

# GERMAN HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS



**T**o say that Germany has a messy history would be a great understatement. From the more than one thousand German microstates to the period of unification, division into East and West, and reunification, Germany has undergone many boundary changes that genealogists have to keep track of.

But German history affects your research far more than just changing the borders on maps. Indeed, border changes are significant because the jurisdiction your ancestor's village belonged to affects where civil records are kept today. These administrative boundaries may have also determined the state's religion and therefore what type of religious records might be available.

This section will give you a crash-course lesson in the history of German-speaking lands. You'll find some history at the beginning of each section of maps, too, mostly to help you zero-in on some concepts relating to the time period or topics covered by the maps in that section.

But before we get into specifics, let's discuss one overriding concept that I covered in my earlier book *Trace Your German Roots Online* (Family Tree Books, 2016): Germany's "non-linear" history. The United States has a linear history, in which (over

time) the country expanded across the continent of North America from east to west, with new states being created from acquired territories, counties being created within those states, and new counties breaking off from older counties. This proceeded pretty much with no looking back, and the historical boundaries created in centuries past are more or less the same as they are today.

But in what is now Germany, progress was less consistent. You'll find that noble dynasties went extinct and their holdings were split between two or more related families. Or war resulted in one neighbor absorbing another—before still another state conquered the winner of that previous conflict. In short, there was loads of ebb and flow throughout the centuries, and you can't draw a straight line from ancient, medieval, or even early-modern Germany to today's Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Most chapters in this atlas deal with a certain chronological selection of maps, all of which show similar depictions of the German states at a given time. Through them, we can view the ebb and flow of German history, starting through a wide-angle lens depicting the Germanic tribes of ancient times. Then we'll zoom in to the Holy Roman Empire during its millennium of existence, followed by the brief (but significant) Second German Empire and today's Germany. Then we'll pan back out to show



demographics as well as the other German-speaking nations and enclaves across Europe.

Let's take a look at the concepts that affect the long arc of German history—those as long-lasting as millennia-old tribal affiliations and those as relatively recent as political self-awareness and civil rights.

## The Germanic Tribes of Central and Eastern Europe: Prehistory to the 600s

Before “Germany”—or even of the sense of a “German” people—there were Germanic tribes such as the Helvetii, Marcomanni, Saxons, Jutes, Angles, Suebi, Cherusci, Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Alemanni. These tribes, first appearing in 500 B.C. or even earlier, originated in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. These Germanic tribes were not literate, and thus much of what we know about them comes from the Romans they encountered.

These tribes frequently butted heads with the Romans. Among the first to spar with the Germanic tribes was the emperor Marius, who defeated the Cimbri and Teutones tribes to take part of Gaul (modern-day France and the Benelux countries) around 100 B.C. Likewise, Julius Caesar completed the Roman conquest of Gaul in the 50s B.C., and Augustus had the aim of pushing the Roman Empire east of the Rhine River into what was dubbed “Germania.” He wanted to shrink the boundary between the Romans and Germanic to the Weser, the Elbe, or perhaps even the Oder. Rome subjugated some additional tribes such as the Cherusci (in 9 B.C.), then the Chatti and Bructeri (4 A.D.).

But before long, the Romans began to struggle in their conquest. In 9 A.D., Roman general Publius Quinctilius Varus and his forces were ambushed by an alliance of tribes (including the Marsi, Chatti, Bructeri, Chauci, Sicambri, Suebi, and Cherusci) in the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. The leader of the Germanic confederation was Arminius (often called Hermann due to a translation error), a Cherusci-born aide to Varus who had received a Roman military education while being a good-faith hostage for his tribe. Arminius became the first non-legendary hero for the emerging Germans, who re-discovered his story after the Dark Ages. But the immediate result of the Roman disaster was that the Rhine remained Rome's frontier, and Germania continued to evolve from an uncivilized area made up of loosely organized tribes into trading partners of and mercenaries for Rome.

By 400, the western part of the now-divided Roman Empire was crumbling, and Germanic tribes (increasing in number and facing competition from Slavs and Huns to the east) took advantage of the power vacuum by invading various areas formerly attached to the empire. Visigoths under the leader Alaric sacked Rome in 410, and Germanic king Odoacer put the final nail in the Western Roman Empire's coffin by eliminating the office of the emperor in 476.

In the chaos during and after Rome's fall, the tribes established rough, decentralized feudal mini-states throughout west-

ern Europe. The Franks inhabited what became France, while the Visigoths lived in present-day Spain, the Vandals in North Africa, the Lombards in northern Italy, and the Ostrogoths in other parts of Italy and the Balkans.

Many present-day areas of Germany and the lands immediately west of it still bear remembrance to the tribal domains from this early Medieval era. Each of the following areas is called a *Stammesherzogtum* or “stem (or tribal) duchy” in recognition of the tribe that once dominated it:

- Alamannia, the home of the Alemanni, which now lies in southwestern Germany as well as parts of France and Switzerland (Note: The French word for Germany is *Allemagne*, harkening back to this ancestry.)
- Bavaria (i.e., the eastern portion of the present-day German state so named) where the tribe of Boii originally settled in what is now the Czech state of Bohemia
- Burgundy, now a region of eastern France that was invaded and resettled by the Burgundians
- Franconia, an area of Bavaria that was the homeland to the Franks before they moved westward to modern France (where they became the most dominant of the western Germanic tribes for several centuries)
- Saxony, which survives in the names of three present-day German states: Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and (of course) Saxony
- Swabia, in present-day Württemberg and Bavaria, for a variant of the Suebi tribe (Note: Swabia incorporates much of the earlier stem duchy of Alamannia.)
- Thuringia, which developed from the Thuringii tribe that lived in east-central Germany

## Feudalism and the Holy Roman Empire: The Middle Ages

It's probably one of history's highest ironies that, before France and Germany became fierce rivals, they shared a common hero in the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne (a Latinized version of “Charles the Great,” called *Karl der Große* in the German language), who ascended the Frankish throne in 768.

Charlemagne, as leader of the Franks, subjugated many of the Germanic tribes that had formed smaller, fluid states after they finished pillaging Rome. After three decades of war, he united much of what is now France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Italy into a single kingdom. He also stopped the westward Slavic migrations, resulting in a fixed German-Slavic linguistic line that still echoes today.

In 800, the pope crowned Charlemagne “Emperor of the Romans,” making him a shadowy successor of the once-mighty Rome and the first “Holy Roman Emperor.” This, in theory, made Charlemagne the secular counterpart to the pope for all of Christianized Western Europe, which was ruled by many other kings but no emperors.



As part of his duties, Charlemagne created many new types of nobility—especially those with the rank of count (German, *Graf*), specifically dubbed *Pfalzgraf*, *Landgraf*, and *Markgraf*. In many cases, these *Grafen* received border territories to rule. Some of these titles survived for centuries, even giving names to geographic areas like the Pfalz (or Palatinate, in English).

In the Medieval world's system of manorialism (or feudalism, as it is often loosely referred), "everybody has a boss." Every person was bound in some way to a superior—peasants to knights, knights to local lords, local lords to higher nobility (such as counts, princes, dukes and kings), and those higher nobles to the emperor. (The church had its own hierarchy, from penitent to pope.) In exchange for being bound as serfs, commoners received some measure of military and economic protection from their "betters." Even as this organization of society died out in other countries, feudalism remained in the German states well into modern times.

Because of Frankish legal inheritance code, Charlemagne's empire fractured among his grandchildren upon his son's death in 840. One of his grandchildren, Ludwig (or Louis the German) inherited "East Francia," which would become the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." Ludwig's brothers also received land: Charles the Bald inherited West Francia, while Lothair was given a long and narrow strip of land between that of his brothers'. Charles' portion became modern France, while Lothair's land (also known as Middle Francia, or Lorraine/Lothringen after Lothair) was eventually divided between France and the German Holy Roman Empire.

Dukes elected the kings in East Francia, but this elective emperorship and the concept of what territories were considered fiefs of the empire were fluid. From the first elections in the 900s (when the dukes ruling the stem duchies were the voters), electors represented these ancient German areas. Many times, this electoral college shifted from father to son, while other electors tried to maintain a "balance of power" between dynasties.

In 1356, Charles IV issued what he called the "Golden Bull" (decree) that limited voting in the imperial election to seven individuals: the three archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne, and the four rulers of Bohemia, the Palatinate, Brandenburg, and Saxony. There were some changes in the composition of the college, especially in the waning years of the empire in the late 1700s. Still rulers from other areas also held fiefs and therefore were loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor: the elector of Hanover was also king of Britain; the elector of Brandenburg became king of Prussia (which was considered to be outside the Empire); and Lorraine and Provence were states of the Empire that later became part of France.

The bottom line is that, by retaining this elective emperorship for centuries, the Holy Roman Empire did not evolve into a centralized, unitary German state. Rather, it became weaker and fractionalized compared to monarchies such as England and France.

## Struggling German Dynasties: The High Middle Ages

This political setup (partible inheritance and having an electoral kingship) was a major factor in keeping the German states disunited, but there were other factors, too. Emperors often convinced their electors to appoint their children as successors, only to have the imperial dynasty die out or be left only with minor sons left. (States that became centralized such as England and France had more reproductive luck in producing stable dynasties.) The emperor often found himself doing favors for the various German city-states in an attempt to curry favor and win over electoral votes.

The Holy Roman Empire's leaders also dreamed of ruling Italy, distracting them from the task of unifying a German kingdom. Otto I, elected king of the Germans in 936, is a prime example. He was an able ruler who defeated the Magyars (forefathers of today's Hungary) and became the first German king to be granted the title "Emperor of the Romans" in nearly fifty years. But, for centuries afterward, his successors would pursue territories in Italy. Military campaigns there drew time and attention away from consolidating the German kingdom. Instead, emperors often had to placate city-states and other minor jurisdictions with new rights to prevent disharmony and revolts while the military was occupied in Italy. The result was even more fractionalization of political power into literally thousands of German-speaking microstates.

As time wore on, instability continued to plague the Germans. The Salian dynasty succeeded Otto's Saxon line, but the Salians went extinct themselves in 1125. It was not until Frederick I (nicknamed Barbarossa or "red beard") of House Hohenstaufen ascended in 1152 that an emperor would once again pursue power in the Italian peninsula. Finally, Frederick's son, Henry VI, convinced the Diet of Würzburg to make the German kingship hereditary in 1196. But the Hohenstaufens fell victim to untimely deaths: Barbarossa died while on Crusade in the Middle East, and Henry VI was allegedly poisoned the next year. Henry's only son, three-year-old Frederick II, became emperor. An able ruler, Frederick II was called the *stupor mundi* (Latin for "the wonder of the world"), but his son Conrad IV outlived him by just four years—leading to another dynasty's extinction. After Conrad's death in 1254, the empire and imperial title were disputed for more than twenty years, and out of this disarray came another century and a half of even shorter dynasties, as the Houses of Wittelsbach and Luxembourg took turns supplying emperors (that is, when German kings were crowned emperors at all).

Briefly ending the interregnum of the 1200s was the election of the first Habsburg, Rudolf, then a middling count with territories based in what's today southwest Germany. The conflicts in his reign allowed him to claim several duchies in what is now Austria, moving the Habsburg power base there. Although he was unable to begin an immediate dynasty—and his later heirs





even divided the house's lands for a time—the Habsburgs again wore the imperial crown in less than two centuries. And when that happened, the title was theirs until it was abolished.

## Religious Wars and the Peace of Westphalia: 1440–1648

The German-speaking Austrian Habsburg family ended the Holy Roman Empire's dynastic problems, producing several consecutive emperors beginning in 1440. In fact, the Habsburgs might have created a German super state, but religious disharmony would get in the way and result in both emperor and pope being diminished as the respective political and religious leaders of western Europe. Emperor Maximilian I (who reigned from 1486 to 1519) married his son to the heiress of Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Their grandson Charles inherited the Habsburgs' many European domains, the newly unified nation of Spain, and Spain's many colonial possessions in North America.

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (Charles I or Carlos I in Spain), called by some "the last European" for his cosmopolitan background, had to face off against the German monk Martin Luther in what would become the Protestant Reformation. Luther called into question many Roman Catholic practices in 1517, leading to the founding of the Lutheran Church and several other Protestant denominations. The Roman Catholic Church would no longer unite Western Europe, and (with the Holy Roman Emperor serving as the chief secular representative of the Catholic Church), the Reformation became a wonderful excuse for the restive German princes to disobey the emperor. In 1531, the Schmalkaldic League of Lutheran rulers was formed, initially

by Hesse and Saxony, but later including the states of Anhalt, Württemberg, and Pomerania, plus imperial free cities such as Augsburg, Frankfurt am Main, and Hanover.

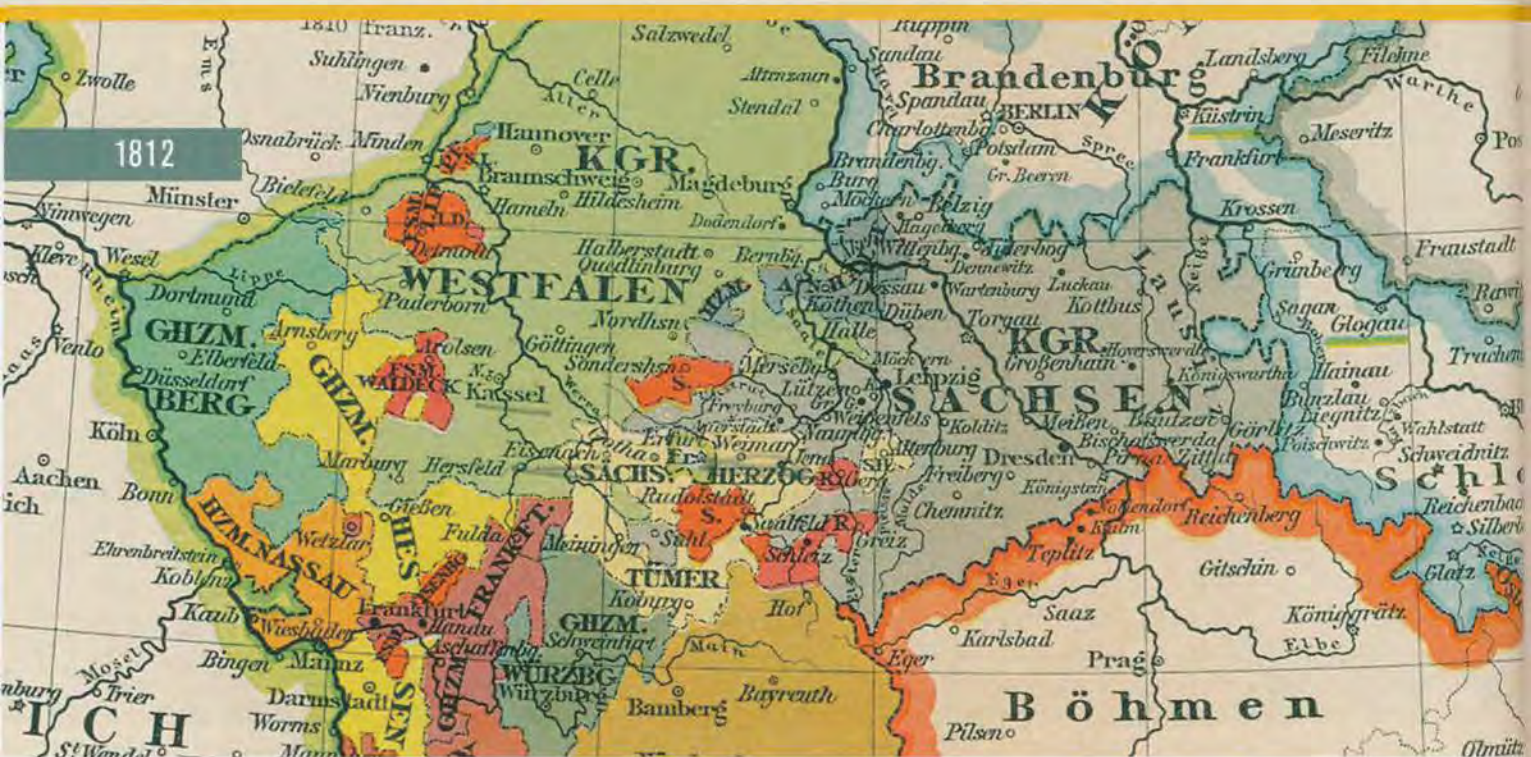
Charles V had a passion for unity and organization more than theology. As a result, he encouraged the Roman Catholic Church to authorize the Counter Reformation in 1545. The Council of Trent in 1563 ushered in changes to the Catholic Church and—much to the applause of today's genealogists—mandated the keeping of parish registers.

Internal and external threats compounded religious tensions. The German lower classes revolted in the German Peasants' War (1524–1526), which has been called the largest popular uprising of the common people until the French Revolution of 1789. In the southeast, the Holy Roman Empire had to contend with the Turkish Ottoman Empire. To counter this, the Empire incorporated a number of multinational (i.e., non-German) states such as Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, and Croatia. Instead of focusing on better consolidating the German states, Charles V built eastward, rather than westward.

Despite Catholic reforms, more than a century of wars followed the Protestant Reformation. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 essentially authorized each German prince to choose Lutheranism or Catholicism as a state religion. But governments were free to ignore other Protestant groups, such as the Reformed followers of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, as well as the Anabaptist movement that spawned the Mennonites and Amish. A number of German states switched from Lutheran to Reformed Calvinist—including the Palatinate (1560), Nassau (1578), Hesse-Kassel (1603) and Brandenburg (1613).

The situation became much worse when the Jesuit-educated, fervently Catholic Ferdinand II became Habsburg emperor. In





the early stages of the Thirty Years War, Protestant Bohemia rejected Ferdinand as their king. The war began in a most interesting way: Bohemians threw two of Ferdinand's officials out a third-story window of the hall where they were meeting, an incident known as the Defenestration of Prague.

The series of conflicts in the three decades that followed proved beyond a doubt that religious wars—not just politics—could make for strange bedfellows. During one phase of the war, France (a Catholic nation) paid Sweden (a Lutheran nation) to carry out battles against the Catholic emperor and his allies. The German states became a battleground for a generation, ruining many farming areas. Some villages no longer existed after the long conflict, and many of those that did still exist were severely depopulated.

The Thirty Years War ended with the Peace of Westphalia, which put to rest any illusion of religious unity in the Holy Roman Empire and instead laid the foundations for modern international relations between nation-states. Allegiance to a political ruler trumped any overlapping loyalty to a religious authority, weakening the pope's influence over politics and opening the door for future political (rather than religious) conflicts. The peace also put the Reformed religion on equal par with Lutherans and Catholics—rulers of the German states could choose any of the three for their subjects to follow. (Anabaptists were still left out of this arrangement and were persecuted nearly everywhere. As a result, Anabaptists who survived persecution became early immigrants to America.)

The rivalry between France and Austria did not end with the Peace of Westphalia. French King Louis XIV, who ruled from 1643 to 1715, not only feared encirclement by the Austrian and Span-

ish branches of the Habsburg family, but he also felt the Rhine River was France's "natural border" and was involved in several wars attempting to conquer the Dutch and German states that already occupied those areas. First in the Low Countries and then throughout the Rhine Valley, Louis made war that again flattened many areas just recovering from the Thirty Years War. In the War of the League of Augsburg (also known as the War of Palatine Succession) from 1688 to 1697, French troops burned many Palatine cities to the ground. Then the War of Spanish Succession from 1701 to 1713 took a toll on more areas. Another of Louis XIV's policies, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (which guaranteed tolerance to French Protestants known as Huguenots), spurred many Huguenots to migrate to German states east of French control.

## Hohenzollern vs. Habsburg, Part I: The Eighteenth Century

The religious split caused by the Protestant Reformation surely was an impediment to the Austrian Habsburgs gaining practical dominance over the German states. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Habsburgs faced a far greater stumbling block: the Hohenzollern dynasty, which had been part of the empire's electoral college as rulers of the Margraviate of Brandenburg since 1415. After secularizing the Teutonic Knights' land into the Duchy of Prussia in 1525, the Hohenzollern state became known as Brandenburg-Prussia in the 1600s. Under the rule of Frederick William, known as the "Great Elector," the Hohenzollerns added disconnected holdings in and outside



the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick William's son, Frederick I, declared himself in 1701 King "in" Prussia—so-called because Prussia was outside the empire, within which no state was to be headed by a king except Habsburg-ruled Bohemia.

The Hohenzollern state, increasingly called merely "Prussia," challenged the Austrian Habsburgs for practical leadership of the empire. With Austria continuing to spend more energy on eastward expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Turks (even sending German settlers to colonize the newly won areas, creating German enclaves that lasted two centuries), Prussia's King Frederick (II) the Great, continued his state's expansion to the west and south of its north German base. Frederick fought the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa in both the War of Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and the Seven Years War (1756–1763) and netted Silesia, a wealthy and mineral-rich area.

Despite the rivalry of Prussia and Austria, the two did join together with Russia to "partition" the territorially large but politically weaker state of Poland. Between 1772 and 1795, Poland's neighbors seized its territories in three instances—resulting in Poland disappearing from the map of Europe for more than a century. Prussia and (to a lesser extent) Austria encouraged German-speaking settlers to move into the previously Polish areas that they had added to their holdings.

Through the eighteenth century, the continent of Europe remained in a rough balance of power with some two hundred German states sprinkling the area between Prussia, Austria, and France. Prussia and Austria remained at odds, but Britain and France frequently changed their allegiances. No continental power gained dominance over the others.

## Napoleonic Reorganization: 1804–1814

No continental power gained dominance until France, that is. While the rivalry between Prussia and Austria dominated the German states in the long run, a French ruler (Emperor Napoleon I) had the most profound effect on the modernization of German states and their reduction in number.

The French Revolutionary Wars altered the European balance of power. When the French Revolution began in 1789, European monarchies looked up in alarm, though the rulers of Germany's minor states probably thought chaos in France would reduce French military power. How wrong they turned out to be. After an initial alliance of major powers (led by Prussia and Austria) invaded France, the new republic instituted the first modern conscription system, boosting the manpower in its army several fold. After this greatly enlarged army was trained, France went on the offensive and overran the German states west of the Rhine River (as well as some Italian states and much of the Low Countries) in 1794.

France's intrusion into the German states would not stop with the occupation of the Rhine's west bank, however. Prussia and Austria both signed peace treaties with the French Republic that established the Rhine as the border, though neither power

accepted France's gains. It took another conflict before Austria recognized France's might, now spearheaded by Napoleon Bonaparte. Under the Treaty of Luneville in 1801, the west bank of the Rhine belonged to France "in complete sovereignty." The treaty also guaranteed that France would compensate the Holy Roman Empire's hereditary princes who had been dispossessed in the war, settling the nobles' objections.

That compensation, accomplished through "mediatization" and "secularization," led to great changes in the German city-states. In 1803, the Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire passed its last significant law, known by the typically long German name *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* (in English, "final recess of the high imperial diet"). In the first phase of compensation, the territories of Roman Catholic officials who had dual status (so-called "prince-bishops" and "imperial abbots") were taken and redistributed to the nobles who had lost territories west of the Rhine. "Mediatization" (named because it shifted a state's status from "immediately" below the emperor in rank to becoming part of larger states) merged microstates and imperial free cities with neighboring secular states.

And the changes continued. Napoleon enticed most of the remaining German states to secede from the Holy Roman Empire and form the Confederation of the Rhine in 1805. This collection of French client states extended from the east bank of the Rhine River (the west bank now considered part of France, proper) to the boundaries of Austria and Prussia. Prussia, for its part, had been reduced, and its territorial expansion temporarily thrown back.

The Habsburg ruler, Francis II, saw the empire's demise coming and changed his sovereign title from *Archduke of Austria* to *Hereditary Emperor of Austria*. He abdicated even that title in 1806, satisfied that he was still an emperor and conceding the Holy Roman Empire's defeat.

The Confederation dissolved in 1813 after Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign. The French and Napoleon had dominated Europe for just a decade and a half. Yet, that relatively short time period would prove a true turning point in German history, one that set the region on a course toward unification that would culminate in a second (and more cohesive) German Empire little more than a half-century later. The German states had transformed from a feudal to a capitalist society, ripe for industrialization.

After Napoleon I's initial abdication in 1814, almost all the princely houses from across Europe were represented at the so-called Congress of Vienna, during which major and minor European powers brokered deals in an attempt to re-create the balance of power that existed before the French Revolution. Royalty and nobility—either present at the Congress or represented by foreign ministers—looked to the principle of "legitimacy" (i.e., restoring pre-Napoleonic rulers to territories). But most changes made to the German states remained intact; only Thuringia, perennially a German backwater, remained an area of micro-states.



## Hohenzollern vs. Habsburg, Part II: The Nineteenth Century

The Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath changed the composition of the German states, but the rivalry between the Hohenzollern and Habsburg houses stayed the same. The Congress of Vienna created a German Confederation as a sort of successor to the Holy Roman Empire and the Confederation of the Rhine, and the new organization became another political battleground for the two German powers. Habsburg Austria ruled over the Confederation's forty states, but Hohenzollern Prussia gained territories at the Congress that made it Austria's equal within the Confederation. (Both states had territories inside and outside of the Confederation.) The member-states of the Confederation enrolled in a mutual defense pact, pledging to come to each other's aide in time of war. They also jointly maintained fortresses at Mainz, Luxembourg, Rastatt, Ulm, and Landau.

Because not all of Prussia's holdings were contiguous, it had a special interest in establishing a customs union called the Zollverein in 1834. In addition to allowing Prussians to move goods more efficiently from one portion of the kingdom to the other, the customs union—which intentionally excluded Austria—was a way to enhance Prussia's leadership of the German states while short-changing Austria. The union opened up a common market, ended tariffs between states, and standardized weights, measures, and currencies within member-states. (And to assess dues to member-states, the Zollverein necessitated a census, records of which are just now being rediscovered by researchers.

This customs union also assisted the growth of a middle class that sought additional political rights and a movement for German unification. Just as the French Revolution rocked the German states with many changes, the continental Revolutions of 1848 began in France and spread through German states. In the half-century since the original revolution, some of the German states' rulers had written constitutions enumerating rights for the people in their domains. Growing industrialism had gone hand in hand with urbanization, and the larger cities were breeding grounds for republican sentiments.

A true sense of a German national identity (rather than, for example, a Bavarian, Saxon, or Westphalian identity) was growing, but the major question was whether the resulting unified state would be a *kleindeutsche* (small Germany, with the Prussian king as emperor) or *grossdeutsche* (greater Germany, offering the imperial crown to the Austrian emperor). After the revolution sputtered, an assembly intended to offer the former to Prussian king Frederick William IV: *Emperor of the Germans*. Frederick privately considered that crown "from the gutter," but publicly found a diplomatic way to decline. And anyway, Austrian troops shut the assembly down.

The Revolutions of 1848 had shaken the Habsburgs in a different way, too. Their Hungarian subjects demanded equality and became co-equal partners, with the nation-state becoming known as Austria-Hungary. As the Turks declined in power, Austria-Hungary's attention again shifted eastward, as the Habsburg Empire sought to gobble up former Ottoman territories.

The Hohenzollerns had no such distraction. When the single-minded Otto von Bismarck became prime minister in 1862, he





fought a decade of short wars that eventually brought the German states into a Second German Empire. During his nearly thirty years in power, Bismarck would use democratic processes (as well as co-opting liberal ideals such as old-age and disability pensions) to achieve his goals. But he was an autocrat at heart.

After Bismarck's first two wars conquered Schleswig-Holstein for Prussia and smacked Austria away from intra-German affairs, Bismarck and Prussian King Wilhelm I engineered the formation of the North German Confederation. Bismarck would serve as chancellor of the Confederation, with the Prussian King Wilhelm I as its president. The remaining German states came on board when Bismarck engineered the Franco-Prussian War as a patriotic conflict against a rival (France) that manhandled Germans less than a century ago.

After defeating the French, Prussia's King Wilhelm was proclaimed German emperor in the Palace of Versailles' Hall of Mirrors in 1871. The new German Empire (or "Second Reich," following from the "First Reich," the Holy Roman Empire) was a federation of twenty-five constituent states that retained some political autonomy. France ceded Alsace and part of Lorraine—territories that had been fought over for centuries—marking an important symbolic victory for the fledgling empire.

After using "blood and iron" to achieve his goals, Bismarck shifted gears to promote peace during which Germany's economy could grow unencumbered. After a Russo-Turkish war ended in 1878, Bismarck called Europe together for the Congress of Berlin. The multinational accords reduced the scope of Russia's victory, granting independence to former Ottoman territories and creating an overall balance of power that kept Europe (mostly) war-free until the outbreak of World War I.

Bismarck also engineered rapprochement between Hohenzollern and Habsburg. The two rival houses both feared the Russian Empire to the east more than they feared one another, and so began to form an alliance.

## The Rise (and Fall, and Rise Again) of a Republic: The Twentieth Century

That Germany in the twenty-first century is often looked upon as a world leader of Western democracy has a special irony, since rule by the people was first tried (and failed) just one hundred years ago.

World War I ended in German defeat. The still-young Empire lost significant blocks of its territory in the Treaty of Versailles, demilitarized, and footed the bill in the form of war reparations. The Weimar Republic was formed out of these ashes, and Germany took its first stab at democratic rule over people who (for the most part) had never experienced anything except the class structure of monarchy and nobility.

The Republic faced difficult circumstances from its very beginning. Some German veterans felt betrayed by their government, and a Communist element was eager to emulate the new

socialist Soviet state. France (Germany's sworn enemy) now occupied Germany's industrial area. Hyperinflation during the mid-1920s made currency practically worthless, and the Great Depression created mass unemployment in Germany.

The Republic kept many of the Empire's states intact, but its constitution contained a nod to Germany's authoritarian past: In times of crisis, the president was allowed to dissolve the parliament and rule by decree. And with the German economy and national morale in poor form, the situation was ripe for authoritarianism and extremism.

Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party adroitly exploited the constitutional flaw. In his rise to power in the 1930s, Hitler put many Germans back to work despite the Great Depression. He also rebuilt the military, which had been disbanded after World War I, and advocated for Germany to retake the lands it lost in the Treaty of Versailles.

But the Nazis signature policy was its notion of German superiority and racism against Jews and other minorities. Hitler's policies disenfranchised Jews, and his administration orchestrated the Holocaust, the systemized killing of millions of Jews and other "undesirables," including Hitler's political opponents.

Hitler muscled his way into Austria and German-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia, and began World War II when he invaded Poland in 1939 and France, the Netherlands, and Belgium in 1940. Eventually, Allied powers (led by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France) closed in on Germany from the west, while the Soviet Union invaded from the east.

Germany's defeat in 1945 resulted in losses of territory and occupation by the Allies. In 1949, the French, British, and Americans united their zones into what became known as West Germany, while the Russians kept their zone separate as East Germany. Russia ruled East Germany as a puppet Communist state, while West Germany became a federal republic. West Germany became a haven for many German-speaking people who abandoned their homes in German enclaves in Eastern Europe as the Russian Red Army advanced in the last year of World War II.

The division of Germany became a symbol of the ideological divide between Western capitalist societies and the Communist Eastern Bloc headed by the Soviet Union. In 1961, East Germany erected a wall separating East Berlin from West Berlin, literally cementing the division between the two spheres of influence.

The Soviet Union's power began to wane throughout the 1980s, and Germans from both sides of Berlin came together to break down the Berlin Wall in 1989. The two Germanys formally reunited the following year, becoming the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Federal Republic of Germany) and ending centuries of disunion, war, and reorganization.

So, welcome to our German world. The maps in this atlas tell the story of a dynamic people, culture, and language that have played a crucial role in not only modern Germany, but also in German-speaking countries, Europe as whole, and even other continents. Let's look at the maps that show the influence staked out by this history.