

Europe's Stormy History—Drama of the Rise and Fall of Empires



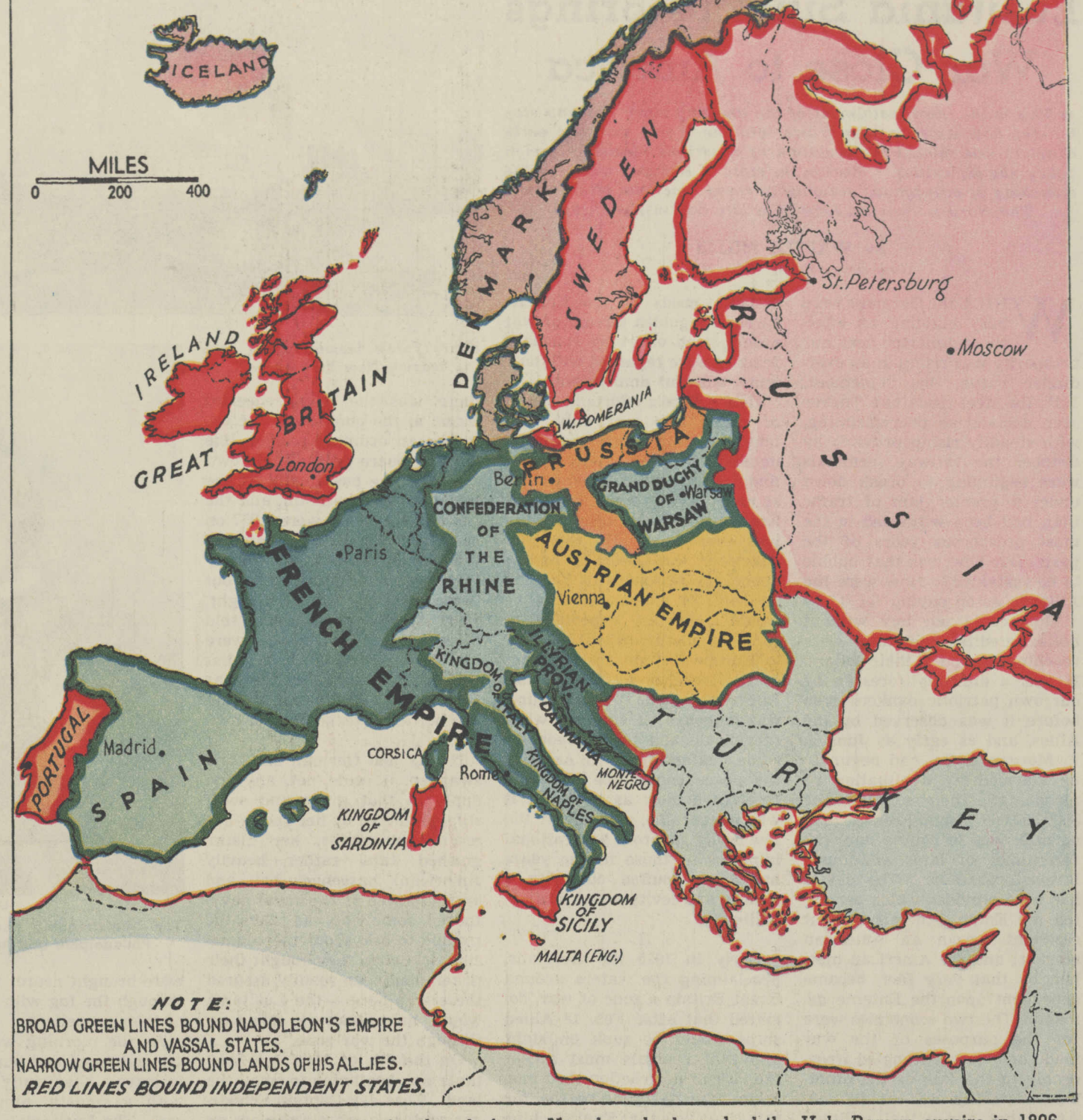
1100 In stormy Europe 839 years ago the dominant power was the Holy Roman empire (the Empire), a Germanic union founded by Otto the Great in 962. Henry IV. of the house of Franconia was emperor. Unlike earlier rulers of the empire, he opposed the pope. England was rising as a power, having been conquered by the Normans in 1066. Southern Italy also was under Norman control. The Eastern Roman empire, under Alexius I., was flourishing; Spain was largely in the hands of the Moors, who had invaded from Africa; and France, under the Capet king Philip I., was as yet only a minor power.



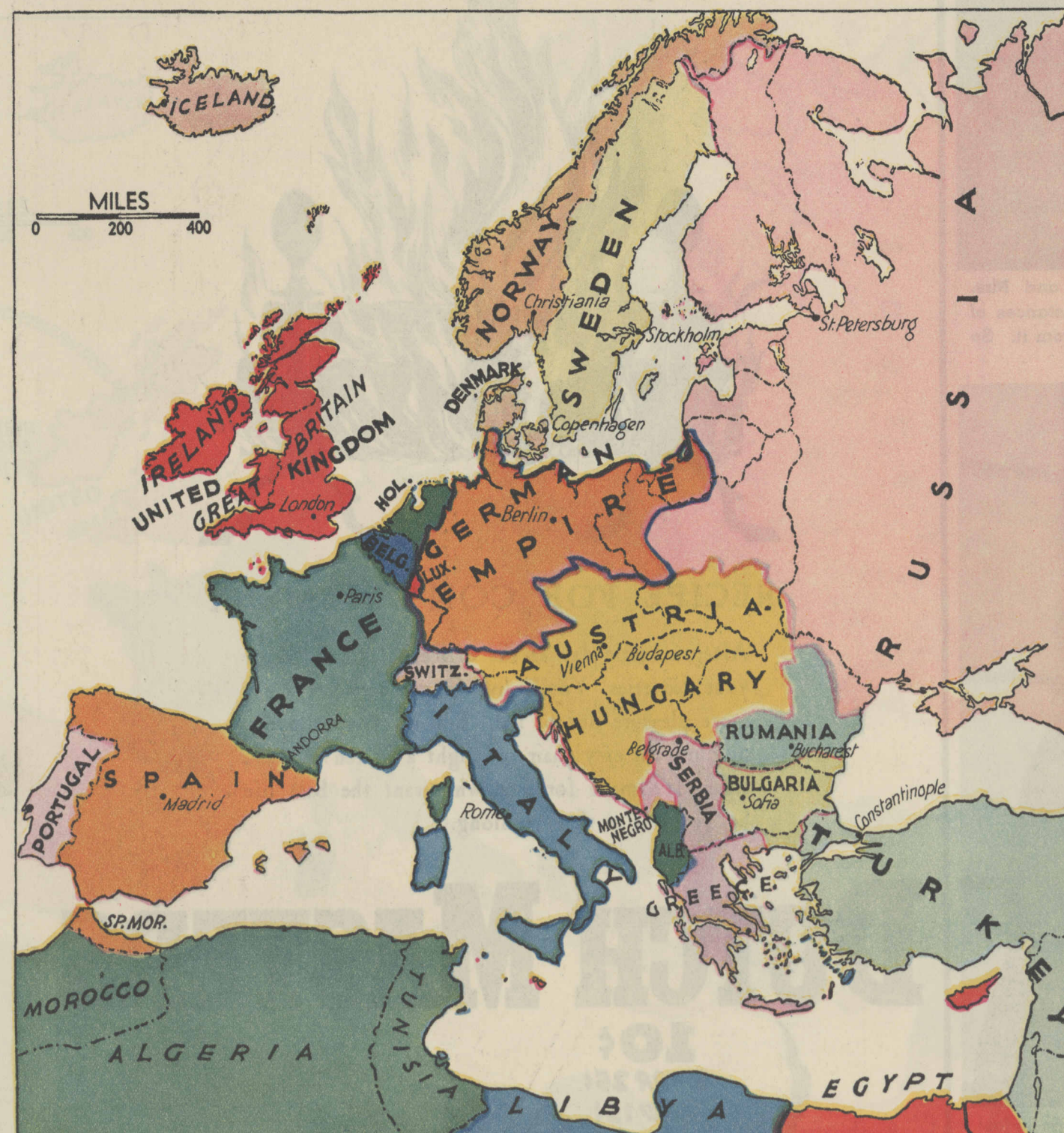
1519 Spain by this time had risen to first rank, after the expulsion of the Moors from its shores and the discovery of America. Its king was Charles I. of Hapsburg, who in 1520 was crowned emperor of the Holy Roman empire as Charles V. A new Mohammedan power, that of the Ottoman Turks, had swept into Europe from Asia Minor, taking Constantinople in 1453. The Eastern Roman empire was no more. The beginning of Prussia was tiny Brandenburg. Scotland still was independent, under the Stuarts, and Henry VIII., father of Queen Elizabeth and most famous of the Tudor kings, was on the English throne.



1740 This was the year that Maria Theresa of the house of Hapsburg-Lorraine came to the throne of the Holy Roman empire, now considerably shrunk but still a great power. Scotland long ago (1603) had been swallowed up by England. The Bourbon Louis XV., great-grandson of the and Monarch, was on the throne of France. Another Bourbon, Ferdinand VI., was king of Spain. Also under Bourbon domination was the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Poland by this time had spread over a wide territory. Its ruler was the German-born Augustus III. Arising in Sardinia was the nucleus of modern Italy.



1810 Here was a Europe stormier than before. Napoleon had crushed the Holy Roman empire in 1806, leaving to Francis II. of Hapsburg only Austria. The Napoleonic empire by 1810 had taken in, directly or as dependencies, all of France and of mainland Italy, most of the former Holy Roman empire, Spain, the Low Countries, the Illyrian and Dalmatian coasts, and the grand duchy of Warsaw, the last named a recreation of Poland. Great Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria were the enemies of Bonaparte in 1814, when his empire went to pieces. His come-back in 1815 failed on the field of Waterloo.



1914 On the eve of the World war, a more terrible calamity than the Napoleonic conflicts, Europe had been relatively calm for some time. Prussia, by its defeat of the Austrians in 1866 and the French in 1871, had consolidated a collection of German states into an empire. The war, touched off by the assassination at Sarajevo, Bosnia, of Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian and Hungarian crowns, saw, before it was finished, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria on one side, and on the other Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, America, and a number of smaller nations. The central powers lost.



1921 Various treaties concluded at the end of the war, including that of Versailles, virtually remade the map of Europe. Alsace-Lorraine, former French territory, went back to France. Poland was restored as a nation, with lands taken from Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Czechoslovakia was created out of the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia. Rumania got Transylvania and Bessarabia. Little Serbia was expanded into Yugo-Slavia. Austria was left a little republic, Hungary a little kingdom without a king. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were set up.



1938 Clouds over Europe! This was the year marked by Germany's open defiance of its former enemies. In March, Adolf Hitler, without meeting other than verbal opposition, took over and incorporated into the German Reich the republic of Austria. In the last days of September occurred the historic Munich conference. This marked the beginning of the breakup of Czechoslovakia, that at under German control the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia and turned over to Hungary the little spear point called Ruthenia. Even Poland in the split-up acquired a narrow strip of Czechoslovakia.



1939 A new storm breaks! In March of this year Hitler consolidated his control over Czechoslovakia. The next month saw Italy's seizure of Albania and the flight into exile of King Zog. And now the war! Five German armies invaded Poland along a lengthy frontier, retaking the free city of Danzig, the Polish corridor, and other former German territory. Polish resistance everywhere was smothered by the power of the Germans. Moving in from the east soon after the German invasion, Russian troops advanced in Poland to the German lines. In Poland's dismemberment Germany took the western half, Russia the eastern.