

Holy Roman Empire -- 844 Years Of Significant (German) History

I know you've clicked on this Web page about the Holy Roman Empire because you're interested in [German history](#). OK, even if you're not so much interested but curious, I can appreciate that.

The real question is: how do you make almost two handfults of centuries of history sound interesting without flinging nothing but names, dates, and places at you? Like there's going to be a test at the end or something.

There is.

Ha-ha, I'm just kidding, don't panic. Put your pencils away. ;-)

How about learning something new? Did you know that the *Heiliges Römisches Reich* (as the Holy Roman Empire is called in German) is often considered First Reich? I know they don't call it that on the German or World History stage, but you couldn't have a Third Reich, or even a Second Reich for that matter, without a first.

This era of German history shouldn't be confused with the Roman Empire. Oh, no, this isn't the time of Julius Caesar or Nero. This came long after these guys were gone — and the Roman Empire had crumbled under the [Germanic Tribes](#) (sometimes known as the Teutonic) in the late 5th century.

Nope, this came some four hundred years later when King Otto the Great (of Germany, Silly) was crowned *Römisch-Deutscher Kaiser* (Holy Roman Emperor) in 962.

This "Empire" only ended when Francis II renounced his claim in 1806 during the [Napoleonic Wars](#) and to the vertically-challenged Frenchman, Napoleon.

Yes, a lot of German history transpired throughout these almost nine centuries; and the history of the Holy Roman Empire has gotten obscured by other "names" of history (the Middle Ages and Renaissance, for instance).

The Holy Roman Empire itself had changed its name during its long reign. In 1512 the new name became Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Like making its name longer was somehow going to make it better?

You know what that tells me? Rulers with too much time on their hands... Go pillage or plunder somewhere, will ya? ;-)

The Holy Roman Empire wasn't just limited to the boundaries of Germany. It included what is now Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, parts of France and Poland, and Belgium. A mere pittance of geography I've listed for an empire that included hundreds of cities and towns all under the crown of the Kaiser. But, interestingly enough didn't always include the infamous city (I mean, Eternal City) of Rome to the list.

The wealth of the Empire can be seen by its magnificent bejeweled crown for the Holy Roman Emperor, which (sadly) isn't on display in Germany — it's in a museum in Vienna.

I sure would love to try that hat on for size, wouldn't you? Do you think they'd let me? ;-)

Too bad the Holy Roman Empire (or whatever name they wanted to call themselves) didn't enjoy a Pax Romana (Roman Peace) like the original. Wars often broke out through Germany (and surrounding Europe) throughout the centuries, including the 16th century [Peasants' War](#) and 17th century [Thirty Years' War](#).

Yeah, I know that they were in part about the religious revolts going on at the time and the [Protestant Reformation](#) had something to do with it, but they were wars nonetheless.

Hmm, looks like they did pillage and plunder after all, didn't they? I guess after changing their name they had more time.

The Sacro Romano Impero (ooh, now you've learned its Latin name) isn't the only famous one you've probably heard of. There's Martin Luther (couldn't have had a Reformation without him), Frederick I (known as Barbarossa), the Hohenstaufens, Philip of Swabia, Pope Innocent III, Otto of Brunswick, and the Hapsburg Dynasty are just a few that shaped lives of millions over the centuries.

Not to mention organizations were started or implemented during the ruling days of the Emperors, the 12th century [Teutonic Order of Knights](#) and the [Hanseatic League](#) for starters.

From 1806 lasting about 60 years, the former Holy Roman Empire then became known as the North German Confederation. This was a set up to what is known as the German Empire, or the Second Reich (see, I told there was a second one).

Confusing, right? No wonder historians seem to specialize — there's so much to know. I hope I helped you understand without boring you too badly. ;-)