

# A Timeline of Major Dates in Western Cultural History – to 1900

- 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-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-Greek culture / Rise of Alexander and Hellenistic culture**  
Plato (early 300s) and Aristotle (mid 300s)  
*Cynics/Skeptics:* Diogenes (early 300s), Pyrrho of Elis (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 was 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
- 1<sup>st</sup> 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  
Jews at Jamnia (late 1<sup>st</sup> century) canonize Hebrew Scripture and outlaw Christianity
- 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) bring 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 Columban (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 Arianist 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 raids on Europe**  
 Charlemagne conquers and unifies France, Germany, and Lombardic Italy; is crowned emperor in 800  
 A political and cultural revival of sorts stirs within Western Christendom  
 But his 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 Cnute) 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 Dantes (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 N. 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 Hapsburg 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**  
**1<sup>st</sup>**  
**quarter**    Napoleon takes charge of the French Revolution (1800) and challenges the rest of Europe  
Hegel lays out the case for all history progressing 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

**1800s:**    **The industrial revolution begins to create new and deep social class tensions**  
**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**quarter**    Wealthy middle class industrialists take command of politics in England (1830)  
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)

**1800s:**    **'Popular' nation-states (built around the identity of a particular people) take shape –**  
**3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**quarter**    **throwing into question the sovereignty of 'Christian' kings and emperors**  
Louis Napoleon creates the 2nd French Empire – and brings Paris to splendor (1850s/1860s)  
The nation-state (but monarchy) of Italy is founded by Cavour, Mazzini + Garibaldi (1860)  
A fierce conflict between Yankee and Southern nationalisms erupts in America (1860s)  
The nation-state (but empire) of Germany is founded by Bismarck (1870)  
Meanwhile the old order comes under even deeper intellectual-spiritual attack:  
Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (vol. 1: 1867) demonstrate 'scientifically' that a  
workers' revolution would inevitably bring about a state-less, property-less society, thus  
encouraging the industrial workers of the West to rise up against the factory and mine owners  
and their governments  
The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) explains 'evolution'  
not as an act of God but one of 'natural selection' whereby the strong push aside the weak as  
the necessary price of progress, stirring up the idea of the necessity of the strong to rule over the  
weak – in the West and in the world

**1800s:**    **The Age of Western imperial domination in the world**  
**4<sup>th</sup>**  
**quarter**    An imperialistic West moves to global dominance  
England and France (and, to a lesser extent, Germany) in Africa and Asia  
The United States in Central America  
A Western condominium ('Open Door' policy) in China  
But Japan takes up Westernization for itself to become imperial power of its own in Asia  
Meanwhile the industrial revolution and land pressure on the countryside is changing the West –  
as urban culture begins to replace rural culture as the norm for Western societies  
The closing of the American frontier closes the escape hatch of the Western poor  
and puts a tightening economic hold on the working poor in the West (1880s/1890s)  
But extreme nationalism seems to be deflecting much of the workers wrath into a readiness to have a  
war – not with the nation's industrial owners but with foreign nationals (1890s)  
[The stage for the tragedy of World War One is thus set]