The History of the
RENAISSANCE
WORLD
Also by Susan Wise Bauer

The History of the Medieval World:
From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade

The History of the Ancient World:
From the Earliest Accounts to the Fall of Rome

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A Guide to Classical Education at Home
For Daniel
Contents

List of Maps xv
List of Illustrations xix
Acknowledgments xxi
Preface xxiii

Part One
RENAISSANCES

One Logic and Compromise · England, Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire, 1100–1122 3
Two The Crusader Enemy · Byzantium, Venice, and the Crusader kingdoms, 1100–1138 13
Three Anarchy · England, Western Francia, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1120–1139 19
Four The Lost Homeland · China, Dai Viet, and Khmer, 1127–1150 25
Five Crusade Resurrected · The Turkish and Crusader kingdoms, with visitations from Germany and France, 1128–1149 34
Six Reconquista and Rediscovery · The Spanish peninsula, 1134–1146 43
Seven Questions of Authority · France and Italy, 1135–1160 49
Eight The New Song · China, 1141–1165 55
Nine The Heiji Disturbance · Japan, 1142–1159 61
Ten Death of an Army · Goryeo, 1146–1197 69
Eleven The First Plantagenet · England and Western Francia, 1147–1154 76
Twelve Frederick Barbarossa · Germany and Italy, 1147–1177 81
Thirteen The Almohads in Spain · North Africa and Spain, 1147–1177 88
Fourteen “Many Nations” · Africa, sometime in the twelfth century 94
Fifteen The Last Fatimid Caliph · The Turkish and Crusader kingdoms, 1149–1171 102
### Contents

**Sixteen**  Monks and Brahmans  ·  South India, 1150–1189  108  
**Seventeen**  Conquest of the Willing  ·  Northern India, 1150–1202  117  
**Eighteen**  Death of a Priest  ·  England and France, 1154–1170  126  
**Nineteen**  Foreign Relations  ·  Byzantium, Hungary, and the Balkans, 1157–1168  134  
**Twenty**  The Venetian Problem  ·  Byzantium and Italy, 1171–1185  141  
**Twenty-One**  Resentments  ·  England, Ireland, and France, 1171–1186  148  
**Twenty-Two**  Saladin  ·  The Turkish and Crusader kingdoms, 1171–1188  155  
**Twenty-Three**  The Gempei War  ·  Japan, 1179–1185  161  
**Twenty-Four**  Kings’ Crusade  ·  England, France, and the Turkish and Crusader kingdoms, 1188–1199  166  
**Twenty-Five**  The Sack of Constantinople  ·  Byzantium and Europe, 1195–1204  176

### Part Two

**INVASIONS, HERESIES, AND UPRISINGS**  185

**Twenty-Six**  Westward  ·  Central and South America, 1200  187  
**Twenty-Seven**  The Mongol School of Warfare  ·  China, North and Central Asia, 1201–1215  195  
**Twenty-Eight**  John Softsword  ·  England and France, 1203–1213  202  
**Twenty-Nine**  Sundiata of the Mali  ·  Africa, 1203–1240  207  
**Thirty**  The Jokyu War  ·  Japan, 1203–1242  211  
**Thirty-One**  The Unwanted Throne  ·  The old Byzantine lands, 1204–1225  217  
**Thirty-Two**  The First Delhi Sultanate  ·  Northern and central India, 1206–1236  225  
**Thirty-Three**  Heresy  ·  France, 1209–1210  233  
**Thirty-Four**  Reconquest and Failure  ·  France and the Spanish peninsula, 1210–1213  242  
**Thirty-Five**  From Bouvines to Magna Carta  ·  France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire, 1213–1217  248  
**Thirty-Six**  The Birth of the Inquisition  ·  France, 1215–1229  257  
**Thirty-Seven**  Moving Westward  ·  China, North and Central Asia, and the Middle East, 1215–1229  262  
**Thirty-Eight**  South of India  ·  India and Sri Lanka, 1215–1283  270  
**Thirty-Nine**  The Fifth Crusade  ·  Egypt and the Crusader kingdoms, 1217–1221  275  
**Forty**  From the Golden Bull to the Baltic Crusade  ·  Hungary, Poland, and the lands of the Lithuanians, 1218–1233  281
Contents x i

Forty-One Lakeshores, Highlands, and Hilltops · Africa, 1221–1290 287
Forty-Two The Sixth Crusade · The Holy Roman Empire, the Crusader kingdoms, and the Ayyubid empire, 1223–1229 293
Forty-Three The Tran Dynasty · Southeast Asia, 1224–1257 298
Forty-Four Young Kings · England, France, and the kingdoms of Spain, 1227–1242 303
Forty-Five The Mongol Horde · Most of Asia and Europe, 1229–1248 310
Forty-Six The Debt of Hatred · The Holy Roman Empire, 1229–1250 318
Forty-Seven The Shadow of God · India, 1236–1266 326
Forty-Eight The Seventh Crusade · France, Egypt, and Syria, 1244–1250 332
Forty-Nine The Splintering Khanate · The Mongol conquests, 1246–1264 339
Fifty The Mamluks of Egypt · Egypt, Syria, and the Mongol lands, 1250–1268 346
Fifty-One Louis the Saint · France and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1250–1267 353
Fifty-Two The Lion’s Den · Germany, Italy, Sicily, and England, 1252–1273 359
Fifty-Three The Recapture of Constantinople · The Latin Empire and the empire of Nicaea, 1254–1261 367
Fifty-Four The Last Crusades · North Africa, Egypt, France, Italy, and the Crusader kingdoms, 1270–1291 372
Fifty-Five Kublai Khan · China, Japan, Goryeo, Champa, and the Dai Viet, 1273–1294 379
Fifty-Six The Sicilian Vespers · Germany, Italy, Sicily, Aragon, and France, 1274–1288 388
Fifty-Seven The Wars of Edward I · England, Scotland, Wales, and France, 1275–1299 394
Fifty-Eight The Second Sultanate of Delhi · India, 1287–1300 403
Fifty-Nine The End of the Papal Monarchy · France, Germany, and Italy, 1301–1317 410
Sixty The Appearance of the Ottomans · Byzantium and the Turks of the Il-khanate, 1302–1347 419
Sixty-One The Fall of the Khilji · India, 1303–1320 427
Sixty-Two The Triumph of the Bruce · Scotland, England, and Ireland, 1304–1314 433
Contents

Part Three
CATASTROPHES

441
Sixty-Three  The Great Famine  All of Europe, 1310–1321 443
Sixty-Four  The Sultan and the Khan  Egypt, the Il-khanate, and the Golden Horde, 1310–1335 449
Sixty-Five  Mansa Musa of Mali  West Africa, 1312–1360 455
Sixty-Six  After the Famine  France and England, 1318–1330 461
Sixty-Seven  The Southern and Northern Courts  Japan, 1318–1339 470
Sixty-Eight  Revolutions  India, 1320–1351 478
Sixty-Nine  Naming the Renaissance  Germany, Italy, and France, 1322–1341 484
Seventy  The Cities in the Lake  Central America, 1325–1375 491
Seventy-One  A Hundred Years of War  France and England, 1329–1347 497
Seventy-Two  The End of the World  Asia, Europe, and India, 1338–1353 505

Part Four
REGROUPINGS

513
Seventy-Three  The Will to War  France, England, and the Spanish kingdoms, 1349–1369 515
Seventy-Four  White Lotus, Red Turban  China, 1351–1382 525
Seventy-Five  After the Mongols  Southeast Asia, 1352–1399 531
Seventy-Six  The Turks and the Desperate Emperor  Byzantium and the lands of the Turks, with side journeys to France and Italy 537
Seventy-Seven  The Disintegration of Delhi  India and Sri Lanka, 1352–1388 544
Seventy-Eight  The Union of Krewo  Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania, 1364–1399 551
Seventy-Nine  The Rebirth of the Mongol Horde  Central Asia, the Middle East, India, and the lands of the Rus’, 1367–1399 557
Eighty  Compromises and Settlements  The Korean peninsula and Japan, 1368–1392 565
Eighty-One  The House of Visconti and the Papal States  France and Italy, 1368–1390 571
Eighty-Two  Bad Beginnings  France and England, 1369–1381 577
Eighty-Three  Dislocation  Africa, 1370–1399 587
Contents

Eighty-Five  The Battle of Nicopolis  The Ottoman empire, Constantinople, and the lands of eastern Europe, 1385–1396  598
Eighty-Six  The Union and Disunion of Kalmar  Scandinavia, 1387–1449  604
Eighty-Seven  The Hussite Uprising  Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bohemia, 1388–1419  611
Eighty-Eight  The Taking of France  France and England, 1401–1420  620
Eighty-Nine  After Timurlane  The north of India, the empire of Timur, the lands of the Ottoman Turks, Egypt, and Byzantium, 1401–1415  627

Part Five
ENDINGS  635

Ninety  The Withdrawal of the Ming  China and the land of the Dai Viet, 1405–1455  637
Ninety-One  Failure  The old lands of the Holy Roman Empire and the remnants of Byzantium, 1412–1440  645
Ninety-Two  Perpetual Slavery  Portugal, Castile, and Africa, 1415–1455  654
Ninety-Three  The Loss of France  France and England, 1422–1453  662
Ninety-Four  The Fall  The Byzantine and Ottoman empires, along with Hungary, Germany, Wallachia, Bohemia, and Serbia, 1430–1453  673

Notes  683
Works Cited  723
Permissions  749
Index  751
Maps

1.1 England and the Holy Roman Empire 9
2.1 The Lands of the Crusades 15
3.1 England and France during the Anarchy 23
4.1 The Kingdoms of China and Southeast Asia 28
5.1 Aleppo and the Crusader Kingdoms 36
5.2 Kingdom of Louis VII 37
5.3 Conquests of Zengi and Nur ad-Din 38
6.1 The Spanish Peninsula, 1144 46
7.1 Peter Abelard's France 51
8.1 The Song and Jin at Peace 59
9.1 Japan under the Cloistered Emperors 63
10.1 Goryeo 69
11.1 Anjou, Normandy, and England 77
12.1 The Empire of Frederick Barbarossa 84
13.1 The Kingdoms of Spain 89
13.2 The Almohad Empire 90
14.1 Many Nations of Africa 96
15.1 The Conquests of Nur ad-Din 102
16.1 The Island of Sri Lanka 109
16.2 The Disintegration of the Chola 113
17.1 The Ghurid Advance 118
18.1 The Kingdoms of France and England 129
19.1 The World of Manuel I 138
20.1 Byzantium and Venice 142
21.1 England, Ireland, and Western Francia 150
22.1 The Conquests of Saladin 158
22.2 Gisors 159
23.1 The Kamakura Shogunate 162
24.1 The World of the Third Crusade 169
24.2 The Kingdom of Jerusalem 171
25.1 The Conquest of Constantinople 181
26.1 Central America 188
26.2 South America 189
Maps

27.1 The Advance of the Mongols 197
28.1 John’s Losses and Philip’s Gains 204
29.1 Sosso and Mali 209
31.1 The Successors of Byzantium 218
32.1 The Nizari 227
32.2 Delhi under Itumish 229
33.1 The Albigensian Crusade 239
34.1 The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa 245
35.1 The World of the Magna Carta 251
36.1 The World of the Inquisition 260
37.1 The Mongol Empire 265
37.2 The Battle of Kalka 267
38.1 The Pandya Renaissance 272
39.1 The Fifth Crusade 276
40.1 The Baltic Crusade 285
41.1 Zagwe, Kanem, and Mapungubwe 289
43.1 The Four Kingdoms of Southeast Asia 301
44.1 The Invasions of Henry III 305
44.2 The Spanish Peninsula, 1248 307
45.1 Mongol Conquests in the East 312
45.2 Mongol Conquests in the West 314
46.1 Frederick’s War in Italy 322
47.1 Balban’s Wars 328
48.1 The Seventh Crusade 334
49.1 The Four Khanates 344
50.1 The Bahri Sultanate 350
51.1 The Pastoureaux 355
52.1 The Battle of Evesham 363
52.2 The Kingdom of Sicily 365
53.1 The Empire of Nicaea 368
54.1 After the Almohads 372
54.2 The Triumph of the Bahri Sultanate 377
55.1 The Yuan Dynasty 384
56.1 The Sicilian Vespers 390
57.1 Wars in Scotland and Wales 396
58.1 The Mongol Invasion of Delhi 406
59.1 The Empire, Divided 415
60.1 The Ottoman Invasion 421
60.2 Serbia under Stefan Dushan 424
61.1 The Rajput Kingdoms 427
Maps xvii

62.1 The Battle of Bannockburn 437
63.1 Flood and Famine 446
64.1 The Collapse of the Il-khanate 453
65.1 The Height of Mali 456
66.1 Edward III and the Valois 466
67.1 The Southern and Northern Courts 475
68.1 New Sultanates in India 481
69.1 Lands Claimed by Louis of Bavaria 487
70.1 The Aztecs 493
71.1 The Start of the Hundred Years’ War 500
72.1 The Spread of the Plague 508
73.1 French Defeats 518
74.1 The Rise of the Ming 528
75.1 Conflict in Southeast Asia 533
76.1 The Ottoman Empire 540
77.1 Bahmani Expansion 547
78.1 Poland under Casimir the Great 552
79.1 The Advance of Timur-Leng 559
79.2 Battle of the Terek River 562
80.1 Joseon and Japan 569
81.1 War in Italy 573
82.1 Richard II and Charles VI 580
83.1 The Hausa Kingdoms 589
84.1 The Battle of Aljubarrota 592
85.1 Ottoman Victories 600
86.1 The Scandinavian Kingdoms 607
87.1 Hussite Wars 614
88.1 The Battle of Agincourt 624
89.1 Timur against the Ottomans 631
90.1 The Sea Voyages of the Yongle Emperor 639
90.2 The Ming and the Oirat 641
91.1 The Empire of Sigismund 648
92.1 Portuguese Explorations 657
93.1 The Dauphin against the English 666
94.1 The Wars of Murad II 674
94.2 The Golden Horn 680
Illustrations

4.1 Central towers of Angkor Wat, Cambodia 31
4.2 Angkor Wat bas-relief sculpture 32
6.1 Early thirteenth-century Arabic manuscript, showing Aristotle teaching Turkish astronomers 47
8.1 Ink Plum Blossoms, by Wang Yansou of the Song dynasty 57
9.1 Family line of Konoe and Sutoku 64
9.2 Detail from the Heiji Scroll: Burning of the Sanjo palace 66
16.1 The Giant’s Tank 110
26.1 Nazca lines: Spider 190
26.2 Nazca lines: Dancing hands 190
31.1 Coin of John III, showing the seated Christ on one side and John with the Virgin Mary on the other 222
32.1 Ruins of the mountain fortress of Alamut 227
55.1 Kublai Khan 381
59.1 The Papal Palace at Avignon 414
63.1 Miniature from the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, showing March planting 444
65.1 Mansa Musa of Mali on the Catalan Atlas 458
66.1 Genealogy of Philip VI and Edward III 467
77.1 Citadel of Gulbarga 546
86.1 Genealogy of Margaret and Eric 606
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Not long after 1140 AD, the Italian scholar Gerard of Cremona traveled to the Spanish peninsula, hoping to find a rare copy of the thousand-year-old Greek astronomy text known as the Almagest.

His chances were better there than anywhere else in Europe. The southern half of the peninsula had been in Arab hands for centuries, and the ruling dynasties of Muslim Spain had brought with them thousands of classical texts, translated into Arabic but long lost to the vernacular languages of the West. The libraries of the city of Toledo, in the center of the peninsula, housed scores of these valuable volumes—and Toledo had now been recaptured by one of the Christian kingdoms of the north, meaning that Western scholars could visit it in relative safety.

Gerard found more than he bargained for: not just astronomy texts but classical and Arabic studies of dialectic, geometry, philosophy, and medicine; unknown monographs by Euclid, Galen, Ptolemy, and Aristotle; a whole treasury of knowledge. Overwhelmed, he settled into Toledo and set to work learning Arabic. “Regretting the poverty of the Latins in these things,” one of his students wrote, “he learned the Arabic language in order to be able to translate. . . . To the end of his life he continued to transmit to the Latin world (as if to his own beloved heir) whatever books he thought finest, in many subjects, as accurately and as plainly as he could.”

Renaissance had begun.

This is not a history of “the Renaissance.” Rather, it is a history of the world during the period that historians have often (although not universally) associated with a rebirth of interest in classical learning. As Gerard’s story shows, this rebirth began much earlier than the fourteenth century.

One of the first Italians to give a name to the reawakened interest in Greek and Roman learning was the poet Petrarch, who announced early in the 1340s that poets and scholars were ready to lead the cities of Italy back to the glory days of Rome. Classical learning had declined, Petrarch insisted, into darkness and obscurity. Now was the time for that learning to be rediscovered: a rebirth, a Renaissance.
Petrarch was lobbying, in a polite and academic but very pointed way, for the distinction of official Roman Poet Laureate—in that day, something perhaps equivalent to the Man Booker Prize or the National Book Award, a public recognition that he was an intellectual whose words should be heeded. As part of his campaign, he was placing himself at the head of an already-existing phenomenon. Since before Gerard of Cremona, Western scholars, many of them Italian, had been working through Arabic libraries, reacquainting themselves with Greek and Roman thinkers. So much of this intellectual groundwork had been laid already that many modern historians now speak of a “Twelfth-Century Renaissance.”

By 1340, in other words, renaissance was so far advanced that it had become visible. Historical eras are never recognizable when they begin; they can only be seen in hindsight. The Renaissance, as the following chapters will show, was rooted in the twelfth century. The twelfth century saw the real beginnings of the struggle between Church hierarchy and Aristotelian logic, a struggle which—reincarnated as a fight between scripture and science, creation and evolution—is still ongoing in the United States in 2013. The twelfth century saw the death of the Crusades, the rise of the Plantagenets, the dominance of the Japanese shoguns, and the journey of Islam into central Africa.

It was a century of renaissances, and that is where my story begins.

The last chapter of this history tells the story of the Ottoman attack on Constantinople in May of 1453, when the triumph of the Turks brought a final end to the Roman dream.

The cultural phenomenon known as the Italian Renaissance continued well after 1453; I do not go on, in this book, to chronicle some of its better-known accomplishments (the political philosophies of Machiavelli, the paintings of Michelangelo and Raphael, the inventions of da Vinci, the observations of Galileo). But in worldwide terms, by the time Constantinople fell, the Renaissance had begun to shade into new eras.

Like the Renaissance itself, those eras were not named by historians until much later. But the ground of the Reformation was seeded and had begun to sprout; the followers of the English scholar John Wycliffe and the Bohemian priest Jan Hus were already organizing against the authority of Rome. And the Age of Exploration was well under way. Twenty years earlier, the Portuguese captain Gil Eannes had finally pushed south past Cape Bojador. A decade after Eannes’s boundary-breaking journey, Prince Henry of Portugal sponsored the first slave market in Europe: a closely orchestrated, carefully publicized event meant to whip up widespread enthusiasm for further explorations into Africa.

The Turkish overthrow of the Byzantine Empire was a world-changer. As the historian Caroline Finkel points out, even the Turks were unsettled by
Constantinople’s fall; the Ottoman chronicler Tursun Bey, the only Turk to
describe the final battle, calls it a “veritable precipitation and downpouring of
calamities from the heavens, as decreed by God Himself.” The transformation
of Constantinople into Istanbul is an end and a beginning, an exclamation
point and new paragraph in the punctuation of world events.

But the transition away from Renaissance and towards the next phase of
human history is, perhaps, even more apparent in the events of the year before.
The Italian pope Nicholas V had just issued a papal bull called *Dum Diversas.*
In recognition of the expense and effort that the Portuguese had put into
exploring the African coast, the Church gave official approval to the enslavement and sale of Africans by the Portuguese crown—a sanction confirmed
again three years later in the charter *Romanus Pontifex.*

Wooing the allegiance and support of the powerful king of Portugal, the
pope had transformed slavery into an institution that all Europeans could
profit from without guilt. Historians do not normally speak of the Age of Enslavement, but in hindsight we can see that the decrees of the 1450s shaped
the futures of three continents and began a whole new story.
Chapter One

Logic and Compromise

Between 1100 and 1122,
the Holy Roman Emperor and the king of England both defy the pope,
and an archbishop makes use of Aristotle

The First Crusade had just ended—and with it, an age.
Eight hundred years after the Roman emperor Constantine led his army
against his own people under the sign of the cross, Christian warriors crossed
the Bosphorus Strait as a unified army of faith, roused by the supreme leader
of the one Christian church to fight against Turks advancing from the east.
No sooner had the Crusade succeeded than the victorious Christian knights
sacrificed their allegiance to the one true faith and claimed another membership.
They were, first and foremost, not sons of the church but sovereigns of
their own private kingdoms.
Among the many meanings of what it meant to be Christian, one
would govern the next four and a half centuries: to be a man of God
meant power.
The ripples of the First Crusade spread out from Syria, in a widening circle
that lapped both east and west.
In England, the wrong king inherited the throne. William II, king of the
realm since 1087, was out hunting when his companion—an experienced
hunter named Walter Tyrrell—drew his bow at a stag and instead hit the king.
William collapsed onto the arrow and died on the spot. Rather than sticking
around and explaining what had happened, Walter (according to the English
historian William of Malmesbury) “leapt hastily on his horse, and with good
help from his spurs got clean away. Nor indeed was there any pursuit.” Instead,
the rest of the hunting party, which included William II’s younger brother
Henry, went back to London and crowned Henry king of England. The date
was August 5, 1100.¹
In fact, Henry wasn’t William’s heir. The English throne should have gone
to Henry’s older brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, but he was still on his
way back from the First Crusade. Before he could claim his crown, Henry invaded Normandy.

The two brothers met in battle near the Norman village Tinchebray; the Duke of Normandy's army was defeated, and Robert was captured and imprisoned for the rest of his very long life. He died in his eighties, still under guard. As for Henry I, he took the title of Normandy for himself, becoming (like his father the Conqueror) both king of England and Duke of Normandy.

His reign, which had begun through force and usurpation, now took a turn towards law. As one of his very first acts, he issued a new declaration: the Charter of Liberties. The first article promised that the “holy church of God” would remain free from royal control, its lands from royal confiscation. But the remaining thirteen articles were all directed towards his people—particularly towards the barons of England.

The barons: the newborn aristocracy of England. William the Conqueror had rewarded his Norman knights by dividing the newly conquered land up into parcels and handing it out. The Anglo-Saxon nobles—the thegns, or “thanes”—had once been second only to the royal family in power and influence. The wars of the Conquest had already thinned their ranks. Now, those who had survived found themselves deprived of their lands, left with only tiny private holdings of their own.²

Unlike the thanes, the Norman barons did not consider themselves landowners, only landholders. William the Conqueror brought into England a new kind of kingship. As monarch, he claimed to own the entire kingdom: all English land, all Norman land, was the possession of the king. The barons were his “tenants in chief,” and in return for their new estates, they owed the king a certain number of armed men for his use: the servitium debitum.³

This system was rooted in tenth-century Francia, where chaos and lawlessness had led the poor to serve their wealthier neighbors in exchange for protection. It became known as feudalism: an order in which service and payments (both money and crops) were exchanged for the right to live on, farm, hold a particular piece of land. In England, the feudal lords and their holdings were set down, by William the Conqueror’s scribes, in a vast two-volume record known as the Domesday Book: a ridiculously ambitious attempt to record the condition and ownership of every piece of English land. Among the names of the feudal lords, barely one percent are Anglo-Saxon. The rest had come to England in William’s service.*

These barons now owed the servitium debitum to Henry. But they remained fiercely protective of their own aristocratic privileges, and the Charter of Liberties assured them that the new king would not extort additional payments.

from them, or prevent them from disposing of their own possessions as they wished.

It was an odd thing for a Norman-born king to limit his own powers—a recognition that twelfth-century England was at the beginning of a new era. But the Charter of Liberties was in reality a canny strengthening of Henry’s hold on the throne. “Know that by the mercy of God,” it began, “and by the common counsel of the barons of the whole kingdom of England, I have been crowned king.” Henry was a usurper, crowned only with the support of the barons, and the Charter was designed to guard his power by keeping them on his side.

In fact, Henry intended to exercise as much authority as his people would allow. And, as soon became clear, more authority than the pope was inclined to grant him.

Like his predecessors, Pope Paschal II insisted on the papal right of investiture—the power to appoint bishops throughout Christendom. Investiture was no small matter. The bishop of a city had authority over all of its ecclesiastical resources—land, money, and men. He had as much power as any secular count or nobleman to build, collect revenue, hire private soldiers, and generally empire-build within the monarch’s own land. But unlike a count or nobleman, a bishop could not marry and pass his estate to his son; each bishop’s death presented another opportunity for either pope or king to jockey into place a loyalist who would put those massive (and ever-growing) resources at the disposal of his master. Henry, claiming his rights as God-ordained, God-appointed, God-approved monarch of England, refused to give up this privilege.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the English church, disagreed.

Anselm of Canterbury, approaching seventy at the time of the First Crusade, was an innovator, an intellectual maverick. He had been educated at Bec Abbey in Normandy, where the well-known teacher Lanfranc taught in a monastic school: a “famous centre of learning,” says the twelfth-century English historian William of Malmesbury, “where pupils on all sides were puffing out their cheeks and spouting forth dialectic.”

*Dialectic: the rules of systematic thinking and inquiry laid out by Aristotle. Such an education was new to the twelfth century. Most clerics knew very little of Aristotle; the only works of the great Greek available to them in Latin had been translated by the sixth-century Roman philosopher Boethius, who made it only through the texts on logic before he ran afoul of Theodoric the Ostrogoth and got himself beheaded.*

*For the career of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who became king of Italy in the last decade of the fifth century, see Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World*, pp. 143–149.
of a traitor. Instead, he rid the West of Aristotelian philosophy. No one else undertook the project, so for the next five hundred years, Aristotle was known to the scholar-monks of Europe only as a logician. And Aristotelian logic was not highly regarded by most churchmen. It promised the careful thinker a way to arrive at true conclusions that would apply, universally to the whole world, without making any reference to scripture. Aristotle offered the possibility of truth without God, of reason without faith.

Both the ninth-century Irish theologian Johannes Scotus Erigena and the eleventh-century teacher Berengar of Tours had already made use of Aristotelian categories to argue against the doctrine of trans-substantio: the assertion that the bread and wine of the Eucharist, while remaining the same in appearance, changed in substance into the body and blood of Christ.* Both men were roundly excoriated for daring to use Aristotle in the service of theology. Erigena, fumed the Bishop of Troyes, was a “master of error” who had dared to come to conclusions about “the truth of God . . . without the utterly faithful authority of the Holy Scripture,” and Berengar of Tours found his writings condemned by a series of church councils, over his objections that he was, in fact, an entirely orthodox son of the Church.5

But Aristotle’s ideas survived. Lanfranc, Anselm’s teacher, had studied logic in Italy before entering Bec Abbey: “He brought the liberal arts from Italy to France . . . and gave them fresh polish with his intellect,” William of Malmesbury tells us. Lanfranc taught his students at Bec to use dialectic as a tool for understanding revelation more clearly; and Anselm, studying beneath the master, found in Aristotelian logic a natural compatibility with his own ways of thinking.6

Anselm himself rose from student to teacher at Bec, and in those years he allowed the logic of Aristotle to penetrate further and further into his theology. He dared to ask why God should exist, in a day when no one asked such questions (an age, as G. R. Evans puts it, of “almost universal belief”); and he dared to search for answers using only reason. “I began to ask myself,” Anselm wrote, in the preface to his Proslogion, “whether one argument might possibly be found, resting on no other argument for its proof, but sufficient in itself to prove that God truly exists, and that he is the supreme good.”7 Resting on no other argument for its proof: this was Aristotelian dialectic, applied to the most central beliefs of the Christian faith. Anselm, inheriting the benefits of several

*The Aristotelian distinction between essence and accident required a rethinking of the whole idea of transubstantiation; medieval theologians began to develop “a new sense of the implications of the rules derived from Aristotle’s Categories, which recognizes that, although, by definition, accidents may alter (for that is the nature of accidents), the substance does not.” Interested readers can find a fuller explanation in G. R. Evans, ed., The Medieval Theologians (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), pp. 90ff.
generations of very cautious scholarship, had struck boldly out past the existing theological frontiers.*

He continued far into the unknown country, tackling not only the existence of God but also the particular Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption, with reason alone. (“The following work,” he writes, in the introduction to the 1098 Why God Became Man, “. . . ends by proving by necessary reasons—Christ being put out of sight, as if nothing had ever been known of him—that it is impossible for any man to be saved without him.”)8

And as he did this, he continued to uphold, almost blindly, the right of the pope alone to appoint bishops.

Anselm spent his entire intellectual life on what must have felt like the edge of disaster: always willing to question what he had received, in faith that there was no tool of logic, no Greek syllogism, no Aristotelian category, that could shake truth. He must have feared, late at night in his rooms, that he was going too far; that one day the truth he held with all his might would indeed crumble in the face of his questions. But he continued to write and to reason.

And, perhaps to assure himself that he was still a good son of the Church, he remained, all of his life, the pope’s man. In 1093, William the Conqueror’s heir, William II, had nominated Anselm to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm agreed to the appointment. But he refused to take the pallium, the cloak that symbolized his office, from William II’s hand. Instead, he insisted that the cloak be placed on the altar so that he could then pick it up. According to the syllogism in his head, this meant that he had been appointed by the pope, not the king.9

Anselm’s loyalty meant that he stood staunchly for the papal right of investiture. Eventually, he and Henry fell out so sharply over the issue that Anselm, afraid for his life, fled to Rome. While he took shelter there, Henry continued to demand his rights, Paschal II to refuse them. “It lies heavy on us that you seem to demand of us something that we can by no means grant,” the pope wrote back to the king, “. . . You will say therefore, ‘This is mine of right.’ Not so, indeed for it belongs not to emperors or kings, but to God, it is His alone.” He added, ominously, “In this matter, we would have you contemplate what you lose.”10

Which was nothing less than salvation: Paschal II had the authority to excommunicate Henry, declaring him cut off from the Church, the sacra-

*Anselm’s line of reasoning in the Proslogion is known as the “ontological argument” for the existence of God: he defines God, famously, as “that of which nothing greater can be conceived,” and attempts to prove that God necessarily exists because we are able to conceive of him. A useful summary for the nonspecialist is found in Alvin Plantinga’s God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God (Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 26ff.
Renaissances

ments, and their saving power. He could even place the entire country of England under an interdict. Churches would be closed, crucifixes draped with black cloth, the dead buried in unconsecrated ground—no Masses, no weddings, no bells. Interdict was a theological weapon of mass destruction, likely to make the king who had caused it grossly unpopular with his people.  

Henry I, involved in a serious war with rebellious barons in Normandy, finally decided that he couldn’t fight both the pope and the Normans. In 1107, he agreed to a compromise; although only Paschal II could appoint English bishops, each bishop would have to go and pay homage to the king before he could take possession of the physical place in England where he would serve. Although this still gave Henry some control over who ended up in bishoprics, Paschal II agreed, since it was clear that this was the biggest concession that the king was willing to make. But the pope saved some face by tacking onto the formal agreement, the “Concordat of London,” a further provision. Bishops had to carry out the homage part only until the “rain of prayers” offered by the faithful softened Henry’s heart and caused him to willingly abandon the practice.

Henry agreed to the provision. Possibly he had less faith in the efficacy of the prayers than Paschal II.

This temporarily reconciled the pope and England, and Anselm returned to Canterbury, where he would serve just two more years before his death. But the struggle for supremacy was not over in England, merely in abeyance.

In 1105, the strong-minded Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, abdicated. This left his nineteen-year-old son and co-ruler, Henry V, in sole control of the Holy Roman Empire: the uneasy collection, under a single crown, of German duchies and northern Italian cities.

It did not, however, make young Henry the emperor. Over the previous three centuries, an uneven tradition had emerged; the heir to the empire could assume power through the right of royal inheritance, but the actual title of Holy Roman Emperor was not awarded until the pope agreed to hold a coronation ceremony in Rome.

But once on the throne, Henry V showed himself to be just as strong-minded as his legendary father. He did not intend to trade power for papal recognition, and he was willing to delay his imperial coronation until the matter of investiture had been thoroughly discussed. He began to argue, with increasing heat, for the royal right to appoint clergy within the empire; and Paschal II, at first willing to make a few concessions to keep peace with the new ruler, continued to refuse.
1.1 England and the Holy Roman Empire
Henry V was a deep man, even at a young age, and he was playing a deep game. Looking around for his most natural ally, he settled on the king of England, still unsoftened by the rain of prayers directed his way. In 1110, he negotiated a betrothal between himself and the English king's nine-year-old daughter, Matilda, which brought him a very large dowry. Then, with Henry I's money, he assembled an army and marched down to the Papal States of Italy to bring the controversy to an end.

With a hostile army waiting just outside his borders, Paschal agreed to a compromise. Henry V would yield his right to appoint bishops, giving the pope the right to decide who would hold spiritual authority. But in return, Paschal would give back all of the lands, political perks, and privileges that had gotten entwined, over the centuries, with the bishoprics.

This neatly pulled apart the sacred and the secular privileges of investiture. The bishops of the empire might be under papal authority, but they would no longer control the vast tracts of land that had made them powerful. It was a victory for Henry, and Paschal knew it; he insisted on keeping the terms secret as long as possible.

Henry V, still running on his fiancée's money, traveled to Rome in the early weeks of 1111, signed the agreement on the night of February 11, and then proceeded to St. Peter's the next morning to be crowned. At the beginning of the ceremony, the terms of the treaty were read out. This was an unwelcome surprise to most of the gathered bishops, who hadn't realized that the pope was willing to give away quite so many of their privileges. When the reading reached the central passage, the one that barred bishops (under sentence of excommunication) from profiting in any way from “cities, duchies, marks, counties, rights of coinage, rights of till, rights of market, militia, and castles of the kingdom,” the bishops raised so much noise and protest that the reading stopped.

In the face of such outcry, Paschal refused to hold to the terms. At once, Henry announced that, since Paschal wouldn't be able to carry out his side of the bargain, he, Henry, wouldn't give up the right of investiture. Paschal retorted that he wouldn't crown Henry emperor after all; at that point Henry ordered his men to take the pope into “protective custody” so that the bishops wouldn't harm their shepherd.

He hauled Paschal outside of Rome and kept him prisoner for two weeks, after which Paschal issued a new decree, “Your kingdom is connected in a singular way to the holy Roman church,” it said. “Therefore . . . we concede to Your Love . . . that you confer investiture of crozier and ring on the bishops and abbots of your kingdom.”

Henry then allowed Paschal to declare him Holy Roman Emperor, and turned for home. He had won the quarrel, but the extorted agreement was
widely unpopular with both the churchmen and the German aristocrats in his own kingdom who feared his growing power. He spent the next decade putting down territorial revolts in Germany, stretched thinner and thinner by the constant warfare.

Paschal’s death, in 1118, gave him a chance to back down with dignity. In 1122, after a long series of negotiations at the German city of Worms, Henry V and the new pope Calixtus II finally came to terms. Henry V, at long last, agreed to renounce the right of investiture, and Calixtus II agreed that, in Germany only, newly appointed bishops would do homage to Henry V as king before their consecration, thus assuring that in the heartland of the emperor, loyalists alone would wear the bishop’s miter.

The Concordat of Worms, like the Concordat of London, was a pragmatic solution: a brief document, five paragraphs outlining Henry’s concessions, four listing the privileges Calixtus was yielding. It answered none of the theological questions and solved none of the underlying conflicts. The knot of secular and sacred power had not been untwisted. It had merely been hidden, temporarily, beneath a thin covering of apparent agreement.
## Renaissance

### Timeline 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAPACY</th>
<th>ENGLAND</th>
<th>HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE</th>
<th>SYRIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paschal II (1099–1118)</td>
<td>Henry I (1100–1135)</td>
<td>Concordat of Worms (1122)</td>
<td>Calixtus II (1119–1124)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>