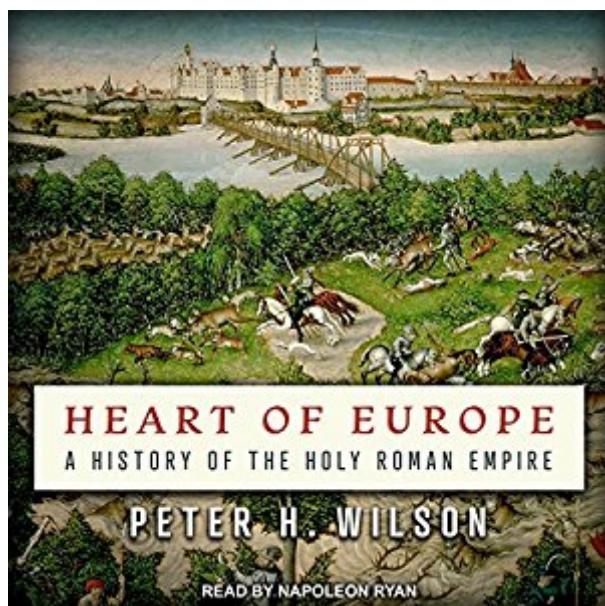


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# Heart Of Europe: A History Of The Holy Roman Empire



## Synopsis

The Holy Roman Empire lasted 1,000 years, far longer than ancient Rome. Yet this formidable dominion never inspired the awe of its predecessor. Voltaire quipped that it was neither holy, Roman, nor an empire. Yet as Peter H. Wilson shows, the Holy Roman Empire tells a millennial story of Europe better than the histories of individual nation-states. *Heart of Europe* traces the empire from its origins within Charlemagne's kingdom in 800 to its demise in 1806. By the mid-tenth century, its core rested in the German kingdom, and ultimately its territory stretched from France and Denmark to Italy and Poland. Yet the empire remained abstract, with no fixed capital and no common language or culture. The source of its continuity and legitimacy was the ideal of a unified Christian civilization, but this did not prevent emperors from clashing with the pope over supremacy. Though the title of Holy Roman Emperor retained prestige, rising states such as Austria and Prussia wielded power in a way the empire could not. While it gradually lost the flexibility to cope with political, economic, and social changes, the empire was far from being in crisis until the onslaught of the French revolutionary wars.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 34 hours and 2 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: June 13, 2017

Language: English

ASIN: B071WDDFNJ

Best Sellers Rank: #2 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Ancient #10 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Rome #10 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe

## Customer Reviews

Received my pre-ordered copy a few days ago + am almost half-way through, and I've already learned an enormous amount. Before Mr Wilson's work, I never understood much about the Holy Roman Empire and this fine book is no less than a masterpiece. I read "Germany and the Holy Roman Empire volumes I & II", Oxford University Press, by Joachim Whaley, 2012 about a year ago, and they're also very good, but Mr Wilson's book has a different nuance with an extremely helpful chronology at the end and a spate of instructive maps at the beginning. Magnificently written

for someone who loves European history. Make this superb volume part of your library.

A great read! I received this book 6 days ago and am already on page 228. The writing is clear, the subject matter couldn't be more interesting (to those of us who like this sort of thing) and I simply can't put it down. Like Mr. Tony Meyer, I've read both volumes of, 'Germany and the Holy Roman Empire,' by Whaley and, for my money, this is the better account. It is simply more readable. If you're interested in the HRE, this is a can't miss.

A very impressive and interesting work about the Holy Roman Empire. This is not, however, an easy book to read, though not because Wilson is a poor writer. Quite the opposite, Wilson is a fine writer, in addition to being an impressive scholar and thoughtful analyst. This is not a narrative history but rather a very detailed and systematic exposition of a relatively novel interpretation of the history of the Empire. Wilson's basic concept, which he examines and evaluates from multiple different perspectives, is that the Holy Roman Empire represents an alternative trajectory of European historical development. Wilson is reacting the long-standing, indeed, dating back to the seminal work of Von Ranke in the 19th century, tendency to regard the development of the national state as the logical and normative path of European historical evolution. The idea that the Empire was an obstacle to the fulfillment of German national destiny appears to have been a particularly potent idea. In contrast to much traditional historiography that depicts the Empire as a confused, weak failure, Wilson argues that the Empire was relatively successful and barring the trauma of the Napoleonic Wars, would have persisted into the 19th century. Wilson demonstrates the historical continuity and relative success of the Empire in series of detailed sections addressing the ideal conceptions of the Empire, the ways in which Imperial subjects conceived of their inclusion in the Empire, the structures of governance in the Empire, and aspects of the social and economic history of the Empire. Each section covers the 1000 years of the Empire and each section exhibits remarkable command of a large range of scholarly literature and primary sources. Stripped to essentials, Wilson argues that the Empire was the logical development of many features of medieval Europe and was a complex, multi-polar state based on corporate institutions that assigned rights on the basis of locality, class, occupation, confession, and several other factors that descended from feudal relations. At its best, the Empire provided a consensual forum to negotiate political and legal conflicts. For much of its history, the basic structure of the Empire was useful enough to attract substantial allegiance up to the very end of the Empire. Abandoning a teleological framework, the long persistence of the Empire makes it an unusually successful, rather

than failed institution.

Excellent read!!!

This was a chore. The Empire was an extremely complicated organization and unfortunately Wilson has not made it any easier to understand. Rather than a history, he examines how the Empire was perceived and functioned and the structure he uses leaves the general reader, at least this general reader baffled much of the time. I've read reviews that Wilson has no structure. That is not true; it is a structure that he lays out in clear terms in his introduction. Basically there are four sections each of three chapters discussing one aspect of the Empire. Part 1 looks at how the Empire was perceived by outsiders and by itself, Part 2 examines the physical makeup of its constituent parts, Part 3 looks at how it was governed, and Part 4 looks at the social history. Each Part digs deep into a single aspect of that section's subject. And therein lies the problem. This structure means Wilson goes over the chronology over and over and over but with no real framework for that chronology. Thus I found it very very hard to place what he is talking about at any given moment into any context with the other aspects the book covers. Even the emperors themselves became nothing but a blur of Ottos, Conrads, and Fredericks covering a thousand years of history. Wilson knows his subject cold and you can't help but learn about the history of central Europe in reading this book and for that reason alone I give this three stars rather than only one or two. But I cannot say I enjoyed reading this; for me, coming to this history with little more knowledge of the Holy Roman Empire than that it wasn't holy, roman or an empire, this was just work.

The book provides an overwhelming amount of facts about a long period in history. But it lacks on overall narrative. The jumble of facts do not give one a large picture of what was happening.

Wonderful! Beautifully written, the work of a true scholar. Not a dull page. The maps that accompany the text are first rate. This book will remain a standard work on the Holy Roman Empire for some years to come. It was enjoyed as much on its second reading as its first.

Excellent

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