GOTHIC EUROPE 1200–1450

Derek Pearsall

ARTS, CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN WORLD

General Editor: Boris Ford

Gothic Europe

1200–1450

Arts, Culture and Society in the Western World
General Editor: Boris Ford

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General Introduction

In these days of ever greater specialisation, few people who write about the arts venture beyond their particular field, and virtually none dare to stray over the boundary into an adjacent art. This is a serious loss, for the arts in any age are bound to share common ideals and characteristics and they emerge, after all, from the same society even if they address somewhat different audiences. And thus they can illuminate each other, both through their similarities and contrasts.

This series of ten volumes aims to present and study Western civilisation as expressed in its arts, including the social and economic soil from which these arts rose and flourished. The scope (but not necessarily the titles) of these volumes is as follows:

The Greek World
The Roman World
Early Medieval Europe (from the late Empire to *c.*950)
Romanesque Europe (*c.*950–*c.*1200)
Gothic Europe (*c.*1200–*c.*1450)
The Renaissance (*c.*1400–*c.*1600)
Baroque Europe (*c.*1575–*c.*1750)
The Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution (1700–1850)
The Romantic Age (*c.*1800–1914)
The Twentieth Century

The series as a whole does not resemble an encyclopedia of the arts, with chapters on the separate arts. Built around a concept of the age and its distinctive civilisation, the central argument of each volume is illuminated by a discussion of individual artists and their works, including popular culture; and of how, by looking at their social roles, their conventions and symbolism,

and their formal structures, these works of art may best be understood and enjoyed.

Finally, the series provides a social, political and economic context for these works, and examines the artistic activity of the age for what it can tell us of the preoccupations and priorities of the society that produced it.

BORIS FORD

Preface

I began this book with a certain degree of scepticism about its title, and about the integrity of both the chronological period and the geographical region that was implied in that title. Surely, I said to myself, the two-and-a-half centuries from 1200 to 1450 have no reality as a 'period' in referring to any historical set of happenings with an ascertainable beginning and end, nor does the term 'Gothic Europe' mean anything, strictly speaking. They are part of a convenient shorthand way of dividing up the past so that talking about it can be divided up among different people. The danger of dividing up the past thus is that these 'periods' will come to be thought of as realities, as if they existed. The ways of guarding against this danger are either not to do it, or to keep reminding oneself and one's reader of the arbitrariness and artificiality of the proceeding. I began by proposing to take the latter of these options, and in this way to make use of a well-known and attractive term as the opportunity for an argument about the pleasures and pains of periodisation; 'Gothic' would be both the subject as well as the title of the subject.

It is maybe in the nature of such enterprises that I grew more persuaded, as I went on, that there was a possibility of talking about 'Gothic Europe 1200–1450' in a way that would recognise the arbitrariness of the dates assigned to the period without nagging continually about its non-existence. There are, after all, only different ways of organising the historical record in an intelligible way, and this is one of them. It is one of the better ones, and I defend it in the opening pages of Chapter One.

Also, I became more convinced that it was possible to point to 'works of art', as we call them, that were produced during the period of 'Gothic Europe' such as are distinctly different from what was produced before and after. Such works of art will be the nucleus of the study (Chapter Three): the Gothic cathedral, the Gothic illuminated manuscript, and the medieval romance-narrative of love and chivalry. Setting the political, social and cultural circumstances for these works will be the principal business of the first two chapters.

Chapter One will outline the geographical, political, social and economic circumstances which provide the substructure of artistic production, while Chapter Two will concentrate on the needs and desires to which these works catered, with particular reference to the principal patrons of the arts: the church, the court and the city.

The last two chapters will suggest, first, something of the divisions already existing within the hierarchically ordered world of Gothic Europe, and the evidence in the arts of the disturbance created by those divisions, and, finally, the manifestation in the arts of processes and pressures towards new forms of self-identification – of nations, communities, classes, persons, and artists. If Chapter Three is a celebration of the 'climax art' of Gothic Europe, full of tonic majors, Chapter Four introduces discordant notes, unexpected modulations, fragmentations, alternative perceptions. Found first as elements within the prevailing harmony – grotesques in church ornament, obscene drolleries in the margins of illuminated books of hours, realistic genre-scenes in religious plays – these begin to absorb more and more attention, contributing to the characteristic late Gothic restlessness of design. Finally, in the manner of a tying-up of themes, Chapter Five revisits the whole period in terms of an exploration of processes of self-identification. The concentration will be on works of art as an expression of new or different kinds of individuality, artistic self-consciousness and sense of nationhood.

I flatter myself that the book thus has a shape of its own, with a large dome (Chapter Three), perhaps the Millennium Dome of the Gothic Moment, under which are displayed the great achievements of Gothic Europe; two anterooms (the briefing rooms), to prepare one for the understanding of these achievements and to make one ready for the moment of epiphany; and two rooms to enable one to recover from, revisit, and re-evaluate the experience (the debriefing rooms).

France is central to the account throughout, as is proper, and is given an appropriate amount of attention. England is given a disproportionately large amount of attention, and other countries, apart perhaps from Italy, are proportionately neglected. There has been an attempt to keep Europe (that is, western Europe, Catholic Europe) in mind throughout and, though there are passages of purely formal and stylistic aesthetic analysis, to concentrate on the dynamic relation between cultural need and cultural production. Detailed accounts of specific 'case-histories' are introduced to balance the broader general survey that aims at the necessary coverage. The narrative, within its separate sequences, is broadly but not systematically chronological, and there is frequent revisitation, from different points of view, of themes, works and artists previously treated. The effect, it is hoped, will be one of multiple perspectives and not mere confusion.

It is in the nature of such a wide-ranging book that its debts cannot be individually acknowledged, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all those scholars (most of them find a place in the Guide to Reading) whose work I have plundered. I can only express the hope that in the areas of scholarship with which I am least familiar I have not made too many blunders. I am

grateful to Barrie Dobson, who has read the whole typescript of the book in draft, for saving me from many such blunders, and to Christopher Norton for his expert reading of the section on the Gothic cathedral and many patient corrections of my misunderstandings. I am also grateful to Katharine Horsley, at present a graduate student at Harvard, who has given me much help in the preparation of the final text and the seeking out of the pictures; to Faith Perkins, who has indefatigably tracked the pictures to their sources and obtained permissions and to Natasha Dupont who has patiently seen the book through its final stages. I should like to pay tribute, too, to the late Boris Ford, who laid the plans for this series and asked me to write the book. Among his many gifts, he had a gift for getting things done.

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Plate I

Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 65 (*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*), fol. 9v. September, from the Calendar sequence. French, 1411–16.

A monthly calendar of saints' days and feast-days was the first item in a book of hours, and it came to be illustrated with scenes of the Labours of the Months, developed in the fifteenth century as full-page miniatures. They were an opportunity to experiment with non-religious scenes of courtly and rural activity in well-realised landscape settings. The painters of this manuscript, the Limbourg brothers, included in each picture one of the châteaux associated with the Duke of Berry or his family. Here, for September, with its grape harvest, is shown the château at Saumur. The miniature was left unfinished, and the lower third, with its stocky figures and genre detail, was completed by Jean Colombe in about 1485. *Text references: pp. 61, 164.*

Plate II

Bourges Cathedral, interior, from the west.

Bourges was part of the second great wave of building in the Gothic style as it spread from the Ile de France in the early thirteenth century. The choir was begun in 1195 and in use by 1232, and the cathedral completed by 1285. In following the new three-storey ordering of the nave (arcade, triforium, clerestory, omitting the tribune arcade below the triforium), the Bourges master has left the arcades at a great height, creating a soaring interior that has no rival in its sense of spaciousness. *Text references: p. 79.*

Plate III

Salisbury Cathedral, general view from the north-west.

Built in a single campaign, 1230–66 (the tower and spire were completed in 1285–1320), Salisbury is perhaps the most harmoniously pleasing of English

cathedrals. Some of the pleasure is due to the excellent prospects that may be obtained across the uniquely wide and tranquil close that surrounds the cathedral; some too to John Constable's famous paintings of 1823 (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London) and 1831 (now in the National Gallery in London). *Text references: pp. 83, 89, 91.*

PLATE IV

Chartres Cathedral, rose-window and other windows in the north transept. *c.*1230.

The fleurs-de-lys of the royal arms of France, repeatedly displayed in the rose, suggest that these windows were a royal commission. The centre of the rose-window depicts the Virgin Enthroned; the lancets below show Melchizedek, David, St Anne with Mary in her arms, Solomon and Aaron. *Text references: pp. 76, 79, 91, 108, 112–14.*

PLATE V

Simone Martini, Annunciation, altarpiece. Commissioned for Siena Cathedral, and now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. 1333.

An early example of the lyricism, refinement and sensitivity of the new 'International Gothic' style. Mary's frightened gesture as she shrinks back is a daringly expressive innovation for the period. Yet the delicately modelled figures are set in an almost airless gold void. *Text references: pp. 117, 208, 215.*

PLATE VI

Orvieto, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. Reliquary of the Sacred Corporal by Ugolino di Vieri and assistants. Enamel on silver-gilt. 1337–38.

At a mass in nearby Bolsena in 1263, a priest who doubted the Real Presence in the eucharist was answered by a miracle, when the host at the moment of consecration began to bleed profusely. The blood stained the corporal (the cloth on which the host is placed after the consecration), a miracle which played a major part in the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi soon afterwards. The miraculously stained corporal-cloth was transferred to the newly built cathedral at Orvieto. The magnificently canopied and pinnacled reliquary (139 cm high) has twelve panels, of which these four show the Bishop of Orvieto receiving the relic, pilgrims at the shrine, and (lower two) the Last Supper and the Washing of the Feet. *Text references: pp. 135–6.*

PLATE VII

Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MSS 9961–2 (the Peterborough Psalter), fol. 14r. *Beatus* page. 1299–1318.

This manuscript is a remarkable example of Gothic book design, in which all the elements of text, decoration, miniature and border have been integrated into a harmonious whole. The *Beatus* page is the page on which the first psalm begins (*Beatus vir*, 'Blessed is the man') and it is usually a showcase for the artist's talent. The initial miniature shows David playing his harp. In the margins are animals and birds, and men working and playing, and in the bas-de-page a vigorous deer-hunting scene. *Text references: p. 151.*

PLATE VIII

Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André MS 2 (the Boucicaut Hours), fol. 65v. The Visitation. 1405–08.

The Boucicaut Master's consummate mastery of landscape and aerial perspective is balanced by reminders of the profound devotional significance of the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth. Two angels follow Mary, one carrying her train, as if she is already the Queen of Heaven, the other carrying her prayer-book. Golden rays symbolise the descent of the Holy Spirit. The scene, for all its compelling appeal to the senses, is 'staged' within a proscenium of grassy and tree-strewn ledges, drawn out-of-scale. *Text references: pp. 165, 212.*

List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CUL	Cambridge University Library
EETS, OS, ES	Early English Text Society, Original Series, Extra Series
fol.	folio (leaf, with two sides, recto and verso)
MS	manuscript
r	recto (i.e. the side of the folio on the right side of the opening)
v	verso (i.e. the side of the folio on the left side of the opening)

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M. 638, f. 23v); Scala for fig. 37; Scrovegni Chapel, Padua/Scala for fig. 70; J.C.D. Smith for fig. 40; Uffizi Gallery, Florence/Scala for plate V; Victoria & Albert Picture Library for fig. 7; Dean and Chapter Winchester Cathedral for fig. 44; Württembergische Landesbibliothek/Bildarchiv Foto Marburg for fig. 1.

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'Gothic Europe': The Political and Economic Order

Why 'Gothic'?

'Gothic' in 'Gothic Europe' signifies a period when the style of architecture that later came to be known as 'Gothic' was dominant. It was a style of architecture so innovative and extraordinary, so powerfully visible still, especially as it is manifested in the great cathedrals of western Europe, that it is not surprising that it has given its name to a whole period. This is not to say that it is easy to define: as Ruskin said, in 'The Nature of Gothic', defining 'Gothicness' is like trying to define the nature of red when there is only purple and orange to work with.[1] The extension of the term to sculpture and painting and the decorative arts was natural enough, given that the display of those arts was mostly in architectural contexts (the carved figures in and on church buildings, the paintings in glass, on the walls and on altarpieces) or incorporated architectural motifs (the canopies and pinnacles of 'Gothic' illumination).

Some scholars have attempted to find the character of Gothic architecture, subjectively defined in terms of delicacy, fineness of detail, restlessness, mobility, in the non-visual arts such as literature. In a passage made famous for English medieval literary scholars by the quotation from it in Charles Muscatine's book on *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, Arnold Hauser offers a version of what has become a common generalisation about Gothic art:

> The basic form of Gothic art is juxtaposition. Whether the individual work is made up of several comparatively independent parts or is not analyzable into such parts, whether it is a pictorial or a plastic, an epic or a dramatic representation, it is always the principle of expansion and not of concentration, of co-ordination and not of subordination, of the open sequence and not of the closed geometric form, by which it is dominated. The beholder is, as it were, led through the stages and stations of a journey, and the picture of reality which it reveals is like a panoramic survey, not a one-sided, unified representation, dominated by a single point of view.[2]

Muscatine has no difficulty in finding these elements of 'co-ordinateness and linearity' in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, as well as 'a second typically Gothic quality, the tension between phenomenal and ideal, mundane and divine, that informs the art and thought of the period'. These ideas of 'Gothic form' are widely current, and offer many temptations to make analogies between the arts, and particularly to argue from the aesthetic of visual form in architecture and art to the aesthetic of verbal and non-visual form in literature. Anyone writing about the different arts and their interaction and mutual influence within a certain period will want to make use of these and similar analogies. But the dangers of merely subjective impressionism are obvious, and one has to remain aware of the slippery nature of such analogies and the illusory foundation on which they are constructed. However, for the use of 'Gothic' as a periodising term, and as a means therefore of labelling all the forms of art produced within the period so designated, there is every justification.

'Gothic' was first introduced by Giorgio Vasari (1513–74) in his *Lives of the Italian Painters* as a term to describe the kind of old-style architecture that he despised.[3] Admiring the architecture of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) and the painting of Raphael (1483–1520), and considering the recent painting, sculpture and architecture of northern Italy as a 'renaissance' of classical art, the only kind of art to be admired, he dismissed the architecture of the previous centuries as barbaric (*maniera barbara*). It was, said Vasari, in the famous philippic against the Gothic style in the Introduction to the *Lives*, in the 'German' (*todeschi*) style or 'the Gothic manner' (*maniera de' Gotti*). Vasari had a theory that the architecture he despised was actually invented by the historical Goths (who surged across Europe in the fifth century and, under Alaric, sacked Rome in 410). A report on Roman antiquities presented by a member of Raphael's circle to Pope Julius II says that the pointed arches and overarching ribbed vaults were imitations of the northern forests where the barbarians constructed rude shelters by leaning trees together. Earlier Gothic (what is now called Romanesque) was meanwhile presumed to imitate the caves and grottoes in which these primitive people had lived even before they hit upon the idea of bowers under spreading leafy branches.

Abuse was heaped upon this Gothic architecture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sir Henry Wotton, in *The Elements of Architecture* (1624), comments upon pointed arches thus:

> These, both for the natural imbecility of the sharp angle itself, and likewise for their very uncomeliness, ought to be exiled from judicious eyes, and left to their first inventors, the Goths and Lombards, among other reliques of that barbarous age.

At the same time, buildings continued to be restored and extended, skilfully and lovingly, in the Gothic style. San Petronio in Bologna had its nave rib-vaulted in 1646–58, Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris in 1644–45, and Saint-Etienne in Caen and Saint-Nicholas in Blois at around the same time. Lincoln College, Oxford, had its 'fourteenth-century' Gothic chapel built in 1631, and the Gothic fan-vault above the stairs leading to the hall of Christ Church, Oxford, dates from 1640. Engravings in books of architectural history such as Dugdale's

History of St Paul's Cathedral (1658) reflect the love of Gothic. All of this is before Gothic was restored to official favour in the late eighteenth century as the perfect expression of a 'natural' aspiration after the divine. This was the analogy favoured in Goethe's eulogy of Strassburg Cathedral (1772): 'It rises like a most sublime wide-arching Tree of God, which with a thousand twigs, a million twigs, tells forth to the neighbourhood the glory of God'. It was not long before Gothic was canonised as the supreme architectural style, anatomised and classified (the supreme accolade) into its different periods ('Early English', 'Decorated', 'Perpendicular', for instance, in Thomas Rickman's *Attempt to discriminate the Styles of Architecture in England from the Conquest to the Reformation*, 1817), and adopted on a massive scale for new building, ecclesiastical and secular.

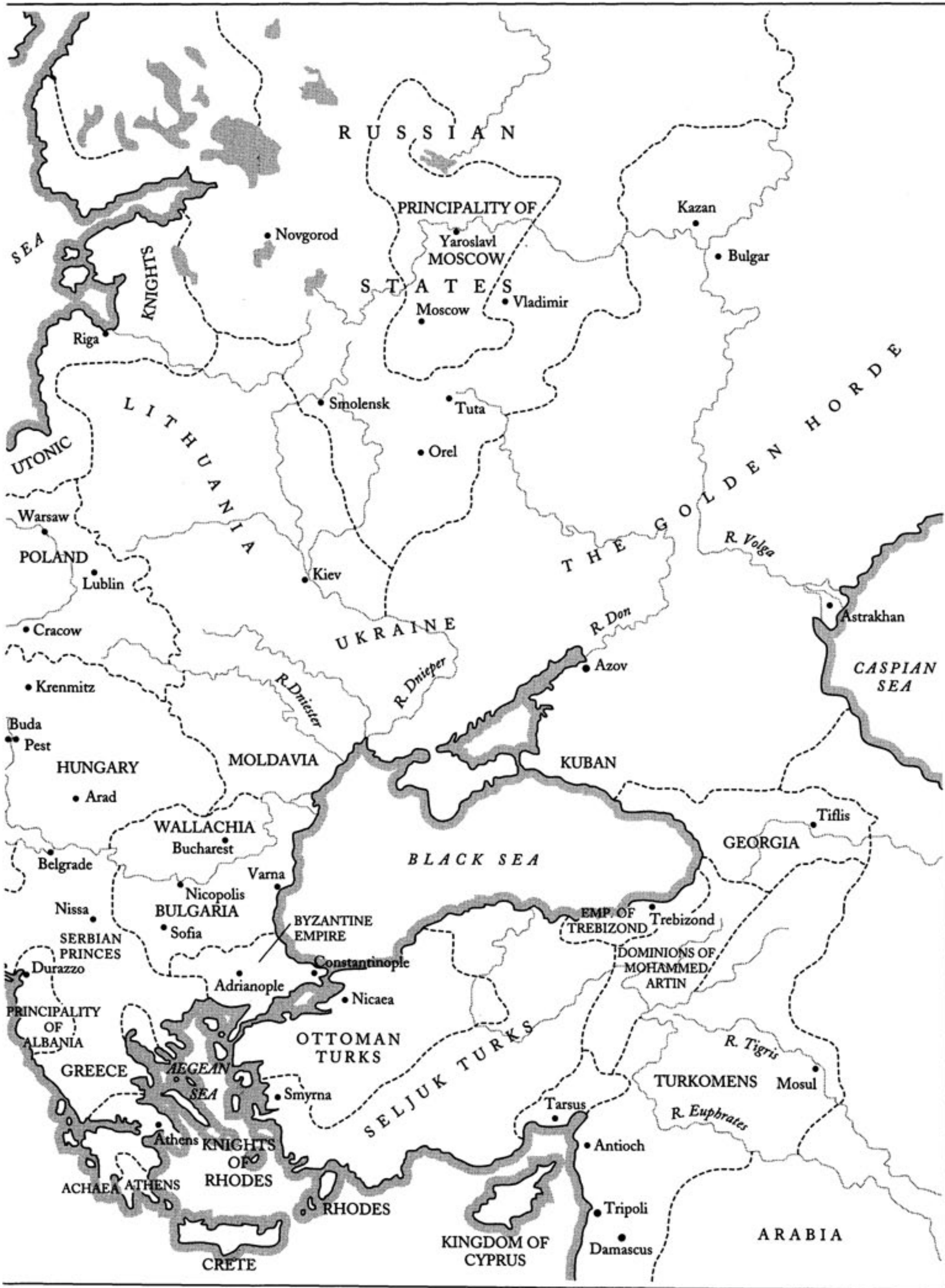
Meanwhile, of course, Gothic had also taken its 'Gothick' turn, first in a patronising and playful manner in 'Gothick' novels like Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), full of vaults, crypts, tombs, painted windows, gloom and dark pomp, and then in a more seriously ridiculous manner in the novels of 'Monk' Lewis and Ann Radcliffe. Samuel Johnson, as a representative of neo-classical rationality, had celebrated the robustness of the ordinary, of truth to nature and the centrally human. The Gothic novel was in some sense a reaction against this, a return of the repressed, a tantalising visitation of the grotesque horrors that lay in the shadow of the Enlightenment. The pervasively religious presences of the Gothic novels – the ubiquitous monks and ruined chapels and suggestions of mysterious supernatural powers – provide one of the links with the past of Gothic, and indicate the nature of some of the spectres that haunted an age of reason (and that remained unappeased in the later literature of vampirism and postmodern schlock-horror).

The familiarity of the Gothic style in architecture, and the visual impact of its many surviving monuments, make it an appealing term to use to identify, if not to characterise, the period in which it was dominant. The exact definition of the chronological extent of that period could vary. If it were being defined in terms of architecture alone, 'Gothic Europe' would begin in 1144, with Abbot Suger, and end in the sixteenth century, sprawlingly, as neo-classical architecture spread from Italy northwards. It would begin early in one part of Europe and end late in other parts (Portugal, England). But though the history of architecture provides the initial justification for the use of the term Gothic, there is no reason to give it too solitary a prominence in arbitrating upon chronological divides. 'Gothic Europe' may be acknowledged to be a convenient periodising term, and 1200–1450 inevitably to some extent an arbitrary slice out of the flux of time, but there are a number of ways in which 'Gothic Europe 1200–1450' can be claimed to have, for 'non-Gothic' reasons, a definable identity and integrity.

Why 1200–1450?

We begin with what defined the Europe we are speaking of. It was the Europe of Latin Christendom, extending north-west to newly Christianised Iceland,

Map 1: Europe, about 1360.


RUSSIAN
PRINCIPALITY OF
MOSCOW
STATES
Yaroslavl
Moscow
Vladimir
Kazan
Bulgar
Novgorod
KNIGHTS
SEA
Riga
UTONIC
LITHUANIA
Smolensk
Tuta
Orel
THE GOLDEN HORDE
R. Volga
Warsaw
POLAND
Lublin
Kiev
Cracow
UKRAINE
R. Don
Astrakhan
Azov
CASPIAN SEA
Krenmitz
R. Dniester
R. Dnieper
Buda
Pest
HUNGARY
Arad
MOLDAVIA
KUBAN
WALLACHIA
Bucharest
Tiflis
GEORGIA
Belgrade
BLACK SEA
Varna
Nicopolis
Nissa
BULGARIA
Sofia
BYZANTINE EMPIRE
EMP. OF TREBIZOND
Trebizond
SERBIAN PRINCES
Durazzo
Constantinople
DOMINIONS OF MOHAMMED ARTIN
Adrianople
Nicaea
PRINCIPALITY OF ALBANIA
OTTOMAN TURKS
R. Tigris
GREECE
AEGEAN SEA
Smyrna
SELJUK TURKS
TURKOMENS
Mosul
Tarsus
R. Euphrates
Athens
KNIGHTS OF RHODES
Antioch
ACHAEA
ATHENS
RHODES
Tripoli
KINGDOM OF CYPRUS
Damascus
ARABIA
CRETE

south-west to the disputed borders with the Moors in Spain, north-east and east to the Slavic kingdoms beyond Poland and Hungary, under the Eastern not the Roman Church, and south-east to the borders of the Eastern or Byzantine Empire. The Eastern or Greek Orthodox church had its headquarters in the imperial capital of Constantinople and claimed, like the Western or Roman church, from which it had finally split in 1053, to be the only true church. Since differences between different Christian sects are often as fiercely maintained as differences between Christians and non-Christians, the Byzantine Empire and the church of which the Patriarch in Constantinople was the head were almost as alien to the west as the Muslim Turks. The earlier crusades to recover the Holy Land inspired some fitful cooperation, but the sack of Constantinople by the crusading armies in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade confirmed the hateful division, defining western Europe as an identity through the oppositional structuring of what it was not, whether Turk or apostate. A further barrier between east and west was erected in the north, where the Mongol invasions of Russia acted to seal off a region that had previously been open to economic and cultural contact with the west. Relationships between the west and Byzantium improved spasmodically during the next two-and-a-half centuries, but it was again events in the east, the seizure of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and the flight of scholars and the spread of Byzantine Greek learning to the west, that led to a new definition of western Europe. It was not only what happened within western Europe during the years 1200–1450 that makes it capable of being talked about as 'Gothic Europe', but also what happened in the east to make the west 'the west'.

The Byzantine Empire and the Turks

The Byzantine Empire had declined from the peak of its power (*c.*1025), when it controlled all Asia Minor and nearly all the Balkans. The Turks were pressing upon its borders, and though they were temporarily discomfited during the First Crusade, which culminated in the capture of Jerusalem in 1098 and the slaughter of all its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants and the setting up of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, they soon regrouped and united under Saladin to reconquer Jerusalem in 1187. Meanwhile, adventures in 'Outremer', as it was called ('the overseas'), had given a tremendous stimulus to trade, chiefly conducted by Venice, but also Genoa and Pisa. The carnage of 1204, when the armies of the Fourth Crusade turned aside to sack Constantinople, was prompted by Venetian trading rivalry as well as religious fervour and the prospect of holy looting among the renegade Christians. A Latin empire was set up, the Western church installed, and much land in the Balkans and across the Bosphorus annexed. The Byzantines held on in western Greece and re-occupied Constantinople in 1261, but their shadowy empire remained a prey to exploitation by the fleets of Venice and Genoa, as well as by the Turks, and portions of it were occupied and garrisoned by the west to protect trade and crusading routes. The island of Rhodes was occupied by the Knights of

St John (the Knights Hospitallers), a crusading order set up for this purpose (another was the Knights Templars, suppressed by the French king in 1312), right up until the end of the Middle Ages (1522).

Crusades continued spasmodically, though not many reached the Holy Land. The Emperor Frederick II had some temporary success in 1228–29, negotiating with the Muslims to have himself crowned in Jerusalem in 1229 (no one was there to crown him in any official capacity, so he crowned himself), but the city was reoccupied in 1244. This led Louis IX of France, shamed by the compromises and greed of his predecessors, to launch a new crusade in 1248. Well-organised and well-financed, the crusading army landed in Egypt, but got no further. Louis IX tried again in 1270, but died on the way at Tunis. This, the Eighth Crusade, was effectively the last. From now on, the pope would concentrate on promoting crusades against western heretics (the Albigensian crusade launched by Innocent III in 1209 against the Cathars of southern France set a bloody precedent) or against those who opposed the wishes of himself and his allies (the clergy could be taxed to pay for such 'crusades', and those who died received plenary absolution).

The Turks, after stemming the advance of the Mongol hordes (who at one point in 1241 raided to the borders of Hungary), picked off the Crusader strongholds one by one. Acre fell in 1300 and the Ottoman Turks got their first foothold in Europe at Gallipoli in 1354. Murad I (Shakespeare's Amurath) set up a Turkish court at Adrianople, and though he himself was killed in battle against the Serbs under Prince Lazar Hrebeljanovic at Kossovo in 1389, the Serbs were defeated, and the Emperor John V asked the west for help. A large and splendid expedition led by John, son of the Duke of Burgundy, proved a fiasco and its army was annihilated at Nicopolis in 1396. The Turks were at the gates of Vienna, but a reprieve came in 1402 when they were set upon in the east by the Mongol Timur (Marlowe's Tamburlaine) and the Sultan Bajezid I was killed. Constantinople was temporarily saved, but Byzantium was now no more than a Turkish vassal (only the Serbs held out) and the 'fall' of Constantinople in 1453 was like the falling of an over-ripe fruit.

The Holy Roman Empire, Italy, and the Papacy

The dissolution of empires is the story too in other parts of Europe, sometimes into elements that were to resist recomposition for many centuries, sometimes into the nation-states that first became recognisable in the later Gothic period. Central and central southern Europe had been ruled by the sprawling Holy Roman Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, dominated by Germany, first under the Ottonian emperors and then under the Emperor Frederick I, Barbarossa (1152–90). Frederick had extended the effective powers of the Empire, as distinct from its nominal suzerainty, into northern Italy and even to Rome, where his challenge to the papacy, then at the height of its medieval power, over rights to the investiture of the clergy (and the claims meantime to the temporalities, that is, the profits from the lands and endowments accrued

Table 1: Chronological list of Holy Roman Emperors, Hohenstaufen to Habsburg

1152–90	Frederick I, Barbarossa, house of Hohenstaufen
1190–97	Henry VI, house of Hohenstaufen
1198–1218	NO EMPEROR
1218–50	Frederick II, house of Hohenstaufen
1250–54	Conrad IV, house of Hohenstaufen
1254–73	INTERREGNUM
1273–91	Rudolf I, house of Habsburg (not crowned)
1292–98	Adolf of Nassau (not crowned), deposed
1298–1308	Albert I, house of Habsburg (not crowned)
1308–13	Henry VII, house of Luxemburg
1314–47	Louis IV (Ludwig IV), King of Bavaria, house of Wittelsbach
1347–78	Charles IV, King of Bohemia, house of Luxemburg
1378–1400	Wenceslas (Wenceslas IV, King of Bohemia 1378–1419), house of Luxemburg
1400–10	Rupert of the Palatinate (not crowned)
1411–37	Sigismund, King of Hungary
1438–39	Albert II, house of Habsburg
1440–93	Frederick III, house of Habsburg

to that office) had ended inconclusively. But Frederick died by drowning on crusade in Asia Minor in 1190 and his successor, Henry VI, died in 1197, leaving an infant son, and the civil wars that followed tore Germany apart. That infant son, early crowned King of Sicily, became emperor as Frederick II in 1218, and Frederick had some success in reasserting imperial power, mostly from his base in southern Italy. He was skilful in his negotiations with the Muslim east when on crusade and had an unusual career as a patron of the arts and sciences, but his struggles to maintain imperial power in Italy against the papacy (he was frequently excommunicated by Gregory IX, pope 1227–41) were undone by his death in 1250.

Frederick II was succeeded as emperor by his eldest son Conrad IV (1250–54), but his illegitimate son Manfred inherited control of large parts of southern Italy. The Empire was in effect divided and, after the death of Conrad in 1254, for many years in disarray. The pope moved swiftly to expel the Hohenstaufens from the south and re-exert papal influence there: he invited Charles of Anjou, the brother of Louis IX of France, to take the throne of Sicily and Naples in opposition to Frederick's son Manfred, thus beginning a century of Franco-papal alliance which was very deleterious to the authority of the papacy. Manfred died in 1266, and the last of the Hohenstaufens, Conradin, was executed by Charles of Anjou at Naples in 1268. The bloody rebellion of the 'Sicilian Vespers' in 1282, when the whole French population on the island was massacred, led to the further invitation to Peter III of Aragon to take the throne of Sicily. There were now two foreign powers with a foothold in the south. Papal influence had been reasserted and the fortunes of the Guelph or pro-papal party in Italy restored, but constant feuding in the