

Era 5: Part 1 - The Emergence of Europe The Monarchies of Medieval Europe¹

During the Middle Ages Europe witnessed the development of strong nation-states with powerful, ruling, secular kings. Many circumstances allowed for this development. The prosperity and peace brought by the period encourage the rise of such rulers. Also, many Europeans wanted to see strong national governments to help protect them. Three important states changed Europe: England; France; Germany.

A. England

1. The island of Britain was settled by a variety of Germanic tribes; the dominant one, both in numbers and strength, became the Angles. Alfred the Great (871-899) successfully ruled by confining the invading Danes to the Northeast and by emphasizing education and learning. 273
2. The Angle king Edward died without an heir. William, the French duke of Normandy, claimed the throne. In 1066 he invaded and defeated the British at the Battle of Hastings, establishing foreign rule in England. William, now known as "The Conqueror", forced all vassals to pledge allegiance to him, not to individual lords, in order to increase his power. He established an important practice of a regular census (The Domesday Book) as foundation for a tax system. 287
3. In 1154, a powerful secular ruler came to the throne. Henry II (great grandson to William) was lord of England and all of western France. He lived in France during most of his reign (for it was there he held the largest territory).
 - a. He worked hard to create in England a strong government. To do so, Henry established the jurisdiction of the royal courts. He helped establish English **common law** (a uniform system of laws based on case-by-case decision, not local customs). Circuit judges and juries found a new prominence in England. By 1250, all important cases in England, whether criminal or civil, were decided by juries. Such courts helped to strengthen the influence of kings like Henry and weaken the influence of the king's vassal lords and barons. Rather than take a case to the local lord, the people began flocking to the king's courts for decisions and protection.
 - b. In an effort to try to control the church he appointed Thomas a' Becket as archbishop of Canterbury. Henry's assertion of jurisdiction over the clergy led to Becket's assassination and Henry's humiliation.
4. Richard III (1189-1199), "The Lion-Hearted", spent only 10 months of his reign in England. He was more concerned with fighting either the Muslims in the Holy Land or the French.

5. John (1199-1216) was an intelligent but ineffective ruler. His mismanagement resulted in territory loss in France (it doesn't help when you murder a nephew in line to inherit the county of Brittany in France, alienating French vassals in the process!). He taxed the people heavily and sometimes abandoned jury trials to punish his enemies. A large group of his vassal lords revolted against him in 1215. They forced him ^{to} sign the Magna Carta —the Great Charter of Liberties—which insisted that the king was bound by the law and that he could not tax without consent. It became the centerpiece of the English system of constitutional government.
6. Edward I expanded the Great Council of the king to include representatives of the people. This body became the Parliament, containing the House of Lords (representatives of the nobles and the clergy) and the House of Commons (representatives of the people).

B. France

1. Feudal lords of the West Carolingian Empire chose Hugh Capet to be their king, but retained much of the power of ruling for themselves.
2. Philip II (1180-1223) was the first highly capable and intelligent ruler of the Capetian dynasty. Much of his rule was spent expanding the borders of his kingdom from a tiny state with Paris as its center to a larger nation. To keep control of his increased kingdom he used local institutions, laws, and customs as often as possible rather than force change on a regional people within his kingdom. By doing this he kept his subjects on his good side. Also, he divided his lands into smaller administrative units and established a local ruler—called bailiffs—over each district.
3. Louis IX reformed the French monarchy based on Catholic Church principles (he was made a saint) and judicial reform (he was known as the French Justinian)
4. Philip IV strengthened the French monarchy by expanding the royal bureaucracy and extending some financial control over the church. He laid the foundation for a French version of the English Parliament—the Estates-General: the clergy (first estate); the nobles (the second estate); and the townspeople and peasants (third estate). Unlike England, France lacked a constitutional check to the king's power.

C. Germany

1. About the year 1000, Germany was one of the most centralized and well-ruled territories in all of Europe. During the 900s, the Carolingian Empire, established by Charlemagne in the 800s, was collapsing. However, even as the house of the Carolingians fell, Germany remained mostly united under dukes (local tribal leaders; also called electors).
2. Henry the Fowler was elected to be king in a "united Germany". He repelled the Slavs and Magyars to expand eastward, but each duke governed his own territory.
3. In 936, a ruler named Otto came to the throne. Known as Otto the Great (936-973), he extended his power over other dukes and established a strong kingdom. By 962, he was crowned emperor. His empire—known as the Roman Empire of the German Nation—was one of the strongest in Europe until 1100. Otto maintained his power through close ties with the Church and its leaders. He thought of himself as the successor of Charlemagne. He also thought himself as protector of the Western Church and papacy by protecting both from invasions. The appointment of many churchmen into administrative positions in the government strengthened the ties; the appointment of churchmen clergy men themselves strained the relationship.
4. During the reign of Henry IV (1056-1106), a pope named Gregory VII (1073-1085) challenged his authority over churchmen and their appointments. Gregory created an alliance between the Church and German dukes and princes. They were prepared to depose Henry, because he challenged the authority of the Church. When Gregory threatened to excommunicate (cut off from the sacraments) Henry, the emperor panicked. In the middle of winter in 1077, Henry made a pilgrimage over the snowy Alps to reconcile himself with the pope. When he arrived at Gregory's castle in Canossa, in northern Italy, Henry spent three days barefoot, crying at the gate, waiting to be received by Pope Gregory. This proved to be a great humiliation for Henry. His support from German secular leaders faded away, and his reign was doomed. In 1105, he was forced to surrender his throne when one of his own sons turned against him in rebellion.
5. Because the emperors of Germany did not control their feudal lords, they lost power. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (who ruled from 1155-1190) tried to reassert his authority by calling his empire the Holy Roman Empire, he did not succeed in stopping the dividing of his territory. He mistakenly believed he could use his Italian territories as his main source of tax revenue; they allied with the church to successfully fight his ambitions. By the 1300s, the German princes gained the right to elect the Holy Roman Emperor. Rule in Germany was then held by powerful dukes governing their own lands, not by the centralized rule of a strong emperor.

D. The Church as a "Monarchy". As the church grew in power it struggled to maintain its spiritual focus—the leadership increasingly became concerned with their own prestige and their own wealth. They offered church offices for sale (simony). They excommunicated those who opposed them. They suspended the church services and sacraments in a given location (interdiction). They established special church courts to fight heresy (false teachings) and intimidate opposition—the inquisition. The kings practiced lay investiture by giving church officials religious authority. The highest—and in some ways lowest—point of the church's intervention in politics came with the Crusades.

1. The Call (the Mission): A plea from Byzantine emperor, Alexius Comnenus, for help against the Muslim Turks; an attempt to rescue the Holy Land from the Muslims
2. The Crusaders (their Motives)
 - a. A sincere desire to rescue the Holy Land
 - b. Fame
 - c. Commercial gain
 - d. A substitute for penance
3. The Campaigns (The Method)
 - a. The First Crusade. Called by Pope Urban II; the only successful Crusade (and it was only temporary); set up Crusader states along the Mediterranean and took Jerusalem; Saladin retook the city in 1187
 - b. The Third Crusade. Known as the Kings' Crusade—Frederick Barbarossa of Germany drowned in Asia Minor; Philip II of France returned after the capture of a small city; Richard of England kidnapped
 - c. The Fourth Crusade. The Crusaders contracted with Venice for transport to the Holy Land; they took them to Constantinople, which the Crusaders sacked.
4. The Consequences (The Mess-ups)
 - a. The Crusades hastened the decline of the medieval church.
 - b. The Crusades expanded the commercial activity of Europe.
 - c. The Crusades weakened the feudal structure of Europe.
 - d. The Crusades opened new horizons to the people.



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