as its principal materials the documentary history of international law, largely in the form of treaties and the negotiations which led up to them. These volumes seek to show why millions of people, over thousands of years, slew each other. In departing from the various theories put forward by historians, anthropologists and psychologists, Gillespie offers a different taxonomy of the causes of war, focusing on the broader settings of politics, religion, migrations and empire-building. These four contexts were dominant and often overlapping justifications during the first four thousand years of human civilisation, for which written records exist.

This book is dedicated to my son, Conor.

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# I

## *Introduction*

### I. THE CONVERSATION ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON

**T**HE TOPIC OF this book is the causes of war. It is the second volume on the topic, covering the years between 1000 and 1400. The complimentary volumes I have written around this topic deal with the customs and laws of war, covering the methods by which humans have fought and killed each other for the last 5,000 years.<sup>1</sup> This book and its accompanying volumes is different: it is about why people fight, not how.

My interests in the causes and practices of warfare began with a discussion I had with my mother over 15 years ago, towards the end of the twentieth century, on whether humanity was better or worse than in the past. Simply put, was humanity making progress or not? Whilst I argued in the affirmative, my mother argued in the negative. As with many such lunchtime discussions on Sunday afternoons, trying to find robust benchmarks was (and is) very difficult, if not impossible. Although the conversation on this particular Sunday afternoon moved on to other topics, this question of ‘progress’ caught my attention. It has remained on my mind for the last decade, during which time I have gone from moments of optimism to pessimism. My supposition is that the causes of warfare have changed for the better—that is, progress has occurred, with the reasons we justify killing, becoming more acceptable than in the past. To prove this point requires a great amount of research to show what the causes were and how they have changed. This means that this volume, which covers the years between 1000 and 1400, is a stepping-stone towards my final answer.

### 2. UTOPIA

There are many philosophical discussions around the idea of ‘progress’.<sup>2</sup> These are often linked to various forms of Utopian thinking.<sup>3</sup> This is especially so as regards

<sup>1</sup> Gillespie, A (2011) *A History of the Laws of War*, Vol 1: *Combatants*; Vol 2: *Civilians* and Vol 3: *Arms Control* (Oxford, Hart Publishing).

<sup>2</sup> Doren, V (1969) *The Idea of Progress* (NYC, Praeger); Hiderbrand, G (ed) *The Idea of Progress: A Collection of Readings* (Los Angeles, California University Press); Melzer, A (ed) (1995) *History and the Idea of Progress* (NYC, Cornell University Press).

<sup>3</sup> Manuel, F (1979) *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (NYC, Harvard University Press); Manuel, F (ed) (1969) *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (NYC, Condor); Buber, M (1949) *Paths in Utopia* (London, Routledge);

## 2 Introduction

the question on which I am focusing, as the flipside of any question about the causes of war is the search for enduring peace. I struggle to think how many gallons of ink have been expended in debates on this question, or on suggestions as to the correct path to Utopia, where the difficulties of the past are bypassed and a bright, violence-free future awaits humanity. There is no monopoly on these plans, and libraries are full of variations on themes that run to thousands of miles of shelving, from theology to ideology, cross-referenced to a bewildering collection of historical epochs and philosophical musings.

The idea of a 'Golden Age', in which there was no warfare, can be found in the writings of, amongst others, the scholars of ancient China and India.<sup>4</sup> Such views were mirrored in Greece and Rome: the Roman poet Ovid wrote of a previous time when 'men kept faith and did what was right ... the peoples passed their lives in security and peace, without need for armies'.<sup>5</sup> These dreams later flowered into the eschatology and promises of times to come of religions like Christianity and Islam. They later flowed into the Enlightenment, when Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued in the eighteenth century that it was demographic growth, private property, the division of class and state coercion that forced warfare upon an otherwise peaceful species.<sup>6</sup> In the twentieth century, the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead famously wrote in 1940 that '[w]arfare is only an invention, not a biological necessity'.<sup>7</sup> A similar view was later reflected in the constitution of UNESCO, which was drawn up in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Specifically, 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'.<sup>8</sup> UNESCO subsequently added to this view with its Seville Statement on Violence, issued to celebrate the International Year of Peace in 1986. This suggested that it was 'scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors', or 'that war or any other violent behavior is genetically programmed in our human nature'. UNESCO affirmed that 'biology does not condemn humanity to war', and anathematised the 'alleged biological findings that have been used ... to justify violence and war'.

I like this view, especially the idea that humanity can escape its past and what Sigmund Freud saw as an underlying desire for aggression as part of our instinctual endowment.<sup>9</sup> I consider this essential, as I am of the belief that humanity has been

Mumford, L (1962) *The Story of Utopias* (NYC, Viking); Bernini, M (1950) *Journey Through Utopia* (London, Routledge).

<sup>4</sup> Hsiao, K (1979) *A History of Chinese Political Thought* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press) 299, 308. Bary, T (ed) (1960) *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol I (NYC, Columbia University Press) 99, 128–30, 237.

<sup>5</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* trans Raeburn, D (2004) (London, Penguin) 1.89–100. Note also Hesiod, *The Works and Days* trans Most, L (2003) (Boston MA, Loeb) 1.146.

<sup>6</sup> Rousseau, JJ *The Discourses* trans Gourevitch, V (1997) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

<sup>7</sup> Mead, M (1940) 'Warfare is Only an Invention' 40 *Asia* 402–05. For contemporary debates about this question, see Livingston-Smith, D (2007) *The Most Dangerous Animal: Human Nature and the Origins of War* (London, St Martins); Fry, D (2007) *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

<sup>8</sup> Preamble, UNESCO Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, S (1930) *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London, Penguin) 86.

constantly beleaguered by warfare. This is certainly the pattern to be found in the period covered by this book, the second volume of the causes for war, as they appeared between the years from 1000 to 1400.

### 3. FACTS

The methodology of this book is somewhat complicated. The skeleton on which it is built comprises treaties. I place great weight on the bilateral and international instruments of each age, as despite all of the difficulties posed by different languages and different ages, treaties and/or agreements reflect in the clearest way possible how different nations see a shared problem and shared solution. As such, at each point, the law, or at least the settlement by which peace has been reached, has been set out as simply as possible. In places where there were no treaties, the bones are taken from the practice of key players of the period, which often became custom. In each epoch I have attempted to read and quote the original sources. These have often been supplemented by the best monographs I can find on each epoch.

Within this methodology it is important to keep in mind, when reading historical texts, that there is a high risk that mistakes have occurred, that the original sources were wrong, mistaken or have been taken out of context. I was conscious of this risk in writing this book, as at various points only fragments of history are available. In places I think these fragments resemble dinosaur bones in the desert: a huge amount of material is often missing, and what remains can be assembled to make a variety of bizarre species bearing no relation to what actually existed. My interpretations are the way in which I see the evidence. I have no doubt others will see it differently. I particularly urge caution in the areas where numbers of those killed have been included. Nevertheless, despite the uncertainties in this area, I have included such figures to provide the roughest of gauges, by which the impacts of decisions concerning warfare can be seen.

### 4. CASUS BELLI IN PRACTICE

*Casus belli* is a Latin expression meaning the justification for acts of war. The noun *casus* means 'incident', 'rupture' or 'case', while *belli* means 'of war'. The need for people to have a just cause can be the difference between an act of heroism and an act of murder. For this reason, hundreds, if not thousands, of philosophers and leaders of states listed justifications for why bloodshed was necessary, and why the following loss or acquisition of property was fair. This point about property is an underlying recognition in all of the chapters that follow. That is, the overwhelming majority of all the wars studied in the period covered by this book have the control and/or ownership of resources as their result. No matter which way the causes for violence are cut, the results are nearly always the same—namely, that the control

and/or ownership of resources (from physical resources through to the ability to draw tax) can change hands, or be defended. This is the practical result of nearly all of the conflicts, involving the great diversity of cultures operating within the four centuries documented in this volume.

## 5. VOLUME TWO

Volume 2 on the Causes of War is different from Volume 1 in the way that it is set out. That is, in the first volume, I divided the causes of war from 3000 BCE to 1000 CE into the categories of empire, migratory peoples, politics and religion. In many ways, this worked for the initial period, as, when I looked back on history, although the ideas were of a currency that could be understood in the twenty-first century, most of the regions, empires, actors and countries were not.

As the work on the second volume progressed, it became apparent to me that the regions, empires, actors and countries with which I was dealing were very familiar; there was a much greater density of information, and some of the patterns discernible in Volume 1 started to disappear. This was particularly obvious in connection with migratory peoples. Politics remained the same, albeit with a greater division between absolute sovereigns, a third force of nobles and/or aristocracy as counterweights, and the development of constitutional mechanisms to limit power. The real change here was in the development of peasant revolutions. An additional difference was the occurrence of wars over dynastic issues, in which both marriages and debates about mechanisms for patrimony became much more common, unlike in the first volume of this work. Finally, religion remained a constant cause for war, in terms of both fighting other faiths and of inter-faith warfare. The difference was in Asia, where the Mongols, and the Song and Ming dynasties, managed to relegate religious justifications for warfare.

Although these causes have remained dominant in both volumes, the way I have displayed them in this volume has changed. In this volume, the same categories of religion, politics, monarchy and migratory peoples are being examined within the chronological order for the years 1000 and 1400. Although the conclusion of this volume reverts back to the original form and focus on the causes I identified in the first volume, the method reached to get to this point (chronologically, rather than purely thematically) is different. Nonetheless, the conclusion, that warfare was a constant and driving consideration in all four centuries of this study, is exactly the same as it was for the first volume. Humanity in these years found killing for reasons of religion, politics and/or monarchy, a very easy thing to do.

## II

### *The Eleventh Century*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS CHAPTER WILL show how the causes of war for the first half of the eleventh century in Europe were dominated by monarchs struggling to rule countries they were born in, or the countries of others. There was little territorial integrity to most areas, which allowed marauding opportunists like the Vikings to carve out new territories, whilst others were only held together by shared customs and language. The leaders in these early decades were involved in struggles that were often tied together via dynastic, marital and diplomatic relationships that already stretched the Continent. In some places, power sharing arrangements emerged whereby or promises were made by a king, to obtain support. Although such promises and rudimentary bodies of powerful men existed to try to control the power of the king, these were often weak and unformulated. Nonetheless, the seeds of challenges to absolute monarchy emerge from this century.

The most significant change to occur in this century in terms of causes for war occurred in the second half, when the Papacy became increasingly powerful, gaining control of its own processes. From here, they would begin to challenge the authority of monarchs, legitimising them and their conquests, or undermining them, if they failed to do as they were told. Within western Europe, this contest for absolute authority between the Papacy and monarchs would last for centuries to come.

The eleventh century was also a time of change in the Islamic world. At its farthest point, the forces of Islam were fighting their way into northern India, whilst at its core, the once great Sunni-based Abbasid Caliphate was losing power, both in general and in theological terms. In general terms, the title 'caliph' had passed from the supreme authority who used to nominate the sultans, to any sultan who cared to assume a designation once held to be unique. Already in the eleventh century, there were eight Muslim potentates who called themselves caliphs, although the more dominant ones, such as the Seljuks, learnt to upgrade their own status, while keeping the Abbasid Caliphs in their place in Baghdad and, rather than usurping them, using them for legitimisation processes. In terms of theological power, the greatest challenge to the Sunni-based Abbasids was the Shia-based Fatimids.

It was the overall fragmentation of the Muslim world which allowed Christian forces to advance in Sicily and Spain. In such instances, combinations of both dynastic and political struggles within Islam allowed outside forces to prevail. This was most obvious



with the decline of the Fatimids, as largely driven by the rise of the Seljuks. It was this rise and competition for territory in the inter-Muslim world that led to a somewhat incidental clash with the armies of Byzantium that, in turn, led to the emperor of Constantinople appealing to the pope for military assistance. From this appeal the process of crusades to the Holy Land were undertaken. Here, the rhetoric of the reoccupation of once Christian lands that were now cruelly oppressed, coupled with promises of spiritual redemption for the soldiers, and the political opportunities that conquest of new lands presented, created a dominant cause of war that would roll on for the next three centuries. In practical terms, by 1099, after the Seljuks had fallen victim to their own fratricidal struggles, Latin Christians held Jerusalem.

The final aspect that this chapter will show is how the causes of war in the eleventh century in Asia were related to the emergence of the Song. Politically, this dynasty that ruled China for next three hundred years from the end of the tenth century was unique. Their neo-Confucian philosophy, focusing on practical matters, supporting the poor, buttressed by egalitarian and non-hereditary structures of government which were open to all, was revolutionary. Although the emperor was not power-sharing in the political sense, the focus of their administration suggested that the purpose of government was for the benefit of the people, not the other way around. In terms of causes of war, the Song, in divesting themselves of the traditional goals to hold adjoining non-Chinese areas, such as Tibet and Vietnam, saw such areas devolve into regional battle zones as local warlords attempted to climb to the top. In terms of external enemies of the Song, the biggest military challenges were the migratory groups of the pagan Liao and the Buddhist Xi Xia. In both instances, rather than war them incessantly, the Song adopted a policy of peace via treaties that provided their enemies with tribute, confident that in the longer term, their philosophies and superior way of life, would defeat the opposition.

## 2. THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS IN EUROPE

### **A. The Vikings**

At the turn of the eleventh century, the Norse were the superpower of the age on the northern shores of Europe. From Leif Eriksson's crossing the Atlantic to plant a small colony on what is today Newfoundland, to advancing through what today are England, France, Scotland and Russia, the 'Men of the North' were remarkable. At an individual level, this society produced warriors who were highly skilled in violence, strongly desirous of prestige and driven by a lust for adventure and power. At the diplomatic level, they mixed their military advances with dynastic marriages and political alliances throughout Europe. Their leaders emerged to rule via the endorsement of an assembly of leading men, as there was no tradition of hereditary rule, let alone primogeniture whereby the eldest son would get the entire undivided realm, in this part of the world at this point. Endorsement was based on his record of



success in battle, kinship and inheritance, and/or on his personal fitness for the role by such acts as the killing of a rival.<sup>1</sup>

Some countries, such as what we know as modern day France, had large sections removed from them by the Norse, such as with Normandy, which became strong and independent. This independence was easy to achieve as France was much more of a confederation of loosely-knitted feudal principalities, than any coherent sovereign nation in which inter-communal violence was common. The most important of the regional leaders were the northern French princes, the Counts of Flanders, Toulouse, Anjou, Blois and Champagne. The Duke of Burgundy, holding a powerful piece of territory in the eastern middle part of France, usually paid scant attention to the king, nor did the leaders of Brittany in north-west France. The lords of the south paid even less attention to the king, and rarely troubled to attend his court. Poitou and Aquitaine formed what was almost an independent principality. In this world, the loose bonds of feudal obligations, marriages and diplomacy would often be trumped to fight neighbours of even family members, as Henry I did, contesting his own father, Robert II, for the throne of France.<sup>2</sup>

Although France was too big to be consumed, in total, by the Vikings, England was not. The digestion began after the English king, Aethelred II, became caught in an unhealthy relationship of continually buying peace with tribute from his enemies. Peace proved to always be temporary. This process began in the eleventh century in 1002, when Aethelred II handed over 24,000 pounds of silver (*Danegeld*) as the price to end Danish raids into England. However, the following year, a much larger invasion followed Aethelred's decision to massacre the Danish settlers who had established themselves on English soil without his permission. In 1003, Exeter, Wilton and Salisbury were destroyed by the vengeful Vikings, as were east Kent, Hampshire and Berkshire in 1004. The killing stopped in 1007, for the price of 30,000 pounds of silver. War broke out again in 1009, and only ended in 1012, with many of the Danes returning home, for the price of 48,000 pounds of silver.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 1013, Sweyn Forkbeard, the King of Denmark, decided that, rather than raiding England again and extracting more tribute, he would take Aethelred's crown. This was easy to achieve, with Aethelred fleeing to the safety of the home province of his second wife, Emma of Normandy. To help secure loyalty to the new dynasty

<sup>1</sup> Bagge S (2004). 'The Transformation of Europe: The Role of Scandinavia' *Medieval Encounters* 10(3): 131–65; Sawyer, P (1997) *Medieval Scandinavia* (London, Minnesota University Press) 57–61, 78–84, 89; Sonne, L (2013) 'Kings, Chieftains and Public Cult in Pre-Christian Scandinavia' *Early Medieval Europe* 22(1): 53–68; Carlyle, AJ (1910) *A History of Medieval Political Theory in the West*, Vol III (London, Blackwood) 20–25, 53–55.

<sup>2</sup> Head, T (2007) 'Peace and Power in France Around the Year 1000' *Essays in Medieval Studies* 23 (1): 1–17; Defries D (2013) 'The Emergence of the Territorial Principality of Flanders' *History Compass* 11 (8): 619–631; Fawtier, R (1974) *The Capetian Kings of France* (London, Macmillan) 60–61, 66–67, 96, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Neidorf, L (2012) 'Aethelred and the Politics of the Battle of Maldon' *Journal of English and German Philology* 111: 451–473; Stenton, F (1985) *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, Clarendon Press) 379–83, 386; Tanner, J (ed) (1958) *The Cambridge Medieval History: Decline of Empire and Papacy*, Vol VII (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) 530–34; Grant, R (2011) *1001 Battles* (London, Penguin) 128.