

A Timeline of Major Dates in Western Cultural History – to 1850

- 500s BC Rise of Greek philosophy in Ionia + Southern Italy / Jewish culture in the East**
Secularist-Materialists: Thales (early 500s), Anaximander (early 500s), Anaximenes (mid-500s)
Transcendentalist-Mystics: Pythagoras (mid to late 500s)
Solon reforms Athens' constitution along democratic lines (early 500s)
Cleisthenes reforms Athens along more fully democratic lines (late 500s)
Jewish prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah and their disciples refine monotheistic Judaism
- 400s BC Golden Age of Greece + Hellenic culture / the "Age of Pericles" in Athens**
Athenians under Themistocles and Miltiades defeat Darius at Marathon (490)
Persians more decisively defeated at Salamis (480 BC) and Platea (479 BC)
Mystics: Heraclitus (early 400s), Parmenides (early 400s)
Materialists: Anaxagoras (mid 400s), Democritus (late 400s - early 300s)
Sophists: Protagoras (mid 400s)
Socrates (late 400s)
Pericles turns the Delian League into an Athenian empire (ca. 460-430 BC)
Athens and its allies fight Sparta and its allies in the Peloponnesian Wars (431-404 BC)
destroying Athens, devastating the rest of Greece and ending the Golden Age of Greece
- 300s BC Decline of Classic Hellenic-Athenian Greek culture / Rise of Alexander and Hellenistic culture**
Plato (early 300s) and Aristotle (mid 300s)
Cynics/Skeptics: Diogenes (early 300s), Pyrrho of Ellis (late 300s),
Macedonian/Greek Alexander the Great conquers from the Nile to the Indus (334-323 BC)
Hellenistic (mixture of Greek + Eastern) culture is thus born
At his death, Alexander's empire is carved up into separate kingdoms, the largest of which were:
Egypt (the Ptolemies), Syria and the East (the Seleucids) and Macedonia-Greece (the Antigonids)
Meanwhile after Rome was burned by the Gauls (387 BC) it recovers — and begins its gradual
expansion in northern Italy against the Etruscans, Gauls and Samnites
- 200s BC Hellenistic culture cynical, passive — and scientific; Rome fights Carthage**
Cynics: Crates (early 200s); *Epicureans:* Epicurus (late 300s - early 200s);
Stoics: Zeno of Citium (early 200s)
Scientists: Aristarchus (early-mid 200s) and Archimedes (mid-late 200s)
Rome seizes the Greek kingdoms of southern Italy and Sicily in the Pyrrhic War (280-275 BC)
Roman-Carthaginian *Punic Wars:* 1st (mid 200s); 2nd (late 200s: Hannibal nearly victorious)
- 100s BC The Rising Roman Republic defeats Carthage — and Macedonian Greece**
The 3rd Punic War (mid 100s): Carthage is destroyed (146 BC);
Greece is also defeated (146 BC) but its culture is respected and absorbed by the Romans
Marius reforms the Roman army, offering poor Romans professional status as full-time soldiers (107 BC)
- 50s BC Julius Caesar + Roman Army lay the foundations for the military-run Roman Empire**
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- Year 1 Jesus is born in Judea**
Octavius Augustus Caesar builds up Imperial Rome
- 1st Century AD The Roman Empire matures — and Judaism goes into the diaspora**
Rome burns, destroying 2/3s of the city (64); Christians are subsequently blamed and persecuted
Jewish Revolt against Rome (67-70)
Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed (70) — and the Jews banished from Jerusalem
- 100s AD Rome reaches the height of her power**
The "Good Emperors" Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), Antoninus (138-161) and
Marcus Aurelius (161-180) brings Roman expansion and its wealth to its greatest extent
- 200s Rome in a state of material and moral decline**
For 50 years, 25 emperors are made and unmade in rapid succession by a venal Praetorian Guard
Diocletian (285-305) tries to restore Roman discipline — and the purity of "original" Roman society
including the elimination of the detested "foreign" Christian religion

- 300s Christianity adopted as the official religion of Rome; but the material decline continues**
Emperor Constantine (312-337) makes Christianity legal (313); he helps formalize "Nicene" or Trinitarian Christianity; he moves the imperial capital to Byzantium (Constantinople)
The Arian controversy over the nature of Christ develops — producing a lasting split within the faith
Emperor Theodosius (379-395) makes Nicene (anti-Arian) Christianity the sole religion (late 300s)
Meanwhile Ulfilas spreads Arian Christianity to the German Goths + from there to other German tribes
The Romans permit the Visigoths to cross the Danube to escape the Asian Huns (376)
But Visigothic-Roman tensions build, the Goths revolt, and the Roman army is crushed at the Battle of Adrianople (378). Obvious to all, Rome can no longer defend itself.
- 400s Rome in an advanced state of decay and collapse — especially in the West**
Visigoth chief Alaric conquers the city of Rome in 410 (Ravenna is actually now the Western capital)
Germans spread quickly throughout the Western empire: Visigoths + Suevi to Spain, Vandals to North Africa, Franks + Burgundians to Gaul or "France," and Saxons + Angles to Britain or "England"
Patrick travels to Ireland (mid 400s?) - to help convert Ireland to Nicene Christianity
Leo I (bishop or "pope" 440-461) greatly strengthens Rome as the center of Western Christianity
Clovis (King of the Franks) unites much of Gaul and Western Germany (late 400s/early 500s); he converts from paganism to Nicene Christianity (late 400s)
- 500s Roman (Byzantine) Emperor Justinian (527-565) attempts to restore the Roman Empire**
But: constant warfare with Persia and the expense of partial Roman reconquest in the West drain physical strength from Byzantine Rome
Also: theological splits and assaults on Christian "heretics" drain moral strength from Byzantine Rome
Roman Christianity in the West is strengthened by Benedict (Italian monastic reformer), Pope Gregory (developer of Catholic Christianity), Irish missionaries Columba (to Scotland) and Columbán (to Burgundy, Switzerland and Northern Italy) and Roman missionary Augustine (to the Anglo-Saxons)
- 600s Muhammad's Arabs conquer huge portions of Eastern (Byzantine) Rome + all of Persia**
A series of Byzantine-Persian wars (613-630) devastates and exhausts both empires
Muhammad (630) unites the tribes of Arabia around his Arian religion, Islam
Muslim Arabs overrun much of the Byzantine Empire: Syria (634), Jerusalem (637), Egypt (641)
The Persians are completely mastered (633-641) — though they take up dissenting "Shi'ite" Islam
Celtic missionaries continue their work in bringing Germanic West Europe to Nicene Christianity
But the Synod of Whitby (664) replaces Celtic Christianity with Roman Christianity in England
- 700s Spain lost to Islam; Rise of the Carolingian Franks; Muslims fail to capture France**
Muslim Arabs cross from North Africa to conquer the Visigothic kingdom in Spain (711-718);
But they are stopped further north by Frankish general Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours (737)
Muslims retreat back into Spain and establish an Islamic Umayyad dynasty there (for 700+ years)
Charles Martel establishes the Carolingian dynasty in France.
- 800s Charlemagne's Empire established — then breaks up; Vikings begin their cruel raids on Europe**
Charlemagne conquers and unifies France, Germany, and Lombardic Italy; he is crowned emperor (800)
A cultural revival of sorts stirs within Western Christendom
But Charlemagne's warring grandsons divide up and weaken his empire (The Treaty of Verdun: 843)
Viking raids are a regular feature of life in Europe — throwing it back into very dark times
- 900s The height of the Viking Age**
Viking attacks are constant along the Irish, English, French and Dutch coasts; Swedes invade Russia
But Viking (Norman) leader Rollo is permitted (911) by the King Charles to settle the French coast
The Normans are quickly Romanized — and brought into Western political-military service
Viking (Rus) leader Vladimir of Kiev converts to Byzantine Christianity (988); he dominates East Europe
- 1000s The first stirrings of a Western revival (which lasts all the way into the 20th century!)**
Viking King Canute (or Cnut) unites England, Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden (early 1000s)
bringing some degree of stability to Northwestern Europe
Saxon England is conquered by French Normans at Hastings (1066) —
bringing it more closely into European affairs
Benedictine monk Anselm of Canterbury stirs the fires of renewed Christian scholarship (late 1000s)
Pope Urban calls the 1st Crusade (1095) to "liberate" the Holy Lands from Muslim Turks

1100s The Christian West breaks out of its political and intellectual confines

The 1st crusade is a success — with Christian kingdoms established in the Holy Lands (1100)
Western scholarship develops under French monks Abelard, Bernard, and Lombard
Height of the Church-State "investiture controversy" as Roman Popes and (German) Holy Roman Emperors compete for dominance in the newly rising Europe
Saladin manages to retake for the Muslims much of the Crusader gain in the Middle East (later 1100s)
But new waves of crusaders arrive (the 2nd crusade) — though they prove unable to oust Saladin;
However East-West commerce begins to replace crusading in importance
Venice begins its rise as a rich and powerful commercial-maritime city-state (late 1100s)

1200s The High Middle Ages

Muslim Arabs drive out the last of the crusaders at the end of the 1200s
but allow commercial + intellectual relations to continue
Venice establishes a vast commercial empire around the Eastern Mediterranean
Genoa, London, Paris, the city-states of Flanders and the Hansa cities of North Germany also prosper
Age of northern (Gothic) cathedrals and cathedral schools (future universities)
Age of Scholasticism and Aristotelian thinking (Dominicans, especially Aquinas)
But also a strong strain of Christian mysticism thriving (Franciscan "Spirituals")

1300s The Closing of the High Middle Ages + beginning of the "Renaissance"

The Black Death (mid 1300s) and the Pope's "Babylonian Captivity" at Avignon, France (1309-1378)
undermine Christianity's moral/political hold and help bring an end to the Middle Ages
Fine arts and literature begin to stir with the Italian artist and architect Giotto (early 1300s),
the Italian writers and poets Dante (late 1200s/early 1300s), Petrarch + Boccaccio (early 1300s)
and the English writer Chaucer (late 1300s)

1400s The height of the Renaissance: great material/intellectual progress in Western Europe

Commercial families of urban Italy (such as the Medici of Florence under Cosimo and Lorenzo)
and princely/kingly families in Northern Europe (such as the Valois of France under Louis XII
and the Tudors of England under Henry VII) come to political prominence
Humanist art, architecture, industry, commerce in Italy and Flanders reach levels of ancient Rome
Beginning of the Age of Exploration — in the quest of a direct route to the wealth of East Asia
Eastern Christendom or Byzantium finally falls to Turkish Muslims (1453) — even as Muslim Spain is
losing out to Christian Spain (the last Muslim state in Spain, Granada, finally falls in 1492)

1500s The Age of Spain: secular wealth strengthens rising classes and undercuts Church + Empire

Luther and Calvin develop Protestantism as a separate Christian branch
Lutheranism appeals to N. European princes/kings seeking independence
Calvinism appeals to Northern European urban commercial class seeking independence
Very Catholic Hapsburg Spain under Charles I (1506-1556) and Philip II (1556-1598) rules supreme
in Europe based on plundered wealth from Mexico (Cortés) + Peru (Pizarro)
The Hapsburgs try to stamp out Protestantism — but the Turks under Suleiman divert them from this
task when the Turks lay siege to Habsburg Vienna (1529)
England under Henry VIII (1509-1547) and Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and
France under Francis I (1515-1547) and Henry IV (1589-1610) continue to rise politically
Defeat of the Spanish Armada by England (1588) brings the beginning of the decline of Spanish power

1600s Europe torn by religious strife; turns to secular science as an alternative path to Truth

Thirty Years War (1618-1648) leaves continental Europe spiritually exhausted
The first English settlements are established in the "New World" — early 1600s
Virginia is settled by company-sponsored fortune hunters aspiring to become "aristocrats"
New England is settled by Puritan refugees seeking to build a community pleasing to God
Middle Colonies are settled by diverse groups, including Quakers, Mennonites and Catholics
(joining the Protestant or Reformed Dutch of New York and Swedes/Dutch of Delaware)
England torn by Civil War between Royalists and Puritans - mid 1600s;
Cromwell establishes a short-lived Puritan Commonwealth in England (1650s)
France under Absolutist King Louis XIV (1643-1715) brings French culture to a position of dominance
in Europe, but drives out France's industrious Huguenots (he revokes the *Edict of Nantes* in 1685)
English Parliament overthrows James II's effort to become an absolutist king like Louis XIV
(The "Glorious Revolution" — 1688-1689)
Newton and Locke lay the foundations of modern science — birthing the "Enlightenment" (late 1600s)

- 1700s** **Age of Enlightenment, Royal absolutism and the early stirrings of democracy**
 Royal families of Europe (Russia, Prussia, Austria, England) mimic French royalty
 But Absolutist hold of French monarchy itself slips as royal wealth dries up
 French *philosophes* (Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, etc.) call for a rule in France of Human Reason
 — or Human Instinct, untainted by traditional social conventions (Rousseau)
 English Absolutist "wannabe" George III drives English colonies to rebellion (1770s) —
 by which the colonies ultimately (mid 1780s) secure total "American" independence
 American democratic traditions produce a model constitutional democracy (later 1780s)
 But in France democratic impulses collapse France into a chaotic Revolution (1789)
 which spreads to the rest of Europe through French Revolutionary armies
 The French "Reign of Terror" (1792-1794) shocks Europe
- 1800s:** **French Nationalism stirs to life other nationalisms in Europe**
1st Napoleon takes charge of the French Revolution (1800) and challenges the rest of Europe
Quarter Hegel lays out the case for all history evolving through the work of a *Weltgeist* (World Spirit)
 Napoleon and France are defeated (1815)
 and attempts are made to restore the Old Order (*Ancien Régime*) of church and royal state ...
 but French nationalism has stirred up political activism among Europe's commoners
 America's War of 1812 has fueled a spirit of American nationalism
 "Romanticism" gives the spirit of nationalism a passionate spirit across the Western world
- 1800s:** **The industrial revolution begins to create new and deep social class tensions**
2nd Wealthy middle-class industrialists take command of politics in England (1830)
quarter Victoria becomes queen — and symbol of mighty Victorian England (1837-1901)
 Americans push westward and overrun the Mexican lands to the West (1840s)
 There is a commoner uprising against aristocratic rule in Austria, Germany and France (1848) ...
 but it all comes to nothing in the end