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The history of Europe is divided into four periods: prehistoric Europe (before about 800 BC), classical antiquity (from 800 BC to AD 500), the Middle Ages (AD 500–AD 1500), and the modern era (since AD 1500). The first early European modern humans appeared in the fossil record about 48, 000 years ago, during the Paleolithic era. Settled agriculture marked the Neolithic era, which spread slowly across Europe from the southeast to the north and west. The later Neolithic period saw the introduction of early metallurgy, the use of copper-based tools and weapons, and the building of megalithic structures, which were exemplified by Stonehenge.

During the Ido-European migrations, Europe saw migrations from the east and southeast. The period known as classical antiquity began with the emergence of the city-states of ancient Greece. Later, the Roman Empire came to dominate the entire Mediterranean Basin. The migration period of the Germanic people began in the late 4th century AD and made gradual incursions into various parts of the Roman Empire. The fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476 traditionally marks the start of the Middle Ages. While the Eastern Roman Empire would continue for another 1000 years, the former lands of the Western Empire would be fragmented into several different states. At the same time, the early slaves began to become established as a distinct group in the central and eastern parts of Europe.

The first great empire of the Middle Ages was the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne, while the Islamic conquest of Iberia established Al-Andalus. The Viking Age saw a second great migration of Norse peoples. Attempts to retake the Levant from the Muslim states that occupied it made the High Middle Ages the age of the Crusades, while the political system of feudalism came to its height. The late Middle Ages were marked by large population declines. As Europe was threatened by the Middle Ages, there was a transitional period known as the Renaissance. Early modern Europe usually dated to the end of the 15th century. Technological changes such as gunpowder and the printing press changed how warfare was conducted and how knowledge was preserved and disseminated. The Reformation saw the fragmentation of religious thought, leading to religious wars. The Age of Exploration led to colonization, and the exploitation of the people and resources of colonies brought resources and wealth to Europe.

After 1800, the Industrial Revolution saw long-established political systems upset and turned over. In the 20th century, World War I led to the remarking of the map of Europe as the largest empires were broken up into nation-states. Lingering political issues would lead to World War II, during which Nazi Germany perpetrated the Holocaust. After World War II, during the Cold War, most of Europe became divided by the Iron Curtain into two military blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The post-war period saw decolonization as Western European colonial empires were dismantled. The post-war period also featured the gradual development of the European integration process, which led to the creation of the European Union. This extended to Eastern European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The 21st century saw the European debt crisis, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

THE BRONZE AGE.

The first well-known literate civilization in Europe was the Minoan civilization, which arose on the island of Crete and flourished from approximately the 27th century BC to the 15th century BC. The Minoans were replaced by the Mycenaean civilization, which flourished during the period roughly between 1600 BC, when Helladic culture on mainland Greece was transformed under influences from Minoan Crete, and 1100 BC. The major Mycenaean cities were Mycenae and Tiryns in Argolis, Pylos in Messenia, Athens in Attica, Thebes and Orchomenus in Boeotia, and Lolkos in Thessaly. In Crete, the Mycenaeans occupied Knossos. Mycenaean settlement sites also appeared in Epirus, Macedonia, on islands in the Aegean Sea, on the coast of Asia Minor, the Levant, Cyprus, and Italy. Mycenaean artifacts have been found well outside the limits of the Mycenaean world.

Quite unlike the Minoans, whose society benefited from trade, the Mycenaeans advanced through conquest. The Mycenaean civilization was dominated by a warrior aristocracy. Around 1400 BC, the Mycenaeans extended their control to create the center of the Minoan civilization. Mycenaeans extended their control to create the center of the Minoan civilization and adopted a form of the Minoan script (called Linear A) to write their early form of Greek in Linear B. The Mycenaean civilization perished with the collapse of the Bronze Age civilization on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The collapse is commonly attributed to the Dorian invasion, although other theories describing natural disasters and climate change have been advanced as well. The Mycenaean civilization disappeared after LH 111 C, when the sites of Mycenae and Tiryns were again destroyed and lost their importance. This end, during the last years of the 12th century BC, occurred after a slow decline of the Mycenaean civilization, which lasted many years before dying out. The beginning of the 11th century BC opened a new context: that of the Proto geometric, the beginning of the geometric period, the Greek Dark Ages of traditional historiography.

The Bronze Age collapse may be seen in the context of a technological history that saw the slow spread of iron-working technology from present-day Bulgaria and Romania in the 13th and 12th centuries BC.

PALEOLITHIC AGE.

Homo erectus migrated from Africa to Europe before the emergence of modern humans. Homo erectus georgicus, which lived roughly 1.8 million years ago in Georgia, is the earliest hominid to have been discovered in Europe. The earliest appearance of anatomically modern people in Europe dates to 45, 000 BC, referred to as the Early European modern humans. Some locally developed transitional cultures (Uluzzian in Italy and Greece, Altimuhlian in Germany, Szeletian in Central Europe, and Chatelperronian in the southwest) use upper Paleolithic technologies at very early dates. Nevertheless, the definitive advance of these technologies is made by the Aurignacian culture, originating in the Levant and Hungary. By 35,000 BC, the Aurignacian culture and its technology had extended through most of Europe.

The last Neanderthals seem to have been forced to retreat to the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula. Around 29,000 BC, a new technology or culture appeared in the western region of Europe; it was the Gravettian. This technology has been theorized to have come with migrations of people from the Balkans. Around 16,000 BC, Europe witnessed the appearance of a new culture, known as Magdalenian, possibly rooted in the old Gravettian. This culture soon superseded the Solutrean and the Gravettian of mainly France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Ukraine. The Hamburg culture prevailed in Northern Europe in the 14th and 13th millennia BC, as the Creswellians did shortly after in the British Isles. Magdalenian culture persisted until c. 10,000 BC, when it quickly evolved into two cultures: Azilizan, in Spain and southern France, and then Sauveterrian, in southern France, and Tardenoisian in Central Europe, while in Northern Europe, the Lyngby complex succeeded the Hamburg culture with the influence of the Feder Messer group as well.

NEOLITHIC AND COPPER AGE.

The Neolithic reached central Europe in the 6th millennium BC and parts of Northern Europe in the 5th and 4th millennia BC. The modern indigenous populations of Europe are largely descended from three distinct lineages: Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, a derivative of the Cro-Magnon population; early European farmers who migrated from Anatolia during the Neolithic Revolution; and Yamnaya pastoralists who expanded into Europe in the context of the Indo-European expansion. The Indo-European migrations started in southeast Europe at around c. 4200 BC, through the areas around the Black Sea and the Balkan Peninsula. In the next 3000 years, the Indo-European languages expanded throughout Europe. Around this time in the 5th millennium BC, the Varna culture evolved. In 4700–4200 BC, the Roman and Greek cultures.

LATE ABUNDANCE AND MIGRATION PERIOD.

When Emperor Constantine reconquered Rome under the banner of the cross in 312, he soon afterward issued the Edict of Milan in 313 (preceded by the Edict of Serdica in 311), declaring the legality of Christianity in the Roman Empire. In addition, Constantine officially shifted the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to the Greek town of Byzantium, which he renamed Nova Roma; it was later named Constantinople. Theodosius 1, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, would be the last emperor to preside over a united Roman Empire until he died in 395. The empire was split into two halves: the Western Roman Empire, centered in Ravenna, and the Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople. The Roman Empire was repeatedly attacked by Hunnic, Germanic, and Slavic forces, and finally, in 476, the Western part fell to the Heruli chieftain Odoacer.

Roman authority in the Western part of the empire had collapsed, leaving a power vacuum in the wake of this collapse. The central organization, institutions, laws, and power of Rome had broken down, resulting in many areas being open to invasion by migrating tribes. Over time, feudalism and manorialism arose, providing for the division of land and labor as well as a broad, if uneven, hierarchy of law and protection. These localized hierarchies were based on the bond of common people to the land on which they worked and to a lord who would provide and administer both local laws to settle disputes among the peasants as well as protection from outside invaders. The western provinces soon were to be dominated by three great powers: the first was the Franks in France (418–843 AD), which covered much of present-day France and Germany; the second was the Visigothic kingdom (418–711 AD) in the Iberian Peninsula; and the third was the Ostrogothic kingdom (493–553 AD) in Italy and parts of the western Balkans.

The Ostrogoths were later replaced by the Kingdom of the Lombards (568–774 AD). Although these powers covered large territories, they did not have the great resources and bureaucracy of the Roman Empire to control regions and localities. More power and responsibilities were left to local lords. On the other hand, it also meant more freedom, particularly in more remote areas. In Italy, Theodoric the Great began the cultural romanization of the new world he had constructed. He made Ravenna a center of Romano-Greek culture and art, and his court fostered a flowering of literature and philosophy in Latin. In Iberia, King Chindasuinth created the Visigothic Code. In the eastern part, the dominant state was the remaining Eastern Roman Empire.

In the feudal system, new princes and kings arose, the most powerful of which was arguably the Frankish ruler Charlemagne. In 1800, Charlemagne was reinforced by his power in Western Europe. Charlemagne's reign marked the beginning of the new Germanic Roman Empire. Outside his borders, new forces were gathering. The Kievan Rus' were making out their territory; a Great Moravia was growing, while the Angles and Saxons were securing their borders. In the 6th century, the Eastern Roman Empire was embroiled in a series of deadly conflicts, first with the Persian Sassanid Empire, followed by Palestine and Syria, which were lost to the Muslim forces, followed by Hispania and southern Italy in the 7th and 8th centuries. The Arab invasion from the east was stopped after the intervention of the Bulgarian Empire.

EARLY MIDDLE AGES.

This age spans roughly five centuries, from 500 to 1000. In the east and southeast of Europe, new dominant states formed: the Avar Khaganate (567–after 882), Old Great Bulgaria (632–668), the Khazar Khaganate (c. 650–696), and Danube Bulgaria were constantly rivaling the hegemony of the Byzantine Empire. From the 7th century on, Byzantine history was greatly affected by the rise of Islam and the Caliphates. Muslim Arabs first invaded historically Roman territory under Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, who entered Roman Syria and Roman Mesopotamia. The Byzantines and neighboring Sassanids were severely weakened by the time, among the most important reasons being the protracted, centuries-lasting, and frequent Byzantine-Sassanian wars, which included the climatic Byzantine-Sassanian war of 602–628. Under Umar, the second Caliph, the Muslims entirely toppled the Sassanid Persian Empire and decisively conquered Syria and Mesopotamia, as well as Roman Palestine, Roman Egypt, and parts of Asia Minor, and Roman North Africa.

In the mid-7th century AD, following the Muslim conquest of Persia, Islam penetrated the Caucasus region, of which parts would later permanently become part of Russia. This trend, which included the conquests by the invading Muslim forces and the spread of Islam as well, continued under Umar's successors and under the Umayyad Caliphate, which conquered the rest of Mediterranean North Africa and most of the Iberian Peninsula. Over the next centuries, Muslim forces were able to take further European territory, including Cyprus, Malta, Crete, Sicily, and other parts of southern Italy. The Muslim conquest of Hispania began when the Moors invaded the Christian Visigothic kingdom of Hispania in 711, under the Berber general Tariq ibn Ziyad. They landed at Gibraltar on April 30 and worked their way northward.

Tariq's forces were joined the next year by those of his Arab superior, Musa ibn Nusair. During the eight-year campaign, most of the Iberian Peninsula was brought under Muslim rule, save for small areas in the northwest and largely Basque regions in the Pyrenees. In 711, Visigothic Hispania was weakened because it was immersed in a serious internal crisis caused by a war of succession to the throne. The Muslims took advantage of the crisis within the Hispano-Visigothic society to carry out their conquests; this territory, under the Arab name Al Andaluz, became part of the expanding Umayyad empire. The second siege of Constantinople ended unsuccessfully after the intervention of Tervel of Bulgaria, which weakened the Umayyad dynasty and reduced their prestige.

In 722, Don Pelayo formed an army of 300 Astur soldiers to confront Munizza's Muslim troops. In the battle of Covadonga, the Astures defeated the Arab Moors, who decided to retire. The Christian victory marked the beginning of the Reconquest and the establishment of the Kingdom of Asturias, whose first sovereign was Don Pelayo. The conquerors intended to continue their expansion in Europe and move northeast across the Pyrenees but were defeated by the Frankish leader Charles Martel at the battle of Poitiers in 732. The Umayyads were overthrown in 750 by the Abbasid, and in 756, the Umayyads established an independent emirate in the Iberian Peninsula.

EARLY MODERN EUROPE.

The early modern ages span from the discovery of the New World in 1492 to the French Revolution in 1789. The period is characterized by the rise of science, a rapid increase in technology, secularized civic politics, and nation-states. Also, there was more industrial revolution, and capitalist economies began the rise and dominance of economic theory in ancient Europe.