

# Ulrich von Hutten Biography

## Ulrich von Hutten

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# Biography

The German imperial knight and humanist Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) advocated the dissolution of Germany's ties with the papacy. He advanced an unrealistic program, however, for solving German national problems by reversion to medieval knighthood and feudalism.

Ulrich von Hutten, born in a castle near Fulda in Hesse, was sent at age 11 to a monastery to become a Benedictine monk. After 6 years he escaped and led a vagabond life, attending four German universities. In Erfurt he befriended Crotus Rubianus and other humanists. He went to Italy, took service as a soldier, and attended universities, spending some time in Pavia and Bologna. In Germany he served in the imperial army (1512). Because of the death of a cousin, Hans, at the hands of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, he published sharp Latin diatribes against the duke, which have been compared with the *Philippics* of Demosthenes and which brought him fame. In 1519 he played a part in the expulsion of the duke.

A second visit to Italy took Hutten to Bologna and Rome (1515-1517). In 1517 he was crowned poet laureate by Emperor Maximilian I in Augsburg for his Latin poems. His protector was Archbishop-Elector Albrecht of Mayence, at whose court he often appeared. In 1517 too he played a part in the defense of Johann Reuchlin against the Cologne Dominicans; he probably wrote the second part of the famous *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*. His *Colloquia* followed in 1518 (in German, 1520-1521). The bitter dialogues *Vadiscus* (1520), directed against the papacy, cost him the protection of Albrecht. His German work *Aufwecker der deutschen Nation* (1520; *Arouser of the German Nation*), which opens with his motto "Ich hab's gewagt" (I have dared to do it), was bold and forward-looking and announced his support of Martin Luther. The hostility aroused by this work forced him to flee to Basel.

In Basel, Hutten hoped to find help from Erasmus, but the two humanists soon feuded. His dream of enlisting Luther and the unsuccessful freedom fighter Franz von Sickingen in his struggle for a stronger, independent empire also failed, as did attempts to interest Maximilian and his successor, Charles V. Efforts to war against the Catholic clergy had degenerated into a robber-baron adventure. In Switzerland, Huldreich Zwingli took an interest in him and sheltered him on the island of Ufenau in Lake Zurich, where Hutten died in 1523.