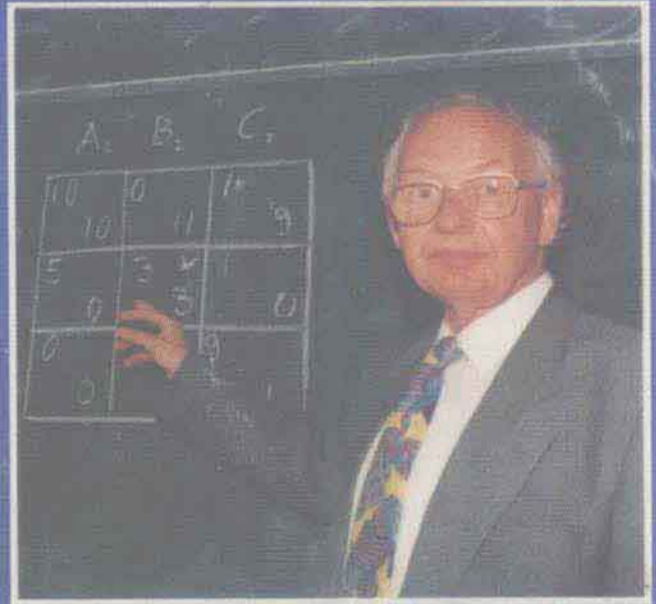


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Contents

History

German history up to 1945	8
From 1945 to the present	27

Country and people

The country	63
The people	66

The federal states

Baden-Württemberg	79
The Free State of Bavaria	82
Berlin	87
Brandenburg	92
The Free Hanseatic City of Bremen	95
The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg	97
Hesse	100
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	103
Lower Saxony	106
North Rhine-Westphalia	109
Rhineland-Palatinate	112
Saarland	115
The Free State of Saxony	118
Saxony-Anhalt	123
Schleswig-Holstein	126
The Free State of Thuringia	128

Political system, constitution, law

The Basic Law	132
The constitutional bodies	140
Federalism and self-government	149
Parties and elections	154
The legal system	161

State and citizens

Public finance	170
Public service	177
Internal security	179

Germany in the world

Foreign policy	184
External security	202
Cooperation with developing countries	206

The economy

Economic system and policy	216
Germany: an attractive region for investment	224
The labour market	236
Incomes and prices	240
Consume protection	246
Housing and urban development	249
Environmental protection	255

Sectors of the economy

Industry	264
Technology	270
Crafts and trades	273
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	277
Commerce	285
Foreign trade	288
Energy and raw materials	294
Money and banking	301
Fairs and exhibitions	308
Transport	312
Posts and telecommunications	321
Germany for the tourist	325

Structures of the social market economy

Industrial relations	332
Codetermination	337
Social security	346
Health	353

Life in the community

Women and society	360
Youth	365
Sports	373
Leisure and holidays	377
Clubs, associations and citizens' action groups	380
Churches and religious communities	382
Mass media and public opinion	386
Radio and television	394

Education and science

Cultural diversity	402
Schools	404
Vocational education	410
Higher education institutions	414
Adult education	419
Scholarship and research	422

Culture

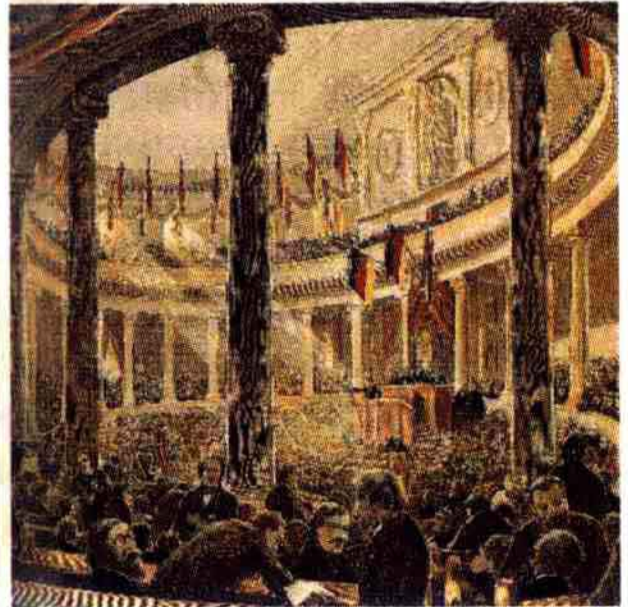
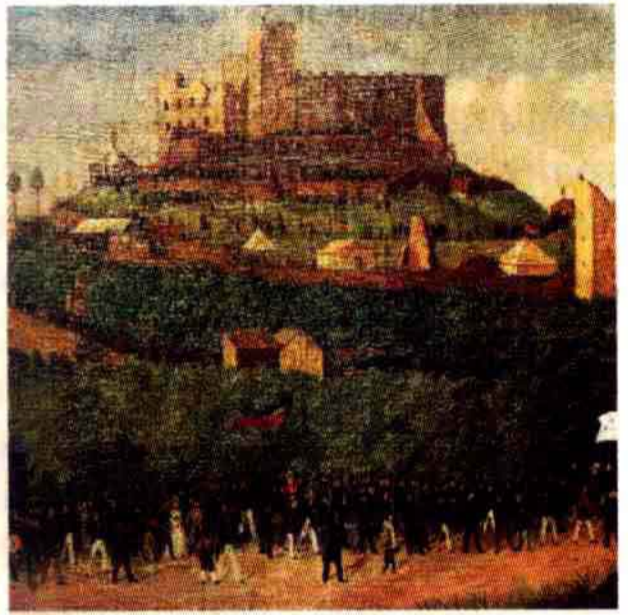
Literature	432
The book trade and libraries	441
Art	445
Architecture	453
Museums, collections, exhibitions	460
Music	466
Theatre	471
Cinema	475
Festivals	481

Index

484

History

- German history up to 1945
- From 1945 to the present



German history up to 1945

Up to the last century it was a widely held belief that German history began in the year A.D. 9. That was when Arminius, a prince of a Germanic tribe called the Cherusci, vanquished three Roman legions in the Teuto-burg Forest (southeast of modern-day Bielefeld). Arminius, about whom not much else is known, was regarded as the first German national hero and a huge memorial to him was built near Detmold in the years 1838-1875.

Nowadays a less simplistic view is taken. The fusing of a German nation was a process which took hundreds of years. The word "deutsch" (German) probably began to be used in the 8th century and initially defined only the language spoken in the eastern part of the Franconian realm. This empire, which reached the zenith of its power under Charlemagne, incorporated peoples speaking Germanic and Romance dialects. After Charlemagne's death (814) it soon fell apart. In the course of various inheritance divisions, a western and an eastern realm developed, whose political boundary approximately coincided with the boundary between German and French speakers. Only gradually did a feeling of cohesion develop among the inhabitants of the eastern realm. Then the term "deutsch" was transferred from the language to its speakers and ultimately to the region they lived in, "Deutschland".

The German western frontier was fixed relatively early and remained fairly stable. But the eastern frontier moved to and fro for hundreds of years. Around 900 it ran approximately along the Elbe and Saale rivers. In subsequent centuries German settlement extended far to the east. This expansion stopped only in the middle of the 14th century. The ethnic boundary then made between Germans and Slavs remained until World War II.

■ ■ ■ **High Middle Ages.** The transition from the East Franconian to the German "Reich" is usually dated from 911, when, after the Carolingian dynasty had died out, the Franconian duke Conrad I was elected king. He is regarded as the first German king. (The official title was "Frankish King", later "Roman King"; from the 11th century the name of the realm was "Roman Empire", from

the 13th century "Holy Roman Empir", and in the 15th century the words "of the German Nation" were added.) It was an electoral monarchy, that is to say, the high nobility chose the king. In addition, "dynastic right" also applied and so the new king had to be a blood relation of his predecessor. This principle was broken several times. There were also a number of double elections. The medieval empire had no capital city; the king ruled roving about from place to place. There were no imperial taxes; the king drew his sustenance mainly from "imperial estates" he administered in trust. His authority was not always recognized by the powerful tribal dukes unless he was militarily powerful and a skilful forger of alliances. Conrad's successor, the Saxon duke Henry I (919-936), was the first to succeed in this, and to an even greater extent his son, Otto (936-973). Otto made himself the real ruler of the realm. His great power found obvious expression when he was crowned Emperor in 962 in Rome.

From then on the German king could claim the title "Emperor". The emperorship was conceived as universal and gave its incumbent control over the entire Occident. However, this notion never became full political reality. In order to be crowned emperor by the Pope the king had to make his way to Rome. With that began the Italian policy of the German kings. For 300 years they were able to retain control of upper and central Italy but because of this were diverted from important tasks in Germany. And so Otto's successors inevitably suffered big setbacks. However, under the succeeding Salian dynasty a new upswing occurred. With Henry III (1039-1056) the German kingship and emperorship reached the zenith of its power, maintaining above all a supremacy over the Papacy. Henry IV (1056-1106) was not able to hold this position. In a quarrel with Pope Gregory VII over whether bishops and other influential church officials should be appointed by the Pope or by the temporal ruler he was superficially successful. But Gregory retaliated by excommunicating Henry, who thereupon surrendered his authority over the church by doing penance to the Pope at Canossa (1077), an irretrievable loss of power by the emperorship. From then on Emperor and Pope were equal-ranking powers.

In 1138 the century of rule by the Staufer or Hohenstaufen dynasty began. Frederick I Barbarossa (1152-

1190), in wars with the Pope, the upper Italian cities and his main German rival, the Saxon duke Henry the Lion, led the empire into a new golden age. But under him began a territorial fragmentation which ultimately weakened the central power. This decline continued under Barbarossa's successors, Henry VI (1190-1197) and Frederick II (1212-1250) despite the great power vested in the emperorship. The religious and temporal princes became semi-sovereign territorial rulers. The end of Hohenstaufen rule (1268) also meant the end of the Emperor's universal rule in the Occident as well. Internal disintegrative forces prevented Germany from becoming a national state, a process just beginning then in other western European countries. Here lies one of the reasons why the Germans became a "belated nation".

■ ■ ■ **Late Middle Ages to modern times.** Rudolf I (1273-1291) was the first Habsburg to take the throne. Now the material foundation of the emperorship was no longer the lost imperial estates but the "house estates" of the dynasties, and house power politics became every emperor's main preoccupation.

The "Golden Bull" (imperial constitution) issued by Charles IV in 1356 regulated the election of the German king by seven electors privileged with special rights. These sovereign electors and the towns, because of their economic power, gradually gained influence while that of the small counts, lords and knights declined. The towns' power further increased when they linked up in leagues. The most important of these, the Hanseatic League, became the leading Baltic power in the 14th century.

From 1438 the crown – although the empire nominally was an electoral monarchy – practically became the property of the Habsburg dynasty which had become the strongest territorial power. In the 15th century demands for imperial reform increased. Maximilian I (1493 to 1519), the first to accept the imperial title without a papal coronation, tried to implement such a reform but without much success. The institutions newly created or reshaped by him – Reichstag (Imperial Diet), Reichskreise (Imperial Counties), Reichskammergericht (Imperial Court) – lasted until the end of the Reich (1806), but were not able to halt its continuing fragmentation. Consequently, a dualism of "Emperor and Reich" developed: the head of the Reich was offset by the estates of the



Emperor Charles IV and the seven electors (illumination, ca. 1370)

Reich – electors, princes and towns. The power of the emperors was curtailed and increasingly eroded by “capitulations”, which they negotiated at their election with the electors. The princes, especially the powerful among them, greatly expanded their rights at the expense of imperial power. But the Reich continued to hold together, the glory of the imperial idea remained alive, and the small and medium-sized territories were protected in the Reich system from attack by powerful neighbours.

The towns became centres of economic power, profiting above all from growing trade. In the burgeoning textile and mining industries, forms of economic activity grew which went beyond the guilds system of the craftsmen and, like long-distance trading, were beginning to take on early capitalistic traits. At the same time an intellectual change was taking place, marked by the Renaissance and Humanism. The newly risen critical spirit turned above all on church abuses.

■ ■ ■ **Age of religious schism.** The smouldering dissatisfaction with the church broke out, mainly through the actions of Martin Luther from 1517, in the Reformation, which quickly spread. Its consequences went far beyond the religious sphere. Social unrest abounded. In 1522/23 the Reich knights rose up and in 1525 the Peasants’ Revolt broke out, the first larger revolutionary movement in German history to strive for both political and social change. Both uprisings failed or were bloodily quelled.



Peasants in revolt (woodcut by Hans Burgkmair, 1525)

The territorial princes profited most from the Reformation. After the changing fortunes of war they were given the right to dictate their subjects' religion by the 1555 Peace of Augsburg. This accorded the Protestants equal rights with those of the Catholics. The religious division of Germany was thus sealed.

On the imperial throne at the time of the Reformation was Charles V (1519-1556), heir to the biggest realm since the time of Charlemagne. His international political interests were too demanding for him to be able to assert himself within Germany. After his abdication the empire was split up. The German territorial states and the western European national states together now formed the new European system of states.

At the time of the Peace of Augsburg, four fifths of Germany were Protestant but the struggle between the faiths had not ended. In the following decades the Catholic Church was able to recapture many areas (Counter-Reformation). The differences between the faiths sharpened, religious parties – the Protestant Union (1608) and the Catholic League (1609) – were formed. A local conflict in Bohemia then triggered the Thirty Years' War which widened into a European conflict over religious and political differences. Between 1618 and 1648 much of Germany was devastated and depopulated. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia brought the cession of territories to France and Sweden and confirmed the withdrawal of

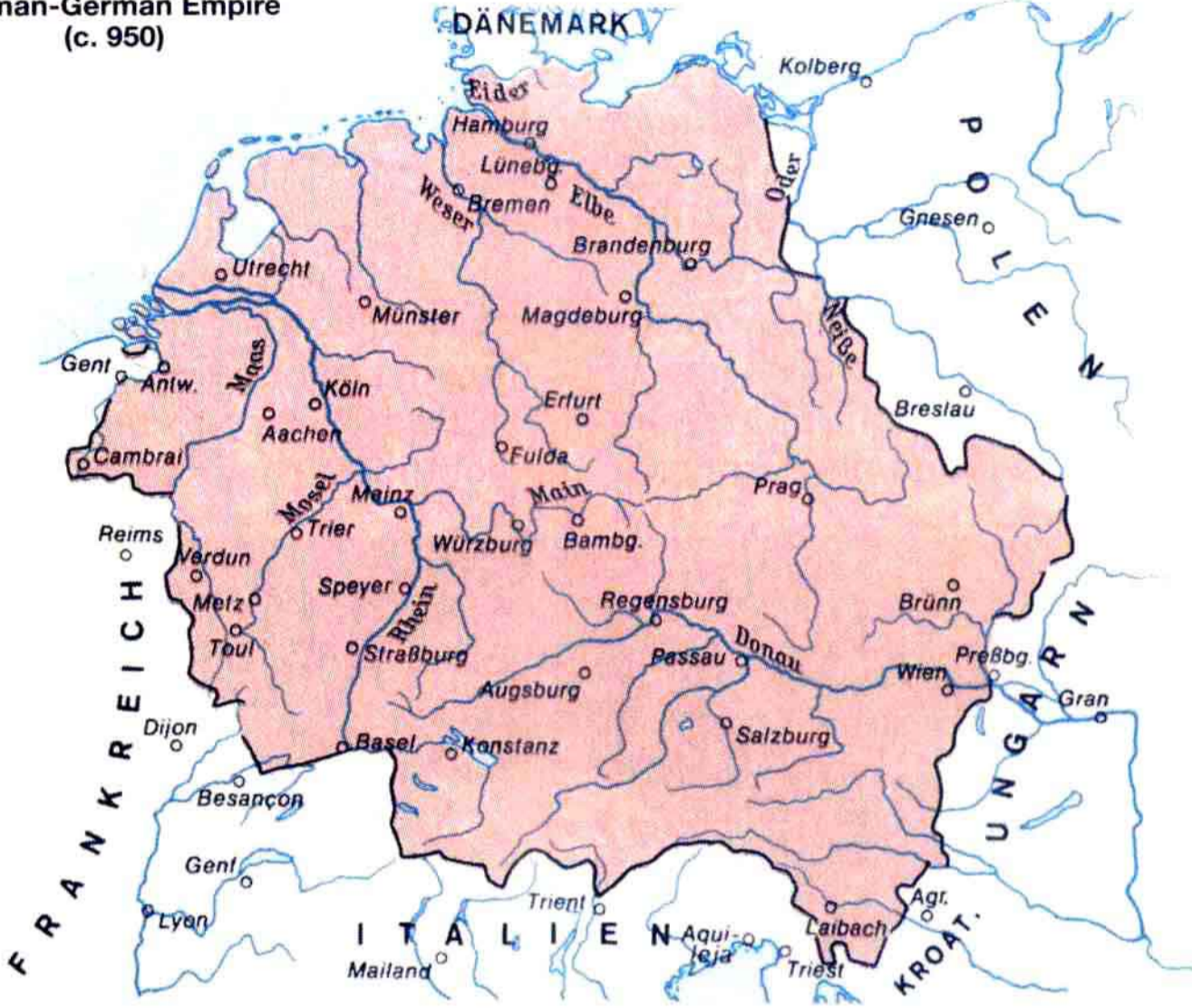
Switzerland and the Netherlands from the Reich. The estates of the Reich were accorded all major sovereign rights in religious and temporal matters and the right to enter alliances with foreign partners.

■ ■ **Age of absolutism.** The almost sovereign principalities took over the absolutist form of government modelled on the French. Absolutism gave the ruler limitless power while at the same time allowing tight administrations to be built up, an organized fiscal policy to be introduced and new armies to be mobilized. Many princes

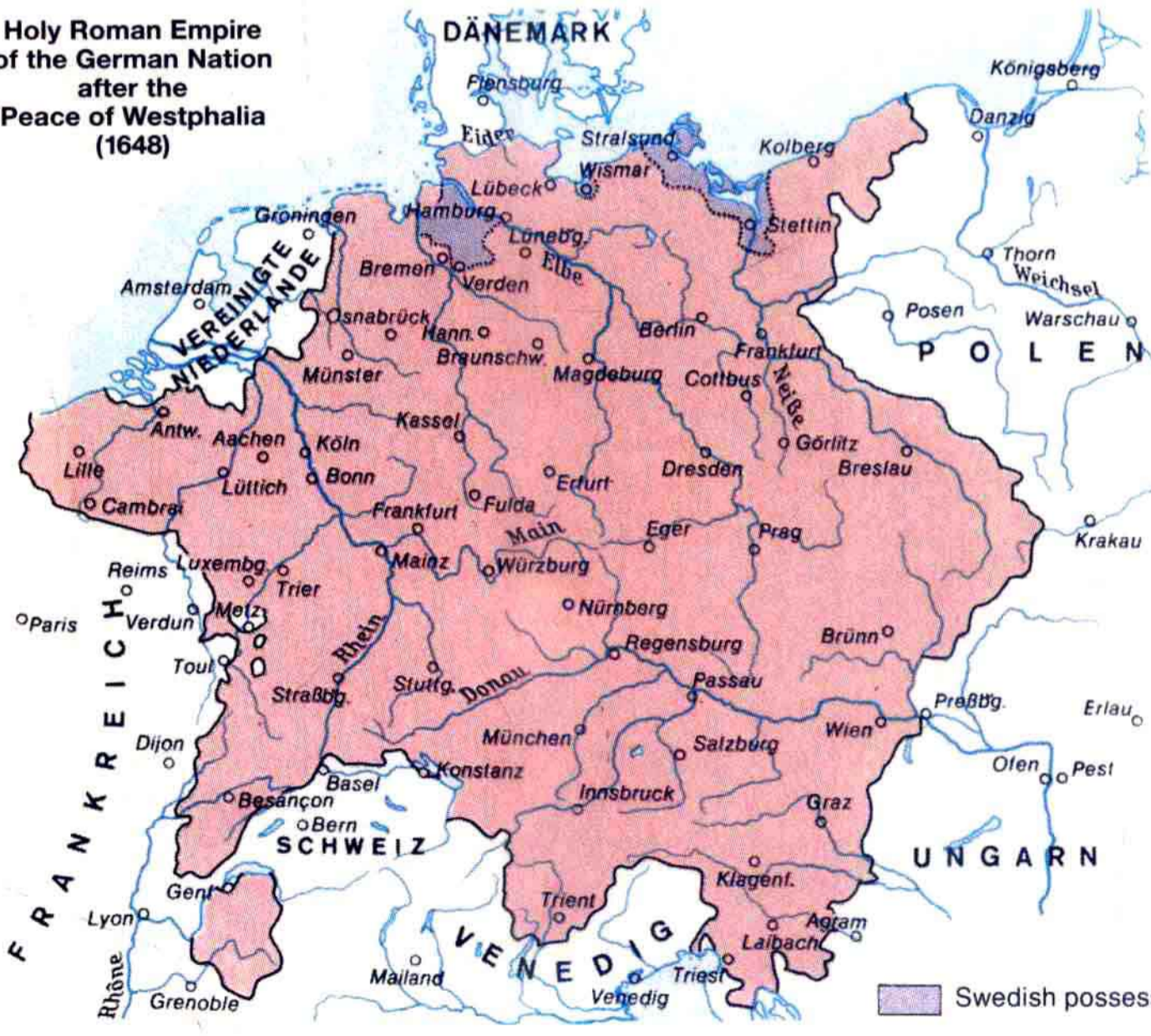


Frederick II, the Great (1712-1786)

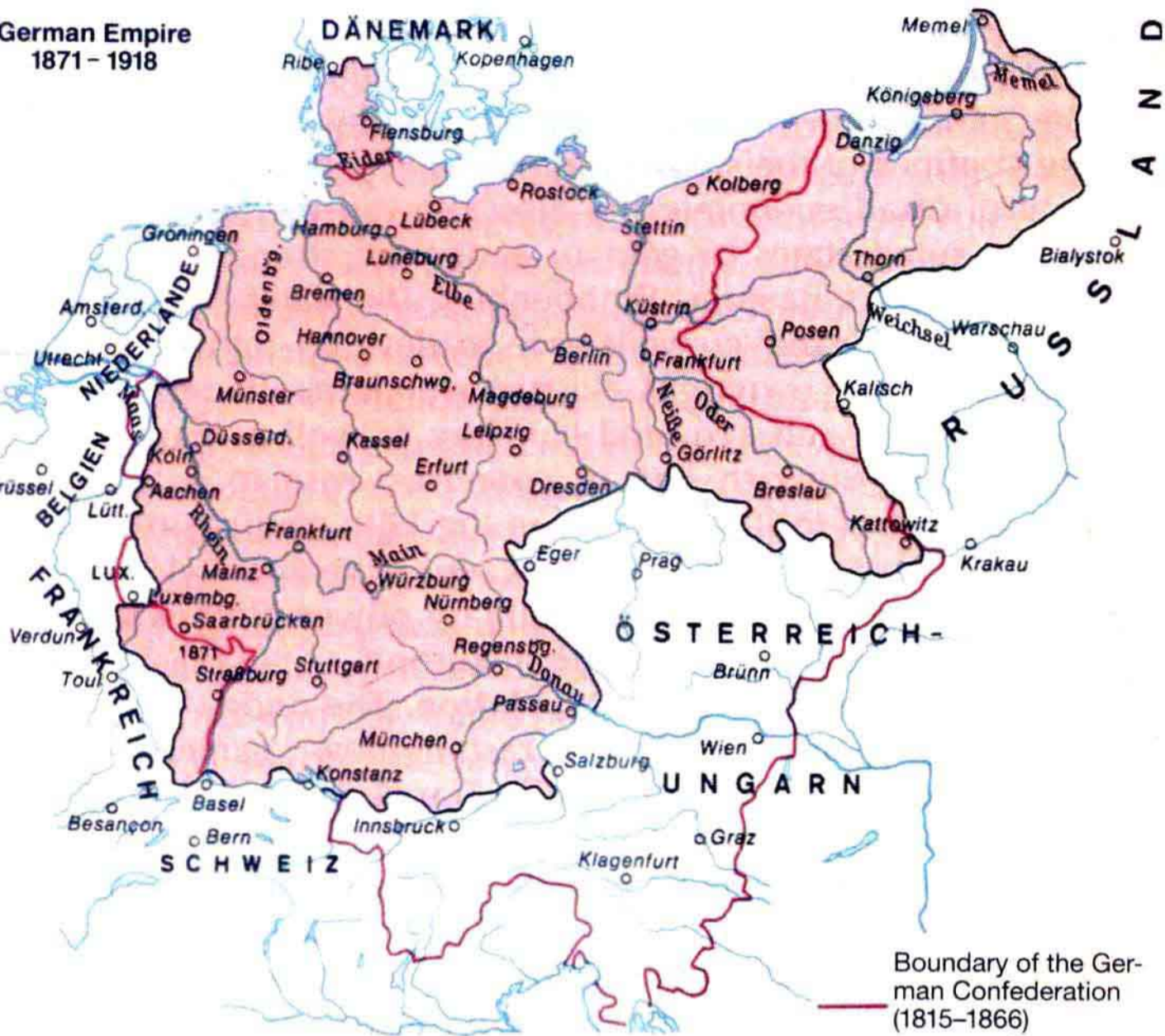
Roman-German Empire (c. 950)



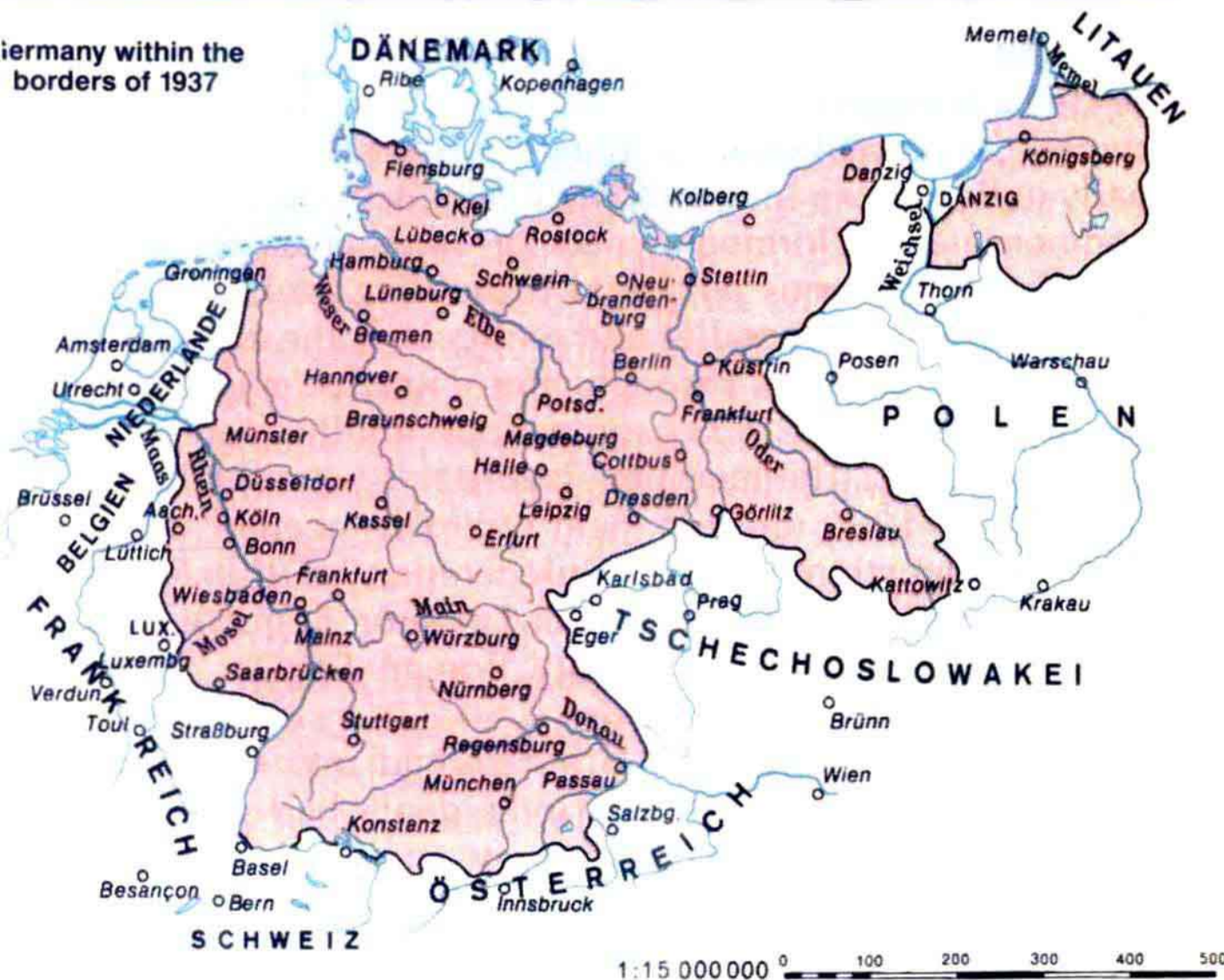
Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation after the Peace of Westphalia (1648)



German Empire 1871 - 1918



Germany within the borders of 1937



aspired to making their residences cultural focal points. Some of them, representatives of "enlightened absolutism", encouraged learning and philosophy, albeit within the confines of their power interests. The policy of state control of all economic life also allowed the absolutistically ruled states to gain in economic strength. Thus lands such as Bavaria, Brandenburg (the later Prussia), Saxony and Hanover were able to develop into power centres in their own right. Austria, which repelled the attacking Turks and acquired Hungary as well as parts of the formerly Turkish Balkan countries, rose to a large power. A rival to it developed in the 18th century in the form of Prussia which, under Frederick the Great (1740-1786), grew into a first-rank military power. Both states sought to assert their authority in Europe.

■ ■ ■ **Age of the French Revolution.** The nudge which brought the crumbling Reich crashing down came from the west. Revolution broke out in France in 1789. Under pressure from the middle classes, the feudal social order which had existed since the early Middle Ages was swept away; a separation of powers and human rights were to assure the liberty and equality of all. The attempt by Prussia and Austria to intervene by force in events in the neighbouring country failed ignominiously and triggered a counter-thrust by the revolutionary armies. Under the stormy advances of the forces of Napoleon, who had assumed the revolutionary heritage in France, the Reich finally collapsed. France took the left bank of the Rhine. To compensate the former owners of these areas for their losses, an enormous territorial reshuffling took place at the expense of the smaller and particularly the ecclesiastical principalities. Through the "Reichsdeputationshauptschluss" of 1803 some four million subjects changed rulers. The medium-sized states were the beneficiaries. In 1806 most of them grouped together under French protection in the Confederation of the Rhine (Rheinbund). In the same year Emperor Franz II laid down the crown and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation ceased to exist.

The French revolution did not spread into Germany. Although there, too, various individuals had over the years tried time and again to do away with the barriers between the aristocracy and the common people, and although leading thinkers welcomed the overthrow in the