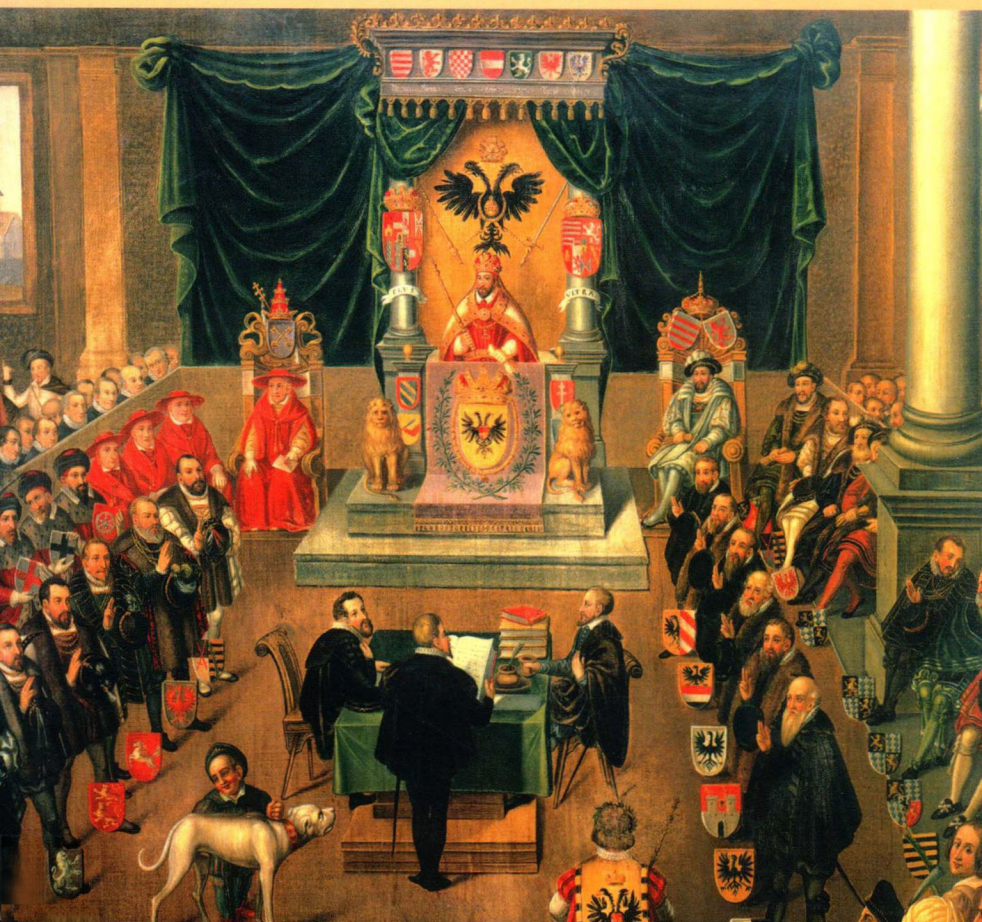


Studies in European History



PETER H. WILSON

THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE 1495–1806

Second Edition



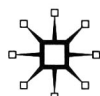
The Holy Roman Empire 1495–1806

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Editors' Preface

The Studies in European History series offers a guide to developments in a field of history that has become increasingly specialised with the sheer volume of new research and literature now produced. Each book has three main objectives. The primary purpose is to offer an informed assessment of opinion on a key episode or theme in European history. Second, each title presents a distinct interpretation and conclusions from someone who is closely involved with current debates in the field. Third, it provides students and teachers with a succinct introduction to the topic, with the essential information necessary to understand it and the literature being discussed. Equipped with an annotated bibliography and other aids to study, each book provides an ideal starting point to explore important events and processes that have shaped Europe's history to the present day.

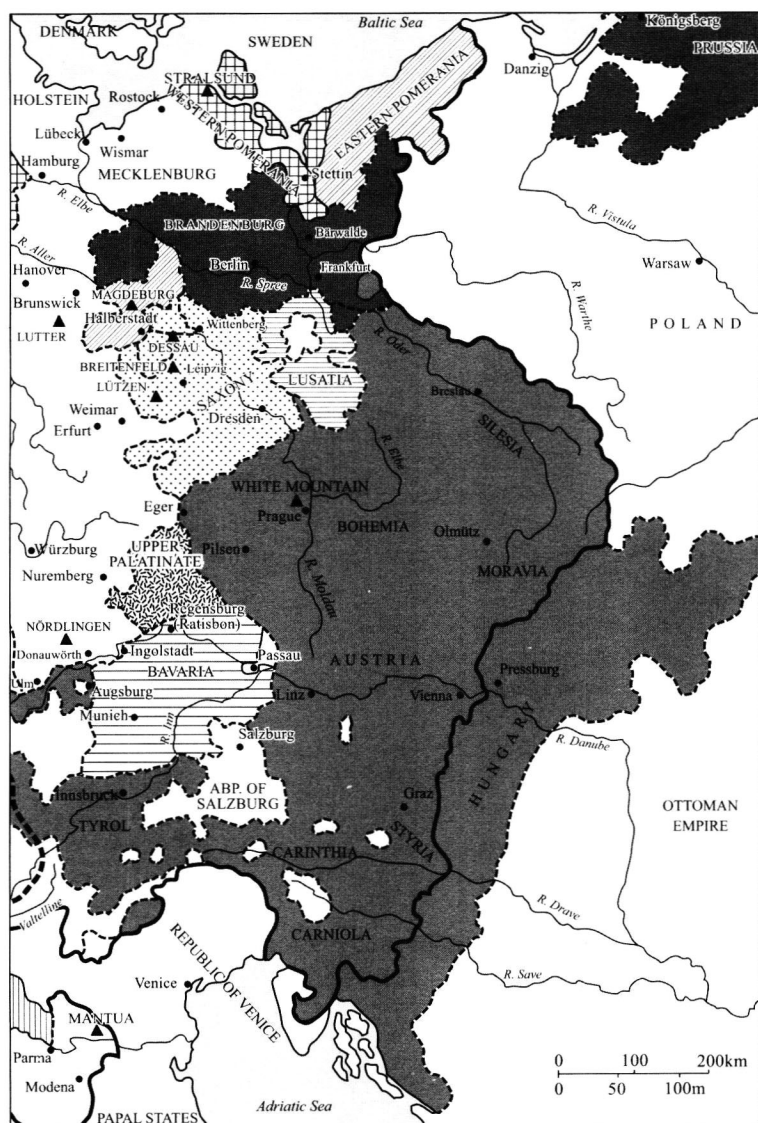
Books in the series introduce students to historical approaches which in some cases are very new and which, in the normal course of things, would take many years to filter down to text-books. By presenting history's cutting edge, we hope that the series will demonstrate some of the excitement that historians, like scientists, feel as they work on the frontiers of their subject. The series also has an important contribution to make in publicising what historians are doing, and making it accessible to students and scholars in this and related disciplines.

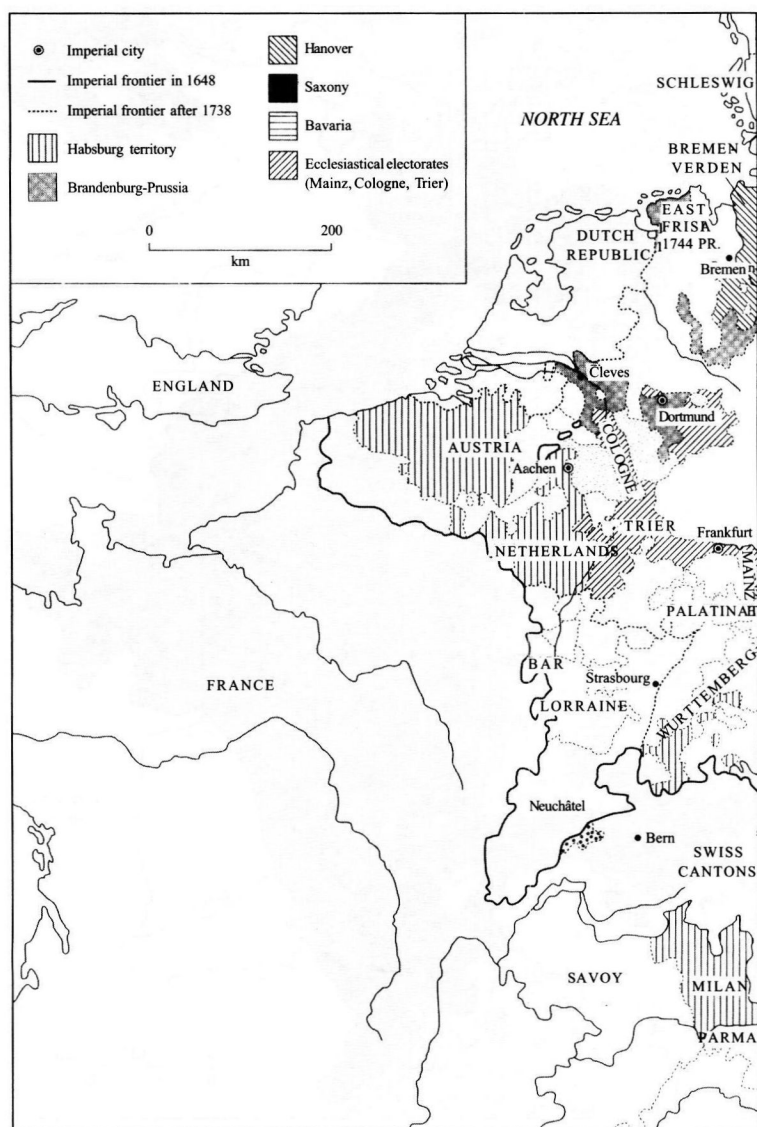
JOHN BREUILLY
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Preface to the Second Edition

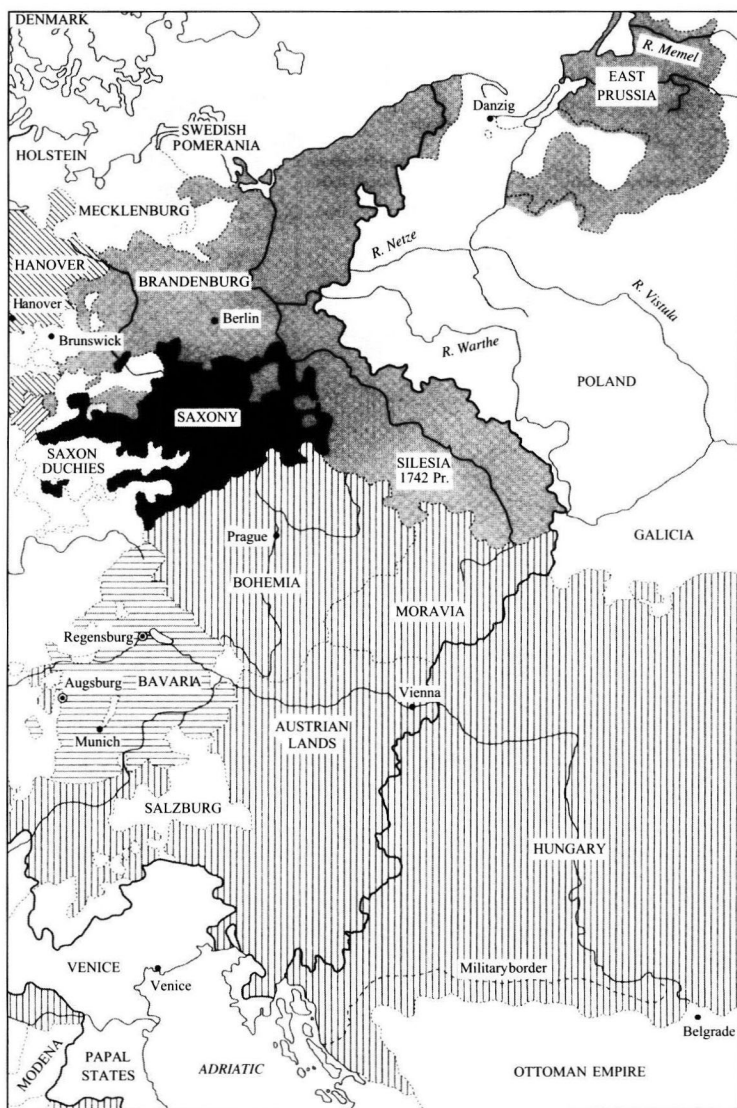
The title and basic structure remain the same as in the first edition, but otherwise this book is almost entirely new. A new chapter on identity has been added to cover debates which have grown since 1999. The other chapters have been extensively rewritten – the second almost completely – to encompass new research and to add clarity and illustrative examples. Some of the arguments have been modified in response to new findings, or because my own views have moved on. The bibliography has been revised and expanded to include web-based material, as well as recent publications. Most of the older literature has been removed, except items of historiographical significance, or those constituting the only works available in English on important topics.

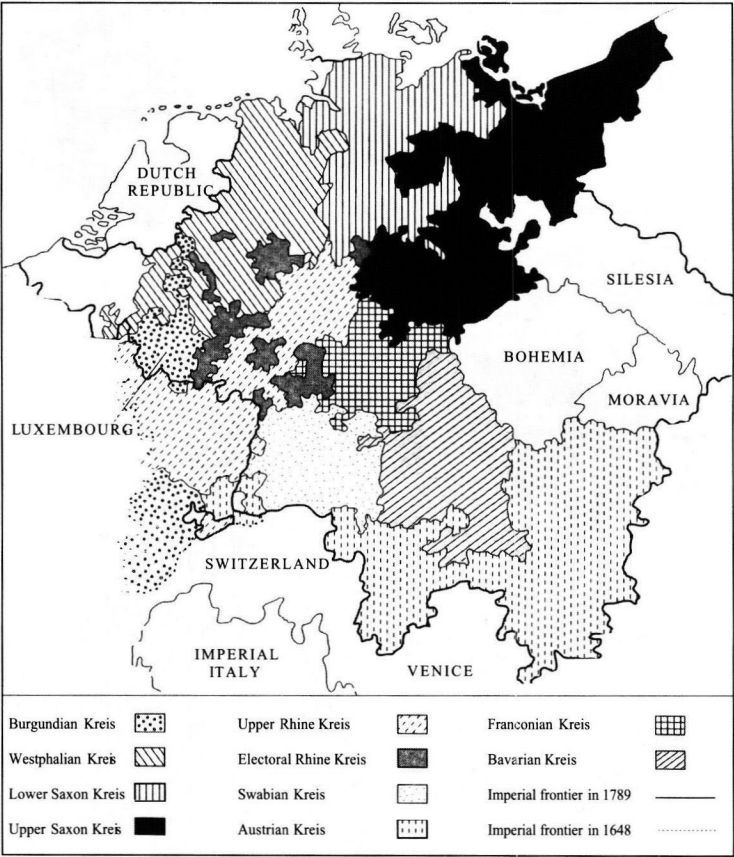
I am very grateful for feedback and suggestions from students and tutors using the first edition, as well as Tim Blanning, my fellow series editors John Breuilly and Julian Jackson, and an anonymous US reader for their detailed comments on a first draft of the revisions. Sonya Barker and the team at Palgrave have provided constant encouragement and have handled all aspects of the production with their customary efficiency.





Map 2 The Holy Roman Empire in 1745 (from Peter H. Wilson, *German Armies: War and German Politics 1648–1806*, 1998, reproduced by kind permission of UCL Press).





Map 3 The Kreise (from Peter H. Wilson, (from Peter H. Wilson, *German Armies: War and German Politics 1648–1806*, 1998, reproduced by kind permission of UCL Press).

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1 The Holy Roman Empire Explained

[i] Introduction

The Holy Roman Empire was once famously dismissed by Voltaire as neither holy, Roman nor an empire. Despite covering most of central Europe for over a millennium, the Empire is still poorly understood in comparison with other European states, even to the point that many scholars dispute whether it was indeed a state at all [40; 60; 65]. Within German historiography, the Empire, or first Reich in contrast to Bismarck's Second and Hitler's Third, used to be a byword for political impotency and national disunity. Recent scholarship has done much to dispel these misconceptions, but the very volume and scope of this newer literature has made it difficult to form a rounded picture of the Empire's development and place within wider European trends.

This book sets out to do this by explicitly addressing the very questions about the Empire that prove persistently difficult to answer: What was it? How did it function? Why did it survive for so long? Why did it collapse when it did? In searching for answers we will return to the very beginning, when the Empire was founded by Charlemagne on Christmas Day, AD 800. However, the main focus will be on the period from 1495; an important date in the Empire's constitutional development, roughly marking the point when it was clear that it would not emerge along the same lines as the great western European monarchies such as France or Spain. The concluding point will be 1806, when the Empire formally disappeared in the wake of Napoleon's reorganization of central Europe, though, as we shall see, its legacy for German politics persisted well beyond that date.