EUROPE
AS
ENDPOINT

The West Asian Origin
of a Civilisation



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Reading note: this text describes; it does not accuse. It makes no claim about any person or group beyond what its sources show.

Corrections, if any, are listed on the website, in “About this edition”.

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The argument

This page is the book in two minutes.

The thesis

Europe is not the starting point of a civilization, but the late result of an older process. The religion, the sacred texts and the moral frameworks that Europe later took as its own came from West Asia. Rome gave them form and reach. The Church carried them on when the Western Roman Empire disappeared. Only then did the whole receive a name and a story of its origin.

That is a thesis, not a self-evident fact. It depends on what is meant by "Europe": here, the Latin Christian order that took shape between roughly 400 and 800 in the west of the former Roman Empire.

One line per chapter

Introduction. Which Europe is meant, what the book does not do, and where it stands among earlier work. p. 8

1. Christianity Did Not Come to Europe. It arose in Judea and Galilee, in a multilingual, eastern Mediterranean world. Europe was a space of reception, not a source. p. 10

2. Rome Moved, It Did Not Create. Rome was a Mediterranean network that carried the faith and gave it form. Roman law and Latin are real Roman contributions. p. 13

3. The Church Took Over. When power dissolved in the west, the Church stayed: bishops, Latin and the book became the ordering principle. p. 16

4. When, Then, Does Europe Begin? When a Christian order keeps functioning without an emperor in the West. p. 19

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7. Europe as Heir. A reflective chapter: what changes when Europe is seen as an heir. p. 28

8. The Weave of Three Continents. A reflective chapter: history as a weave rather than a line. p. 30

What it is not

Not a polemic and not a denial of Europe, but a repositioning. It brings no new source material; it rereads well-known material and connects it.

A NOTE ON METHOD

Before you read

Primum In Silentiis

This text describes; it does not accuse. It makes no claim about any person or group beyond what its sources show.

A note on method. This book is a synthesis. It brings no new source material; it rereads well-known material and connects it. Where it interprets, it says so. AI assistance (Claude, Anthropic) was used in editing and in translating from the Dutch. The thesis, the choices and the final responsibility rest with Nyxaur.

INTRODUCTION

Europe Misunderstood

Europe is usually told as a civilization that arose from within. First Athens, where reason was born. Then Rome, which brought order and law. Finally Christianity, which gave the whole a soul. In that story Athens, Rome and Jerusalem stand as three pillars under one roof.

This book reads the same history in the opposite direction. It does not ask where Europe began, but what it was assembled from. The answer it proposes: Europe is not the starting point of a civilization, but the late result of an older process. The religion, the sacred texts and the moral frameworks that Europe later took as its own came from West Asia. Rome gave them form and reach. The Church carried them on when the Western Roman Empire disappeared. Only then did the whole receive a name and a story of its origin.

That is a thesis, not a self-evident fact. It depends on what one means by "Europe".

Which Europe

The word can mean three things. Geographically, Europe is a continent, with Athens, Rome and Thessaloniki inside it. Politically, it is a group of states or a union. Culturally and religiously, it is a community that recognizes itself by shared texts, rituals and memories.

This book uses the third meaning. By Europe it means here: the Latin Christian order that took shape between roughly 400 and 800 in the west of the former Roman Empire. An order recognizable by one canon, a transregional church hierarchy and a shared moral language, and one that kept functioning without an emperor in the West.

That choice has consequences. The Byzantine Empire falls outside it. It was Christian, Roman and partly located in Europe, but it kept its emperor. That is exactly what makes it the best comparison: the same inheritance, a different form. Scandinavia and the Slavic world also fall outside this book; they joined this order after 800.

The book treats the Greco-Roman world neither as "European" nor as "non-European". It was a Mediterranean space that connected three continents: Europe, West Asia and North Africa. Where the book speaks of origin, it says West Asia: Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia and the lands around them. Where it speaks of the space of transmission, it says Mediterranean.

What this book does not do

It does not deny European creativity. What Europe did with its inheritance was new. It only says that this creativity worked within structures that came from elsewhere.

It does not deal with Islam. Between 632 and 711 Arab armies conquered Syria, Egypt, North Africa and most of Hispania. That helped to define the boundaries of Western Christendom, and it is mentioned once in this book. Its full treatment belongs to a later book.

And it does not stand alone. Denys Hay wrote about the late emergence of the idea of Europe as early as 1957.[1] In 1992 Rémi Brague called Europe a "secondary" culture, one whose source lies outside itself.[2] Peter Brown and Chris Wickham showed how the Church outlived the Roman world in the West.[3] This book brings those lines together and places the emphasis on the West Asian origin.

Structure

The first five chapters carry the thesis: the origin of Christianity, the role of Rome, the takeover by the Church, the moment at which Europe becomes recognizable, and the beginning later assigned to Charlemagne. Chapter 6 sketches how that origin later faded from view. Chapters 7 and 8 are reflective: they ask what it means to see Europe as an heir.

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1. Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957).
2. Rémi Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris: Criterion, 1992).
3. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome* (London: Penguin, 2009).

CHAPTER 1

Christianity Did Not Come to Europe

In the familiar story Christianity enters Europe as the crown on an existing civilization: a religious refinement of something already there.

That picture is wrong. Neither geographically nor chronologically does it hold.

Christianity did not come to Europe the way a guest comes to a house. It existed before Europe existed as a cultural unit. And it arose outside Europe.

A religion without Europe

The central events of Christianity take place in Judea and Galilee. Jesus preached in Galilee and died in Jerusalem. His first followers came from the same region. The earliest communities we know of were in Jerusalem, Damascus and Antioch.[4] Edessa and Alexandria followed early, although their beginnings are only well documented later.

The world in which Christianity arose was Jewish, multilingual and rooted in the religious traditions of the Levant. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Greek was the common language of the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, Macedonia and the Christians of Rome, whose liturgy remained Greek into the third century.[5]

In the first century there was no Christian centre of power anywhere, Europe included. Rome did grow quickly in standing: around the year 96 the community in Rome wrote an admonishing letter to the one in Corinth.[6] Even so, the centre of gravity of early Christianity lay in the east. The debates over doctrine and canon ran through a network of Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Lyon and Carthage. The great councils met mostly in Asia Minor: Nicaea in 325, Ephesus in 431, Chalcedon in 451. Against these stand Arles in 314 and Constantinople in 381, on the European side.

Had anyone in the first century been asked where Christianity belonged, no one would have answered "Europe". The word had no religious or cultural meaning yet.

Paul and the misleading map

It is often objected that Paul travelled to Europe. He founded communities in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, spoke in Athens and eventually reached Rome. Those communities are among the earliest we know of, and part of the New Testament is addressed to them. That is true, and it counts.

But Paul himself was a Hellenized Jew from Tarsus, in Asia Minor. What he proclaimed was the messianic expectation and scriptural interpretation of a Jewish movement from the Levant. What changed was the stage. The cities he visited were port cities in a Greek-speaking world, closely tied to the eastern Mediterranean.[7]

In that sense Paul's mission was not a "Europeanization" of Christianity, but the extension of a network that began in the Levant. In this phase Europe was not a source, but a space of reception.

No Europe without the book

From the start Christianity is a religion of texts: writings, interpretation, canon. These texts, too, are not European products.

The Old Testament took shape mainly in Judah and later in the Persian province of Yehud, in conversation with Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Egyptian traditions. Its Greek translation, the Septuagint, was made in Alexandria. The New Testament was written in Greek, but its references, images and expectations come from the Jewish tradition. That Greek and Jewish are not opposites here has long been accepted in the field.[8]

When these texts later become dominant in Europe, it is not because Europe produced them, but because Europe inherited them.

Europe was not religiously empty. It had temples, priestly colleges, mystery cults, synagogues and schools of philosophy.[9] What was new was something else: one canon, one hierarchy and a message with a universal claim. That combination was planted from outside.

What this means

Take these facts seriously and the perspective tilts. Europe then appears not as the natural home of Christianity, but as a space later shaped by Christianity. In this book's reading, faith is not an addition to Europe. Europe is a consequence of faith.

The insight is uncomfortable because it reverses the familiar story. Europe becomes not the starting point of civilization, but an endpoint of transmission.

In the next chapter the pattern returns. Rome supplied the roads, the administration and the scale on which faith could spread. But it did not supply the faith itself.

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4. Acts 9 and 11; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
5. J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
6. The letter is known as 1 Clement.
7. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).
8. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).
9. Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

CHAPTER 2

Rome Moved, It Did Not Create

When Christianity reaches the west, it does not enter an empty landscape. It travels with an empire. To understand what that empire did, a misunderstanding must first be cleared away. Rome was not a European civilization in the modern sense. It was a Mediterranean system, built around the sea, whose centre of gravity shifted steadily eastward from the third century on.[10]

Rome did not create a new religious world for the west. It moved an existing one, and gave it form.

An empire without a continent

As an administrative unit, "Europe" meant almost nothing to Rome. The empire thought in provinces, cities and routes. Hispania, Gaul, Syria, Egypt and Anatolia were parts of one network, built to let people, goods, ideas and laws circulate.

The eastern provinces were no periphery. Antioch, Alexandria and Ephesus were larger, richer and intellectually more influential than most cities in the west. The empire was bilingual: Greek was the language of culture in the east and among many elites, Latin the language of the army, of law and administration, and of the whole west. From the third century emperors seldom resided in Rome itself, but in Trier, Milan, Nicomedia, Antioch and, from 330, Constantinople.

In that context it is misleading to call Rome "European". It was a Mediterranean network that joined three continents.

Roads, cities and transmission

What made Rome unique was its infrastructure: roads, harbours, cities and layers of administration of unprecedented durability. Along those lines religions, languages and customs could spread quickly.

Christianity benefited greatly. Apostles travelled on Roman roads and sea routes. Letters went with private couriers, since the imperial post served the state alone.[11] Communities formed in Roman cities, where a measure of legal security existed.

Without Rome, Christianity would have looked different. That it could also grow outside the empire is shown by the Syriac church: it spread through Persia and reached Tang China in 635.[12] Rome therefore did not decide whether Christianity spread, but what form it took in the west.

Rome as form, not source

That form was not incidental. Christianity took over Roman legal concepts, the diocese as an administrative unit, the city as the base of church authority. Latin produced a theology of its own, from Tertullian to Augustine, both of them North Africans.[13] That is more than new packaging. Roman law and Latin are genuine Roman contributions.

Yet the sacred texts, the messianic core, the moral universalism and the history of salvation came from elsewhere. Rome gave them form but did not replace them. The result was a West Asian religion in Roman shape.

This also explains why Christianity outlived Rome in the west. When the political structures disappeared, the church organization remained. The Church used Roman forms, but did not depend on Rome.

The misconception of "Rome as beginning"

Much historical writing lets Europe begin with Rome. But Rome began as a city in Italy and became an empire that ignored the lines we would later draw between continents. In the sense used in this book, Europe arises only when Rome disappears in the west, not when it appears.

As long as the empire exists, there is in this sense no Europe, only an empire. In the east that empire endured, until 1453. In the west it fell apart, and there room opened for something else.

The quiet transfer

Rome's greatest role, then, lies not in creation but in transmission. It carried a religion from West Asia to the edges of its empire. Then it disappeared in the west, and left that religion behind as the most coherent system that remained.

Not the only one. Gothic, Frankish and Burgundian kings took over Roman law and Roman administrators. The Visigothic king Alaric II issued his own collection of Roman law in 506.[14] Kings and Church were co-heirs.

But only the Church reached across all the kingdoms. What remained: roads without emperors, cities without prefects, laws without an empire. In that space the Church took the place of the empire.

In the next chapter we see how that transition happened. Not suddenly, but slowly and almost unnoticed.

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10. Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
11. E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
12. Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).
13. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
14. The *Breviarium Alaricianum* or *Lex Romana Visigothorum*, promulgated on 2 February 506. See Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (London: Macmillan, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

The Church Took Over

The fall of the Western Roman Empire is often described as a catastrophe. But for those who lived through it, it was no sudden end. It was a gradual disappearance of authority. Emperors came and went, taxes faltered, laws were enforced less and less. What disappeared was not life itself, but the structure that ordered it.

Through that disappearance one institution remained standing everywhere: the Church.

When power dissolves

In 476 the last emperor in the west vanished. Roman administration did not vanish on the same day. In Italy, Odoacer and then Theoderic ruled with a Roman senate. The emperor Justinian reconquered Italy in the sixth century, and Ravenna remained a Byzantine seat of government until 751.[15] In Gaul and Hispania kings ruled.

Even so, cities went on without the empire that had built them. People kept trading, marrying, burying, praying. What they needed was not an empire, but continuity.

The Church provided that continuity by being present. Bishops stayed in their cities, often as the most stable authority. They judged disputes, organized food supplies, negotiated with armies and arranged care. Pope Leo I went out to meet Attila in 452. Around 600 Gregory the Great organized the grain supply of Rome.

That role did not begin in a vacuum. As early as 318 the emperor Constantine had granted bishops their own jurisdiction.[16] What the empire had given the bishops survived when the empire disappeared. So began a shift that was hardly recognized as such: church leaders took over administrative tasks, often because there was no one else left.[17]

From office to calling

Roman authority rested on office, rank and law. Church authority rested on ordination, text and community. That made it more resistant to political upheaval.

A bishop did not need an army to be heard. His authority came from his office and from Scripture. It also came from something more earthly: many bishops descended from the old senatorial families, with land, money and networks.[18] Lineage and Scripture worked together.

Still, the shift is real. The Bible offered not only meaning but norms for conduct, justice and order. In a world without an emperor in the west, the book became a source of authority. In this book's reading, power here shifts from territory to text.

Latin becomes sacred

In this period Latin acquires a new function. What had been the administrative language of an empire becomes the language of liturgy, Bible and church correspondence. That Latin Bible, the Vulgate, was translated by Jerome in Bethlehem.

So a shared cultural space survived even as political borders moved. That space was neither national nor ethnic, but religious. People who never met shared the same texts, rituals and moral language.

That was new. Rome had created cohesion through administration, citizenship and a shared classical education.[19] The Church created cohesion through meaning, even where administration had ended.

The new map of power

Historians no longer like to speak of "dark" centuries, and rightly so. No void arose, but a new ordering. Cities became episcopal sees, monasteries became centres of learning and administration, church networks replaced imperial routes.

That order was not European in origin. It rested on a religion, texts and ideas from West Asia, now operating in a post-Roman world. Europe was not founded here, but formed: slowly and without declaration.

No one said: "Now Europe begins."[20] But looking back, one sees Europe beginning here.

Without a plan, without a name

What stands out is that this happens without a self-conscious project. There was policy: missions, councils, papal letters. Gregory the Great deliberately sent monks to England in 597. But there was no plan to found anything like Europe. No founding moment, no constitution, no declaration of a beginning. What arose was a practice: people ordered their world around church, text and ritual.

Only later would anyone give the whole a name. By then the structure was in place. In this reading, Europe does not exist because it was conceived, but because it kept functioning when the empire disappeared.

If Europe arises here, when does this Christian order become visible as something different from Rome, from Byzantium and from the empire that came before?

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15. Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London: Penguin, 2009).
16. *Codex Theodosianus* 1.27.1 (318) and *Constitutio Sirmondiana* 1 (333). See Salvatore Puliatti, "L'episcopalis audientia tra IV e V secolo," *Koinonia* 40 (2016): 299–330.
17. Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
18. Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
19. Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
20. The earliest known trace of the word as the name of a people is the *Chronicle of 754*, which calls the Franks at Poitiers (732) *Europenses*. See chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

When, Then, Does Europe Begin?

If Europe does not begin in Athens, not in Rome and not with the birth of Christianity, then when? The question forces another way of looking. What we are looking for is not a date, but a recognizable form.

This book proposes: Europe arises when a Christian order keeps functioning without the empire that made it possible.

After the empire

After 476 the Western Roman emperorship disappears, but not the world it had produced. Roads remain, cities endure, and the Church stays organized. What is missing is central authority. What appears is a mosaic of kingdoms, joined by a shared religious language.[21]

That mosaic did not become unanimous at once. The Visigoths in Hispania were Arian until 589, the Lombards in Italy longer still. The Irish and Roman churches differed over the date of Easter until the synod of Whitby in 664. But step by step people in Gaul, Italy, Hispania, Britain and later the Germanic lands come to share the same saints, feasts and texts.[22] That pattern is no longer Roman, nor West Asian. It could only arise in this post-imperial situation.

Europe becomes recognizable when Christianity is no longer a religion within an empire, but the load-bearing principle of a society.

The southern boundary

There is one more force that marks out this order, although it lies outside this book. Between 632 and 711 Arab armies conquered Syria, Egypt, North Africa and most of Hispania. The lands where Christianity had arisen came under a new empire and a new religion. Latin Christendom was cut off from its cradle and, for the first time, acquired a clear southern boundary.

In 1937 Henri Pirenne drew a famous conclusion from this: without Muhammad, no Charlemagne.[23] His thesis has since been revised on many points, but the question remains. A Latin chronicler in Islamic Spain called the Franks who held firm at Poitiers in 732 *Europenses*: Europeans. It is the earliest known use of the word for a people.[24] What this means for the story of Europe is the subject of a later book.

Time without an emperor

The handling of time changes too. The old picture of a cyclically minded antiquity against a linearly minded Christianity does not hold; Rome itself counted in a line, from the founding of the city.[25] What does change is the frame. The Christian order places history between creation and consummation, in a history of salvation.

Slowly the count shifts as well. In 525 Dionysius Exiguus reckoned from the birth of Christ. Bede used that era in 731 for his history of the English church, and through the Carolingians it became common. Charters long continued to date by regnal years. But people no longer placed themselves only within an empire; they also placed themselves within a story.

That story was not invented in Europe. It became European because here it was the structure that outlived the empire.

Borders without walls

Europe also arises without clear borders. There is no map on which it is marked out. Its borders are porous and gradual. They run along dioceses, monastic networks and liturgical practices, not along rivers or forts.

As a result Europe develops differently from an empire. It is not a territorial unit, but an institutional and symbolic one. It is recognizable by what people believe, read and commemorate, more than by where they live.

The moment of recognition

Between the sixth and the eighth century this order becomes stable enough to reproduce itself. Teaching takes place in monasteries. Kings issue their own laws, such as the Frankish *Lex Salica* and the Lombard edict of Rothari of 643.

But more and more they seek the Church's blessing. The Visigothic king Wamba was anointed in 672; the Frankish king Pippin in 751 and again in 754.

Here Europe emerges as a recognizable pattern. Not as a nation and not as an empire, but as a Christian civilization without an emperor in the West.

That last phrase is precise. Rome long recognized the emperor in Constantinople; only from 781 did Pope Hadrian I date his letters no longer by that emperor's regnal years, but by Charlemagne's. In the east the same Christian order existed with an emperor. That is the decisive difference between Rome's two heirs.

A civilization without an origin myth

In this phase Europe still has no story of its beginning. It does acquire a name: *Europenses* in 754, and around 799 a poet at the Frankish court calls the king *pater Europae*, father of Europe. But it does not yet have an origin.

That comes later. And it does not come by chance.

In the next chapter we see how Europe is given a beginning after all. Not by memory, but by construction. How one figure, or rather one story, gives this Christian order a starting point: Charlemagne.

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21. Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
22. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*.
23. Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris: Alcan, 1937).
24. The *Chronicle of 754*, also called the *Mozarabic Chronicle* or *Continuatio Hispana*.
25. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Time in Ancient Historiography," *History and Theory* 6, Beiheft 6 (1966): 1–23.

CHAPTER 5

Charlemagne and the Constructed Beginning

Every civilization that endures sooner or later acquires a story of its origin. Not to describe the past correctly, but to make the present intelligible. Such stories almost always come later. Rome, too, received its Romulus in writing only centuries after the founding. Europe is no exception: it receives its beginning only after it already exists.[26]

The figure who makes this possible is Charlemagne.

An emperor after the emperors

When Charles is crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas Day 800, the Western Roman Empire has been gone for 324 years. There is no imperial continuity in the west, no Roman state apparatus. What there is, is a Christian order that has functioned for generations without an emperor in the west.

The coronation is therefore not a restoration of Rome, but a symbolic reconstruction. Contemporaries themselves spoke of *renovatio*, renewal. In Rome Charles was acclaimed as emperor of the Romans. In his own charters he styled himself more cautiously *imperator Romanum gubernans imperium*: emperor governing the Roman Empire. In Constantinople, after all, an emperor still reigned, or rather an empress, Irene.[27]

The title, then, referred not to an existing empire in the west, but to a memory, and above all to a source of legitimacy. In this book's reading Charles becomes emperor not because he embodies Rome, but because the Christian order of the west needed an emperor to explain itself.

The composite figure

What makes Charles remarkable is not only his power, but his symbolic layering. In the sources he appears at once as Roman ruler, biblical king and protector of the Church. In Alcuin's circle he was called David. Others saw in

him a new Constantine.

That combination is no accident. It reflects the inheritance from which this order emerged: Roman power, West Asian sacred history and Christian morality, gathered in one person. Charles is not a historical origin, but a point of convergence.

What matters here, then, is not the historical Charles, but the image that was made of him. That image is not empirical, but narrative. It makes Europe legible.

Myth as binding agent

The Carolingian renaissance brought real innovation. A new, clear script appeared, Caroline minuscule. Texts were corrected and copied, schools founded, and the *Admonitio generalis* of 789 laid down rules for teaching and church discipline.[28] From 779 the church tithe was enforced by secular authority. Charles did build.

But he built on an order that was already standing. What he added ordered and strengthened what was there, and was afterwards declared a beginning. In that sense Charles is not the father of Europe, but its first myth. He provides a starting point where before there had mostly been continuity.

That image arose in his own lifetime. Around 799 a poet called him *pater Europae*.[29] Later came the *Song of Roland*, his canonization in 1165 and, in 1950, the Karlspreis for European unification. The beginning was made again and again.

This is a crucial transition. Europe is no longer only a practice, but also an idea.

Why Charlemagne?

Why does Charlemagne receive this role, and not a pope or another king? Because he stands at the intersection of power and holiness. He rules with sword and book, with land and text. He embodies the alliance between worldly power and a West Asian religious tradition that by now functions as European.

Charlemagne is therefore not a rupture but a capstone. He marks the moment at which Europe grants itself an origin: not because it needed one in order to exist, but because it needed one in order to explain itself.

A beginning that comes too late

The result is a paradox. Europe's official beginning comes after its actual emergence. The myth follows the practice. First there is an order, then the story of its beginning.

That explains why Europe so often reaches for the past to define itself. It does not look forward to an origin, but back to a construction.

In the next chapter we see how this constructed beginning later hardened. How the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and nationalism rewrote the story of Europe, and so pushed its West Asian origin ever further to the margins.

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26. On made and invented traditions: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

27. Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Janet L. Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

28. Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

29. In the so-called Paderborn Epic, *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*. See Donald A. Bullough, "Europae Pater: Charlemagne and His Achievement in the Light of Recent Scholarship," *English Historical Review* 85 (1970): 59–105.

CHAPTER 6

Why This Was Forgotten

If Europe grew out of a West Asian religious and institutional process, why do we hardly recognize it? Why is Europe usually presented as a civilization with roots of its own? The answer lies not in a lack of sources, but in a history of reinterpretation.

Europe did not simply forget its origin. It reclassified it, again and again.

The Renaissance: rediscovery with selection

The Renaissance is often described as the rediscovery of classical antiquity. But what was rediscovered, and how it was classified, matters.

The humanists were Christians, and many of them sought precisely Eastern wisdom. Marsilio Ficino translated the Hermetic corpus, which he took to be ancient Egyptian wisdom. Johannes Reuchlin learned Hebrew; Erasmus published the Greek New Testament in 1516.[30] The Renaissance did not lose sight of the East.

What did shift was the place of origin. Classical antiquity became the cradle of a renewed culture. Christianity remained present, but was increasingly seen as the West's own religion, not an imported one. The Renaissance did not merely restore the past; it rearranged it.

The Enlightenment and the nineteenth century: Europe as the measure

In the Enlightenment Europe presents itself as the centre of reason and progress. The picture was not one-sided. Voltaire admired China; Montesquieu, in his *Persian Letters*, had Europe seen through Persian eyes.[31] But the distinction between "Europe" and "the rest" became a frame of thought.

In the nineteenth century that frame hardened. West Asia became "the Orient": static, mystical, outdated.[32] Classical Greece was detached from its eastern context and declared the pure origin of Europe.[33]

At the same time something happened that contradicts this picture. Oriental philology and archaeology grew into major sciences. Assyriologists read the cuneiform tablets of Mesopotamia, and around 1902 a fierce debate broke out in Germany over the Babylonian roots of the Bible.[34] The West Asian origin was not denied. It was classified as exotic background, not as foundation.

Nationalism: origin in the soil

In the nineteenth century nationalism adds a further layer. Peoples tie their identity to soil, language and descent. Europe no longer appears as a shared Christian order, but as a collection of nations with roots of their own.

An origin from elsewhere fits badly into that. History is rewritten as a series of internal developments: Germanic, Celtic, Latin. The early Middle Ages are read the same way, as the birth of nations that did not yet exist.[35] Christianity is nationalized, its West Asian origin pushed further to the margins.

So Europe drifts ever further from West Asia.

The price of forgetting

What these periods share is that they use history to support a present self-image. Europe is presented as independent, rational and original, because that image is politically, culturally and morally useful.

That makes the displaced origin not a conspiracy, but a selection. A civilization that wants to see itself as universal finds it hard to admit that its core structures came from elsewhere.

Whoever classifies their origin this way loses the ability to understand themselves in relation to others. They see themselves as the norm, not as an heir. That makes dialogue difficult, and criticism defensive.

The aim, then, is not to deny Europe, but to reposition it. Not as an isolated miracle, but as the endpoint of a long, shared history.

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30. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

31. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, trans. Robert Savage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

32. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
33. Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
34. Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
35. Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 7

Europe as Heir

The last two chapters are reflective. They ask what the preceding thesis means, not whether it holds.

What changes when we no longer see Europe as an origin, but as an heir? The answer is not that Europe becomes "less". It becomes historically more precise, and so more mature. A civilization that knows its descent does not need to shout over itself.

Europe's strength lies not in inventing everything it values, but in preserving, transforming and institutionalizing it. It did not simply copy religious, legal and intellectual traditions from West Asia and the Mediterranean world; it anchored them durably in a new context.

That is an achievement. Civilizations are shaped not only by origin, but by the capacity to transmit. In that respect Europe has been exceptionally successful.

Recognizing this calls for another vocabulary. Not "invention", but "inheritance". Not "source", but "node".

Identity without exceptionalism

Much resistance to this perspective comes from fear: the fear that Europe loses its special status once it is no longer seen as an autonomous starting point. That fear is unfounded. Europe loses nothing by acknowledging its place in a larger whole.

It loses only the need for exceptionalism.

A Europe that sees itself as part of a larger network does not have to construct an opposition between "us" and "the rest". It can understand itself as the result of encounter, transmission and transformation.

Back to the weave

Perhaps the most important gain of this perspective is psychological. A civilization that acknowledges its dependence does not have to defend itself against every criticism. It can listen without fear.

Europe did not arise through demarcation, but through permeability. It always has.

Seen this way, Europe no longer appears as an isolated continent with a unique destiny, but as a node in a larger network. West Asia supplied the pattern, Rome the loom, Europe a carpet.

In the final chapter we return to the whole, and to the question of why this repositioning matters.

CHAPTER 8

The Weave of Three Continents

History is often told in lines: this led to that, here something began, there it ended. But some processes are better understood as a weave. Not straight lines, but threads that cross, strengthen each other and sometimes disappear, only to reappear elsewhere.

The history of Europe is such a weave.

What we now divide into continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, functioned for centuries as one connected world. People, ideas, texts and institutions moved more freely than modern maps suggest. The Mediterranean was not a border, but a highway.[36] West Asia was not an outlying region, but a centre.

Within this weave Christianity arose. Not as a European religion, but as a West Asian movement, rooted in Jewish traditions and shaped in multilingual cities. Rome did not take this movement over; it carried it and gave it form. And when Rome disappeared in the west, the religion remained, with its texts, structures and moral frameworks.

What was later called "Europe" was the region where this inheritance had to function on its own.

Not a rupture, but a shift

It is tempting to think in ruptures: ancient against medieval, Roman against European, Eastern against Western. What this book proposes is that there are fewer ruptures than shifts. Power shifts from emperor to church. Authority shifts from law to text. Identity shifts from empire to faith.

Europe does not arise through a new beginning, but through the continuation of something old under new conditions.

The use of repositioning

Why does this matter? Not to assign blame, and not to make Europe small, but to put it back in proportion. A civilization that sees itself as an endpoint rather than an origin can understand itself more honestly.

That understanding is no academic luxury. It shapes how Europe relates to others, to its past and to its future. A Europe that sees itself as an heir can acknowledge that transmission, migration and cultural mixing have always belonged to its history.

Perhaps this is the core: mature civilizations have no need of mythical purity. They can carry their complexity. They know that what shaped them is older than themselves, and larger.

Europe does not have to become smaller by acknowledging its West Asian origin. It only has to become more accurate.

Looking back

This book began with a simple reversal: Europe is not a beginning, but an endpoint. What followed was not an attack, but a reconstruction. Not a denial, but a relocation.

Whoever places Europe back in the weave of three continents sees the idea of isolated civilizations disappear. What remains is history as it was: connected, layered and shared.

And perhaps that is the most European insight of all.

Primum In Silentiis

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36. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

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Glossary

Terms as this book uses them.

Europe. The Latin Christian order that took shape between roughly 400 and 800 in the west of the former Roman Empire, recognizable by one canon, a transregional church hierarchy and a shared moral language, and functioning without an emperor in the West.

West Asia. The place of origin: Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia and the lands around them.

Mediterranean. The space of transmission: a connected world of three continents, Europe, West Asia and North Africa.

Byzantium. The Eastern Roman Empire: Christian, Roman and partly in Europe, with an emperor until 1453. The book's main comparison: the same inheritance in a different form.

Heir. The book's word for Europe's position: it did not invent the inheritance, but preserved, transformed and institutionalized it. "Not source, but node."

Constructed beginning. A beginning assigned afterwards: first there is an order, then the story of its beginning.

Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in Alexandria.

Vulgate. The Latin Bible, translated by Jerome in Bethlehem.

Arian. Holding Arianism, a Christian doctrine about the nature of Christ that the Roman church did not share. The Visigoths in Hispania were Arian until 589.

***Europenses*.** "Europeans": what a Latin chronicle of 754 calls the Franks at Poitiers (732). The earliest known use of the word for a people.

***Pater Europae*.** "Father of Europe": what a poet at the Frankish court called Charlemagne around 799.

***Renovatio*.** "Renewal": how contemporaries described the coronation of 800, rather than a restoration of Rome.

Caroline minuscule. The clear new script of the Carolingian renaissance.

Admonitio generalis. Charlemagne's rules of 789 for teaching and church discipline.

Orientalism. The nineteenth-century frame in which West Asia became "the Orient": static, mystical, outdated.

Babel-Bibel. The fierce debate in Germany around 1902 over the Babylonian roots of the Bible.

Karlspreis. The Charlemagne Prize for European unification, awarded since 1950.

Timeline

Every date that appears in the book, in order, with the chapter where it is discussed.

1st century. The earliest communities we know of: Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch. Chapter 1

Around 96. The community in Rome writes an admonishing letter to Corinth. Chapter 1

314. Council of Arles. Chapter 1

318. Constantine grants bishops their own jurisdiction. Chapter 3

325. Council of Nicaea. Chapter 1

330. Constantinople becomes an imperial residence. Chapter 2

381. Council of Constantinople. Chapter 1

431. Council of Ephesus. Chapter 1

451. Council of Chalcedon. Chapter 1

452. Pope Leo I goes out to meet Attila. Chapter 3

476. The last emperor in the west vanishes. Chapter 3

506. Alaric II issues his collection of Roman law. Chapter 2

525. Dionysius Exiguus reckons from the birth of Christ. Chapter 4

589. The Visigoths in Hispania cease to be Arian. Chapter 4

597. Gregory the Great sends monks to England. Chapter 3

Around 600. Gregory organizes the grain supply of Rome. Chapter 3

632 to 711. Arab armies conquer Syria, Egypt, North Africa and most of Hispania. Chapter 4

635. The Syriac church reaches Tang China. Chapter 2

643. The edict of Rothari. Chapter 4

664. The synod of Whitby. Chapter 4

672. The Visigothic king Wamba is anointed. Chapter 4

731. Bede uses the new era in his history of the English church. Chapter 4

732. The Franks hold firm at Poitiers. Chapter 4

751. Ravenna ceases to be a Byzantine seat of government; Pippin is anointed (again in 754). Chapter 3, Chapter 4

754. A Latin chronicle calls the Franks *Europenses*. Chapter 4

779. The church tithe is enforced by secular authority. Chapter 5

781. Pope Hadrian I changes how he dates his letters. Chapter 4

789. The *Admonitio generalis*. Chapter 5

Around 799. A poet calls Charlemagne *pater Europae*. Chapter 5

800. Charlemagne is crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas Day. Chapter 5

1165. Charlemagne is canonized. Chapter 5

1453. The eastern empire ends. Chapter 2

1516. Erasmus publishes the Greek New Testament. Chapter 6

Around 1902. The Babel-Bibel debate in Germany. Chapter 6

1937. Henri Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne*. Chapter 4

1950. The first Karlspreis. Chapter 5

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Method

This book is a synthesis. It brings no new source material; it rereads well-known material and connects it. Where it interprets, it says so. AI assistance (Claude, Anthropic) was used in editing and in translating from the Dutch. The thesis, the choices and the final responsibility rest with Nyxaur.

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Corrections

None yet.