

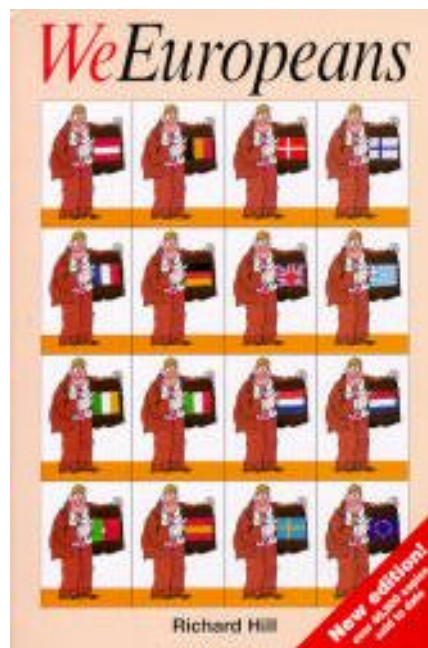
We Europeans

By

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An Alternative History of Europe



"The great events of history are often due to secular changes in the growth of population and other fundamental economic causes, which, escaping by their gradual character the notice of contemporary observers, are attributed to the follies of statesmen or the fanaticism of atheists"

John Maynard Keynes

"If without languages we are colour blind, without history we are groping in total darkness"

Sir Michael Howard

"...from humanity, via nationality to bestiality"

Franz Grillparzer

"There's nothing new in the world except the history you don't know"

Harry S Truman

"All civilisations ... are omelettes made with broken eggs"

The Economist

"History never repeats itself, it stutters" [L'histoire ne se répète jamais, elle bégaye"]

Unidentified

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"

George Santayana

"History would be an excellent thing if only it were true"

Tolstoy

"History is more or less bunk"

Henry Ford

"One damn thing after another"

A cynic's view of history

Once upon a time... there was a cosy little continent crammed with alien cultures, each of them strange, even sinister, to its neighbours, most of them recently emerged from a series of devastating wars.

That was how Europe looked to observers only fifty years ago. Yet the greatness of Europe is precisely the variety of its cultures and the interaction between them - a process that, set against the cultures of other continents, leaves an impression of homogeneity.

This vexatious state of affairs, the fact that we are both alike and different, is examined in the chapters that follow. Even if it is easy to demonstrate that there are still real differences between one country and another - enhanced as they have been by that great but hopefully temporary phenomenon, the nation state - the things we Europeans have in common are just as important.

What's more, faced with momentous events in our immediate surroundings, we now have the perfect opportunity to settle with our past.

It's not just the countries of eastern Europe that need to take a fresh and unpoliticised look at their histories: everybody knows that truth was falsified to suit the doctrines of the time. Unfortunately, while people there can still remember how things were under communism (western Europeans have to go further back into their history to set the record straight), they seem to be more interested in creating new myths and pseudo-identities to replace the plain old lies.

Yet, viewed in a historical perspective, we in western Europe have a worse record of misrepresentation. The falsifications of the fascist regimes of Germany, Italy and Spain - where the history books have since been put to right, with occasional gaps - reflect a tradition of ideological and often brutal totalitarianism that started with the Crusades and became institutionalised in the Inquisition, the obscurantism of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain and the pogroms, both civil and religious, that ensued across the Continent over the centuries.

The countries of western Europe can benefit from a fresh and more objective look at their individual and shared histories. The culprit today is no longer totalitarianism, but general party political obfuscation allied with the need to justify past colonial and other adventures.

These motives have prompted the superimposition of a patina of pregnant silences and furtive half-truths on the reality of our national pasts. In some cases the nation states have deliberately and deviously instilled hatred towards 'the foreigner' in the hearts of their citizens. The consequences - maybe also the causes - are evident. Of the past 2,000 years, one in five has been a year of war.

National history books have also tended to link little of their own country's events with those of neighbour nations, except when at war. Occasionally there is even a kind of Machiavellian conspiracy: the combined geniuses of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Greece managed to invent, for a range of strictly irredentist reasons peculiar to each of them, a modern 'Macedonian' race which now looks more and more like a historical if not a hysterical nonsense.

When the author went to school in post-WWII England, nobody talked about a particularly important event in the British and European history of the last 100 years: the Boer War was passed over in silence. Yet Italian schoolchildren were at the same time being told all about it - and nothing about the bloody goings-on in Abyssinia (as Ethiopia was known at the time), for which their own parents were responsible.

British history used to have a curious habit of stopping short about the time of the battle of Borodino - perhaps appropriately so, since it was Tolstoy who made the essential point that history is not about kings and dates but about people.

French history used to have a habit of *starting* on 14 July 1789, though there were occasional lapses in favour of the Sun King and, even further back, Jeanne d'Arc. German history still understandably skirts the first half of the present century.

Often what surprises is what remains unsaid. There are remarkable lacunae in what the nation states have chosen to tell their citizens, whether out of self-interest or myopia. It is not that long ago that the British public first became aware that, in the closing years of WWII, three million people died of famine in what is now called Bangladesh in order to keep the Burma Army on its feet - a conscious act of British defence policy at the time.

Little is also said in the perpetrators' history books of the effects of the Scottish clearances of the 1850s (except in Scotland), of the Turkish massacre of over one million Armenians in 1915, of the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33, of the Austrian role in the 'Final Solution', of Czechoslovak bullying of the Sudetendeutsch in 1945, of exact events in the history of *l'Algérie française*, and so on.

Nation state policies, reinforced by economic constraints, have also managed to dispose of generations without killing them. Walloon ironsmiths went to Sweden; Scottish crofters emigrated to Scandinavia, the Baltic States and even Ireland in search of a better living; some of the Scots in Ulster thought better of it and went on to the southern United States; many German, Norwegian, British and Irish labourers and farmers travelled westwards in the same direction; Ukrainians and Croats flocked to Canada; and Italians, and even Cornish and Yorkshire miners, emigrated en masse to South America.

Untypically, in the context of European history, there were even some major movements eastwards: the Pontic Greeks to the southeastern shores of the Black Sea and the Volga Germans to the northern shores of the Caspian and - much later, with the help of Stalin - even further east to Kazakhstan.

The truth is that, today, many of us know little about such events. They are hiccups of history, part of the process of cultural digestion. While the original motive may have been political and within the narrow criteria of the era justifiable, time has since buried the reality in an accretion of contemporaneous and irrelevant data. Thanks to the intrusion of the nation state, much of Europe has lost contact with its past.

As individuals - English, French, German or whatever - we all have our own perspective of a common European history and each of these perspectives is different. National histories plough parallel furrows. Even the history of Europe as taught in the schools of Europe is still partly a travesty, partly a cover-up.

So I find it encouraging that comparative European, even world, history books are now starting to emerge, and that the most serious effort of clarification relates to the period after AD 1000, with the advent of the nation state. Rather surprisingly, some of the best initiatives are the work of French historians.

The nation states, with their practices and prejudices, are like massive boulders blocking the path to our common past. Right now, the French government is still doing its best to stonewall attempts by Alsations to learn the language of their Swabian relatives. And it's not that long ago that the United Kingdom government announced its intention to **increase** the emphasis on British history in the country's schools: evidently some of us are going backwards!

The self-serving versions of history concocted in the interests of the nation states ultimately do a disservice to the European 'ideal' of a community of races that have cohabited, traded, created a common culture - and of course fought with one another - over many centuries.

Our roots are in the East

The collapse of the Berlin Wall (nobody ever talks about the Iron Curtain!) challenged a western European *Weltanschauung* that had hardened over fifty years. We had to step back in time and remind ourselves that our history and culture find their roots largely in the East. If we go back to prehistory, we find evidence that the earliest settlers came southwestwards out of the depths of the Eurasian landmass. Many of them then moved on westwards along the shores of the Mediterranean, both north and south, from the area known as the Fertile Crescent.

Without going into the credentials of people known to some as the Atlanto-Mediterraneans (the people who hewed, dragged and raised the monoliths of Carnac and Stonehenge around 3000 BC), we can see that, like so many to follow, they felt the impetus of a *Drang nach Westen* that has characterised European history from that day to this.

The Celts, a people speaking a tongue derived from a proto-European language base known as Indo-European, provided the first major recorded settlement in what we now call western Europe, advancing in waves at various intervals up to 1200 BC. Historians are uncertain who was here when they arrived - certainly the Basques and the Iberians (who appear to have arrived earlier from North Africa), likewise the Ligurians and the Etruscans. A Mongolian people, the Finns, were also well established in the far north.

But the Celts were to be overtaken by other Germanic tribes coming from the same direction and ended up in what can be called the *Celtic Fringe*, with their backs to the Atlantic Ocean.

Agriculturalists of undetermined origin also moved westwards from Asia Minor, bringing their genes with them - or rather, according to a study undertaken by a team of American sociobiologists, six distinctive proteins still evident in the inhabitants of the earliest European regions to be cultivated.

It was the Celts who laid the initial foundations for a pan-European trading network. From their early civilisation in the Hallstatt region of what is now Austria (*Hall* from the Greek *hals* = salt), they developed a salt and iron trade that acted as a catalyst for commerce in many other commodities: amber from the Baltic, skins from the far north, spices from the south.

The Celtic salt roads, generally following the uplands for fear of raiding by unfriendly folk on the way, were primitive by comparison with the Roman roads but helped open up Europe to civilisation. As so often since, trade preceded politics: left to its own, it could have put a very different stamp on the history of Europe.

It would be wrong, however, to think of the Celts as a united people. They quarrelled frequently, a fact that encouraged the Romans to undertake the conquest of Gaul, today France, and thereby create the first European Union (the second being the empire of Charlemagne and the third, and the most perfect in my opinion, being the 'Open Europe' of the 12th and early-13th centuries).

John Casey of Durham University's department of archaeology makes the point that for the first four centuries of this era the present members of the European Union, with the exception of Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, were in part or whole provinces of the Roman Empire. That means Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, France, Germany (in part), the British Isles, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

As Casey explains: "The disunity of the Celtic societies which made up the population of the Iberian peninsula, Gaul comprising France and Belgium, Germany west of the Rhine, Britain and the lands bordering the Danube, made possible piecemeal Roman conquest of this vast territory by a combination of force and diplomacy." The rivers were as important to the Romans as their new and impressive road network. Like the Rhine, the Danube comes up frequently in early European history, as much for its importance as a transportation route as for its significance as a barrier.

The Roman road system, unlike the Celtic salt roads, was created to serve the army and the administration. "For civilians land transport, except over very short distances, or for very high-value goods of low bulk, was uneconomical... Archaeology allows us to build up a picture of this trade which supplements the historical sources. Corporations of shippers are found at key ports, both coastal and inland, as at Ostia (Italy), Arles (France), Cologne (Germany) and Lyons (France). London was a major port...".

Life at the other end of the Roman Empire was more confused. Barbarians kept on dropping in from the East. Diocletian, beset with these and other problems, decided they were too big to manage alone. So he split what has more recently been known as Yugoslavia between his own empire and the Greek-speaking Byzantine empire of the East. This was the first of many arbitrary decisions that were ultimately to have serious consequences for late-20th century politics: administrative division led to a schism of the churches (Roman and Orthodox) and to the introduction of separate alphabets. Diocletian, incidentally, then retired to his palace in a city appropriately called Split and spent what was left of his life cultivating cabbages.

As history has shown, the Romans of course got it wrong, but they did succeed in driving the Celts into the westernmost corners of Europe - although the ones in Britain made it back to Brittany, one of the few examples of a folk movement from west to east.

The frontiers of the Roman Empire crumbled partly through the fortuitous aid of nature when the Rhine froze over on 31 December of the year 406 AD (an easy date to remember). The Roman Empire then disintegrated progressively despite the assimilation of colonised peoples.

The first across the Rhine, helped on their way by the Huns, were evidently so glad to get out they could hardly stop. They were also obligingly accommodated by what was left of the Roman Empire, which really couldn't do much else.

The Marcomanni and Quadi tribes of the Suevi group of peoples (Suevi = Swabian) settled in the northwest corner of the Iberian peninsula, present-day Galicia and northern Portugal; a clan of Alans of Iranian stock went a bit further south for a while; and the Vandals conducted an elegant 'reverse', ie west-east, pincer movement taking them through Andalusia (hence the name) and Tunisia to Rome, whence they disappeared off the map.

The rest of the Swabians, the Alemanni (who became synonymous in the French language with the Germans), stayed relatively close to home, contenting themselves with land offered to them on the left bank of the Rhine - an early case of poacher turned gamekeeper.

In one of the more coherent examples of European colonisation, they created a stable and longlasting community of peoples that took in - and still takes in today - an area extending from Alsace in France to the Austrian Vorarlberg, spanning southwest Germany and Switzerland. The Bavarians, a much more mixed bunch of people, settled alongside and later colonised the Ostmark of the Frankish Empire, today's Austria.

Other westward or southward bound folk included the Burgundians (a Germanic race who did a great job getting themselves assimilated into French culture!), the Lombards (the 'longbeards' from the far north who settled in Northern Italy), the Goths, both western (Visigoth) and eastern (Ostrogoth) branches, and of course the Franks who gave their name to France. The Goths in fact dithered for a while, heading southeastwards from Poland to the Black Sea and Asia Minor before they turned west and headed for Greece, the Balkans, Italy and Spain.

They had all originally come from further east as did, in chronological order, the Huns (a Mongol folk from Central Asia who were eventually defeated by a combined Roman, Frankish and Visigothic army in 451 AD and disappeared), the Slavs (some of them also known as Wends or Sorbs) who moved into the vacuum left by the Germanic peoples in what is today Mecklenburg, Pomerania and areas to the southeast, the Avars (another Hunnish lot) and the Turko-Finnish Magyars who, after a round trip (see below), ended up in Hungary.

A Germanic by any other name...

Western Europe then slid slowly into what historians choose to call, for want of a better phrase, the Dark Ages. Whether they were that dark is debatable. The western Roman emperor was deposed in 476 AD, but immigrant barbarian leaders still tried to legitimise themselves by seeking recognition from Constantinople. Meanwhile Irish missionaries, coming back from the outer edge of the Celtic Fringe, proselytised across wide swathes of the European Continent.

The so-called Dark Ages were also considerably enlightened, technically and culturally, by the arrival of the Arabs in southern Spain in 711 AD. In any case these Dark Ages didn't last that long because by the year 768 Charlemagne, the illegitimate son of an upstart king with the unlikely name of Pip the Short (*Pepin le Bref*) and a lady graciously referred to as Bertha of the Big Foot (*Berthe au Grand Pied*), had popped up on the European scene and Europe was being recreated.

Charlemagne was crowned Emperor in Rome on Christmas Day 800 AD (another easy date) and by his death in 814 AD he had created an empire covering - to use the analogy suggested by John Casey - most of France and Italy, western Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, as well as Switzerland, Austria and lands further east. He had even embarked on a plan to link the Rhine with the Danube, rather precociously anticipating the opening of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal in 1992.

The Celtic Fringe, including the Brittany peninsula, was notably absent from Charlemagne's empire, along with Britain and most of Spain - which he had ventured into in the year 778, only to be rebuffed by the Arab Emir of Saragossa. On the way back through the Basque country, his army sacked Pamplona and deservedly got ambuscaded by a Basque force in the Pyrenees. This event entered European history books as one of the first but certainly not the last distortions of reality. Charlemagne's rearguard got chewed up by a bunch of Basque guerillas throwing rocks, not by an army of 300,000 Saracens as legend would have it, and Roland certainly didn't burst a blood vessel blowing his horn...

The close of Charlemagne's reign is an appropriate point at which to draw the first balance. The findings to date, we suggest, are threefold. First, that the majority of the invaders were of Germanic stock (one used to say 'Aryan', which also included the Celts, but Hitler turned this into a dirty word). Moreover, they got just about everywhere, Franks and Burgundians to France (Luigi Barzini maintains in his book *The Europeans*⁹ that almost half the inhabitants of present-day France are the descendants of Germanic tribes), Visigoths to Spain, Lombards and Ostrogoths to Italy, Vandals to North Africa, and so on.

Secondly, by the year 800 AD, there had already been two relatively successful attempts to create a European Union - which is hardly surprising in view of this *brassage* or stew of different peoples.

Third, one should treat racial descriptions with utmost care: the Franks, the Burgundians and the Lombards are Germanic or Nordic, not Latin. As often as not, the name used by one European nation to describe another is a misnomer. The English call the inhabitants of the Netherlands the Dutch (from *duitsch/deutsch*), the others, with equal disregard for racial origins, Hollanders. The right label, according to the Dutch, would be Batavians, pace the Frisians.

The French, unless they're being rude, know the Germans as *les Allemands*, yet the Alemanni (German: *alle Mann*) were just one small confederation of Germanic tribes which happened to be geographically the closest to French civilisation at the time. The Italian know them as *tedeschi* from the Old English *theod*, itself derived from the Old High German *diot*, the word for a people or nation. Surprisingly only the British seem to have got it absolutely right: Germans, a word of Celtic origin.

Some changes in direction

So Charlemagne came and went and his empire, like the Roman Empire, slowly fell apart. The Vikings, who had been little more than a thorn in his side, now got down to serious business, establishing the 'Dane-law' in Britain and - after a series of forays up the Seine to Paris - negotiating, in 911 AD, the conditions necessary for the creation of a fine new culture in Normandy. At about the same time, their fellow-Vikings established a highly successful trading station at Novgorod in Russia, which shows that the Vikings were capable of a lot more than rowing hard, wearing silly hats with horns in them (a myth, as it happens) and plundering.

The same period saw two other important developments. The first was prompted by the Magyars, today's Hungarians and the first non-Germanic settlers in western Europe of our era, who embarked on one of the few examples of a racial 'round trip'. This took them through Germany and France, over the Alps into northern Italy and back home to Hungary (nb 'the land of the Huns'). They then settled down, adopted Christianity and a written constitution, but, along with the Finns, stuck loyally to their Finno-Ugric languages.

The second development, following on the taming of the Magyars, was a genuine counter-movement eastwards across the northern half of Europe. The Wends, who had settled along the Baltic coastline, encouraged Germanic peoples to come back with their agricultural techniques, their crafts and their laws. This movement later extended even further eastwards with the Germanic settlements in Poland and the colonies of the Teutonic Knights. Further south, Bavarians and other frontier settlers drove a wedge between the Slav communities, effectively isolating those that later became known as the South Slavs from their fellows.

It was at the end of the first millennium that the prime example of the modern nation state, in the European sense, reared its head. Its beginnings, in 987 AD in what is now called France, were not that auspicious - a minor noble, Hugues Capet (*Hugh the Cape*), was crowned in a small place called Noyon - but, thanks to a clever strategy of local alliances directed against both German competitors and Rome, the Capetian dynasty laid the foundations for the modern French state.

Two other significant developments took place at about the same time. István I, later canonised as St Stephen, assumed the throne of the new and christianised Kingdom of Hungary on New Year's Day 1001 (another easy date) and Otto the Great founded the Welf dynasty from Hanover, sowing the seeds of a Holy Roman Empire that slowly matured into a modern Germany.

Other less spectacular things were going on at the same time. The emergence of an artisanal class, a minor intelligentsia, along with the first city states, even the creation of new towns (*Villeneuve* and *Villefranche*, the town of the Franks, are common placenames in France) prompted what some historians call the 'Open Europe' of the early Middle Ages. These developments were accompanied by rapid population growth: it is estimated that, between the year 1000 (when the world was rumoured to be coming to an end in any case) and the year 1300, the western European headcount more than doubled.

It was a time of enquiry, of relative give-and-take, of an awareness of the riches to be rediscovered in both the Classical and in contemporary civilisations, particularly the Arab and Jewish cultures. One fine aspect of this cultural flowering, anticipating the Italian *Rinascimento*, was Romanesque art and architecture ('Norman' to the British) which, through the extension of monastic life, permeated Europe, both West and East.

Commerce also opened up again on a European scale, picking up where the Celts and the Romans had left off. At first this trade was essentially land-based. Thanks to its central position, Champagne became almost a 'Single Market' in its own right, with traders from all over Europe converging on the four annual fairs at Troyes, Provins, Lagny-sur-Marne and Bar-sur-Aube. At the end of the thirteenth century, commerce shifted back to the searoutes, with Bruges, Genoa and Venice as the principal poles for this traffic. To the north the Hanseatic League reigned supreme.

The 'openness' of this Europe is well demonstrated by the life of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. In 1198 AD, at the age of four, he inherited the Kingdom of Sicily from the Normans of all people - who, not content with staying Vikings, had established a second and equally fine empire in the Mediterranean. Frederick was a very eclectically educated lad who developed equal sympathy for the Arab and European cultures, both of which were well represented in Sicily at the time. He was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1212 AD and then spent most of his life quarrelling with the Popes - one of whom, Gregory IX, sent a crusade against him and excommunicated him, after which he rather reluctantly headed his own crusade to the Holy Land.

Frederick has been called variously 'the first modern man', *stupor mundi* ('amazement of the world') and even, to Italian peasants today, *il Gran Frederigo*. When he failed to quell an unruly Arab community on the island, he had the intelligence to create a new township for them on the Italian mainland, Lucera (cited rather unkindly on mediaeval Italian maps as *Lucera delli Pagani*). And as King of Jerusalem he officially made his new possession a city of the three 'non-pagan' religions, Christian, Jewish and Muslim.

The Hohenstaufen dynasty hailed from Waiblingen, a burg close to today's Stuttgart. The best the Italians could make of this impossible Germanic placename was *Ghibbeline*, a name they gave to the Hohenstaufen faction (the people who built those pretty castles with the swallowtail battlements). The opposing faction were the Ottonian Welfs from Saxony, whom Frederick finally silenced through the intervention of Philip II of France at the battle of Bouvines (a nondescript yet significant corner of France close to the Belgian frontier). Hence Max Beerbohm's immortal phrase "enter Guelphs and Ghibbelines, fighting". So much European history has been distorted phonetically: the French even managed to transmogrify the calvinist *Eidgenossen* ('confederates') into *Huguenots*.

But the real message here is that, as dear old Frederick II so ably demonstrated, Europe was a mishmash of cultural interests spilling over from one so-called state to another. Yet in addition to the good things, this 'Open Europe' bore the seeds of the mistrustful Middle Ages that followed. The Church of Rome was in such a parlous state by now that it created a breeding ground for heresy. The most famous of the heretical sects was the Cathars, followers of a manicheistic faith that had found its way to western Europe from Bulgaria. The epithet 'Bulgar' became synonymous with heresy and suitably associated habits, hence its survival today in the word 'bugger'. Another example of how history distorts things.

Anyway Rome, in the form of Pope Innocent III, eventually put paid to the heretics. Taking advantage of the growing estrangement between the south and the north of France - the people of the *langue d'oc*, the *hoc*-speakers, and those of the *langue d'oïl*, the *hoc ille* or *oui*-speakers - his Holiness summoned the northerners to a Crusade against their fellow-Europeans under the leadership of a well-meaning but, as time passed, increasingly nasty character called Simon de Montfort. The ensuing bloody sieges of the cities of Languedoc between 1209 and 1229 AD contributed to the destruction of this first 'Open Europe'.

Simon's dirty work was aided and abetted by a monastic order created specially for the purpose, the Dominicans. Its founder, a certain Dominic de Guzman, was another apparently well-meaning individual who happened to be passing through the Languedoc on his way back from the Holy See to Burgo de Osma, a place that once boasted a bishopric but today claims 5,000 inhabitants and a large cathedral. Dominic (on no account to be confused with Guzman el Bueno) set a standard for later Spaniards by enforcing conversion through, to use a nice word, coercion - an initiative that ultimately metastasized into the Spanish Inquisition.

It is perhaps worth noting parenthetically that Fernand Niel, a distinguished French historian who roundly condemned this intra-European Crusade, tempered his strictures with the comment that, by bringing a number of provinces to heel, it did after all contribute to the unification of the French nation state. So?

Similar dastardly deeds were being done at the same time by Conrad of Marburg who, as chief Inquisitor of the area we now call Germany, roamed up and down the country on a mule, terrorising the population, conjuring up the demons of mass psychosis (as Adolf Hitler did more recently) and applying summary justice on a grand scale in the name of religion.

Ironically, conditions in Spain - destined to become the *haut-lieu* of the Inquisition - were relatively serene at the time, probably due to the presence of the Arabs and fellow-Muslims from North Africa (variously called Saracens or Moors). The Arabs showed the rest of the world, in varying degrees during 600 years of occupation, the virtues of religious tolerance, allowing Christians and Jews to practise their religions in the occupied territories, sponsoring the arts and the sciences, tending the land with superb irrigation systems, and passing on the accumulated knowledge of the Classical civilisations.

A concept of Europe...

Few Europeans acknowledge their debt to the Arabs (or, parenthetically, recognise the poor deal the latter got in return, something that is now catching up with us). Most of us are totally unaware of the fact that it was the real or perceived threat they posed to the existing order, religious and social, that helped give our continent the identity it has today.

Peter Millar made this point in an editorial in *The European* newspaper: "It took a long time and a lot of bloodshed, the sacking of Rome and the sacking of Constantinople to create the concept of any sort of European continental identity based on habitation of a contiguous land mass. The catalyst was Islam - the threat from without. It is dubious whether a concept of Europe as any sort of coherent body would ever have emerged had the followers of Mohammed not first ripped the southern bank of the Mediterranean from the influence of Rome and challenged the northern bank in a giant pincer movement that reached from the Pyrenees to the gates of Vienna."

The Arab invasion of Spain had one particular consequence which also contributed to the realisation of an 'Open Europe' even if it was, again, a defensive reaction to an alien system. This was the creation of the pilgrimage route to the supposed tomb of Saint James in Compostela. Millions of ordinary folk in search of an indulgence, prisoners walking out their punishment, and simple adventurers travelled down the old Roman roads to Galicia in the early middle ages and later.

Religious orders and lay benefactors built hospices, hospitals, causeways and bridges to help them on their way. They leave behind traces that comment on the continental scale of this venture. On the one hand, sites and names on the pilgrimage road that testify to a cosmopolitan past, for example a village in the mountains of northwestern Spain called Ruitelán, a rough transcription from the native Rutland of a man who opened an inn there. On the other, traces of the pilgrimage in faraway places, like the fresco of a *Jacquet* in a tiny village lost among the lakes of Mecklenburg in distant northeastern Germany.

Spain, in the form of a nation state created by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabelle, put a stop to such sentimental nonsense in 1492, after the fall of the Moorish Kingdom of Granada. The 'Catholic Kings' reneged on their promise of freedom of religion, they expelled the Jews of Toledo and, later, the *moriscos*, the Muslim converts to the Christian faith. Ironically but happily, thanks to an enlightened individual by the name of Sultan Bayezid II, the Sephardic Jews found a new haven in the Ottoman Empire.

So we come back, irrevocably, to the ultimate supremacy of the nation state. Not much more needs to be said in this alternative history of Europe - except perhaps that Napoleon, much later on, managed to bully and manoeuvre much of Europe into living together again, in crude imitation of the Romans and Charlemagne. But he was motivated by the spirit of *La Patrie*, the nation state extended, and didn't give a damn about the European ideal.

The concept of the nation state found its origins in France at the end of the first millenium and was later sealed, for both the French and the English, by a new sense of identity born of the awful experiences of the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Yet, in most other parts of Europe, it is a relatively recent creation. The Netherlands and Spain took shape in the last five centuries, Italy, Belgium, Greece and modern-day Germany in the last two.

With its gift for self-justification and colonial adventures, this modern emanation of the nation state is a striking but hopefully shortlived feature on the historic landscape of Europe. It is certainly not contributing to the creation of a New World Order. As an American anthropologist Virginia Hine pointed out, the League of Nations and the United Nations "failed because they were built upon the very form of social organization they were designed to supersede - the nation state". We see the same phenomenon here within Europe...

These nation states were artificial political creations, rather than coherent ethnic entities, as hopefully the preceding pages have shown. And the concept of the strictly ethnic state, now back in vogue in eastern Europe, is an even greater aberration which only took shape in the last two hundred years.

Yet it is uncanny how ethnic, as opposed to nation-state, frontiers so often coincide with marked changes in terrain. One of the rare exceptions to this rule is the Flemish-Walloon borderline in present-day Belgium - where, fifteen hundred years ago, the Great Referee blew his whistle for 'time' on the playing fields of history.

There are even localised examples of changes in terrain acting as barriers to the movement of both peoples and ideas - and I am not just thinking of the English Channel. One is the 'drumlins' of County Down in northern Ireland, a range of glacier-formed hills which separates the people of Ulster from the rest of the Irish. Another is the Landsker line of hills in southern Pembrokeshire which divides a mixed community of English, Norman and, yes!, Flemish stock from the native Welsh to the north. Yet another is the hills and forests on the northern fringes of Sweden's southern province of Skåne, which delineated an area that was more akin to Denmark - and was occupied for centuries by the Danes - than to the Sweden to the north.

It is also worth remembering that 'our natural heritage' is not as natural as we Europeans pretend it to be. For a start the hand of man - the Englishman, the Dutchman, the Frenchman, etc - is evident enough if you fly from London to Frankfurt, irregular hedge-lined fields giving way to landscapes cultivated in squares, then strips, then squares getting larger and larger (no doubt the EU's Common Agricultural Policy will eliminate these differences and turn our land yellow and blue with its sunflower, oilseed rape, linseed and colza production subsidies!).

Cultivation of the olive tree changed the face of Mediterranean Europe even before the present era. Many of our fruit trees and herbs came to us by courtesy of the Arabs at the end of the first millenium. The famous oak forests of Europe are a result of the uninhibited land clearance movements of the early Middle Ages. The Scots moors and the Irish bogs - now treasured by travel connoisseurs for their distinctive landscapes - were rich forest country until the Celts cut all the trees down. Even the woodlands of Denmark disappeared several centuries ago. The planetrees that line the *routes nationales* of France only arrived from the East in the 1700s. And the tulip, a symbol of the Netherlands, arrived from Turkey in the mid-16th century. And so on...

So anyone who talks about 'our natural heritage', as if time had stood still all these centuries, is talking rubbish. Even in the so-called 'Dark Ages' - a misnomer if ever there was one - Europe was surprisingly open. It was only with the emergence of that upstart phenomenon, the nation state, that the idea of sovereignty and independence took hold.

As history has shown time and again, we are interdependent. In the words of the French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "no region in Europe can be fully understood in isolation from the rest". And our interdependence goes much further than the confines of Europe. One of the most traumatic events in pan-European history - for no region was spared - came with the arrival from central Asia in 1348 of the Black Death, ferried to us on a galley from the Genoese trading station of Caffa in the Crimea. The subsequent decimation of urban populations encouraged a ghetto mentality, but then led to the economic revival that spurred the development of the nation state...

(Box)

Historical whodunits

We tend to talk of races as if they acquire immutable characteristics. Yet, every now and then, we see startling evidence of change.

Obviously, some of us wonder what happened to the Ancient Greeks - those fine, athletic, blonde creatures of the Classical legends. There's not much evidence of them today.

We also wonder where the Basques came from. An original-minded people with a particularly high rhesus negative factor, did they really come from the Caucasus or thereabouts, like most of the rest of us. And we wonder what happened to the Etruscans. Did they end up in Raetian Switzerland as some people suggest?

But probably the most dramatic and indisputable example is provided by the Vikings, who transmogrified from a relatively wild and migrant warrior folk ("warmongering, ale-swilling rapists", in the words of one historian) to the Normans, the highly cultured settled civilisation of the early Middle Ages.

More recently, we have the case of the Prussians, reputedly the most work-oriented and best organised of all Europeans. Attributes claimed for them (forgetting their militarism for a moment) included modesty, honesty, tolerance, pragmatism and thrift. What happened to all of this?

Well, for a start, the original Prussians or *Prusi*, a Baltic tribe related to the Lithuanians and Latvians, were butchered by the Teutonic Knights and disappeared in the Middle Ages. The people that then usurped the name earned their reputation - with the help of *der alter Fritz*, Frederick II - partly on the battlefield, partly through industry. Today, in the eastern lands of Germany, there is not that much evidence that the Prussian tradition survived. Foreign investors complain relentlessly about a lack of a work ethic.

Yet I suspect that some of the qualities associated with the Prussian tradition have survived: orderliness, discipline and a sense of social responsibility. What we are witnessing is a shift in values.

Fifty years of life in a collectivist environment, however badly managed, have accustomed people to the benefits of a cocooned society, unexciting yet satisfying. But the Prussian virtues of intelligence and industry, particularly in the newly emerging entrepreneurial and administrative classes, will find their proper place - and reassert themselves - given time!