Western Civilization: A Concise History - Volume 2

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The Idea of Western Civilization

Introduction

What is “Western Civilization”? Furthermore, who or what is part of it? Like all ideas, the concept of Western Civilization itself has a history, one that coalesced in college textbooks and curriculums for the first time in the United States in the 1920s. In many ways, the very idea of Western Civilization is a “loaded” one, opposing one form or branch of civilization from others as if they were distinct, even unrelated. Thus, before examining the events of Western Civilization’s history, it is important to unpack the history of the concept itself.

Where is the West?

The obvious question is “west of what”? Likewise, where is “the east”? Terms used in present-day geopolitics regularly make reference to an east and west, as in “Far East,” and “Middle East,” as well as in “Western” ideas or attitudes. The obvious answer is that “the West” has something to do with Europe. If the area including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Israel - Palestine, and Egypt is somewhere called the “Middle” or “Near” East, doesn't that imply that it is just to the east of something else?

In fact, we get the original term from Greece. Greece is the center-point – to the east of the Balkan Peninsula was east, to the west was west, and the Greeks were at the center of their self-understood world. Likewise, the sea that both separated and united the Greeks and their neighbors, including the Egyptians and the Persians, is still called the Mediterranean, which means “sea in the middle of the earth” (albeit in Latin, not Greek - we get the word from a later "Western" civilization, the Romans). The ancient civilizations clustered around the Mediterranean treated it as the center of the world itself, their major trade route to one another and a major source of their food as well.

To the Greeks, there were two kinds of people: Greeks and barbarians (the Greek word is *barbaros*). Supposedly, the word barbarian came from Greeks mocking the sound of non-Greek languages: “bar-bar-bar-bar.” The Greeks traded with all of their neighbors and

knew perfectly well that the Persians and the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, among others, were not their inferiors in learning, art, or political organization, but the fact remains that they were not Greek, either. Thus, one of the core themes of Western Civilization is that right from its inception, of the east being east of Greece and the west being west of Greece, and of the world being divided between Greeks and barbarians, there was an idea of who is central and superior, and who is out on the edges and inferior (or at least not part of the best version of culture).

In a sense, then, the Greeks invented the idea of west and east, but they did not extend the idea to anyone but themselves, certainly including the “barbarians” who inhabited the rest of Europe. Likewise, the Greeks did not invent “civilization” itself; they inherited things like agriculture and writing from their neighbors. Neither was there ever a united Greek empire: there was a great Greek civilization when Alexander the Great conquered what he thought was most of the world, stretching from Greece itself through Egypt, the Middle East, as far as western India, but it collapsed into feuding kingdoms after he died. Thus, while later cultures came to look to the Greeks as their intellectual and cultural ancestors, the Greeks themselves did not set out to found “Western Civilization” itself.

Mesopotamia

While many contemporary Western Civilization textbooks start with Greece, this one does not. That is because civilization is not Greek in its origins. The most ancient human civilizations arose in the Fertile Crescent, an area stretching from present-day Israel - Palestine through southern Turkey and into Iraq. Closely related, and lying within the Fertile Crescent, is the region of Mesopotamia, which is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq. In these areas, people invented the most crucial technology necessary for the development of civilization: agriculture. The Mesopotamians also invented other things that are central to civilization, including:

- **Cities:** note that in English, the very word “civilization” is closely related to the word “civic,” meaning “having to do with cities” as in "civic government" or "civic duty." Cities were essential to sophisticated human groups because they allowed specialization: you could have some people concentrate all of their time and energy on tasks like art, building, religious worship, or warfare, not just on farming.
- **Bureaucracy:** while it seems like a prosaic subject, bureaucracy was and remains the most effective way to organize large groups of people. Civilizations that developed large and efficient bureaucracies grew larger and lasted longer than those that neglected

bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is, essentially, the substitution of rules in place of individual human decisions. That process, while often frustrating to individuals caught up in it, does have the effect of creating a more efficient set of processes than can be achieved through arbitrary decision-making. Historically, bureaucracy was one of the most important "technologies" that early civilizations developed.

- **Large-scale warfare:** even before large cities existed, the first towns were built with fortifications to stave off attackers. It is very likely that the first kings were war leaders allied with priests.
- **Mathematics:** without math, there cannot be advanced engineering, and without engineering, there cannot be irrigation, walls, or large buildings. The ancient Mesopotamians were the first people in the world to develop advanced mathematics in large part because they were also the most sophisticated engineers of the ancient world.
- **Astronomy:** just as math is necessary for engineering, astronomy is necessary for a sophisticated calendar. The ancient Mesopotamians began the process of systematically recording the changing positions of the stars and other heavenly bodies because they needed to be able to track when to plant crops, when to harvest, and when religious rituals had to be carried out. Among other things, the Mesopotamians were the first to discover the 365 (and a quarter) days of the year and set those days into a fixed calendar.
- **Empires:** an empire is a political unit comprising many different “peoples,” whether “people” is defined linguistically, religiously, or ethnically. The Mesopotamians were the first to conquer and rule over many different cities and “peoples” at once.

The Mesopotamians also created systems of writing, of organized religion, and of literature, all of which would go on to have an enormous influence on world history, and in turn, Western Civilization. Thus, in considering Western Civilization, it would be misleading to start with the Greeks and skip places like Mesopotamia and, also, Egypt, because those areas were the heartland of civilization in the whole western part of Eurasia.

Greece and Rome

Even if we do not start with the Greeks, we do need to acknowledge their importance. Alexander the Great was one of the most famous and important military leaders in history, a man who started conquering “the world” when he was eighteen years old. When he died his empire fell apart, in part because he did not say which of his generals was to take over after his death. Nevertheless, the empires he left behind were united in important ways, using Greek as one of their languages, employing Greek architecture in their buildings, putting on plays in the

Greek style, and of course, trading with one another. This period in history was called the Hellenistic Age. The people who were part of that age were European, Middle Eastern, and North African, people who worshiped both Greeks gods and the gods of their own regions, spoke all kinds of different languages, and lived as part of a hybrid culture. Hellenistic civilization demonstrates the fact that Western Civilization has always been a blend of different peoples, not a single encompassing group or language or religion.

Perhaps the most important empire in the ancient history of Western Civilization was ancient Rome. Over the course of roughly five centuries, the Romans expanded from the city of Rome in the middle of the Italian peninsula to rule an empire that stretched from Britain to Spain and from North Africa to Persia (present-day Iran). Through both incredible engineering, the hard work of Roman citizens and Roman subjects, and the massive use of slave labor, they built remarkable buildings and created infrastructure like roads and aqueducts that survive to the present day.

The Romans are the ones who give us the idea of Western Civilization being something *ongoing* – something that had started in the past and continued into the future. In the case of the Romans, they (sometimes grudgingly) acknowledged Greece as a cultural model; Roman architecture used Greek shapes and forms, the Roman gods were really just the Greek gods given new names (Zeus became Jupiter, Hades became Pluto, etc.), and educated Romans spoke and read Greek so that they could read the works of the great Greek poets, playwrights, and philosophers. Thus, the Romans deliberately adopted an older set of ideas and considered themselves part of an ongoing civilization that blended Greek and Roman values. Like the Greeks before them, they also divided civilization itself in a stark binary: there was Greco-Roman culture on the one hand and barbarism on the other, although they made a reluctant exception for Persia at times.

The Romans were largely successful at assimilating the people they conquered. They united their provinces with the Latin language, which is the ancestor of all of the major languages spoken in Southern Europe today (French, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, etc.), Roman Law, which is the ancestor of most forms of law still in use today in Europe, and the Roman form of government. Along with those factors, the Romans brought Greek and Roman science, learning, and literature. In many ways, the Romans believed that they were bringing civilization itself everywhere they went, and because they made the connection between Greek civilization and their own, they played a significant role in inventing the idea of Western Civilization as something that was ongoing.

The Middle Ages and Christianity

Another factor in the development of the idea of Western Civilization came about after Rome ceased to exist as a united empire, during the era known as the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages were the period between the fall of Rome, which happened around 476 CE, and the Renaissance, which started around 1300 CE. During the Middle Ages, another concept of what lay at the heart of Western Civilization arose, especially among Europeans. It was not just the connection to Roman and Greek accomplishments, but instead, to religion. The Roman Empire had become Christian in the early fourth century CE when the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. Many Europeans in the Middle Ages came to believe that, despite the fact that they spoke different languages and had different rulers, they were united as part of "Christendom": the kingdom of Christ and of Christians.

Christianity obviously played a hugely important role in the history of Western Civilization. In inspired amazing art and music. It was at the heart of scholarship and learning for centuries. It also justified the aggressive expansion of European kingdoms. Europeans truly believed that members of other religions were infidels (meaning "those who are unfaithful," those who worshipped the correct God, but in the wrong way, including Jews and Muslims, but also Christians who deviated from official orthodoxy) or pagans (those who worshipped false gods) who should either convert or be exterminated. For instance, despite the fact that Muslims and Jews worshiped the same God and shared much of the same sacred literature, medieval Europeans had absolutely no qualms about invading Muslim lands and committing horrific atrocities in the name of their religion. Likewise, medieval anti-Semitism (prejudice and hatred directed against Jews) eventually drove many Jews from Europe itself to take shelter in the kingdoms and empires of the Middle East and North Africa; historically it was much safer and more comfortable for Jews in places like the predominantly Muslim Ottoman Empire than it was in most of Christian Europe.

A major irony of the idea that Western Civilization is somehow inherently Christian is that Islam is unquestionably just as "Western." Islam's point of origin, the Arabian Peninsula, is geographically very close to that of both Judaism and Christianity. Its holy writings are also closely aligned to Jewish and Christian values and thought. Perhaps most importantly, Islamic kingdoms and empires were part of the networks of trade, scholarship, and exchange that linked together the entire greater Mediterranean region. Thus, despite the fervor of European

crusaders, it would be profoundly misleading to separate Islamic states and cultures from the rest of Western Civilization.

The Renaissance and European Expansion

Perhaps the most crucial development in the idea of Western Civilization in the pre-modern period was the Renaissance. The term “Middle Ages” was invented by thinkers during the Renaissance, which started around 1300 CE. The great thinkers and artists of the Renaissance claimed to be moving away from the ignorance and darkness of the Middle Ages – which they also called the “dark ages” - and returning to the greatness of the Romans and Greeks. People like Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Christine de Pizan, and Petrarch proudly connected their work to the work of the Romans and Greeks, claiming that there was an unbroken chain of ideas, virtues, and accomplishments stretching all the way back thousands of years to people like Alexander the Great, Plato, and Socrates.

During the Renaissance, educated people in Europe roughly two thousand years after the life of the Greek philosopher Plato based their own philosophies and outlooks on Plato's philosophy, as well as that of other Greek thinkers. The beauty of Renaissance art is directly connected to its inspiration in Roman and Greek art. The scientific discoveries of the Renaissance were inspired by the same spirit of inquiry that Greek scientists and Roman engineers had cultivated. Perhaps most importantly, Renaissance thinkers proudly linked together their own era to that of the Greeks and Romans, thus strengthening the concept of Western Civilization as an ongoing enterprise.

In the process of reviving the ideas of the Greeks and Romans, Renaissance thinkers created a new program of education: “humanist” education. Celebrating the inherent goodness and potentialities of humankind, humanistic education saw in the study of classical literature a source of inspiration for not just knowledge, but of morality and virtue. Combining the practical study of languages, history, mathematics, and rhetoric (among other subjects) with the cultivation of an ethical code the humanistics traced back to the Greeks, humanistic education ultimately created a curriculum meant to create well-rounded, virtuous individuals. That program of education remained intact into the twentieth century, with study of the classics remaining a hallmark of elite education until it began to be displaced by the more specialized disciplinary studies of the modern university system that was born near the end of the nineteenth century.

It was not Renaissance ideas, however, that had the greatest impact on the globe at the time. Instead, it was European soldiers, colonists, and most consequentially, diseases. The first people from the Eastern Hemisphere since prehistory to travel to the Western Hemisphere (and remain - an earlier Viking colony did not survive) were European explorers who, entirely by accident, "discovered" the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century CE. It bears emphasis that the "discovery" of the Americas is a misnomer: millions of people already lived there, as their ancestors had for thousands of years, but geography had left them ill-prepared for the arrival of the newcomers. With the European colonists came an onslaught of epidemics to which the native peoples of the Americas had no resistance, and within a few generations the immense majority - perhaps as many as 90% - of Native Americans perished as a result. The subsequent conquest of the Americas by Europeans and their descendents was thus made vastly easier. Europeans suddenly had access to an astonishing wealth of land and natural resources, wealth that they extracted in large part by enslaving millions of Native Americans and Africans.

Thanks largely to the European conquest of the Americas and the exploitation of its resources and its people, Europe went from a region of little economic and military power and importance to one of the most formidable in the following centuries. Following the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of Central and South America, the other major European states embarked on their own imperialistic ventures in the following centuries. "Trade empires" emerged over the course of the seventeenth century, first and foremost those of the Dutch and English, which established the precedent that profit and territorial control were mutually reinforcing priorities for European states. Driven by that conjoined motive, European states established huge, and growing, global empires. By 1800, roughly 35% of the surface of the world was controlled by Europeans or their descendents.

The Modern Era

Most of the world, however, was off limits to large-scale European expansion. Not only were there prosperous and sophisticated kingdoms in many regions of Africa, but (in an ironic reversal of the impact of European diseases on Americans) African diseases ensured that would-be European explorers and conquerors were unable to penetrate beyond the coasts of most of sub-Saharan African entirely. Meanwhile, the enormous and sophisticated empires and kingdoms of China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and South Asia (i.e. India) largely regarded

Europeans as incidental trading partners of relatively little importance. The Middle East was dominated by two powerful and "Western" empires of its own: Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

The explosion of European power, one that coincided with the fruition of the idea that Western Civilization was both distinct from and *better* than other branches of civilization, came as a result of a development in technology: the Industrial Revolution. Starting in Great Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century, Europeans learned how to exploit fossil fuels in the form of coal to harness hitherto unimaginable amounts of energy. That energy underwrote a vast and dramatic expansion of European technology, wealth, and military power, this time built on the backs not of outright slaves, but of workers paid subsistence wages.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution underwrote and enabled the transformation of Europe from regional powerhouse to global hegemon. By the early twentieth century, Europe and the American nations founded by the descendents of Europeans controlled roughly 85% of the globe. Europeans either forced foreign states to concede to their economic demands and political influence, as in China and the Ottoman Empire, or simply conquered and controlled regions directly, as in South Asia and Africa. None of this would have been possible without the technological and energetic revolution wrought by industrialism.

To Europeans and North Americans, however, the reason that they had come to enjoy such wealth and power was not because of a (temporary) monopoly of industrial technology. Instead, it was the inevitable result of their inherent biological and cultural superiority. The idea that the human species was divided into biologically distinct races was not entirely invented in the nineteenth century, but it became the predominant outlook and acquired all the trappings of a "science" over the course of the 1800s. By the year 1900, almost any person of European descent would have claimed to be part of a distinct, superior "race" whose global dominance was simply part of their collective birthright.

That conceit arrived at its zenith in the first half of the twentieth century. The European powers themselves fell upon one another in the First World War in the name of expanding, or at least preserving, their share of global dominance. Soon after, the new (related) ideologies of fascism and Nazism put racial superiority at the very center of their worldviews. The Second World War was the direct result of those ideologies, when racial warfare was unleashed for the first time not just on members of races Europeans had already classified as "inferior," but on European ethnicities that fascists and Nazis now considered inferior races in their own right, most obviously the Jews. The bloodbath that followed resulted in approximately 55 million

deaths, including the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and at least 25 million citizens of the Soviet Union, another “racial” enemy from the perspective of the Nazis.

Western Civilization Is “Born”

It was against the backdrop of this descent into what Europeans and Americans frequently called “barbarism” - the old antithesis of the “true” civilization that started with the Greeks - that the history of Western Civilization first came into being as a textbook topic and, soon, a mainstay of college curriculums. Prominent scholars in the United States, especially historians, came to believe that the best way to defend the elements of civilization with which they most strongly identified, including certain concepts of rationality and political equality, was to describe all of human existence as an ascent from primitive savagery into enlightenment, an ascent that may not have strictly speaking started in Europe, but which enjoyed its greatest success there. The early proponents of the “Western Civ” concept spoke and wrote explicitly of European civilization as an unbroken ladder of ideas, technologies, and cultural achievements that led to the present. Along the way, of course, they included the United States as both a product of those European achievements and, in the twentieth century, as one of the staunchest defenders of that legacy.

That first generation of historians of Western Civilization succeeded in crafting what was to be the core of history curriculums for most of the twentieth century in American colleges and universities, not to mention high schools. The narrative in the introduction in this book follows its basic contours, without all of the qualifying remarks: it starts with Greece, goes through Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, then on to the growth in European power leading up to the recent past. The traditional story made a hard and fast distinction between Western Civilization as the site of progress, and the rest of the world (usually referred to as the “Orient,” simply meaning “east,” all the way up until textbooks started changing their terms in the 1980s) which invariably lagged behind. Outside of the West, went the narrative, there was despotism, stagnation, and corruption, so it was almost inevitable that the West would eventually achieve global dominance.

This was, in hindsight, a somewhat surprising conclusion given when the narrative was invented. The West’s self-understanding as the most “civilized” culture had imploded with the world wars, but the inventors of Western Civilization as a concept were determined to not only rescue its legacy from that implosion, but to celebrate it as the *only* major historical legacy of relevance to the present. In doing so, they reinforced many of the intellectual dividing lines

created centuries earlier: there was true civilization opposed by barbarians, there was an ongoing and unbroken legacy of achievement and progress, and most importantly, only people who were born in or descended from people born in Europe had played a significant historical role. The entire history of most of humankind was not just irrelevant to the narrative of European or American history, it was irrelevant to the history of the modern world for *everyone*. In other words, even Africans and Asians, to say nothing of the people of the Pacific or Native Americans, could have little of relevance to learn from their own history that was not somehow "obsolete" in the modern era. And yet, this astonishing conclusion was born from a culture that unleashed the most horrific destruction (*self*-destruction) ever witnessed by the human species.

The Approach of This Book (with Caveats)

This textbook follows the contours of the basic Western Civilization narrative described above in terms of chronology and, to an extent, geography because it was written to be compatible with most Western Civilization courses as they exist today. It deliberately breaks, however, from the "triumphalist" narrative that describes Western Civilization as the most successful, rational, and enlightened form of civilization in human history. It casts a wider geographical view than do traditional Western Civilization textbooks, focusing in many cases on the critical historical role of the Middle East and North Africa, not just Europe. It also abandons the pretense that the history of Western Civilization was generally progressive, with the conditions of life and understanding of the natural world of most people improving over time.

The purpose of this approach is not to disparage the genuine breakthroughs, accomplishments, and forms of "progress" that did originate in "the West." Technologies as diverse and important as the steam engine and antibiotics originated in the West. Major intellectual and ideological movements calling for religious toleration, equality before the law, and feminism all came into being in the West. For better and for worse, the West was also the point of origin of true globalization (starting with the European contact with the Americas, as noted above). It would be as misleading to dismiss the history of Western Civilization as unimportant as it is to claim that only the history of Western Civilization *is* important.

Thus, this textbook attempts to present a balanced account of major events that occurred in the West over approximately the last 10,000 years. "Balance" is in the eye of the reader, however, so the account will not be satisfactory to many. The purpose of this introduction is to make explicit the background and the framework that informed the writing of

the book, and the author chooses to release it as an Open Education Resource in the knowledge that many others will have the opportunity to modify it as they see fit.

Finally, a note on the *kind* of history this textbook covers is in order. For the sake of clarity and manageability, historians distinguish between different areas of historical study: political, intellectual, military, cultural, artistic, social, and so on. Historians have made enormous strides in the last sixty years in addressing various areas that were traditionally neglected, most importantly in considering the histories of the people who were *not* in power, including the common people of various epochs, of women for almost all of history, and of slaves and servants. The old adage that "history is written by the winners" is simply *untrue* - history has left behind mountains of evidence about the lives of the so-called losers, or at least of those who had access to less personal autonomy than did social elites. Those elites did much to author some of the most familiar historical narratives, but those traditional narratives have been under sustained critique for several decades.

This textbook tries to address at least some of those histories, but here it will be found wanting by many. Given the vast breadth of history covered in its chapters, the bulk of the consideration is on "high level" political history, charting a chronological framework of major states, political events, and political changes. There are two reasons for that approach. First, the history of politics lends itself to a history of events linked together by causality: first something happened, and then something else happened because of it. In turn, there is a fundamental coherence and simplicity to textbook narratives of political history (one that infuriates many professional historians, who are trained to identify and study complexity). Political history can thus serve as an accessible starting place for newcomers to the study of history, providing a relatively easy-to-follow chronological framework.

The other, related, reason for the political framing of this textbook is that history has long since declined as a subject central to education from the elementary through high school levels in many parts of the United States. It is no longer possible to assume that anyone who has completed high school already has some idea of major (measured by their impact at the time and since) events of the past. This textbook attempts to use political history as, again, a starting point in considering events, people, movements, and ideas that changed the world at the time and continue to exert an influence in the present.

To be clear, not all of what follows has to do with politics in so many words. Considerable attention is also given to intellectual, economic, and to an extent, religious history. Social and cultural history are covered in less detail, both for reasons of space and the simple fact that the author was trained as an intellectual historian interested in political theory. These,

hopefully, are areas that will be addressed in future revisions, particularly in expanding the considerations of women's history, gender, and the social and cultural history of non-elites in many eras.

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Chapter 1: The Crusades and The High Middle Ages

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of invasions of the Middle East by Europeans in the name of Christianity. They went on, periodically, for centuries. They resulted in a shift in the identity of Latin Christianity, great financial benefits to certain parts of Europe, and many instances of horrific carnage. The Crusades serve as one of the iconic points of transition from the early Middle Ages to the "high" or mature Middle Ages, in which the the localized, barter-based economy of Europe transitioned toward a more dynamic commercial economic system.

The background to the Crusades was the power of a new Islamic empire in the Middle East, that of the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks were fierce fighters, trained by their background as steppe nomads and raiders, who had converted to Islam prior to the eleventh century. They proved even more deadly foes to the Byzantine Empire than had the Arab caliphates, and by late in the eleventh century the Byzantine emperor Alexius called for aid from the Christians of western Europe, despite the ongoing divide between the Latin and Orthodox churches.

In 1095, Pope Urban II responded by giving a sermon in France summoning the knights of Europe to holy war to protect Christians in and near the Holy Land. Urban spoke of the supposed atrocities committed by the Turks, the richness of the lands that European knights might expect to seize, and the righteousness of the cause of aiding fellow Christians. The idea caught on much faster and much more thoroughly than Urban could have possibly expected; knights from all over Europe responded when the news reached them. The idea was so appealing that not only knights, but thousands of commoners responded, forming a "people's crusade" that marched off for Jerusalem, for the most part without weapons, armor, or supplies.

Much of the impulse of the Crusades came from the fact that Urban II offered unlimited penance to the crusaders, meaning that anyone who took part in the crusade would have all of their sins absolved; furthermore, pilgrims were now allowed to be armed. Thus, the Crusades were the first armed Christian pilgrimage, and in fact, the first "official" Christian holy war in the history of the religion. In addition to the promise of salvation, and equally important to many of the knights who flocked to the crusading banner, was the promise of loot (and, again, Urban's speech explicitly promised the crusaders wealth and land). Many of the crusaders were minor

lords or landless knights, men who had few prospects back home but now had the chance to make something of themselves in the name of liberating the Holy Land. Thus, most crusaders combined ambition and greed with genuine Christian piety.

The backbone of the Crusades were the knightly orders: organizations of knights authorized by the church to carry out wars in the name of Christianity. The orders came into being after the First Crusade, originally organized to provide protection to Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. They were made up of “monk-knights” who took monastic vows (of obedience, poverty, and chastity) but spent their time fighting as well as praying. The concept already existed at the start of the crusading period, but the orders grew quickly thanks to their involvement in the invasions. Two orders in particular, the Hospitallers and the Templars, would go on to achieve great wealth and power despite their professed vows of poverty.

The First Four Crusades

The First Crusade (1095 - 1099), which lasted only four years following the initial declaration by Pope Urban, was amazingly successful. The Abbasid Caliphate had long since splintered apart, with rival kingdoms holding power in North Africa and the Middle Ages. The doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims further divided the Muslim Ummah. In addition, the Arab kingdoms battled the Seljuk Turks, who were intent on conquering everything, not just Christian lands. Thus, the Crusaders arrived precisely when the Muslim forces were profoundly divided. By 1099, the Crusaders had captured Jerusalem and much of the Levant, forming a series of Christian territories in the heart of the Holy Land. These were called The Latin Principalities, kingdoms ruled by European knights.

The Latin Principalities at their height. Note how the Seljuk (here spelled "Seljuq") territories almost completely surrounded the principalities.

After their success in taking Jerusalem, the knightly orders became very powerful and very rich. They not only seized loot, but became caravan guards and, ultimately, money-lenders (the Templars became bankers after abandoning the Holy Land when Jerusalem was lost in 1187). Essentially, the major orders came to resemble armed merchant houses as much as monasteries, and there is no question that many of their members did a very poor job of living up to their vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Likewise, the rulers of the Latin Principalities made little effort to win over their Muslim and Jewish subjects, treating them instead as sources of wealth, infidels unworthy of humane treatment.

Subsequent Crusades were much less successful. The problem was that, once they had formed their territories, the westerners had to hold on to them with little but a series of strong

forts up and down the coast. The European population centers were obviously hundreds or thousands of miles away and the local people were mostly Jews and Muslims who detested the cruel invaders.

Attacks on the Latin Principalities resulted in the Second Crusade, which lasted from 1147 - 1149. The Second Crusade consisted of two Crusades that happened simultaneously: some European knights sailed off to the Holy Land, while others fought against the Cordoban Caliphate in the Iberian Peninsula. The Europeans ultimately lost ground in the Middle East but managed to retake Lisbon in Portugal from the Muslim Caliphate there. In fact, the Second Crusade's significance is that crusaders began to wage an almost ceaseless war against the Cordoban Caliphate in Spain - in a sense, Christian Europeans, particularly the inhabitants of the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain, concluded that there were plenty of infidels much closer to home than Jerusalem and its environs. These wars of Christians against Spanish Muslims were called the Spanish "Reconquest" (*Reconquista*), and they lasted until the last Muslim kingdom fell in 1492 CE.

In 1187 an Egyptian Muslim general named Salah-ad-Din (his name is normally anglicized as Saladin) retook Jerusalem after crushing the crusaders at the Battle of Hattin. This prompted the Third Crusade (1189 - 1192), a massive invasion led by the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Frederick Barbarossa), the king of France (Philip II), and the king of England (Richard I - known as "The Lion Heart"). It completely failed, with the English king negotiating a peace deal with Saladin after Frederick died (he drowned trying to cross a river) and Philip returned to France. After this, only a few small territories remained in Christian hands.

Arguably the most disastrous (in terms of failing to achieve its stated goal of controlling the Holy Land) crusade was the Fourth Crusade, lasting from 1199 – 1204. This latest attempt to seize Jerusalem began with a large group of crusaders chartering passage with Venetian sailors, long since accustomed to profiting from crusader traffic. En route, the crusaders and sailors learned of a succession dispute in Constantinople and decided to intervene. The intervention turned into an outright invasion, with the crusaders carrying out a horrendously bloody sack of the ancient city. In the end, the crusaders set up a Latin Christian government that lasted for about fifty years while completely ignoring their original goal of sailing to the Holy Land. The only lasting effect of the Fourth Crusade was the further weakening of Byzantium in the face of Turkish invaders in the future. To emphasize the point: Christian knights from Western Europe set out to attack the Muslim kingdoms of the Middle East but ended up conquering a Christian kingdom, and the last political remnant of the Roman Empire at that, instead.

Many further crusades followed; popes would continue to authorize official large-scale invasions of the Middle East until the end of the thirteenth century, and the efforts of Christian knights in Spain during the Reconquest very much carried on the crusading tradition for centuries. Later crusades were often nothing more than politically-motivated power grabs on the part of popes, launched against a given pope's political opponents (i.e. fellow European Christians who happened to be at odds with a pope). Technically, the last crusade was the Holy League, an army drawn from various kingdoms in Central and Eastern Europe dispatched to fight the Ottoman Empire in 1684. None of the latter crusades succeeded in seizing land in the Middle East, but they did inspire a relentless drive to overthrow and destroy the now centuries-old Muslim kingdom of Spain, as noted above, and they also inspired the idea of the potential "holiness" of warfare itself among Christians.

Consequences of the Crusades

The Crusades had numerous consequences and effects. Three were particularly important. First, the city-states of northern Italy, especially Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, grew rich transporting goods and crusaders back and forth between Europe and the Middle East. As the transporters, the merchants, and the bankers of crusading expeditions, it was northern Italians that derived the greatest financial benefit from the invasions. The Crusades provided so much capital that the northern Italian cities evolved to become the banking center of Europe and the site of the Renaissance starting in the fifteenth century.

Second, the ideology surrounding the Crusades was to inspire European explorers and conquerors for centuries. The most obvious instance of this phenomenon was the Reconquest of Spain, which was explicitly seen through the lens of the crusading ideology at the time. In turn, the Reconquest was completed in 1492, precisely the same year that Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas. With the subsequent invasions of South and Central America by the Spanish, the crusading spirit, of spreading Catholicism and seizing territory at the point of a sword, lived on.

Third, there was a new concern with a particularly intolerant form of religious purity among many Christian Europeans during and after the Crusades. One effect of this new focus was numerous outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence in Europe; many crusaders attacked Jewish communities in Europe while the crusaders were on their way to the Holy Land, and anti-Jewish laws were enacted by many kings and lords inspired by the fervent, intolerant new brand of Christian identity arising from the Crusades. Thus, going forward, European Christianity itself became harsher, more intolerant, and more warlike because of the Crusades.

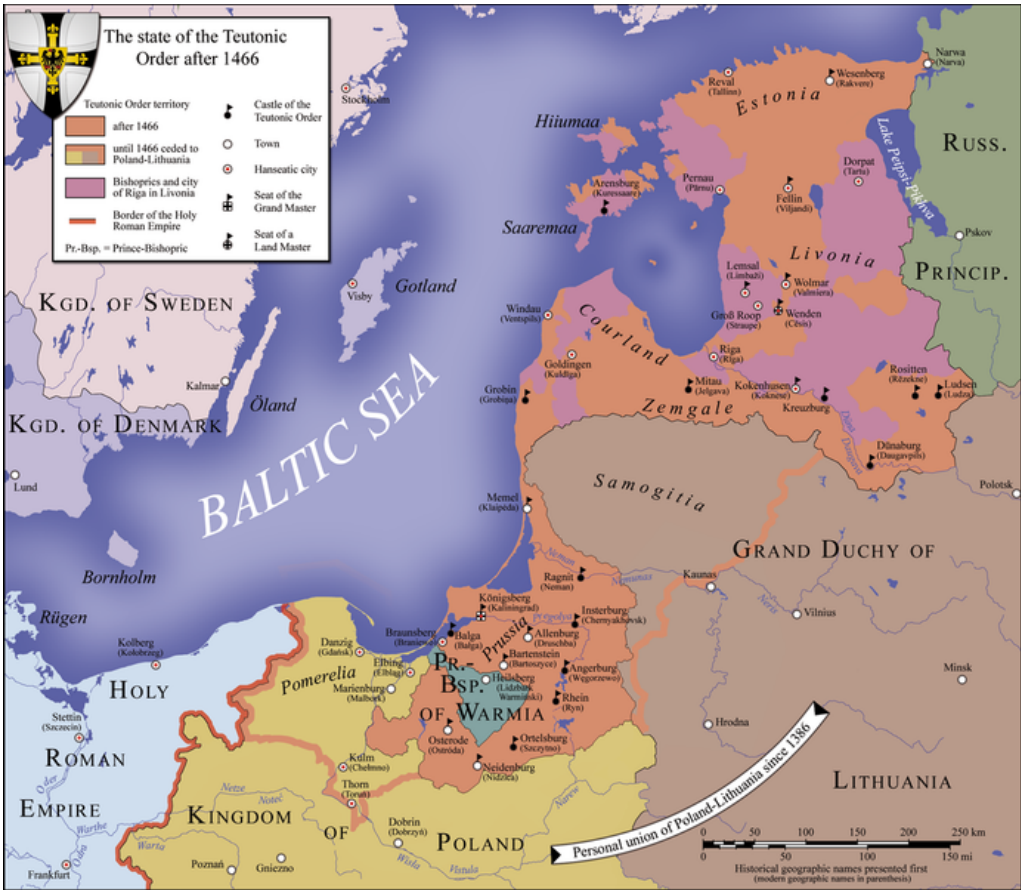
The Northern Crusades and the Teutonic Knights

Often overlooked in considerations of the Crusades were the “Northern Crusades” – invasions of the various Baltic regions of northeastern Europe (i.e. parts of Denmark, northern Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland) between 1171, when the Pope Alexander III authorized a crusade against the heathens of the east Baltic, and the early fifteenth century, when the converted kingdoms and territories of the Baltic began to seize independence from their crusading overlords: the Teutonic Knights.

The Teutonic Knights were a knightly order founded during the Third Crusade at a hospital in the Latin city of Acre. They were closely modeled after the Templars, adopting their “rule” (their code of conduct) and spending most of the twelfth century crusading in the Holy Land. Their focus shifted, however, in the middle of the century when they began leading Crusades against the pagan peoples of the eastern Baltic, including the Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, and various other groups.

The Baltic lands were the last major region of Europe to remain pagan. Neither Latin nor Orthodox missionaries had made significant headway in converting the people of the region, outside of the border region between the lands of the Rus and the Baltic Sea. Thus, the Teutonic Knights could make a very plausible case for their Crusades as analogous to the Spanish Reconquest, and the Teutonic Knights proved very savvy at placing agents in the papal court that worked to maintain papal support for their efforts.

The Teutonic Order ultimately outlasted the other crusading orders by centuries. The Order was very successful at drumming up support from European princes and knights, relying on annual expeditions of visiting warriors to do most of the fighting while the Teutonic Knights themselves literally held down the fort in newly-built castles. They were authorized by various popes not only to conquer and convert, but to rule over the peoples of the east Baltic, and thus by the thirteenth century the Teutonic Knights were in the process of conquering and ruling Prussia, parts of Estonia, and a region of southeastern Finland and present-day Lithuania called Livonia. These kingdoms lasted a remarkably long time; the Teutonic Order ruled Livonia all the way until 1561, when it was finally ousted. Thus, for several centuries, the map of Europe included the strange spectacle of a theocratic state: one ruled directly by monk-knights, with no king, prince, or lord above them.



The theocracy of the Teutonic Knights as of 1466 (marked in orange and purple along the shores of the Baltic). Note that 1466 falls squarely into the Renaissance period - the Northern Crusades began during the Middle Ages but their influence lasted far longer.

The Northern Crusades were, in some ways, as important as the Crusades to the Holy Land in that they were responsible for extinguishing the last remnants of paganism in Europe – it was truly gone by the late fourteenth century in Lithuania, Estonia, and Livonia – and in conquering a large territory that would one day be a core part of Germany itself: Prussia.

The Emergence of the High Middle Ages

The early Middle Ages, from about 500 CE – 800 CE, operated largely on the basis of subsistence agriculture and a barter economy. Economies were almost entirely local; local lords and kings extracted wealth from peasants, but because there was nowhere to sell a surplus of food, peasants tended to grow only as much as they needed to survive, using methods that went unchanged for centuries. There was a limited market for luxury goods even among those

wealthy enough to afford them, and the only sources of reliable minted coins were over a thousand miles away, in Byzantium, Persia, and the Arab kingdoms.

This descent into subsistence had happened for various reasons over the course of the earlier centuries. The fall of the western empire of Rome had strangled the manufacture and trade in high-quality consumer goods (a trade that had been very extensive in Rome). Centuries of banditry, raids, and wars made long-distance travel perilous. In turn, the simple lack of markets meant that there was no incentive to grow more than was needed, and the nobility sought to become more wealthy and powerful not by concerning themselves with agricultural productivity (let alone commerce), but by raiding one another's lands.

Europe had enjoyed brief periods of relative stability earlier, culminating around 800 CE during Charlemagne's rise to power. During the rest of the ninth and tenth centuries, however, the invasions of the Magyars, Saracens, and Vikings had undermined the stability of the fragile political order creating by the Carolingians. Many accounts written at the time, almost exclusively by priests and monks, decried the constant warfare of the period, both that caused by invaders from beyond the European heartland and that between European rulers themselves. Historians now believe that market exchange was growing as a component of the European economy by about 800 CE, but the period between 800 - 1000 was still one of political instability and widespread violence.

Things started to change around the year 1000 CE. The major causes for these changes were twofold: the end of full-scale invasions from outside of the core lands of Europe, and changes in agriculture that seem very simple from a contemporary perspective, but were revolutionary at the time.

The Medieval Agricultural Revolution

In 600 CE, Europe had a population of approximately 14 million. By 1300 it was 74 million. That 500% increase was due to two simple changes: the methods by which agriculture operated and the ebb in large-scale violence brought about by the end of foreign invasions.

The first factor in the dramatic increase in population was the simple cessation of major invasions. With relative social stability, peasants were able to consistently plant and harvest crops and not see them devoured by hungry troops or see their fields trampled. Those invasions stopped because the Vikings went from being raiders to becoming members of settled European kingdoms, the Magyars likewise took over and settled in present-day Hungary, and the Saracens were beaten back by increasingly savvy southern-European kingdoms. Warfare between states in Europe remained nearly constant, and banditry still commonplace in the

countryside, but it appears that the overall levels of violence, at least, did drop off over the course of the eleventh century.

Simultaneously, important changes were underway in agricultural technology. Early medieval farmers had literally scratched away at the soil with light plows, usually drawn by oxen or donkeys. Plows were like those used in ancient Rome: the weight of the plow was carried in a pole that went across the animal's neck. Thus, if the load was too heavy the animal would simply suffocate. In turn, that meant that only relatively soft soils could be farmed, limiting the amount of land that could made arable.

A series of inventions led to dramatic changes. Someone (we have no way of knowing who) developed a new kind of collar for horses and oxen that rested on the shoulders of the animal and thus allowed it to draw much heavier loads, enabling the use of heavier plows. Those plows were called *carruca*: a plow capable of digging deeply into the soil and turning it over, bringing air into the topsoil and refreshing its mineral and nutrient content. Simultaneously, iron horseshoes became increasingly common, which dramatically increased the ability of horses to produce usable muscle power, and iron plowshares proved capable of digging through the soil with greater efficiency.

In addition to the increase in available animal power thanks to those innovations, farmers started to take advantage of new techniques that greatly increased the output of the fields themselves. Up to that point, European farmers tended to employ two-field crop rotation, planting a field while leaving another "fallow" to recover its fertility for the next year. This system was sustainable but limited the amount of crops that could be grown. Starting around 1000 CE, farmers became more systematic about employing three-field crop rotation: working with three linked fields, they would plant one with wheat, one either with legumes (peas, beans, lentils) or barley, and leave one fallow, allowing animals to graze on its weeds and leftover stalks from the last season, with their manure helping to fertilize the soil. After harvest, farmers would rotate: the fallow field would be planted with grain, the grain with legumes, and the legume field left fallow. This process dramatically enriched the soil by returning nutrients to it directly with the legumes or at least allowing it to naturally recover while it lay fallow. Thus, the overall yields of edible crops dramatically increased. Likewise, with the greater variety, the actual nutritional content of food became better.

Finally, starting in earnest in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, windmills and watermills became increasingly common for grinding grains into usable flour. The difference in speed between hand-grinding grain and using a mill was dramatic - it could take most of a day to grind enough flour to bake bread for a family, but a mill could grind fifty pounds of grain in less than a

half hour. While peasants resented having to pay for access to mills (which were generally controlled by landowners, often nobles or the Church), the enormous increase in productivity meant that much more food was available overall. Thus, mills were still cost effective for peasants, and milled flour became the norm across most of Europe by the end of the twelfth century.

The medieval agricultural revolution had tremendous long-term consequences for peasants and, ultimately, for all of European society Thanks to the increase in animal power and the effects of crop rotation, existing fields became far more productive. Whole new areas were opened to cultivation, thanks to the ability of the *carruca* to cut through rocky soil As a result, there was a major expansion between 1000 – 1300 from the middle latitudes of Europe farther north and east, as the farming population took advantage of the new technology (and growing population) to clear and cultivate what had been forest, scrub, or swamp. In turn, the existence of a surplus encouraged lords to convert payment in kind (i.e. taxes and rents paid in actual foodstuffs and livestock) to cash rent. Likewise, the relative stability allowed smaller kingdoms to mint their own coins, and over the course of a century or so (c. 1000 – 1100) much of Europe became a cash economy rather than a barter economy. This gave peasants an added incentive to cultivate as much as possible.

Peasants actually did very well for themselves in these centuries; they were often able to bargain with their lords for stabilized rents, and a fairly prosperous class of landowning peasants emerged that enjoyed traditional rights vis-à-vis the nobility. Thus, the centuries between 1000 CE - 1300 CE were relatively *good* for many European peasants. Later centuries would be much harder for them. As an aside, it is important to bear in mind that the progressive view of history, namely the idea that "things always get better over time" is actually factually *wrong* for much of history, as reflected in the lives of peasants in Middle Ages and early modern period.

Cities and Economic Change

The increase in population tied to the agricultural revolution had another consequence: beyond simply improving life for peasants and increasing family size, it led to the growth of towns and cities. Even though most peasants never left the area they were born in, many did migrate to the nearest towns and cities and try to make a life there; serfs (unfree peasants) who made it to a town and stayed a year and day were even legally liberated from having to return to the farm. Likewise, whole families and even villages migrated in search of new lands to farm, generally speaking to the east and north as noted above.

This period saw the rebirth of urban life. Not since the fall of Rome had most towns and cities consisted of more than just central hubs of local trade with a few thousand inhabitants. By the twelfth century, however, many cities were expanding rapidly, sometimes by as much as six times in the course of a few centuries. Likewise, the leaders of these cities were often merchants who grew rich on trade, rather than traditional landowning lords.

Even as the agricultural revolution laid the foundation for growth and the cities took advantage of it, other factors led to the economic boom of this period. Lords created new roads and repaired Roman ones from 1,000 years earlier, which allowed bulk trade to travel more cheaply and effectively. More important than bulk goods, however, were luxury goods, a trade almost entirely controlled by the Italian cities during this period. Caravans arrived in the Middle East from China and Central Asia and sold goods to Italian merchants waiting for them. From the Black Sea Region and what was left of Byzantium, the Italians then transported these goods back to the west. Silk and spices were worth far more than their weight in gold, and their trade created the foundation for early financial markets and banks.

Trade networks emerged not only linking Italy to the Middle East but southern to northern Europe. In the Champagne region of France annual fairs brought merchants together to trade their goods. German rivers saw the growth of towns and cities on their banks where goods were exchanged. Starting in the twelfth century, the German city of Lubeck became the capital of the Hanseatic League, a group of cities engaged in trade that came together to regulate exchange and maintain monopolies on goods.

The social consequences were dramatic and widespread, yet the status of merchants in European society was troubled. They were resented by the poor (still the vast majority of the population), often despised by traditional land-owning nobles, and frequently condemned by the church. *Usury*, the practice of lending money and charging interest, was classified as a sin by the Church even though the Church itself had to borrow money and pay interest constantly. Likewise, anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews as greedy and ruthless arose from the simple fact that dealing in money and money-lending was one of the only professions Jews were allowed to pursue in most medieval kingdoms and cities. Christian Europeans needed loans (as it happens, loans and banking are essential to a functioning cash economy), but despised the Jews they got those loans from - hence the origins of some of the longest-lasting anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Even though cities did not "fit" in the medieval worldview very well, even the most conservative kings had to recognize the economic strength of the new cities. Just as peasants had been able to negotiate for better treatment, large towns and cities received official town

charters from kings in return for stable taxation. In many cases, cities were practically politically independent, although they generally had to acknowledge the overall authority of the king or local lord.

The growth in trade did not, however, create a real “market economy” in the modern sense. For one thing, skilled trades were closely regulated by craft guilds, which maintained legal monopolies. Monopolies were granted to guilds by kings, lords, or city governments, and anyone practicing a given trade who was not a member of the corresponding guild could be fined, imprisoned, or expelled. Guilds jealously guarded the skills and tools of their trades - everything from goldsmithing to barrel making was controlled by guilds. Guilds existed to ensure that their members produced quality goods, but they also existed to keep out outsiders and to make the "masters" who controlled the guilds wealthy.

Medieval Politics

The feudal system flourished in the High Middle Ages. While it had its origins in the centuries after the collapse of the western Roman Empire, the formal system of vassals pledging loyalty to kings in return for military service (or, increasingly, in return for cash payments in lieu of military service) really came of age in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The lords themselves presided over a rigidly hierarchical social and political system in which one’s vocation was largely determined by birth, and the vocation of the nobility was clearly defined by landowning and making war.

Lords - meaning land-owning nobles - lived in “manors,” a term that denoted not only their actual houses but the lands they owned. All of the peasants on their lands owed them rent, originally in the form of crops but eventually in cash, as well as a certain amount of labor each year. Peasants were subdivided into different categories, including the relatively-well off independent yeomen and freeholders, who owned their own plots of land, down to the serfs, semi-free peasants tied to the land, and then the cottagers, who were the landless peasants worse-off even than serfs. The system of land-ownership and the traditional rights enjoyed by not just lords, but serfs and freeholders who lived under the lords, is referred to as “manorialism,” the rural political and economic system of the High Middle Ages as a whole.

One of the traditional rights, and a vital factor in the lives of peasants, were the commons: lands not officially controlled by anyone that all people had a right to use. The commons provided firewood, grazing land, and some limited trapping of small animals, collectively serving as a vital “safety net” for peasants living on the edge of subsistence. Access

to the commons was not about written laws, but instead the traditional, centuries-old agreements that governed the interactions between different social classes. Eventually, peasants would find their access to the commons curtailed by landowning nobles intent on converting them to cash-producing farms, but for the medieval period itself, the peasants continued to enjoy the right to their use.

The kingdoms of Europe up to this point were barely unified. In many cases, kings were simply the most powerful nobles, men who extracted pledges of loyalty from their subjects but whose actual authority was limited to their personal lands. Likewise, kings in the early Middle Ages were largely itinerant, moving from place to place all year long. They had to make an annual circuit of their kingdoms to ensure that their powerful vassals would stay loyal to them; a vassal ignored for too long could, and generally did, simply stop acknowledging the lordship of his king. Those patterns started to change during the High Middle Ages, and the first two kingdoms to show real signs of centralization were France and England.

In France, a series of kings named Philip (I through IV) ruled from 1060 to 1314, building a strong administrative apparatus complete with royal judges who were directly beholden to the crown. The kings ruled the region around Paris (called the *Île-de-France*, meaning the "island of France"), but their influence went well beyond it as they extended their holdings. Philip IV even managed to seize almost complete control of the French Church, defying papal authority. He also proved incredibly shrewd at creating new taxes and in attacking and seizing the lands and holdings of groups like the French Jewish community and the Knights Templar, both of whom he ransacked (the assault on the Knights Templar started in 1307).

In England, the line descending from William the Conqueror (following his invasion in 1066) was also effective in creating a relatively stable political system. All land was legally the king's, and his nobles received their lands as "fiefs," essentially loans from the crown that had to be renewed for payments on the death of a landholder before it could be inherited. Henry II (r. 1154 – 1189) created a system of royal sheriffs to enforce his will, created circuit courts that traveled around the land hearing cases, and created a grand jury system that allowed people to be tried by their peers.

In 1215, a much less competent king named John signed the Magna Carta ("great charter") with the English nobility that formally acknowledged the feudal privileges of the nobility, towns and clergy. The important effect of the Magna Carta was its principle: even the king had to respect the law. Thereafter English kings began to call the Parliament, a meeting of the Church, nobles, and well-off commoners, in order to get authorization and money for their wars.

Monasticism

One special social category within medieval society deserves added attention: the monks and nuns. Monks and nuns took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience when they left their normal lives and joined (respectively) monasteries and convents. They did not, however, have to spend their time attending to the spiritual needs of laypeople (i.e. people outside of the Church), which was the primary function of priests. Instead, they were to devote themselves to prayer and to useful works, activities that were thought to encourage piety and devotion among the monks and nuns, and which often proved to be extremely profitable to the monasteries and convents themselves.

Monasteries and convents grew to become some of the most important economic institutions in medieval Europe, despite their stated intention of housing people whose full-time job was to pray for the souls of Christians everywhere. Monasteries and convents had to be economically self-sustaining, overseeing both agriculture and crafts on their lands. Over time, activities like overseeing agriculture on monastery lands, brewing beer or making wine, or painstakingly copying the manuscripts of books often became a major focus of life in monasteries and convents. In essence, many monasteries and convents became the most dynamic and commercially successful institutions in their home regions. Monks and nuns encouraged innovative new forms of agriculture on their lands, sold products (including textiles and the above-mentioned beer and wine) at a healthy profit, and despite their vows of poverty, successful monasteries and convents became lavishly decorated and luxurious for their inhabitants.

Simultaneously, one way that medieval elites tried to shore up their chances of avoiding eternal damnation was leaving land and wealth in their wills to monasteries and convents. Generations of European elites granted land, in particular, to monasteries and convents during life or as part of their posthumous legacy. The result was the astonishing statistic that monasteries owned a full 20% of the arable land of Western Europe by the late Middle Ages.

Corruption

Monasteries and convents were not alone in their wealth. The upper ranks of the Church - bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the popes themselves - were almost exclusively drawn from the European nobility. Lower-ranking churchmen were, in turn, commoners, often drawn from the ranks of the same peasants that they ministered to from one of the small parish churches that dotted the landscape. All of the wealth that went into the Church, from an

obligatory tax called the tithe, was siphoned up to the upper reaches of the institutional Church, and many of the high-level priests lived like princes as a result.

Morality in this setting was, predictably, lax. Despite the nominal requirement not to marry, many high-level priests lived openly with concubines and equally openly supported their children, seeing their sons set up as landowners or members of the Church in their own right and marrying off daughters to noble families. Despite the injunction to live simply and avoid luxury, many priests (and monks, and nuns) were greedy and ostentatious; one notorious practice was of bishops or archbishops who controlled and received incomes from many different territories (called "bishoprics") at once but never actually visited them. Another practice was of noblemen literally buying positions in the Church for their sons - teenage boys might find themselves appointed bishops thanks to the financial intervention of their fathers, with Church officials pocketing the bribe. Medieval depictions of hell were full of the image of priests, monks, and nuns all plummeting into the fire to face eternal torment for what a profoundly poor job they had done while alive in living up to the moral demands of their respective vocations. In other words, medieval laypeople were well aware of how corrupt many in the Church actually were.

In addition, while medieval education and literacy was almost entirely confined to the church as an institution, many rural priests were at best semi-literate. All Church services were conducted in Latin, and yet some priests understood Latin only poorly, if at all (it had long since vanished as a vernacular language in Europe). Thus, some of the very caretakers of Christian belief in medieval society often had a very shallow understanding of what that belief was supposed to consist of theologically.

For all of the Middle Ages, however, the fact that the lay public knew that the Church was corrupt and that many of its members were incompetent was of limited practical importance. There was no alternative. Without the Church, without the sacraments only it could offer, without the prayers issued by monks and nuns for the souls of believers, and without its reassurance of a life to come after death, medieval Christians were certain that their eternal souls were damned to hell.

Medieval Learning

Despite the biases of later Renaissance thinkers that the medieval period was nothing but the “dark ages,” bereft of learning and culture, there were very important intellectual achievements in the period of 1000 – 1400 CE. Most of these had to do with foreign influences that were taken and reshaped by European thinkers, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to innovations originating in the Islamic empires to the south and east of Europe.

Likewise, despite the problems of corruption and ignorance among members of the clergy, scholarship *did* continue and even prosper within the church during the late Middle Ages. Numerous priests were not only literate in Latin and deeply knowledgeable about Christian theology, but made major strides in considering, debating, and explaining the nuances of Christian thought. Thus, it is a mistake to consider the medieval church as nothing more than a kind of "scam" - it did provide meaningful guidance and comfort to medieval Christians, and some of its members were exemplary thinkers and major intellectuals.

Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages

A symptom of the growth of intellectual life in the High Middle Ages was the fact that literacy (which, at the time, meant the ability to read, not necessarily to write) finally revived, at least a bit, following the real nadir of literacy that had lasted from the collapse of the western Roman Empire until about 1050. As of 1050, perhaps 1% of the population could read, most of whom were priests, some of the latter only being able to stumble through the Latin liturgy without fully comprehending it. While it is impossible to calculate anything close to the exact literacy rates at any point before the modern era, it is still clear that literacy started to climb following that eleventh-century low point, with many regular merchants and even a few peasants acquiring at least basic reading knowledge by the fourteenth century. The explanation for this growth in literacy is an expansion of educational institutions that had only existed in a few pockets earlier in the Middle Ages.

The two forms of educational institutions available were tutoring offered within monasteries and schools associated with cathedrals. Both were, obviously, part of the Church, and cathedral schools in particular focused on training future priests. Monasteries offered basic education in literacy (in Latin) to laypeople as well as the monks themselves, and even some prosperous farmers achieved a basic degree of literacy as a result. Cathedral schools in cities

offered the same, and they increasingly trained not only local elites, but even the children of artisans and merchants.

While they did offer basic education to laypeople, the official focus of cathedral schools was in training priests. They began to expand after 1000 CE, offering a more focused and rigorous grounding in sacred texts and, to an extent, ancient texts from Rome, to help educate Church leaders and laypeople. The cathedral schools were supposed to be turning out not just spiritual leaders, but skilled bureaucrats, and that required a rigorous form of education that encouraged the study not just of the Bible, but of classics of Latin literature like the speeches of the great Roman politician Cicero and ancient Rome's great epic poem, Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus, those priests-in-training who were lucky enough to attend one of the better cathedral school acquired a strong command of classical Latin and were made aware of the high intellectual standards that had prospered in the glory days of Rome.

Scholasticism

If there was a single event that changed education and scholarship in the late Middle Ages, it was the arrival of the lost works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle was one of the greatest geniuses of the ancient world, producing learned works on philosophy, astronomy, physics, biology, literary criticism and, most importantly for medieval Europe, logic. Some of Aristotle's works had survived in Europe after the fall of Rome, but most of it had vanished. Over the course of the eleventh century, translations of Aristotle's work on formal philosophical logic re-emerged in Europe. Most had been preserved in the Arab world, where Aristotle was considered the single most important pre-Islamic philosopher and was studied with great rigor by Arab scholars. Enterprising scholars - many of them Jewish philosophers who lived in North Africa and Spain - translated Aristotle's work on logic from Arabic into Latin. Later, Greeks from Byzantium came to Europe with the originals in Greek and they, too, translated it into Latin.

The importance of this rediscovery of Aristotle is that his work on logic offered a formal system for evaluating complicated bodies of work like the Christian Bible itself. The inherent problem facing believers of any religion based on a single major text is figuring out what that text fundamentally *means*. To wit: the Christian Bible is full of parables, stories, and accounts of events that are often terrifically difficult to interpret. Even in the four gospels that describe the life of Christ, not all of Christ's actions or sayings are easy to understand, and the gospels sometimes offer conflicting accounts. What did Christ mean when he said "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the

kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24)? What did he mean with "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34)? Not to mention, how was a Christian to make sense of the stern, vengeful God described in the Old Testament and the deity of peace and forgiveness represented by Christ? Most medieval Christians were content to simply accept the sacraments and offer prayers to the saints without worrying about the theological details, but increasingly, educated priests themselves wanted to understand the nuances of their own religion.

Thus, Aristotle's formal approach to logic proved invaluable to the interpreters of the Bible. Armed with his newly-rediscovered system of logical interpretation, key figures within the Church began to analyze the Bible and the works of early Christian thinkers with new energy and focus. The result was scholasticism, which was the major intellectual movement of the High Middle Ages. Scholasticism was the rigorous application of methods of logic, originally developed by Aristotle, to Christian scriptures. And, because the cathedral schools of the late Middle Ages increasingly relied on scholasticism to train and teach new priests, it spread rapidly across all of Europe.

By roughly 1100 CE, a new form of formal education based on scholasticism was the method of instruction in cathedral schools. The instructor would read a short passage from the Bible or an early Christian intellectual leader, then cite various authorities on the meaning of the passage. This was called the lecture, which simply means the "reading." Students would then consider the possible meanings of the passage in a period of meditation. Finally, students might be called on to debate their respective interpretations. In debates, students were expected to cite not only the passage itself but any supporting evidence they could come up with from the vast body of sacred and ancient writings. The result was that, at least at the better cathedral schools, large numbers of newly-minted priests emerged with a strong understanding of Christian thought and an equally strong grasp of rhetoric, debate, and logic.

Some teachers in the scholastic tradition became minor intellectual celebrities, the most celebrated being Peter Abelard (1079 – 1142), a brilliant teacher and debater in Paris who gave extensive lectures exploring both the pros and cons of various important questions that had been considered by the Church fathers. Abelard's major focus was the use and application of reason to faith – he was of the belief that ultimate truth could and should sustain reasoned investigation of its precepts, a stance that got him into considerable trouble with some Church leaders. Abelard's point was that educated Christians *should* challenge their own beliefs and try to understand them; to him, since Christians were safe in the assumption that the Bible would

always be the ultimate source of truth, their own attempts to understand its apparent contradictions and ambiguities only strengthened the Christian religion as a whole.

The new rigor of education and the expansion of cathedral schools, helped in part by the popularity of figures like Abelard, led in turn to the emergence of the first true universities. Initially, they were comparable to craft guilds, with organizations of students and teachers negotiating over the cost of classes and preventing unauthorized lecturers from stealing students. A princely charter was granted to the law students of Bologna in northern Italy in 1158, which marks it as the first recognized university. The most significant medieval university was, however, the Sorbonne of Paris in 1257. It grew out of the cathedral school of Notre Dame, at which Abelard had taught, and it is usually considered the oldest large university in the western world (it is still very much in operation today).

Medieval universities created a number of practices that live on to the present in higher education. They drew up a curriculum, established graduation requirements and exams, and conferred degrees. The robes and distinctive hats of graduation ceremonies are directly descended from the medieval models. Teachers were all members of the clergy, “professing” religion, hence the term "professor." The core disciplines, which date back to Roman times, were divided between the liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic (called the trivium) and what might now be described as a more “technical” set of disciplines: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (the quadrivium) - this division was the earliest version of a curriculum of “arts and sciences.” Finally, the four kinds of doctorates, the PhD (doctor of philosophy), the JD (doctor of jurisprudence, that is to say of law), the ThD (doctor of theology, a priest), and the MD (doctor of medicine), are all derived from medieval degrees.

All students and professors were male, since the assumption was that the whole purpose of studies was to create better church officials; while some women did become outstanding medieval thinkers, they were either exceptional individuals who had been tutored by men or were nuns who had access to the (often excellent) education of the convents.

Conclusion

While it is tempting to characterize European intellectual life before about 1000 CE as part of a "dark age," that was obviously no longer the case by the eleventh century. Educational institutions multiplied, diversified, and expanded, and the quality of education and scholarship increased along with that expansion. While most people - by definition, peasants - remained illiterate and largely ignorant of the world beyond their own villages, there was at least a current

of real intellectual curiosity and rigorous scholarship expanding among the upper classes by the High Middle Ages.

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Latin Principalities - MapMaster
Teutonic Theocracy - S. Bollmann

Chapter 2: The Crises of the Middle Ages

From a very "high level" perspective, the years between about 1000 CE - 1300 CE were relatively good ones for Europe. The medieval agricultural revolution sparked an expansion of population, urbanization, and economics, advances in education and scholarship paid off in higher literacy rates and a more sophisticated intellectual life, and Europe was free of large-scale invasions. Starting in the mid-thirteenth century in Eastern Europe, and spreading to Western Europe in the fourteenth century, however, a series of crises undermined European prosperity, security, and population levels. Historians refer to these events as the "crises of the Middle Ages."

The Mongols

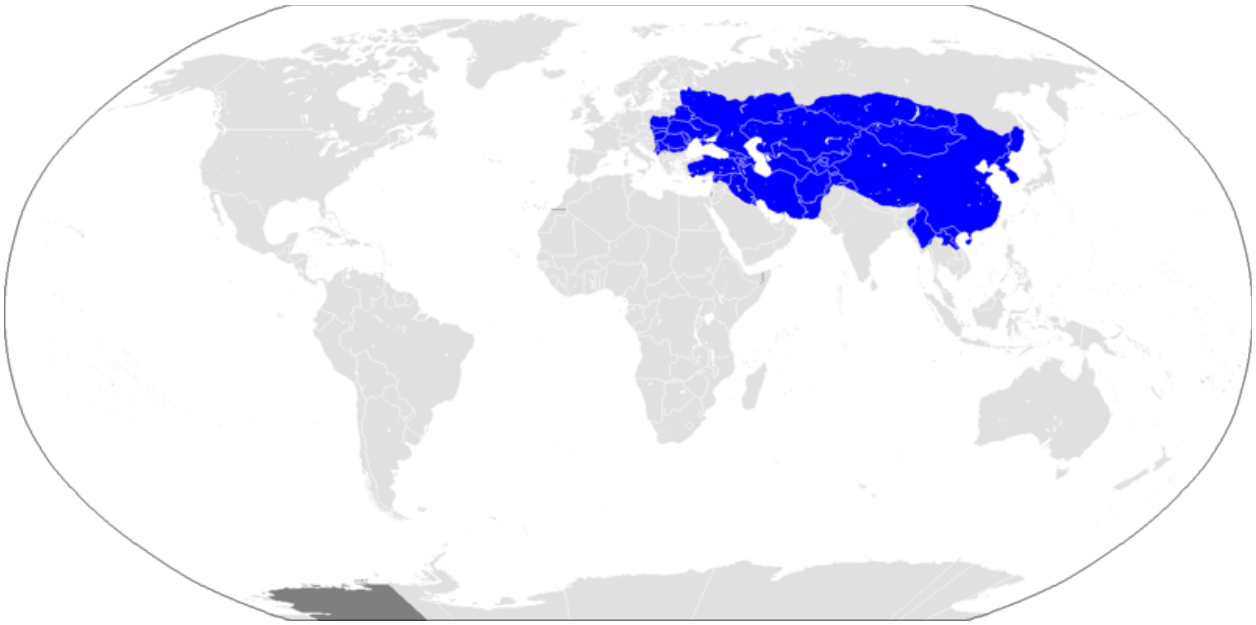
The Mongols are not always incorporated into the narrative of Western Civilization, because despite the enormous breadth of their empire under Genghis (also Anglicized as Chingis) Khan and his descendants, most of the territories held by the Mongols were in Asia. The Mongols, however, are entirely relevant to the history of Western Civilization, both because they devastated the kingdoms of the Middle East at the time and because they ultimately set the stage for the history of early-modern Russia.

The Mongols and the Turks are related peoples from Central Asia going back to prehistory. They were nomads and herders with very strong traditions of horse riding, archery, and warfare. In general, the Turks lived in the western steppes (steppe is the term for the enormous grasslands of Central Asia) and the Mongols in the eastern steppes, with the Turks threatening the civilizations of the Middle East and Eastern Europe and the Mongols threatening China. A specific group of Turks, the Seljuks, had already taken over much of the Middle East by the eleventh century, and over the next two hundred years they deprived the Byzantine Empire of its remaining holdings outside of Constantinople and its immediate surroundings.

Meanwhile, in 1206 the Mongols elected a leader named Temujin (b. 1167) “Khan,” which simply means “warlord.” The election was the culmination of years of battles and struggles between Temujin and various rival clan leaders. By the time he united the Mongols under his rule, he had already overcome numerous setbacks and betrayals, described years

later in a major history commissioned by the Mongol rulers, the *Secret History of the Mongols*. After his election as Khan, he set his sites on the lands beyond Mongolia and eventually became known as Genghis Khan, meaning “Great Khan.” Genghis Khan united both the Mongols and various Turkish clans, then launched the single most successful campaign of empire-building in world history.

Temujin personally oversaw the beginning of the expansion of the “Mongol Horde” across all of Central Asia as far as the borders of Russia and China. Over the following decades, Mongol armies conquered all of Central Asia itself, Persia (in 1221), northern China (in 1234), Russia (in 1241), the Abbasid Caliphate (in 1258), and southern China (in 1279). Importantly, most of these conquests occurred under Temujin’s sons and grandsons (he died in 1227), demonstrating that Mongol military prowess was not dependent on Temujin’s personal genius. Ultimately, the Mongol empires (a series of “Khanates” divided between the sons and grandsons of Temujin) stretched from Hungary to Anatolia and from Siberia to the South China Sea.



The Mongol Empire at its height, under Temujin’s grandson Kublai Khan, was the largest land empire in world history.

Mongol military discipline was extraordinary by pre-modern standards. Starting with Temujin himself, all Mongols were beholden to a code of conduct and laws called the *Yasa* (historians debate whether or not the Yasa was a codified set of laws or just a set of traditions). They were divided into units divisible by ten, from hundred-man companies to

ten-thousand-man armies called *Tumen*. Since clan divisions had always undermined Mongol unity in the past, Temujin deliberately placed members of a given clan in different Tumen to water-down clan loyalty and encourage his warriors to think of themselves as part of something greater than their clans.

Mongols had strict regulations for order of march, guard duty, and maintenance of equipment. All men were expected to serve in the armies, and the Mongols quickly and efficiently plundered the areas they conquered to supply their troops. Mongols trained relentlessly; during the brief periods of peace they took part in great hunts of animals which were then critiqued by their commanders. Each warrior had several horses, all trained to respond to voice commands, and in battle Mongol armies were coordinated by signal flags.

The Mongols also made extensive use of spies and intelligence to gather information about areas they planned to attack, interviewing merchants and travelers before they arrived. They were noteworthy for being willing to change their tactics to suit the needs of a campaign, using siege warfare, terror tactics, even biological warfare (flinging plague-ridden corpses over city walls) as necessary. Once the Mongols had conquered a given territory, they would deport and use soldiers and engineers from the conquered peoples against new targets: Persian siege engineers were used to help the conquest of China, and later, Chinese officials were used to help extract taxes from what was left of Persia.

The Mongol horde often devastated the lands it conquered. Some, like the Central Asian kingdom of Khwarizm, were so devastated that the areas it encompassed never fully recovered. Temujin himself believed that civilization was a threat that might soften his men, so he had whole cities systematically exterminated; in some of their invasions the Mongols practiced a medieval form of what we might justifiably call genocide. Fortunately for the areas conquered by the Mongols, however, under Temujin's sons and grandsons this policy of destruction gave way to one of (often still vicious) economic exploitation and political dominance.

The Mongols in Eastern Europe

In 1236, after years of careful planning, the Mongols attacked Russia. Russia was not a united kingdom - instead, each major city was ruled by a prince, and the princes often fought one another. When the Mongols arrived, the Russian principalities were divided and refused to fight together, making them easy prey for the unified and highly-organized Mongol army. By 1240, all of the major Russian cities had been either destroyed or captured – the city of Vladimir was burned with its population still inside.

In 1241, the Mongols invaded Poland and Hungary simultaneously. Here, too, they triumphed over tens of thousands of European knights and peasant foot-soldiers. Both kingdoms would have been incorporated into the Mongol empire if not for the simple fact that the Great Khan Ogodei (Temujin's third son, who had become Great Khan following Temujin) died, and the European *Tumen* were recalled to the Mongol capital of Karakorum. This event spared what very well could have been a Mongol push into Central Europe itself; the pope at the time called an anti-Mongol crusade and those Europeans who understood the scope of the threat were terrified of the prospect of the Mongols marching further west. As it happens, the Mongols never came back.

The Mongols were finally stopped militarily by the Mamluk Turks, the rulers of Egypt as of the thirteenth century, who held back a Mongol invasion in 1260. By then, the inertia of the Mongol conquests was already slowing down as the great empire was divided between different grandsons of Temujin; the Mamluk victory did not represent the definitive defeat of the Mongol horde as a whole, just a check on Mongol expansion in one corner of the vast Mongol empire. By then, the Mongol khanates had become truly independent from one another, with Mongol rule eventually collapsing over time (a process that happened in just a few decades in some places, but took centuries in others - Russia was not free of Mongol rule until the second half of the fifteenth century).

Mongol rule had mixed consequences for both Asian and European history. There was a beneficial stabilization in the trade that crossed the west – east axis in Eurasia as a continent, as Silk Road traders enjoyed a relatively peaceful and stable route. It also terrified Europeans, who heard travelers' tales of the non-Christian "Tatars" in the east who had crushed all opposition, and in Russia it created a complex political situation in which the native Slavic peoples were forced to pay tribute to Mongol lords. To this day, the period of Mongol rule is often taught in Russia as the period of the "Tatar Yoke," when any hope of progress for Russia was suspended for centuries while the rest of Europe advanced; while that may be a bit of an exaggeration, it still has a kernel of truth.

The Black Death

Historians have now arrived at a consensus that the deadliest epidemic in medieval and early-modern history began in the Mongol khanates and spread west: the Black Death, or simply "the plague," of the fourteenth century. The plague devastated the areas it affected, none more

so than Europe. That devastation was in large part due to the vulnerability of the European population to disease thanks both to poor harvests and the lack of practical medical knowledge.

A series of bad harvests led to periods of famine in Europe starting in the early fourteenth century. Conditions in some regions were so desperate that peasants reportedly resorted to cannibalism on occasion. When harvests were poor, Europeans not only died outright from famine, but those who survived were left even more vulnerable to epidemics because of weakened immune systems. By the time the plague arrived in 1348, generations of people were malnourished and all the more susceptible to infection as a result.

Medicine was completely ineffective in holding the plague in check. Europeans did not understand contagion – they knew that disease spread, but they had absolutely no idea how to prevent that spread. The prevailing medical theory was that disease was spread by clouds of foul-smelling gases called "miasmas," like those produced by stagnant water and decay. Thus, people sincerely believed that if one could avoid the miasmas (which of course never actually existed), they could avoid sickness. Over the centuries, doctors advocated various techniques that were meant to dispel the miasmas by introducing other odors, including leaving piles of onions on the streets of plague-stricken neighborhoods and, starting in the seventeenth century, wearing masks that resembled the heads of birds, with the “beaks” stuffed with flower petals.

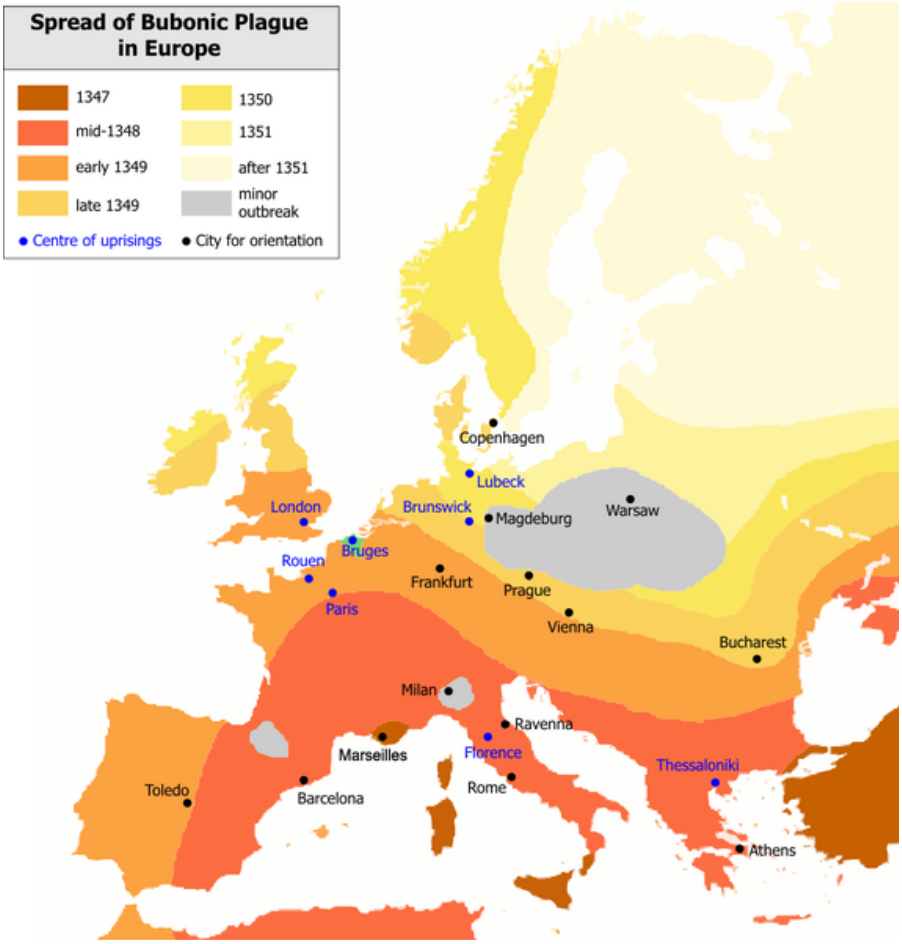
A later depiction of a doctor in the midst of a plague epidemic.

Not surprisingly, given the dearth of medical knowledge, epidemics of all kinds regularly swept across Europe. When harvests failed, the poor often went to the cities in search of some kind of respite, either work or church-based charity. In 1330, for instance, the official population of the northern Italian city of Florence was 100,000, but a full 20,000 were paupers, most of whom had come from the countryside seeking relief. The cities became incubators for epidemics that were even more intense than those that affected the countryside.

Thus, a vulnerable and, in terms of medicine, ignorant population fell victim to the virulence of the Black Death from 1348 to 1351. Historians still debate as to exactly which (identifiable with contemporary medical knowledge) disease or diseases the the Black Death consisted of, but the prevailing theory is that it was bubonic plague. Bubonic plague is transmitted by fleas, both those carried by rats and transmitted to humans, and on fleas exclusive to humans. In the incredibly unsanitary conditions of medieval Europe, there were both rats and fleas everywhere. In turn, many victims of bubonic plague developed the "pneumonic" form of the disease, spread by coughing, which made it both incredibly virulent and lethal (about 90% of those who developed pneumonic plague died).

The theory the Black Death was the bubonic plague runs into the problem that modern outbreaks of bubonic plague do not seem to travel as quickly as did the Black Death, although that almost certainly has much to do with the vastly more effective sanitation and treatment available in the modern era as compared to the medieval setting of the Black Death. One hypothesis is that those with bubonic plague may have caught pneumonia as a secondary infection, and that pneumonia was thus another lethal component of the Black Death. Regardless of whatever disease or combination of diseases the Black Death really was, the effects were devastating.

The plague exploded across Europe starting at the end of the 1340s. All of Southern Europe was affected in 1348; it spread to Central Europe and England by 1349 and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia by 1350. It went on to spread even further and continued to fester until 1351, when it had killed so many people that the survivors had developed a resistance to it. The death toll was astonishing: in the end, the Black Death killed about one-third of the population of Europe in just three years (that is a conservative estimate - some present-day historians have calculated that it was closer to half!) Some cities lost over half of their population; there are even cases of villages where there was only a single survivor. This was an enormous demographic shift in a very short amount of time that had lasting consequences for European society, thanks mostly to the labor shortage that it introduced.



The plague's spread, from south to north, over the course of just a few years. The section marked in grey is incorrectly labeled "minor outbreak": in fact, while data is difficult to come by for that region, it seems clear that the plague hit just as hard there as elsewhere in Europe.

The only somewhat effective response to the Black Death was the implementation of quarantines. The more fast-acting city governments of Europe locked those who had plague symptoms in their homes, often for more than a month, and sometimes whole neighborhoods or districts were placed under quarantine. In the countryside, people refused to travel to larger cities and towns out of fear of infection. Even though quarantines slowed the spread of the plague in some cases, overall they did little but delay it.

More common than practical measures like quarantines, however, was prayer and the search for scapegoats to blame for the devastation. The spiritual reaction to the plague was, among Christian Europeans, to implore God for relief, beg for forgiveness, and to look to outsiders to blame. Building on the murderous anti-Semitism that had begun in earnest during the period of the crusades, Jews were often the victims of this phenomenon. There was a huge

spike in anti-Semitic riots during plague outbreaks, as Jews were blamed for somehow bringing the plague (a frequent accusation was that Jews had poisoned wells), and thousands of Jews were massacred as a result.

Religious movements emerged in response to the plague as well, like the Flagellants: groups of penitent who roamed the countryside, villages, and towns whipping themselves and begging God for forgiveness. Many people sincerely believed that the Black Death was the opening salvo of the End Times, since the history of Europe in the fourteenth century so clearly involved both famine and pestilence - two of the four "horsemen" that were to accompany the End Times according to the Bible (the others, war and death, were ever-present as well).

The Black Death ended in 1351, but the plague returned roughly every twenty years in some form. Some cases were as devastating, at least in limited areas, as the Black Death had been. The plague did not stop entirely until the early eighteenth century - to this day it is not clear what brought an end to large-scale plague outbreaks, although one theory is that a species of brown rat that was not as vulnerable to the plague overwhelmed the older black rats that had infested Europe.

Effects of the Plague's Aftermath

Ironically, the immediate economic effects of the plague after it ended were largely positive for many people. The demographic consequences of the Black Death, namely its enormous death toll, resulted in a labor shortage across all of Europe. The immediate effect was that lords tried to keep their peasants from fleeing the land and to keep wages at the low levels they had been at before the plague hit, sparking various peasant uprisings. Even though those uprisings were generally bloodily put down in the end, the overall trend was that laborers *had* to be paid more; their labor was simply more valuable. In the decades that followed, then, many peasants benefited from higher prices for their labor and their crops.

Another group that benefited was women. For roughly a century after the plague, women had more legal rights in terms of property ownership, the right to participate in commerce, and land ownership, than they had enjoyed before the plague's outbreak. Women were even able to join certain craft guilds for a time, something that was unheard of earlier. The reason for this temporary improvement in the legal and economic status of women was precisely the same as that of peasants: the labor shortage.

The plague also ushered in a cultural change that came about because of the prevalence of death in the fourteenth century. Europeans became so used to death that they often depicted it graphically and quite terribly in art. Paintings, stories, and theatrical

performances emerged having to do with the “Dance of Death,” a depiction of the futility of worldly possessions and status vis-à-vis the inevitability of death. Likewise, graves and mausoleums came to be decorated with statues of grotesque skeletons and writhing bodies. When people were dying, their families and friends were supposed to come and view them, inoculating everyone present against the temptation to enjoy life too much and encouraging them to greater focus on preparing their souls for the afterlife.

The Dance of Death, with this image produced decades after the Black Death had already run its course.

The 100 Years’ War

The plague happened near the beginning of the conflict between England and France remembered as the Hundred Years’ War, which lasted from 1337 – 1453. That conflict was not really one war, but instead consisted of a series of battles and shorter wars between the crowns of England and France interrupted by (sometimes fairly long) periods of peace.

The war began because of simmering resentments and dynastic politics. The root of the problem was that the English kings were descendants of William the Conqueror, the Norman

king who had sailed across the English Channel in 1066 and defeated the Anglo-Saxon king who then ruled England. From that point on, the royal and noble lines of England and France were intertwined, and as marriage between both nobles and royalty often took place across French - English lines, the inheritance of lands and titles in both countries was often a point of contention. The culture of nobility in both countries was so similar that the “English” nobles generally spoke French instead of English in day-to-day life.

This confusion very much extended to the kings themselves. The English royal line (the Plantagenets) often enjoyed pledges of fealty from numerous “French” nobles, and “English” kings often thought of themselves as being as much French as English - King Richard the Lion-Hearted, for instance, spent most of his career in France battling for control of more French territory. Likewise, a large region in southwestern France, Aquitaine, was formally the property of the English royal line, with the awkward caveat that, while a given English king might be sovereign in England, his lordship of Aquitaine technically made him the vassal of whoever the French king happened to be. Thus, hundreds of years after William’s conquest, the royal and noble lines of England and France were often hard to distinguish from one another.

The war began in the aftermath of the death of the French King Charles IV in 1328. The king of England, Edward III, was next in line for succession, but powerful members of the French nobility rejected his claim and instead pledged to give the crown to a French noble of the royal line named Philip VI. When Philip began passing judgments to do with the English-controlled territory of Aquitaine, Edward went to war, sparking the Hundred Years’ War itself.

The war itself consisted of a series of raids and invasions by English forces punctuated by the occasional large battle. English kings and knights kept the war going because it was a way to enrich themselves – they would arrive in France with a moderately-sized force of armed men to loot and pillage. English forces tended to be better organized than were their French counterparts, so even France’s much greater wealth and size did prevent major English victories. The most famous of those victories was the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, in which a smaller English force decimated the elite French cavalry through effective use of longbows, a weapon that could transform an English peasant into more than the equal of a mounted French knight. The aftermath of Agincourt saw most of the French nobility accept the English king, Henry V, as the king of France. Henry V promptly died, however, and the conflict exploded into a series of alliances and counter-alliances between rival factions of English and French nobles (one French territory, Burgundy, even declared its independence from France and became a staunch English ally for a time).

Decades into the war, the French received an unexpected boost in their fortunes thanks to the intervention of one of the future patron saints of France itself: Joan of Arc. Joan was an illiterate peasant girl who walked into the middle of the conflict in 1429, supporting the French Dauphin (heir) Charles VII. Joan reported that she had received a vision from God commanding her to help the French achieve victory against the invading English. French forces rallied around Joan, with Joan herself surviving several battles (her personal tactic consisted of praying for victory from horseback in the midst of battles - her survival was itself a major boost to French morale). Buoyed by the sense that God was on their side, French forces prevailed. Even though she was soon captured and handed over to the English for trial and execution as a witch by the Burgundians, Joan became a martyr to the French cause and, eventually, one of the most significant French nationalist symbols. By 1453, the French forces finally ended the English threat.

An illustration of Joan of Arc from 1505, just under 60 years after the end of the war.

The war had a devastating effect on France. Between the fighting and the plague, its population declined by half. Many French regions suffered economically as luxury trades shut down and whole regions were devastated by the fighting. The French crown introduced new taxes, such as the *Gabelle* (a tax on salt) and the *Taille* (a household tax) that further burdened commoners. On the cultural front, the English monarchy and nobility severed their ties with France and high English culture began to self-consciously reshape itself as distinctly *English* rather than French, leading among other things to the use of the English language as the language of state and the law for the first time.

The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism

Even as the French and English were at each other's throats, the Catholic church fell into a state of disunity, sometimes even chaos. The cause was one of the most peculiar episodes in late medieval European history: the "Babylonian Captivity" of the popes in the fourteenth century. The term originally referred to the Biblical story of the Jews' enslavement by the Babylonian Empire in the sixth century BCE, but the late-medieval Babylonian Captivity refers instead to the period during which the popes no longer lived in their traditional residence in Rome.

The context for this strange event was the state of the Catholic church as of the early fourteenth century. The church was a very diverse, and somewhat diffuse, institution. Due to the simple geographical distance between Rome and the kingdoms of Europe, the popes did not exercise much practical authority over the various national churches, and high-level churchmen in European kingdoms were often more closely associated with their respective kings than with Rome. Likewise, there were many times during the Middle Ages when individual popes were weak and ineffectual and could not even command obedience within the church hierarchy itself.

Over the centuries the papacy struggled, and often failed, to assert its control over the church as an institution and to hold the pretensions of kings in check. Those weaknesses were reflected in a simple fact: there had been a number of times over the centuries in which there were rival popes, generally appointed by compliant church officials who answered to kings. Obviously, having rival popes undermined the central claim of the papacy to complete authority over the Church itself and over Christian doctrine in the process (let alone the occasional insistence by popes that their authority superseded that of kings - see below).

The Babylonian Captivity began when Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull (formal commandment) in 1303 to the effect that all kings had to acknowledge his authority over even their own kingdoms, a challenge he issued in response to the taxes kings levied on church property. Unfortunately for Boniface, he lacked both influence with the monarchs of Europe and the ability to defend himself. Infuriated, the French king, Philip IV, promptly had the pope arrested and thrown in prison; he was released months later but promptly died.

Philip supported the election of a new pope, Clement V, in 1305. Clement was a Frenchman with strong ties to the French nobility. At the time, Rome was a very dangerous city, with rival noble families literally fighting in the streets over various feuds, so Clement moved

himself and the papal office to the French city of Avignon, which was much more peaceful. This created enormous concern among non-French Church officials (most of them Italian), who feared that the French king, then the most powerful ruler in Europe, would have undue influence over the papacy. Their fears seemed confirmed when Clement started appointing new cardinals, a pattern that ultimately saw 113 French cardinals out of the 134 who were appointed in the following decades.

From 1305 to 1378, the popes continued to live and work in Avignon (despite the English invasions of the 100 Years' War). They were not directly controlled by the French king, as their opponents had feared, but they were definitely influenced by French politics. They also came to accept bribes and kickbacks for the appointment of Church officials and shady schemes with Church lands. This situation was soon described as a new Babylonian Captivity by clerics and laypeople alike (especially in Italy), comparing the presence of the papacy in France to the enslavement of the ancient Jews in Babylon.

In 1378, the new pope, Urban VI, announced his intention to move the papacy back to Rome. As rival factions developed within the upper levels of the Church hierarchy, a group of French cardinals elected another, French, pope (Clement VII), and Europe thus was split between two rival popes, both of whom excommunicated each other as a heretic and impostor (the term used at the time was "antipope.") This led to the Great Western Schism, a period from 1378 to 1417 during which there were as many as *three* rival popes vying for power. For almost forty years, the church was a battlefield between both rival popes and their respective followers, and laypeople and monarchs alike were generally able to go about their business with little fear of papal intervention.

The Great Western Schism finally ended after a series of church councils, the Conciliar Movement, succeeded in establishing the authority a single pope in 1417. The movement elected a new pope, Martin V, and made the claim that church councils could and should hold the ultimate authority over papal appointments – this concept was known as the *via consilii*, the existence of a great council with binding powers over the church's leadership. This, however, undermined the very concept of what the papacy *was*: the "Doctrine of the Keys" held that the pope's authority was passed down directly from Christ, and that even if councils could play a role in the practical maintenance of the church, the pope's authority was not based on their approval. Ultimately, a powerful pope, Eugene IV, reconfirmed the absolute power of the papacy in 1431. Thus, this attempt at reform failed in the end, inadvertently setting the stage for more radical criticisms of papal power in the future.

The most important consequence of the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism was simple: the moral and spiritual authority of the church hierarchy was seriously undermined. While no one (yet) envisioned rejecting the authority of the church altogether, many people regarded the church's leadership as just another political institution.

Conclusion:

Some of the trends, patterns, and phenomena that were to take shape during the Renaissance era which began around 1300 began in the midst of the crises of the Middle Ages. France and England emerged from the 100 Years War to become stronger, more centralized states (although it took a civil war in England to get there, described in a subsequent chapter). The labor shortage in the aftermath of the Black Death spurred a period of modest economic growth. And, while European culture may have become more pessimistic and xenophobic as a whole, one region was rising to wealth and prominence precisely because of its long-distance trade and cultural connections: Northern Italy. It was there that the Renaissance began.

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Chapter 3: The Renaissance: Political and Social Setting

The Renaissance was the “rebirth” of culture, art, and learning that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, starting in Italy and spreading to various other parts of western Europe. It produced a number of artists, scientists, and thinkers who are still household names today: Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Donatello, Botticelli, and others. The Renaissance is justly famous for its innovations in art and learning, and even though some of its thinkers were somewhat conceited and off-base in dismissing the prior thousand years or so as being nothing but the “dark ages,” it is still the case that the Renaissance was enormously fruitful in terms of intellectual production and creation.

“The” Renaissance lasted from about 1300 – 1500. It "ended" in the early sixteenth century in that its northern Italian heartland declined in economic importance and the pace of change and progress in the arts and learning slowed, but in a very real sense the Renaissance never truly ended - its innovations and advances had already spread across much of Europe, and even though Italy itself lost its prominence, the patterns that began in Italy continued elsewhere.

The timing of the Renaissance coincided with some of the crises of the Middle Ages described in the last chapter. The overlap in dates is explained by the fact that most of Europe remained resolutely “medieval” during the Renaissance’s heyday in Italy: the ways of life, forms of technology, and political structure of the middle ages did not suddenly change with the flowering of the Renaissance, not least because it took so long for the innovations of the Renaissance to spread beyond Italy. Likewise, in Italy itself, the lives of most people (especially outside of the major cities) were all but identical in 1500 to what they would have been centuries earlier.

Background

Simply put, the background of the Renaissance was the prosperity of northern Italy. Italy did not face a major, ongoing series of wars like the Hundred Years' War in France. It was hit hard by the plague, but no more so than most of the other regions of Europe. One unexpected "benefit" to Italy was actually the Babylonian Captivity and Great Western Schism: because the popes' authority was so limited, the Italian cities found it easy to operate with little papal interference, and powerful Italian families often intervened directly in the election of popes when it suited their interests. Likewise, the other powers of Europe either could not or had no interest in troubling Italy: England and France were at war, the Holy Roman Empire was weak and fragmented, and Spain was not united until the late Renaissance period. In short, the crises of the Middle Ages actually *benefited* Italy, because they were centered elsewhere.

In this relatively stable social and political environment, Italy also enjoyed an advantage over much of the rest of Europe: it was far more urbanized. Because of its location as a crossroads between east and west, Italian cities were larger and more abundant than were cities in other kingdoms and regions of Europe, with the concomitant economic prosperity and sophistication associated with urban life. By 1300, northern Italy boasted twenty-three city-states with populations of 20,000 or more, each of which would have constituted an enormous metropolis by medieval standards.

Italian cities, clustered in the north, represented about 10% of Italy's overall population. While that means that 90% of the population was either rural or lived in small towns, there was still a far greater concentration of urban dwellers in Italy than anywhere else in Europe. Among those cities were also several that boasted populations of over 100,000 by the fifteenth century, including Florence and Milan, which served as centers of banking, trade, and craftsmanship. Italian cities had large numbers of very productive craft guilds and workshops producing luxury goods that were highly desirable all over Europe.

Economics

Italy lay at the center of the incredibly lucrative trade between Europe and the Middle East, a status determined both by its geography and the role Italians had played in transporting goods and people during the crusading period. Along with the trade itself, it was in Italy that key mercantile practices emerged for the first time in Europe. From the Arab world, Italian merchants learned about and ultimately adopted a number of commercial practices and

techniques that helped them (Italians) stay at the forefront of the European economy as a whole.

For example, Italian accountants adopted double-entry bookkeeping (accounts payable and accounts receivable) and Italian merchants invented the *commenda*, a way of spreading out the risk associated with business ventures among several partners - an early form of insurance for expensive and risky business ventures. Italian banks had agents all over Europe, which provided reliable credit and bills of exchange, allowing merchants to travel around the entire Mediterranean region to trade without having to literally cart chests full of coins to pay for new wares.

One other noteworthy innovation first employed in Europe by Italians was the use of Arabic numerals instead of Roman numerals, since the former are so much easier to work with (e.g. imagine trying to do complicated multiplication or division using Roman numerals like "CLXVIII multiplied by XXXVIII," meaning "168 multiplied by 38" in Arabic numerals...it was simply far easier to introduce errors in calculation using the former). Overall, Italian merchants, borrowing from their Arab and Turkish trading partners, pioneered efforts to rationalize and systematize business itself in order to make it more predictable and reliable.

Benefiting from the fragmentation of the church during the era of the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism, Italian bankers also came to charge interest on loans, becoming the first Christians to defy the church's ban on "usury" in an ongoing, regular fashion. The stigma associated with usury remained, but bankers (including the Medici family that came to completely dominate Florentine politics in the fifteenth century) became so wealthy that social and religious stigma alone was not enough to prevent the spread of the practice. This actually led to *more* anti-Semitism in Europe, since the one social role played by Jews that Christians had grudgingly tolerated - money-lending - was increasingly usurped by Christians.

Much of the prosperity of northern Italy was based on the trade ties (not just mercantile practices) Italy maintained with the Middle East, which by the fourteenth century meant both the remains of the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople as well as the Ottoman Turkish empire, the rising power in the east. From the Turks, Italians (especially the great mercantile empire controlled by Venice) bought precious cargo like spices, silks, porcelain, and coffee, in return for European woolens, crafts, and bullion. The Italians were also the go-between linking Asia and Europe, by way of the Middle East.

The Italian city-states were sites of manufacturing as well. Raw wool from England and Spain made its way to Italy to be processed into cloth, and Italian workshops produced luxury goods sought after everywhere else in Europe. Italian luxury goods were superior to those

produced in the rest of Europe, and soon even Italian weapons were better-made. Italian farms were prosperous and, by the Renaissance period, produced a significant and ongoing surplus, feeding the growing cities themselves.

One result of the prosperity generated by Italian mercantile success was the rise of a culture of conspicuous consumption. Both members of the nobility and rich non-nobles spent lavishly to display their wealth and their culture and learning. All of the famous Renaissance thinkers and artists were patronized by the rich, which was how the artists and scholars were able to concentrate on their work. In turn, patrons expected "their" artists to serve as symbols of cultural achievement that reflected well on the patron. The fluorescence of Renaissance art and learning was a consequence of that very specific use of wealth: mercantile and banking riches translated into social and political status through art, architecture, and scholarship.

Political Setting

Even though the western Roman Empire had fallen apart by 476 CE, the great cities of Italy survived in better shape than Roman cities elsewhere in the empire. Likewise, the feudal system had never taken as hold as strongly in Italy – there were lords and vassals, but especially in the cities there was a large and strong independent class of artisans and merchants who balked at subservience before lords, especially lords who did not live in the cities. Thus, by 1200, most Italian cities were politically independent of lords and came to dominate their respective hinterlands, serving as lords to "vassal" towns and villages for miles around.

Instead of kings and vassals, power was in the hands of the *popoli grossi*, literally meaning the "fat people," but here meaning simply the rich, noble and non-noble alike. About 5% of the population in the richest cities were among them. The culture of the *popoli grossi* was rife with flattery and politicking, since so much depended on personal connections. Since noble titles meant less, more depended on one's family reputation. The most important thing to the social elite was *honor*. Any perceived insult had to be met with retaliation, meaning there was a great deal of bloodshed between powerful families - Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo and Juliet* was set in Renaissance Italy, featuring rival elite families locked in a blood feud over honor. There was no such thing as a police force, after all, just the guards of the rich and powerful and, usually, a city guard that answered to the city council. The latter was often controlled by powerful families on those councils, however, so both law enforcement and personal vendettas were generally carried out by private mercenaries.

Another aspect of the identify of the *popoli grossi* was that, despite their penchant for feuds, they required a peaceful political setting on a large scale in order for their commercial interests to prosper. Thus, they were often hesitant to embark on large-scale war in Italy itself. Likewise, the focus on education and culture that translated directly into the creation of Renaissance art and scholarship was tied to the identity of the *popoli grossi* as people of peace: elsewhere in Europe noble identity was still very much associated with war, whereas the *popoli grossi* of Italy wanted to show off both their mastery of arms *and* their mastery of thought (along with their good taste).

Portrait of a young Cosimo de Medici, who would become the de facto *ruler of Florence in the fifteenth century. He is depicted holding a book and wearing a sword: symbols of his learning and his authority.*

The central irony of the prosperity of the Renaissance was that even in northern Italy, the vast majority of the population benefited only indirectly or not at all. While the lot of Italian peasants was not significantly worse than that of peasants elsewhere, poor townsfolk had to endure heavy taxes on basic foodstuffs that made it especially miserable to be poor in one of the richest places in Europe at the time. A significant percentage of the population of cities were "paupers," the indigent and homeless who tried to scrape by as laborers or sought charity from the church. Cities were especially vulnerable to epidemics as well, adding to the misery of urban life for the poor.

The Great City-States of the Renaissance

In the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries, the city-states of northern Italy were aggressive rivals; most of the formerly-independent cities were swallowed up by the most powerful among them. However, as the power of the French monarchy grew in the west and the Ottoman Turks became an active threat in the east, the most powerful cities signed a treaty, the Peace of Lodi, in 1454 which committed each city to the defense of the existing political order. For the next forty years, Italy avoided major conflicts, a period that coincided with the height of the Renaissance.

The great city-states of this period were Milan, Venice, and Florence. Milan was the archetypal despot-controlled city-state, reaching its height under the Visconti family from 1277 – 1447. Milan controlled considerable trade from Italy to the north. Its wealth was dwarfed, however, by that of Venice.

Venice

Venice was ruled by a merchant council headed by an elected official, the Doge. Its Mediterranean empire generated so much wealth that Venice minted more gold currency than did England and France combined – its gold coins (ducats) were always exactly the same weight and purity and were accepted across the Mediterranean as a result. Its government had representation for all of the moneyed classes, but no one represented the more than half of the city's population that consisted of the urban poor.

The source of Venice's prosperity was its control of the spice trade. It is difficult to overstate the value of spices during the middle ages and Renaissance - Europeans had a limitless hunger for spices (note that the theory that spices were desirable because they masked the taste of rotten meat is patently false; medieval and Renaissance-era Europeans did not eat spoiled foods). Unlike other luxury goods that could be produced in Europe itself, spices could only be grown in the tropical and subtropical regions of Asia, meaning their transportation to European markets required voyages of many thousands of miles, vastly driving up costs.

The European terminus of much of that trade was Venice. In about 1300 40% of all ships bearing spices offloaded in Venice, and by 1500 it was up to 60%. The prices commanded by spices ensured that Venetian merchants could achieve incredible wealth. For example, nutmeg (grown in Indonesia, halfway around the world from Italy) was worth a full 60,000% of its original price once it reached Europe. Likewise, spices like pepper, cloves, and cinnamon could only be imported rather than grown in Europe itself, and Venice controlled the

majority of that hugely lucrative trade. Spices were, in so many words, worth far more than their weight in gold.

Based on that wealth, Venice was the first place to create true banks (named after the desks, *banchi*, where people met to exchange or borrow money in Venice). Furthermore, innovations like the letter of credit were necessitated by Venice's remoteness from many of its trade partners; it was too risky to travel with chests full of gold, so Venetian banks were the first to work with letters of credit between branches. A letter of credit could be issued from one bank branch at a certain amount, redeemable only by the account owner. That individual could then travel to any city with a Venetian bank branch and redeem the letter of credit, which could then be spent on trade goods.

In addition, because Venice needed a peaceful trade network for its continuing prosperity, it was the first power in Europe to rely heavily on formal diplomacy in its relations with neighboring states. By the late 1400s practically every royal court in Europe and North Africa had a Venetian ambassador in residence. The overall result was that Venice spearheaded many of the practices and patterns that later spread across northern Italy and, ultimately, to the rest of Europe: the political power of merchants, advanced banking and mercantile practices, and a sophisticated international diplomatic network.

Florence and Rome

Florence was a republic with longstanding traditions of civic governance. Citizens voted on laws and served in official posts for set terms, with powerful families dominating the system. By 1434 the real power was in the hand of the Medici family, who controlled the city government (the *Signoria*) and patronized the arts. Rising from obscurity from a resolutely non-noble background, the Medici eventually became the official bankers to the papacy, acquiring vast wealth as a result. The Medici spent huge sums on the city itself, funding the creation of churches, orphanages, municipal buildings, and the completion of the great dome of the city's cathedral, at the time the largest freestanding dome in Europe. They also patronized most of the most famous Renaissance artists (at the time as well as in the present), including Donatello, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo.

Florence benefited from a strong culture of education, with Florentines priding themselves not just on wealth, but knowledge and refinement. By the fifteenth century there were 8,000 children in both church and civic schools out of a population of 100,000. Florentines boasted that even their laborers could quote the great poet, and native of Florence, Dante Alighieri (author of *The Divine Comedy*). At the height of Medici, and Florentine, power in the

second half of the fifteenth century, Florence was unquestionably the leading city in all of Italy in terms of art and scholarship. That central position diminished by about 1500 as foreign invasions undermined Florentine independence.

The city of Rome, however, remained firmly in papal control despite the decline in independence of the other major Italian cities, having become a major Renaissance city after the end of the Great Western Schism. The popes re-asserted their control of the Papal States in central Italy, in some cases (like those of Julius II, r. 1503 – 1513) personally taking to the battlefield to lead troops against the armies of both foreign invaders and rival Italians. The popes usually proved effective at secular rule, but their spiritual leadership was undermined by their tendency to live like kings rather than priests; the most notorious, Alexander VI (r. 1492 – 1503), sponsored his children (the infamous Borgia family) in their attempts to seize territory all across northern Italy. Thus, even when “good popes” came along occasionally, the overall pattern was that the popes did fairly little to reinforce the spiritual authority they had already lost because of the Great Western Schism

Regardless of their moral failings, the popes restored Rome to importance as a city after it had fallen to a population of fewer than 25,000 during the Babylonian Captivity. Under the so-called "Renaissance popes," the Vatican itself became the gloriously decorated spectacle that it is today. Julius II paid Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and many of the other famous works of Renaissance artists stud the walls and facades of Vatican buildings. In short, popes after the end of the Great Western Schism were often much more focused on behaving like members of the *popoli grossi*, fighting for power and honor and patronizing great works of art and architecture, rather than worrying about the spiritual authority of the church to laypeople.

Print

In general, the Renaissance did not coincide with a great period of technological advances. As with all of pre-modern history, the pace of technological change during the Renaissance period was glacially slow by contemporary standards. There was one momentous exception, however: the proliferation of the movable-type printing press. Not until the invention of the typewriter in the late nineteenth century and the Internet in the late twentieth century would comparable changes to the diffusion of information come about. Print vastly increased the rate at which information could be shared, and in turn, it underwrote the rise in literacy of the

early modern period. It moved the production of text in Europe away from a "scribal" tradition in which educated people hand-copied important texts toward a system of mass-production.

In the centuries leading up to the Renaissance, of course, there had been *some* major technological advances. The agricultural revolution of the high Middle Ages had been brought about by technology (heavier plows, new harnesses, crop rotation, etc.). Likewise, changes in warfare were increasingly tied to military technology: first the introduction of the stirrup, then everything associated with a "gunpowder revolution" that began in earnest in the fifteenth century (described in a subsequent chapter). Print, however, introduced a revolution in *ideas*. By making the distribution of information fast and comparatively cheap, more people had access to that information than ever before. Print was also an enormous leap forward in the long-term view of human technology as a whole, since the scribal tradition had been in place since the creation of writing itself.

The printing press works by coating a three-dimensional impression of an image or text with ink, then pressing that ink onto paper. The concept had existed for centuries, first invented in China and used also in Korea and parts of Central Asia, but there is no evidence that the concept was transmitted from Asia to Europe (it might have, but there is simply no proof either way). In the late 1440s, a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg from the city of Meinz struck on the idea of carving individual letters into small, movable blocks of wood (or casting them in metal) that could be rearranged as necessary to create words. That innovation, known as movable type, made it viable to print not just a single page of text, but to simply rearrange the letters to print subsequent pages. With movable type, an entire book could be printed with clear, readable letters, and at a fraction of the cost of hand-copying.

A modern replica of a printing press of Gutenberg's era.

Gutenberg himself pioneered the European version of the printing process. After developing a working prototype, he created the first true printed book to reach a mass market, namely a copy of the Latin Vulgate (the official version of the Bible used by the Church). Later dubbed the "Gutenberg Bible," it became available for purchase in 1455 and in turn became the world's first "best-seller." One advantage it possessed over hand-written copies of the Bible that quickly became apparent to church officials was that errors in the text were far less likely to be introduced as compared to hand-copying. Likewise, once new presses were built in cities and towns outside of Meinz, it became cheaper to purchase a printed Bible than one written in the scribal tradition.

Printing spread quickly. Within about twenty years there were printing presses in all of the major cities in Western and Southern Europe. Gutenberg personally trained apprentice printers, who became highly sought-after in cities everywhere once the benefits of print became apparent. By 1500, about fifty years after its invention, the printing press had already largely replaced the scribal tradition in book production (there was a notable lengthy delay in its

diffusion to Eastern Europe, especially Russia, however – it took until 1552 for a press to come to Russia). Presses tended to be operate in large cities and smaller independent cities, especially in the Holy Roman Empire. The free cities of the German lands and Italy were thus as likely to host a press as were larger capital cities like Paris and Rome.

Gutenberg would go on to invent printed illustration in 1461, using carved blocks that were sized to fit alongside movable type. Printed illustration became crucial to the diffusion of information because literacy rates remained low overall; even when people could not read, however, they could look at pamphlets and posters (called "broadsides") with illustrations. Mere decades after the invention of the press, cheap printed posters and pamphlets were commonplace in the major cities and towns, often shared and read aloud in public gatherings and taverns. Thus, even the illiterate enjoyed an increased access to information with print.

Printing had various, and enormous, consequences. Information could be disseminated far more quickly than ever before. Whereas with the scribal tradition, readers tended to hold books in reverence, with the reader having to seek out the book, now books could go to readers. In turn, there was a real incentive for all reasonably prosperous people to learn to read because they now had access to meaningful texts at a relatively affordable price. While religious texts dominated early print, both literary works and political commentaries followed. Overall, print led to a revolutionary increase in the sheer volume of all kinds of written material: in the first fifty years after the invention of the press, more books were printed than had been copied in Europe by hand since the fall of Rome.

Not all writing shifted to print, however. A scribal tradition continued in the production of official documents and luxury items. Likewise, personal correspondence and business transactions remained hand-written; the legacy of good penmanship survived well into the twentieth century, in part because it was not until the typewriter was invented in the nineteenth century that printed documents could be produced ad hoc. Nevertheless, by the late fifteenth century, whenever a text could be printed to serve a political purpose or to generate a profit, it almost certainly would be.

There were other, unanticipated, issues that arose because of print. In the past, while the church did its best to crack down on heresies, it was not necessary to impose any kind of formal censorship. No written material could be mass-produced, so the only ideas that spread quickly did so through word of mouth. Print made censorship both much more difficult and much more *important*, since now anyone could print just about anything. As early as the 1460s, print introduced disruptive ideas in the form of the next best-seller to follow the Bible itself, a work that advocated the pursuit of salvation without reference to the church entitled *The*

Imitation of Christ. The Church would eventually (in 1571) introduce an official Index of Prohibited Books, but several works were already banned by the time the Index was created.

While there were other effects of print, one bears particular note: it began the process of standardizing language itself. The long, slow shift from a vast panoply of vernacular dialects across Europe to a set of accepted and official languages was impossible without print. Print necessitated that standardization, so that people in different parts of “France” or “England” were able to read the same works and understand their grammar and their meaning. For the first time, the very concept of proper spelling emerged, and existing ideas about grammar began the process of standardization as well.

Conclusion: Patronage

The most memorable, or at least iconic, effects of the Renaissance were artistic (considered in the next chapter). To understand why the Renaissance brought about such a remarkable explosion of art, it is crucial to grasp the nature of *patronage*. In patronage, a member of the *popoli grossi* would pay an artist in advance for a work of art. That work of art would be displayed publicly - most obviously in the case of architecture with the beautiful churches, orphanages, and municipal buildings that spread across Italy during the Renaissance. In turn, that art would attract political power and influence to the person or family who had paid for it because of the honor associated with funding the best artists and being associated with their work. While there was plenty of bloodshed between powerful Renaissance families, their political competition as often took the form of an ongoing battle over who could commission the best art and then "give" that art to their home city, rather than actual fighting in the streets.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of patronage in action was when Cosimo de Medici, then the leader of the Medici family and its vast banking empire, threw a city-wide party called the Council of Florence in 1439. The Council featured public lectures on Greek philosophy, displays of art, and a huge church council that brought together representatives of both the western Latin Church and the Eastern Orthodox church in a (doomed) attempt to heal the schism that divided Christianity. The Catholic hierarchy also used the occasion to establish the canonical and in a sense “final” version of the Christian Bible itself (in question were which books ought to be included in the Old Testament). The entire affair was paid by Cosimo out of his personal fortune - he even paid for the travel expenses of visiting dignitaries from places as far away as India and Ethiopia. The Council clinched the Medici as *the* family of Florence for the next generation, with Cosimo being described by a contemporary as a “king in all but name.”

Art and learning benefited enormously from the wealth of northern Italy precisely because the wealthy and powerful of northern Italy competed to pay for the best art and the most innovative scholarship - without that form of cultural and political competition, it is doubtful that many of the masterpieces of Renaissance art would have ever been created.

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Cosimo de Medici - Public Domain
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Chapter 4: The Renaissance: Art and Learning

Humanism

The starting point with studying the Renaissance is just learning what the word means: rebirth. But what was being reborn? The answer is the culture and ideas of classical Europe, ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance thinkers and artists very consciously made the claim that they were reviving long-lost traditions from the classical world in areas as diverse as scholarship, poetry, architecture, and sculpture. The feeling among most Renaissance thinkers and artists was that the ancient Greeks and Romans had achieved truly incredible things, things that had not been, and possibly could never be, surpassed. Much of the Renaissance began as an attempt to mimic or copy Greek and Roman art and scholarship (corresponding to one another in classical Latin, for example), but over the decades the more outstanding Renaissance thinkers struck out on new paths of their own - still inspired by the classics, but seeking to be creators in their own right as well.

Of the various themes of Renaissance thought, perhaps the most important was humanism, an ancient intellectual paradigm that emphasized both the beauty and the centrality of humankind in the universe. Humanists held that humankind was inherently rational, beautiful, and noble, rather than debased, wicked, or weak. They sought to celebrate the beauty of the human body in their art, of the human mind and human achievements in their scholarship, and of human society in the elegance of their architectural design. Humanism was, among other things, an optimistic attitude toward artistic and intellectual possibility that cited the achievements of the ancient world as proof that humankind was the crowning achievement of God's creation.

Renaissance humanism was the root of some very modern notions of individuality, along with some specific phenomena such as the idea that education ought to arrive at a well-rounded individual. The goal of education in the Renaissance was to to realize as much of the human potential as possible with a robust education in diverse disciplines. This was a true, meaningful change over medieval forms of learning in that education's major purpose was no longer believed to be the clarification of religious questions or better intellectual support for religious

orthodoxy; the point of education was to create a more competent and well-rounded person instead.

Along with the idea of a well-rounded individual, Renaissance thinkers championed the idea of Civic Humanism: one's moral and ethical standing was tied to devotion to one's city. This was a Greek and Roman concept that the great Renaissance thinker Petrarch championed in particular. Here, the Medici of Florence are the ultimate example: there was a tremendous effort on the part of the rich and powerful to invest in the city in the form of building projects and art. This was tied to the prestige of the family, of course, but it was also a heartfelt dedication to one's home, analogous to the present-day concept of patriotism.

Practically speaking, there was a shift in the practical business of education from medieval scholasticism, which focused on law, medicine, and theology, to disciplines related to business and politics. Renaissance learning was born in the cities of northern Italy because of the wealth of northern Italy. Princes and other elites wanted skilled bureaucrats to staff their merchant empires; they needed literate men with a knowledge of law and mathematics, even if they themselves were not merchants. City governments began educating children (girls and boys alike, at least in certain cities like Florence) directly, along with the role played by private tutors. These schools and tutors emphasized practical education: rhetoric, math, and history. Thus, one of the major effects of the Italian Renaissance was that this new form of education, usually referred to as "humanistic education" spread from Italy to the rest of Europe by the late fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, a broad cross-section of European elites, including nobles, merchants, and priests, were educated in the humanistic tradition.

A "Renaissance man" (note that there *were* important female thinkers as well, but the term "Renaissance man" was used exclusively for men) was a man who cultivated classical virtues, which were not quite the same as Christian ones: understanding, benevolence, compassion, fortitude, judgment, eloquence, and honor, among others. Drawing from the work of thinkers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil, Renaissance thinkers came to support the idea of a virtuous life that was not the same thing as a specifically *Christian* virtuous life. And, importantly, it was possible to become a good person simply through studying the classics – all of the major figures of the Renaissance were Christians, but they insisted that one's moral status could and should be shaped by emulation of the ancient virtues, combined with Christian piety. While the Renaissance case for the debasement of medieval culture was overstated - medieval intellectual life prospered during the High Middle Ages, there was definitely a distinct kind of intellectual courage and optimism that came out of the return to classical models over medieval ones during the Renaissance.

Important Thinkers

The Renaissance is remembered primarily for its great thinkers and artists, with some exceptional individuals (like Leonardo da Vinci) being renowned as both. What Renaissance thinkers had in common was that they embraced the ideals of humanism and used humanism as their inspiration for creating innovative new approaches to philosophy, philology (the study of language), theology, history, and political theory. In other words, reading the classics inspired Renaissance thinkers to emulate the great writers and philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome, creating poetry, philosophy, and theory on par with that of an Aristotle or a Cicero. Some of the most noteworthy included the following.

Dante (1265 - 1321)

Durante degli Alighieri, better remembered as Dante, was a major figure who anticipated the Renaissance rather than being alive during most of it (while there is no "official" start to the Renaissance, the life of Petrarch, described below, lends itself to using 1300 as a convenient date). Experiencing what would later be called a mid-life crisis, Dante turned to poetry to console himself, ultimately producing the greatest written work of the late Middle Ages: *The Divine Comedy*. Written in his own native dialect, the Tuscan of the city of Florence, The Divine Comedy describes Dante's descent into hell, guided by the spirit of the classical Roman poet Virgil. Dante and Virgil emerge on the other side of the earth, with Dante ascending the mountain of purgatory and ultimately entering heaven, where he enters into the divine presence.

Dante's work, which soon became justly famous in Italy and then elsewhere in Europe, presaged some of the essential themes of Renaissance thought. Dante's travels through hell, purgatory, and heaven in the poem are replete with encounters with two categories of people: Italians of Dante's lifetime or the recent past, and both real and mythical figures from ancient Greece and Rome. In other words, Dante was indifferent to the entire period of the Middle Ages, concentrating instead on what he imagined the spiritual fate of the great thinkers and heroes of the classical age would have been (and gleefully relegating Italians he hated to infernal torments). Ultimately, his work became so famous that it established Tuscan as the basis of what would eventually become the language of "Italian" in so many words - all educated people in Italy would eventually come to read the *Comedy* as a matter of course and it came to serve as the founding document of the modern Italian language in the process.

Petrarch (1304 – 1374)

Francesco Petrarca, known as Petrarch in English, was in many ways the founding father of the Renaissance. Like Dante, he was a Florentine (native of the city of Florence) and single-handedly spearheaded the practice of studying and imitating the great writers and thinkers of the past. Petrarch personally rediscovered long-lost works by Cicero, widely considered the greatest writer of ancient Rome during the republican period, and set about training himself to emulate Cicero's rhetorical style. Petrarch wrote to friends and associates in a classical, grammatically spotless Latin (as opposed to the often sloppy and error-ridden Latin of the Middle Ages) and encouraged them to learn to emulate the classics in their writing, thought, and values. He went on to write many works of poetry and prose that were based on the model provided by Cicero and other ancient writers.

Petrarch was responsible for coming up with the very idea of the "Dark Ages" that had separated his own era from the greatness of the classical past. His own poetry and writings became so popular among other educated people that he deserves a great deal of personal credit for sparking the Renaissance itself; following Petrarch, the idea that the classical world might be "reborn" in northern Italy acquired a great deal of popularity and cultural force.

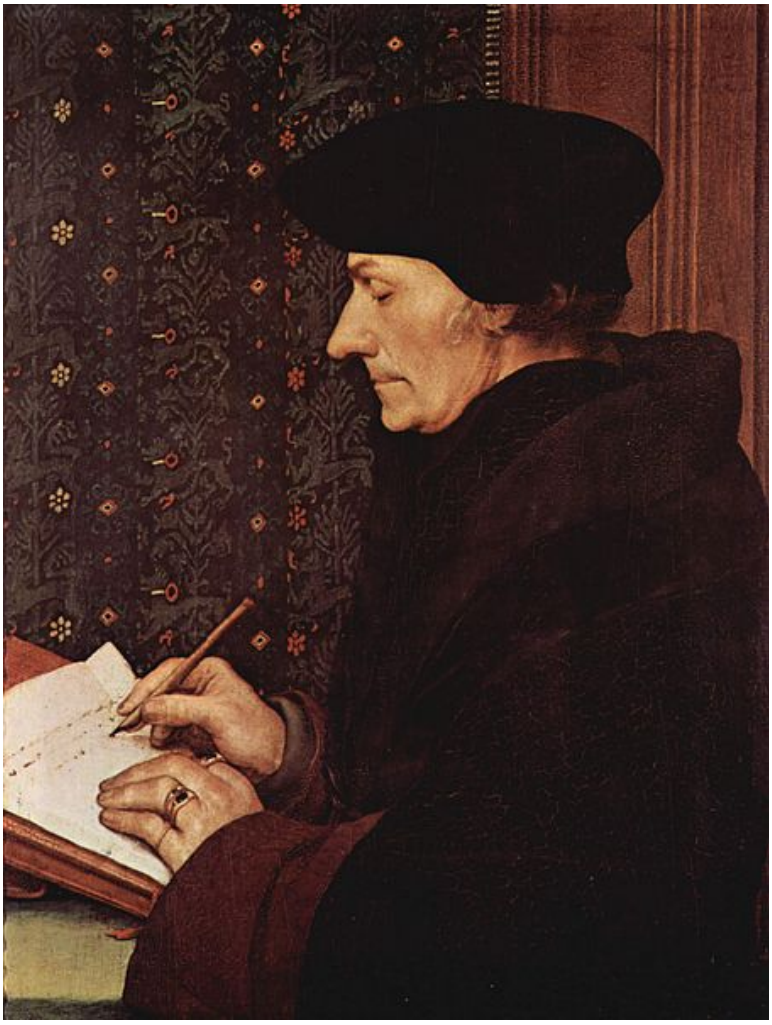
Christine de Pizan (1364 - 1430)

Christine de Pizan was the most famous and important woman thinker and writer of the Renaissance era. Her father, the court astrologer of the French king Charles V, was exceptional in that he felt it important that his daughter receive the same quality of education afforded to elite men at the time. She went on to become a famous poet and writer in her own right, being patronized (i.e. receiving commissions for her writing) by a wide variety of French and Italian nobles. Her best-known work was *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she attacked the then-universal idea that women were naturally unintelligent, sinful, and irrational. Instead, she argued, history provided a vast catalog of women who had been moral, pious, intelligent, and competent, and that it was men's pride and the refusal of men to allow women to be properly educated that held women back. In many ways, the *City of Ladies* was the first truly feminist work in European history, and it is striking that she was supported by, and listened to by, elite men due to her obvious intellectual gifts despite their own deep-seated sexism.

In the illustration above, Christine de Pizan presents a copy of The City of Ladies *to a French noblewoman, Margaret of Burgundy. The illustration itself is in the pre-Renaissance "Gothic" style, without linear perspective, despite its approximate date of 1475. This is one example of the relatively slow spread of Renaissance-inspired artistic innovations.*

Desiderius Erasmus (1466 - 1536)

Erasmus was an astonishingly erudite priest who benefited from both the traditional scholastic education of the late-medieval church and the new humanistic style that emerged from the Renaissance. Of his various talents, one of the most important was his mastery of philology: the history of languages. Erasmus became completely fluent not just in classical and medieval Latin, but in the Greek of the New Testament (i.e. most of the earliest versions of the New Testament of the Bible are written in the vernacular Greek of the first century CE). He also became conversant in Hebrew, which was very uncommon among Christians at the time.



In the above well-known portrait of Erasmus, he is depicted in heavy, fur-lined robes and hat, a necessity even when indoors in Northern Europe for much of the year. Realistic portraiture was another major innovation of the Renaissance period.

Armed with his lingual virtuosity, Erasmus undertook a vast study and re-translation of the New Testament, working from various versions of the Greek originals and correcting the Latin Vulgate that was the most widely used version at the time. In the process, Erasmus corrected the New Testament itself, catching and fixing numerous translation errors (while he did not re-translate the Old Testament from the Hebrew, he did point out errors in it as well).

Erasmus was criticized by some of his superiors within the Church because he was not officially authorized to carry out his studies and translations; nevertheless, he ended up producing an extensively notated re-translation of the New Testament with numerous corrections. Importantly, these corrections were not just a question of grammatical issues, but

of *meaning*. The Christian message that emerged from the “correct” version of the New Testament was a deeply personal philosophy of prayer, devotion, and morality that did not correspond to many of the structures and practices of the Latin Church. He was also an advocate of translations of the Bible into vernacular languages, although he did not produce such a translation himself.

Some of his other works other included *In Praise of Folly*, a satirical attack on corruption within the church, and *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, which de-emphasized the importance of the sacraments. Erasmus used his abundant wit to ridicule sterile medieval-style scholastic scholars, the corruption of “Christian” rulers who were essentially glorified warlords, and even the very idea of witches, which he demonstrated relied on a faulty translation from the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 – 1527)

Machiavelli was a "courtier," a professional politician, ambassador, and official who spent his life in the court of a ruler - in his case, as part of the city government of his native Florence. While in Florence, Machiavelli wrote various works on politics, most notably a consideration of the proper functioning of a republic like Florence itself. Unfortunately for him, Machiavelli was caught up in the whirlwind of power politics at court and ended up being exiled by the Medici.

While in exile, Machiavelli undertook a new work of political theory which he titled *The Prince*. Here, Machiavelli detailed how an effective ruler should behave: training constantly in war, forcing his subjects to fear (but not hate) him, studying the ancient past for role models like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, and never wasting a moment worrying about morality when power was on the line. In the process, Machiavelli created what was arguably the first work of "political science" that abandoned the moralistic approach of how a ruler *should* behave as a good Christian and instead embraced a practical guide to holding power. He dedicated the work to the Medici in hopes that he would be allowed to return from exile (he detested the rural bumpkins he lived among in exile and longed to return to cosmopolitan Florence). Instead, *The Prince* caused a scandal when it came out for completely ignoring the role of God and Christian morality in politics, and Machiavelli died not long after. That being noted, Machiavelli is now remembered as a pioneering political thinker; it is safe to assume that far more rulers have consulted *The Prince* for ideas of how to maintain their power over the years than one of the moralistic tracts that was preferred during Machiavelli's lifetime.

Baldassarre Castiglione (1478 - 1529)

Castiglione was the author of *The Courtier,* published at the end of his life in 1528. Whereas Machiavelli's *The Prince* was a practical guide for rulers, *The Courtier* was a guide to the nobles, wealthy merchants, high-ranking members of the church, and other social elites who served and schemed in the courts of princes: courtiers. The work centered on what was needed to win the prince's favor and to influence him, not just avoiding embarrassment at court. This was tied to the growing sense of what it was to be "civilized" – Italians at the time were renowned across Europe for their refinement, the quality of their dress and jewelry, their wit in conversation, and their good taste. The relatively crude tastes of the nobility of the Middle Ages were "revised" starting in Italy, with Castiglione serving as both a symptom and cause of this shift.

The effective courtier, according to Castiglione, was tasteful, educated, clever, and subtle in his actions and words, a true politician rather than merely a warrior who happened to have inherited some land. Going forward, growing numbers of political elites came to resemble a Castiglione-style courtier instead of a thuggish medieval knight or "man-at-arms." When he died, no less a personage than the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V lamented his loss and paid tribute to his memory.

Art and Artists

Perhaps the most iconic aspect of the Renaissance as a whole is its tremendous artistic achievements - figures like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti are household names in a way that Petrarch is not, despite the fact that Petrarch should be credited for creating the very concept of the Renaissance. The fame of Renaissance art is thanks to the incredible creativity of the great Renaissance artists themselves, who both imitated classical models of art and ultimately forged entirely new artistic paths of their own.

Medieval art (called "Gothic" after one of the barbarian tribes that had conquered the Roman Empire) had been unconcerned with realistic depictions of objects or people. Medieval paintings often presented things from several angles at once to the viewer and had no sense of three-dimensional perspective. Likewise, Gothic architecture tended to be bulky and overwhelming rather than refined and delicate; the great examples of Gothic architecture are undoubtedly the cathedrals built during the Middle Ages, often beautiful and inspiring but a far cry from the symmetrical, airy structures of ancient Greece and Rome.

Another example of Gothic art. The artist, Lorenzo Monaco, painted during the Renaissance period, but the work was created before linear perspective had replaced the "two-dimensional" style of Gothic painting.

In contrast, Renaissance artists studied and copied ancient frescoes and statues in an attempt to learn how to realistically depict people and objects. And, just as Petrarch "invented" the major themes of Renaissance thought by imitating and championing classical humanist thought, a Florentine artist, architect, and engineer named Filippo Brunelleschi "invented" Renaissance art through the imitation of the classical world.

Filippo Brunelleschi (1377 - 1446)

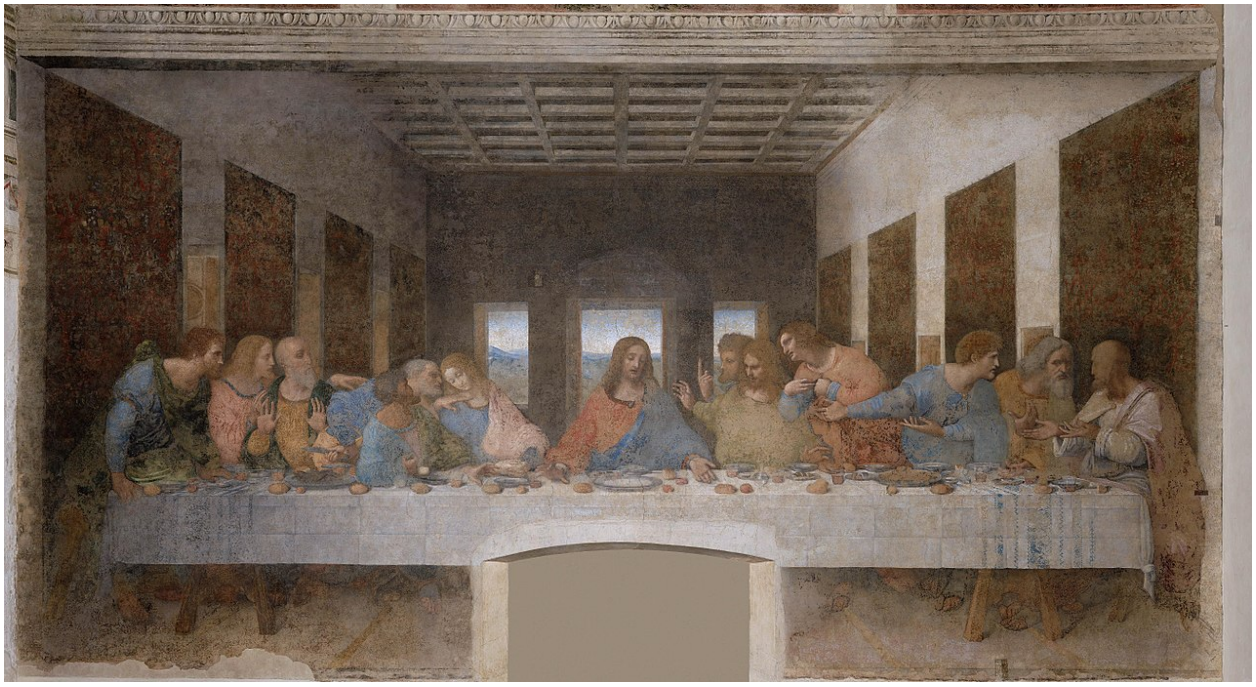
Brunelleschi was an astonishing artistic and engineering genius. He became a prominent client of the Medici, and with their political and financial support he undertook the construction of what would be the largest free-standing domed structure in all of Europe: the dome of the cathedral of Florence. For generations, the cathedral of Florence had stood unfinished, its main tower having been built too large and and too tall for any architect to complete. Literally no one knew how to build a freestanding stone dome on top of a tower over

350 feet high. By studying ancient Roman structures and employing his own incredible intellect, Brunelleschi built the dome in such a way that it held its internal structure together during the construction process. He invented a giant, geared winch to raise huge blocks of sandstone hundreds of feet in the air and was even known to personally ascend the construction to place bricks. The dome was completed in 1413, crowning both his fame as an architect and the Medici's role as the greatest patrons of Renaissance art and architecture at the time.

While the dome is usually considered Brunelleschi's greatest achievement, he was also the inventor of one of the most important artistic concepts in history: linear perspective. He was the first person in the Western world to determine how to draw objects in two dimensions, on a piece of paper or the equivalent, in such a way that they looked realistically three-dimensional (i.e. having depth, as in looking off into the distance and seeing objects that are farther away "look smaller" than those nearby). Unlike other Renaissance innovations that had direct parallels in other cultures, like the study of ancient texts or a recognizably humanistic approach to philosophy, linear perspective does appear to be one truly unprecedented intellectual invention originating in Europe. This innovation spread rapidly and completely revolutionized the visual arts, resulting in far more realistic drawings and paintings.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452 - 1519)

Da Vinci was famous in his own time as both one of the greatest painters of his age and as what we would now call a scientist – at the time, he was sought after for his skill at engineering, overseeing the construction of the naval defenses of Venice and swamp drainage projects in Rome at different points. He was hired by a whole swath of the rich and powerful in Italy and France; in his old age he was the official chief painter and engineer of the French king, living in a private chateau provided for him and receiving admiring visits from the king.



Leonardo Da Vinci's The Last Supper*. Note how the walls and ceiling tiles appear to slant downwards toward a point at the horizon behind Jesus (in the center). That imaginary point - the "vanishing point" - was one of the major artistic breakthroughs associated with linear perspective first discovered by Brunelleschi*.

Leonardo's most important "scientific" work at the time had to do with human anatomy. The church banned the dissection of corpses on religious grounds - the fear was that the soul needed a site to return to during the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the world, so human bodies were not to be tampered with. Da Vinci received special dispensation from the church to perform human dissections on the bodies of executed criminals, however, ostensibly to look for the physical organ that contained the soul. In fact, he was just interested in seeing how the body worked, and his anatomical drawings inspired new generations of physicians to learn how the body functioned based on empirical observation.

One of Da Vinci's anatomical sketches, in this case examining the musculature of the shoulder and neck.

Da Vinci is famous today thanks as much to his diagrams of things like flying machines as for his art. Ironically, while he was well known as a practical engineer at the time, no one had a clue that he was an inventor in the technological sense: he never built physical models of his ideas, and he never published his concepts, so they remained unknown until well after his death.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 - 1564)

Michelangelo was the most famous artist of the Renaissance during his own lifetime, patronized by the city council of Florence (run by the Medici) and the pope alike. He created numerous works, most famously the statue of the David and the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The latter work took him four years of work, during which he argued constantly with the Pope, Julius II, who treated him like an artisan servant rather than the true artistic

genius Michelangelo knew himself to be. Michelangelo was already the most famous artist in Europe thanks to his sculptures. By the time he completed the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he had to be accepted as one of the greatest painters of his age as well, not just the single most famous sculptor of the time.

Michelangelo's David*, completed in 1504 (it took three years to complete). The statue was meant to celebrate an ideal of masculine beauty, inspired by the example of Greek sculpture and by the work of an earlier Renaissance artist, Donatello*.

In the end, a biography of Michelangelo written by a friend helped cement the idea that there was an important distinction between mere artisans and true artists, the latter of whom were temperamental and mercurial but possessed of genius. Thus, the whole idea of the artist as a ingenious social outsider derives in part from Michelangelo's life.

Conclusion

Renaissance art and scholarship was enormously influential. While the process took many decades, both humanist scholarship and education on the one hand and classically-inspired art and architecture on the other spread beyond Italy over the course of the fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, the study of the classics became entrenched as an essential part of elite education itself, joining with (or rendering obsolete) medieval scholastic traditions in schools and universities. The beautiful and realistic styles of sculpture and painting spread as well, completely surpassing Gothic artistic forms, just as Renaissance architecture replaced the Gothic style of building. Along with the political and technological innovations described in the following chapters, Renaissance learning and art helped bring about the definitive end of the Middle Ages.

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Chapter 5: Politics in the Renaissance Era

The Renaissance was originally an Italian phenomenon, due to the concentration of wealth and the relative power of the city-states of northern Italy. Renaissance thought spread, however, thanks to interactions between the kings and nobility of the rest of Europe and the elites of the Italian city-states, especially after a series of wars at the end of the fifteenth and start of the sixteenth centuries saw the larger monarchies of Europe exert direct political control in Italy.

The End of the Italian Renaissance

Detailed below, a new regional power arose in the Middle East and spread to Europe starting in the fourteenth century: the Ottoman Turks. In 1453, the ancient Roman city of Constantinople fell to the Turks, by which time the Turks had already seized control of the entire Balkan region (i.e. the region north of Greece including present-day Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Albania, and Macedonia). The rise in Turkish power in the east spelled trouble for the east-to-west trade routes the Italian cities had benefited from so much since the era of the crusades, and despite deals worked out between Venice and the Ottomans, the profits to be had from the spice and luxury trade diminished (at least for the Italians) over time.

By the mid-fifteenth century, northern manufacturing began to compete with Italian production as well. Particularly in England and the Netherlands, northern European crafts were produced that rivaled Italian products and undermined the demand for the latter. Thus, the relative degree of prosperity in Italy vs. the rest of Europe declined going into the sixteenth century.

The real killing stroke to the Italian Renaissance was the collapse of the balance of power inaugurated by the Peace of Lodi. The threat to Italian independence arose from the growing power of the kingdom of France and of the Holy Roman Empire, already engaged in intermittent warfare to the north. The French king, Charles VIII, decided to seize control of Milan, citing a dubious claim tied up in the web of dynastic marriage, and a Milanese pretender invited in the French to help him seize control of the despotism in 1494. All of the northern Italian city-states were caught in the crossfire of alliances and counter-alliances that ensued; the

Medici were exiled from Florence the same year for offering territory to the French in an attempt to get them to leave Florence alone.

The result was the Italian Wars that ended the Renaissance. The three great powers of the time, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain, jockeyed with one another and with the papacy (which behaved like just another warlike state) to seize Italian territory. Italy became a battleground and, over the next few decades, the independence of the Italian cities was either compromised or completely extinguished. Between 1503 – 1533, one by one, the cities became territories or puppets of one or the other of the great powers, and in the process the Italian countryside was devastated and the financial resources of the cities were drained. In the aftermath of the Italian Wars, only the Papal States of central Italy remained truly politically independent, and the Italian peninsula would not emerge from under the shadow of the greater powers to its north and west until the nineteenth century.

That being noted, the Renaissance did not *really* end. What "ended" with the Italian Wars was Italian financial and commercial power and the glory days of scholarship and artistic production that had gone with it. By the time the Italian Wars started, all of the patterns and innovations first developed in Italy had already spread north and west. In other words, "The Renaissance" was already a European phenomenon by the late fifteenth century, so even the end of Italian independence did not jeopardize the intellectual, commercial, and artistic gains that had originally blossomed in Italy.

The greatest achievement of the Italian Renaissance, despite the higher profile given to Renaissance art, was probably humanistic education. The study of the Classics, a high level of literary sophistication, and a solid grounding in practical commercial knowledge (most obviously mathematics and accounting) were all combined in humanistic education. Royal governments across Europe sought out men with humanistic educations to serve as bureaucrats and officials, even as merchants everywhere adopted Italian mercantile practices for their obvious benefits (e.g. the superiority of Arabic numerals over Roman ones, the crucial importance of accurate bookkeeping, etc.). Thus, while not as glamorous as beautiful paintings or soaring buildings, the practical effects of humanistic education led to its widespread adoption almost everywhere in Europe.

Even the Church, which continued to educate its priests in the older scholastic tradition, welcomed the addition of humanistic forms of education in some ways. Many of the most outstanding scholars in Europe remained members of the Church, benefiting from both their scholastic and their humanistic educational backgrounds. Erasmus, discussed in the last

chapter, was one such priest, as was the most important figure in the Christian Reformation that began in 1517, the German monk Martin Luther.

Likewise, the clear superiority of Italian artists and architects during the heyday of the Renaissance led artists from elsewhere in Europe to flock to Italy. Those artists tended to study under Italian masters, then return to their countries of origin to do their own work. By the middle of the fifteenth century, a "Northern Renaissance" of painters was flourishing in parts of northern Europe, particularly the Low Countries (i.e. the areas that would later become Belgium and the Netherlands). By the sixteenth century, "Renaissance art" was universal in Europe, with artists everywhere benefiting from the use of linear perspective, evocative and realistic portraiture, and the other artistic techniques first developed in Italy.

Politics: The Emergence of Strong States

While the city-states of northern Italy were enjoying the height of their prosperity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, northern and western Europe was divided between a large number of fairly small principalities, church lands, free cities, and weak kingdoms. As described in previous chapters, the medieval system of monarchy was one in which kings were really just the first among nobles; their power was based primarily on the lands they owned through their family dynasty, *not* on the taxes or deference they extracted from other nobles or commoners. In many cases, powerful nobles could field personal armies that were as large as those of the king, especially since armies were almost always a combination of loyal knights (by definition members of the nobility) on horseback, supplemented by peasant levies and mercenaries. Standing armies were almost nonexistent and wars tended to be fairly limited in scale as a result.

During the late medieval and Renaissance periods, however, monarchs began to wield more power and influence. The long-term pattern from about 1350 – 1500 was for the largest monarchies to expand their territory and wealth, which allowed them to fund better armies, which led to more expansion. In the process, smaller states were often absorbed or at least forced to do the bidding of larger ones; this is true of the Italian city-states and formerly independent kingdoms like Burgundy in eastern France.

War and the Gunpowder Revolution

Monarchs had always tied their identity to war. The European monarchies were originally the product of the Germanic conquests at the end of the Roman period, and it was a point of great pride among noble families to be able to trace their family lines back to the warlords of old. Political loyalty was to the king one served, *not* the territory in which one lived. Likewise, territories were won through war or marriage, so they did not necessarily make sense on a map; many kings ruled over a patchwork of different regions that were not necessarily adjacent (i.e. they did not physically abut one another; a present-day example is the fact that Alaska is part of the United States but is not contiguous with the "lower 48" states). Kings not only fought wars to glorify their line and to seize territory, but they had nobles who egged them on since war was also fought for booty. Kings and nobles alike trained in war constantly, organized and fought in tournaments, and were absolute fanatics about hunting. Henry VIII of England spent about two-thirds of his “free” time hunting, for instance.

By about 1450, military technology changed significantly. The basis of this change can be summed up in a single word: gunpowder. First developed in China, but first used militarily in the Middle East, gunpowder arrived in Europe in the fourteenth century. By the fifteenth century it was increasingly widespread in war. Early gunpowder weapons were ridiculously inaccurate and dangerous (to the user) by later standards - they frequently exploded, they were grossly inaccurate, and they took a long time to reload. They were also, however, both lethal and relatively easy to use. It was easy to train men to use gunpowder weapons, and those weapons could easily kill a knight who had spent his entire life training to fight.

Thus, by the later part of the fifteenth century, wars were simply fought differently than they had been in the Middle Ages. There was still the symbolic core of the king and his elite noble knights on horseback, but the actually tactical utility of cavalry charges started to fade. Instead, squares of pikemen (i.e. soldiers who fought with long spears called pikes) supplemented by soldiers using primitive muskets neutralized the effectiveness of knights. In turn, these new units tended to made up of professional soldiers for hire, mercenaries, who fought for pay instead of honor or territory.

Another change in military technology was the emergence of cannons, which completely undermined the efficacy of castles. The ability to build, maintain, and operate cannons required advanced metallurgy and engineering, which in turn required highly skilled technicians (either royal ones or mercenaries for hire). The most famous case of the superiority of cannons to walls was the Turkish siege of Constantinople in 1453, which finally spelled the end of the

Byzantine Empire. The result of the artillery revolution was that fortresses and walls had to be redesigned and rebuilt quite literally from the ground up, a hugely expensive undertaking that forced monarchs and nobles to seek new sources of revenue.

Illustration of a siege during the 100 Years' War. Cannons were introduced by the second half of the war, but note the fact that most of the soldiers remain armed with bows and pikes - the gunpowder "revolution" took the better part of a century.

The Resulting Financial Revolution

To sum up, gunpowder inaugurated a long-term change in how wars were fought. In the process, states found themselves forced to come up with enormous amounts of revenue to cover the costs of guns, mercenaries, and new fortifications. This undertaking was extremely expensive. Even the larger kingdoms like France were constantly in need of additional sources of wealth, leading to new taxes to keep revenue flowing in. Royal governments also turned to officials drawn from the towns and cities, men whose education came to resemble that of the humanist schools and tutors of Italy. Humanism thus arrived from Italy via the staffing of royal offices, ultimately in service of war. It is also worth noting that most of these new royal officials were not of noble birth; they were often from mercantile families.

The practical nature of humanistic education ensured that this new generation of bureaucrats was more efficient and effective than ever before. Likewise, whereas members of the nobility believed that they *owned* their titles and authority, royal officials did not – they were

dependent on their respective kings. Kings could not fire their nobles, but they could fire their officials. Thus, this new breed of educated bureaucrat had to be good at their jobs, as they had no titles to fall back on.

The major effort of the new royal officials (despised by the old nobility as “new men”) was expanding the crown’s reach. They targeted both the nobles and, especially, the church, which was the largest and richest institution in Europe. One iconic example was the fact that the French crown almost completely controlled the French church (despite battles with the papacy over this control), and directly appointed French bishops. In turn, those bishops often served the state as much as they did the church.

The very idea of the right of a government, in this case that of the king, to levy taxes that were applicable to the entire territory under its control dates from this period. Starting in the fourteenth century, the kingdoms of Europe started levying taxes on both commodities, like salt, that were needed by everyone, and on people just for being there (a head tax or a hearth tax). The medieval idea had been that the king was supposed to live on the revenues from his own estates; it was the new monarchies of the Renaissance period that successfully promoted the view that kings had the right to levy taxes across the board.

That being noted, nowhere did kings succeed in simply levying taxes without having to make concessions to their subjects. Different forms of representative bodies from the nobility, the church, and (typically) the cities had the right to approve new taxes; kings were able to secure approval by rewarding loyalty with additional titles, gifts, land, and promises of no future changes to taxation. An institution of this type was the English parliament, which strongly asserted its control over taxation, a role played in France by several different *parlements* distributed across the kingdom.

The New Kingdoms: Spain, England, France, and the Holy Roman Empire

Spain

In the Middle Ages, Spain had been divided between small Christian kingdoms in the north and larger Muslim ones in the south. The Crusades were part of a centuries-long series of wars the Christian Spaniards called the Reconquest, which reached its culmination in the late fifteenth century. Spain became a powerful and united kingdom for the first time when the monarchs of two of the Christian kingdoms were married in 1479: Queen Isabella of Castile and

King Ferdinand of Aragon. During their own lifetimes Aragon and Castile remained independent of one another, though obviously closely allied, but the marriage ensured that Isabella and Ferdinand's daughter Joanna and her son Charles V would go on to rule over Spain as a single, unified kingdom.

The "Catholic monarchs" as they were called were determined to complete the Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula, and in 1492 they succeeded in doing so, capturing Grenada, the last Muslim kingdom. Full of crusading zeal, they immediately set about rooting out "heretics" like the kingdom's large Jewish population, forcing Jews to either convert to Catholicism or leave the kingdom that same year. In 1502 they gave the same ultimatum to the hundreds of thousands of Muslims as well. Most Jews and Muslims chose to go into exile, most to the relatively tolerant and economically prosperous kingdoms of North Africa or the (highly tolerant by the standards of European kingdoms at the time) Ottoman Empire.

The Spanish monarchs also attacked the privileges of their own nobility, in some cases literally destroying the castles of defiant nobles and forcing nobles to come and pay homage at court (in the process neutralizing them as a threat to their authority). After Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World in 1492, recalcitrant nobles were often shipped off as governors of islands thousands of miles away. They also succeeded in reforming the tax system to get access to more revenue, especially by taxing trade, and so by 1500 the Spanish army was the largest and most feared in Europe.

In many ways, the sixteenth century was "the Spanish century," when Spain was the most prosperous and powerful kingdom in Europe, especially after the flow of silver from the Americas began. Spain went from a disunited, war-torn region to a powerful and relatively centralized state in just a few decades.

England

It initially seemed like England would follow a very different path than did Spain; while Spain was becoming stronger and more unified, England plunged into decades of civil war before a strong monarchy emerged. After the end of the Hundred Years' War, English soldiers and knights returned with few prospects at home. They enlisted in the service of rival nobles houses, ultimately fueling a conflict within the royal family between two different branches, the Lancasters and the Yorks. The result was a violent conflict over the crown called the War of the Roses, lasting from 1455 – 1485. Ultimately, a Welsh prince named Henry Tudor who was part of the extended family of Lancasters defeated Richard III of York and claimed the throne as King Henry VII.

Henry VII proved extremely adept at controlling the nobility, in large part through the Star Court, a royal court used to try nobles suspected of betraying him or undermining the king's authority. The Star Court's judges were royal officials appointed by Henry, and it readily and regularly used torture to obtain confessions from the accused. He also seized the lands of rebellious lords and banned private armies that did not ultimately report to him. The result was a streamlined political system under his control and a nobility that remained loyal to him as much out of fear as genuine allegiance. The sixteenth century saw Henry's line, the Tudors, establish an increasingly powerful English state, largely based on a pragmatic alliance between the royal government and the gentry, the landowning class who exercised the lion's share of political power at the local level.

That alliance was shored up by staggering levels of official violence through law enforcement and the brutal suppression of popular uprisings. For example, roughly 20,000 people were executed in England in the 30 years between 1580 and 1610, a rate which if applied to the present-day United States would amount to 46,000 executions a year. Criminals who were not hanged or beheaded were routinely whipped, branded, or mutilated in order to inspire (in so many words from magistrates at the time) "terror" among other potential law-breakers or rebels. Nevertheless, despite that violence and its relatively small population, England did emerge as a powerful and centralized kingdom by the middle of the sixteenth century.

France

France emerged at the same time as the only serious rival to Spain. The French king Charles VII (r. 1422 – 1461), the same king who finally won the 100 Years War for France and expelled the English, created the first French professional army that was directly loyal to the crown. He funded it with the *taille*, the direct tax on both peasants and nobles that had originally been authorized by the nobility and rich merchants of France during the latter part of the Hundred Years' War, and the *gabelle*, the salt tax. Each of these taxes were supposed to be temporary sources of revenue to support the war effort.

Charles's successor Louis XI (r. 1431 – 1483), however, managed to make the new taxes permanent. In other words, he converted what had been an emergency wartime revenue stream into a permanent source of money for the monarchy. He was called "The Spider" for his ability to trap weak nobles and seize their lands under various legal pretenses. He also expelled the Jews of France as heretics, seizing the wealth of Jewish money-lenders in the process, and he even liquidated the old crusading order of the Knights Templar headquartered

in France, seizing *their* funds as well. By the time of his death, the French monarchy was well funded and exercised increasing power over the nobility and towns.

The Holy Roman Empire

In contrast to the growth of relatively centralized states in Spain, England, and France, the German lands of central Europe remained fragmented. The very concept of "Germany" was an abstraction during the Renaissance era. Germany was simply a region, a large part of central Europe in which most, but not all, people spoke various dialects of the German language. It was politically divided between hundreds of independent kingdoms, city-states, church lands, and territories. Its only overarching political identity took the form of that most peculiar of early-modern European states: the Holy Roman Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire dated back to the year 800 CE, when the Frankish king Charlemagne was crowned "Holy Roman Emperor" by the pope. The point of the title was to convey on Charlemagne, and the vast territory he had conquered by the year 800, the historical legacy of the Roman Empire. In other words, it was an attempt to legitimize the greatest king of the time by association with the legacy of the ancient world. Likewise, an explicit link was made between the pope and the emperor as the two most powerful figures in Christendom.

The Empire itself only stayed united for a short time after Charlemagne's life; his three grandsons divided it, and it would never again see genuine political unity. Instead, the title and the concept survived, but the position of emperor became nothing more than a kind of exclamation mark at the end of a longer list of titles carried by whoever the emperor happened to be at a given time. The "real" power of any given emperor was determined not by the imperial title, but by the other lands and titles he had inherited through normal dynastic succession.

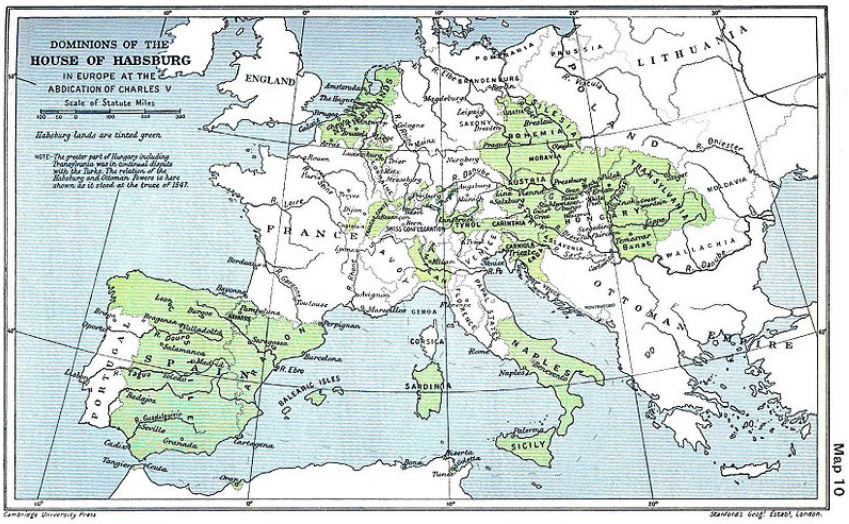
In fact, by the early modern period, emperorship was an elected position. That phenomenon began in 1356 when a pragmatic emperor, Charles IV, issued the Golden Bull, which created a system by which future emperors would be chosen by their most powerful subjects. Seven great rulers scattered across the Empire (four princes and three archbishops) had the right to vote on imperial succession. Starting in 1438, the rich and powerful princely Austrian family of Habsburg was able to secure the title and convert it to a virtually-hereditary one by virtue of the fact that they were consistently able offer the largest bribes to the electors. The Habsburgs were also favored for leadership by the electors because their kingdoms bordered the growing Ottoman Turkish empire, and thus they played a vital role in holding the

Turks in check. From 1438 to 1806, when the empire finally dissolved when it was conquered by Napoleon Bonaparte, there was only ever one non-Habsburg emperor.

The Holy Roman Empire featured a parliament, the Imperial Diet, wherein representatives of the member states, free cities, kingdoms, duchies, and church lands met to petition the emperor and to debate political issues of the day. Practically speaking, the Diet had little impact on the laws of the constituent states of the empire. The emperor had the right to issue decrees, but any member state in the Empire could safely ignore those decrees unless the emperor was willing to back them with his own force (meaning, after 1438, the Habsburgs were willing to mobilize their own armies).

While the Holy Roman Empire was thus a far cry from the increasingly centralized states of Western Europe, the Habsburgs were unquestionably one of the most powerful royal lines, and their own territories stretched from Hungary to the New World by the sixteenth century. The greatest emperor (in terms of the sheer amount of territory he ruled) was Charles V, who ruled from 1519 – 1558. A grandson of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, Charles inherited a gargantuan amount of territory.

The sheer number and variety of Charles V's territorial possessions and related titles strikes almost comical levels from a contemporary perspective. He was emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Spain, grand duke of various territories in Poland and Romania, princely count of southern German lands, duke of others, and even claimed sovereignty over Jerusalem (although of course he did not actually control the Holy Land). Most of these titles were not the result of military conquests - they were places he had inherited from his ancestors. The unofficial Habsburg motto was "Let others wage war. You, happy Austria, marry to prosper." Charles oversaw not only the Habsburg possessions in Europe, but the enormous new (Spanish) empire that had emerged in the New World since the late fifteenth century.



The European possessions of Charles V. Note how his territories were non-contiguous (i.e. they were not geographically united) because they were primarily the results of lands he inherited from various ancestors.

Ironically, Charles himself had a terrible time managing anything, despite his personal intelligence and competence. He proved unable to contain the explosion of the Protestant Reformation, he was engaged in ongoing defensive wars against both France and the Turks, and his territories were so far-flung that he spent most of his life traveling between them. He eventually abdicated in 1558, and recognizing that the Habsburg lands were almost ungovernable, he handed power over to his brother Ferdinand I in Austria (Ferdinand also became Holy Roman Emperor) and his son Philip II in Spain and its possessions. Henceforth, the two branches of the Habsburgs were united in their Catholicism and their enmity with France, but little else.

The Ottoman Empire

The single most powerful state of the early modern period in the region of Western Civilization was not based in Europe, but the Middle East: the Ottoman Empire. As an aside, In many Western Civilization texts, the Ottomans are given a cursory treatment, treated as a kind of faceless threat to European states rather than being described in adequate detail. That is both ironic and unfortunate, since the Ottoman Empire was the very model of a successful early-modern state, politically centralized, economically prosperous, and engaged in not just

warfare but an enormous amount of commerce with other states, very much including the states of Europe.

The Ottoman Empire originated in various small Turkish kingdoms that were left in the wake of the devastating Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. The Turks are an interrelated group of peoples originating in Central Asia; they spoke various related dialects and share a common ethnic origin. Traditionally, along with the Mongol people further to their east, the Turks were among the most fierce steppe nomads, living by herding animals and raiding the "civilized" lands to their south and west.

The Turks began the transition from steppe nomads to the rulers of settled kingdoms by the tenth century, culminating with the Seljuk invasion of the eleventh century. The Turks were driven by two motivations: the tradition of warfare against non-Muslims, and the straightforward interest in looting defeated enemies. They made frequent war against Byzantium, the Arab Muslims states, and, as often, against each other. While organized initially along tribal and clan lines, they took pains to imitate the more settled Islamic empires that had come before them by practicing Islamic (*shariah*) law and sponsoring Islamic scholarship. In the early fourteenth century, a Seljuk lord named Osman captured a significant chunk of territory from the Byzantines in Anatolia, and he founded a dynasty named after his clan, anglicized to "Ottoman."

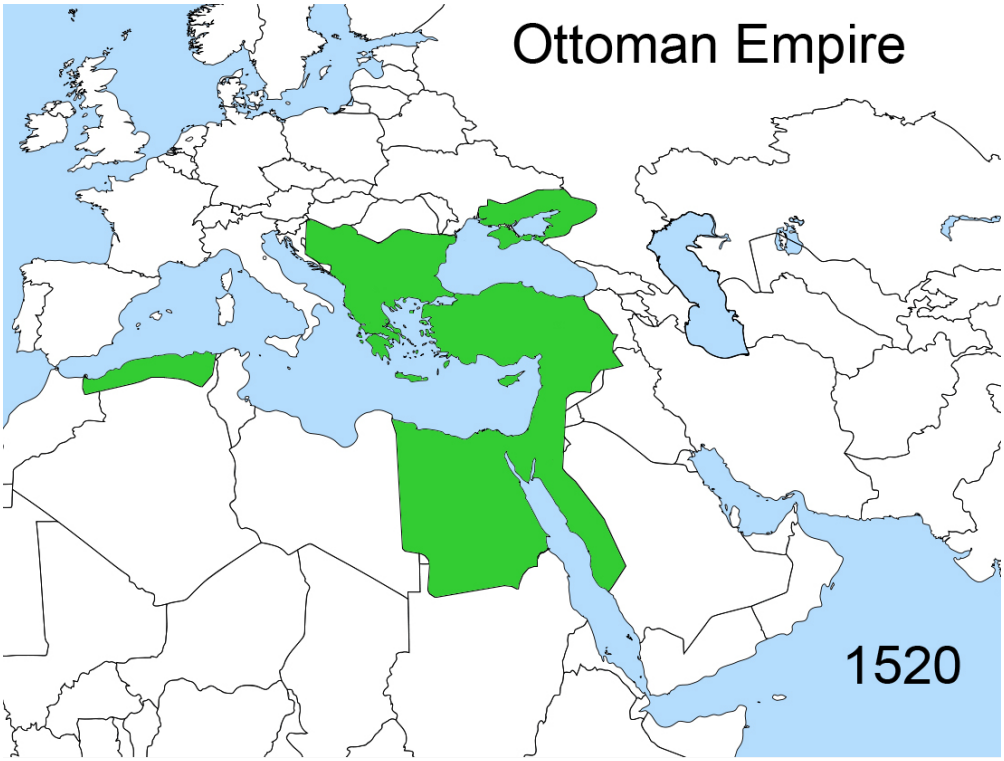
The Ottomans went on to conquer vast territories, including both the lands of the earlier Caliphates and, for the first time, parts of Europe that had never before been held by Islamic rulers, including the islands of the eastern Mediterranean, Greece, and the Balkans. In 1453, the Ottoman Sultan (king) Mehmet II succeeded in conquering Constantinople and, with it, the remnants of Byzantium itself. He moved the capital of his empire to Constantinople and restored it to its former glory. By his death in 1481, it was once again one of the great cities of Europe, and by 1600 its population had reached 700,000, making it the largest city in Europe or the Middle East. The capture of Constantinople inaugurated a new phase of Ottoman history, one in which the Ottomans saw themselves as the inheritors not only of the earlier Islamic states, but of the Roman Empire as well.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, relying on a newly-constructed navy, the Ottomans first crippled the Venetian commercial empire and then conquered various islands in the Mediterranean and territories in North Africa. They conquered Egypt in 1517 when the Ottomans defeated a rival Turkic empire, the Mamluks. The Ottomans were the first major empire to take full advantage of the gunpowder revolution of the fifteenth century: their armies excelled at using muskets and field guns at a time when most European armies still relied on

pikes and even bows. Ottoman armies were well-trained and well-provisioned, and they consistently bested European armies in open battle.

Also in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans conquered the western coast of the Arabian peninsula, and with it the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Through a somewhat questionable story about a survivor of the Mongol attacks and his descendants, the Ottoman Sultans claimed the title of Caliph, or spiritual head of the entire Sunni Muslim world. Thus, by the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottomans not only ruled a vast empire, they were the acknowledged spiritual leaders of the majority of Muslims in the world.

The Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520 – 1566) carried out a stunning series of expansions and conquests during the sixteenth century. His armies occupied the Balkans, then Hungary, and ultimately laid siege to Vienna in 1529, something that would have been unthinkable a century earlier. By his death in 1566, the Ottoman Empire was one of the largest in the world, exceeding the territory that had been held by Byzantium even at its height.



The Ottoman Empire at the start of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent.

Even though there was unquestionably a religious component to Ottoman conquests, the empire itself was comparatively tolerant, something that helps to explain its longevity. Regional governors were dismissed if they were so heavy-handed or intolerant that their subjects rose up

in rebellion. Non-Muslims were officially tolerated as *dhimmis*, protected peoples, who had to pay a special tax but were not compelled to convert to Islam. Both the Christian patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the head of the Jewish congregation of Constantinople (as well as the Armenian Christian patriarch) were official members of the Sultan's court, with each religious leader carrying both the privilege and the responsibility of representing their respective religious communities to the Ottoman government. They oversaw their own distinct educational systems and were responsible for tax collection among their communities, referred to as *millets*. To be clear, non-Muslims were held in a socially and legally secondary position within Ottoman society, but they still enjoyed vastly better status and treatment than did religious minorities in Christian kingdoms in Europe at the time.

Another great strength for the Ottoman state was its use of soldiers and officials who were officially the slaves of the Sultan. The very core of the Ottoman armies, after the conquest of Christian lands formerly held by Byzantium, was the *Janissaries*, Christians who were taken as slaves as young adolescents and trained in both war and administration back in Istanbul, after being converted to Islam. These men were the most powerful individuals in the empire, yet were technically the slaves of the Sultan himself. Their children were free, and at least during the height of Ottoman power through the seventeenth century, their children did not inherit Janissary status. This ensured that people of importance in the system were valued for competence instead of just inheritance. The Ottomans developed an enormous and highly organized bureaucracy well before the "absolutist" monarchs of Europe tried to do the same. By the sixteenth century the bureaucracy was divided between the highest officers, recruited from the Christian slave system, and the middle ranks, consisting of free Muslims.

The height of Ottoman power was the late sixteenth century; their chronological trajectory in that sense matches Spain's, which enjoyed its real flowering at the same time after a century of plundering the New World. While the Ottoman Empire stopped expanding by the end of the sixteenth century, it remained one of the most powerful states in the entire region of the Mediterranean for centuries to come.

Conclusion

All of the large-scale patterns described above took a long time to develop; it was not as if there were small medieval kingdoms one year and major, centralized states the next. Likewise, many historians totally reject the idea of the gunpowder "revolution" because it took well over a century from the fifteenth well into the sixteenth centuries to really come to fruition.

Instead, what is evident in hindsight is that centralized states with legal control and the right to raise taxes over their entire territories began in earnest during this period, introducing new legal and political patterns that would only expand in the centuries that followed. Likewise, while gunpowder may have taken a long time to fully transform warfare and state finances, there can be no question that it did so in the long run.

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Chapter 6: European Exploration and Conquest

Europe was not a particularly important place, in the context of global empires, economics, or cultural influence during the medieval period. While it invaded the Middle East during the crusades and the European states themselves warred against one another almost constantly, on balance Europe was quite weak and poor compared to other regions farther east. China and India are both outstanding examples of regions that produced far greater wealth, had far larger populations, and were far more militarily powerful than any European kingdom was; in the case of China under the Ming dynasty of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Chinese Empire was probably more powerful than all of Europe put together. Likewise, China's cultural influence on its neighbors was profound.

Nevertheless, the long expansion of European power from Europe itself to the rest of the world began in the fifteenth century. One of the great world-historical conundrums is why European states expanded so rapidly and aggressively, while other powers like that of China, the Ottoman Empire, or the Indian kingdoms did not. Why was it *Europe* that took over the Americas (and, much later, much of the rest of the world) rather than Persia, the Ottoman Empire, India, or China?

Ironically, one of the most likely answers to that question is that it was Europe's relative poverty as compared to the states of the Middle East and Asia that led Europeans to seek out new sources of wealth. Whereas the intra-Asian trade routes linking China, Korea, Japan, the islands of the western Pacific, Southeast Asia, and India ensured that Asian states enjoyed access to wealth and luxury goods, Europeans had to rely on the hugely expensive long-distance trade between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe to access goods like spices and porcelain that Europeans desperately wanted (so we can conclude based on the prices elite Europeans were willing to pay for them) but could not produce themselves.

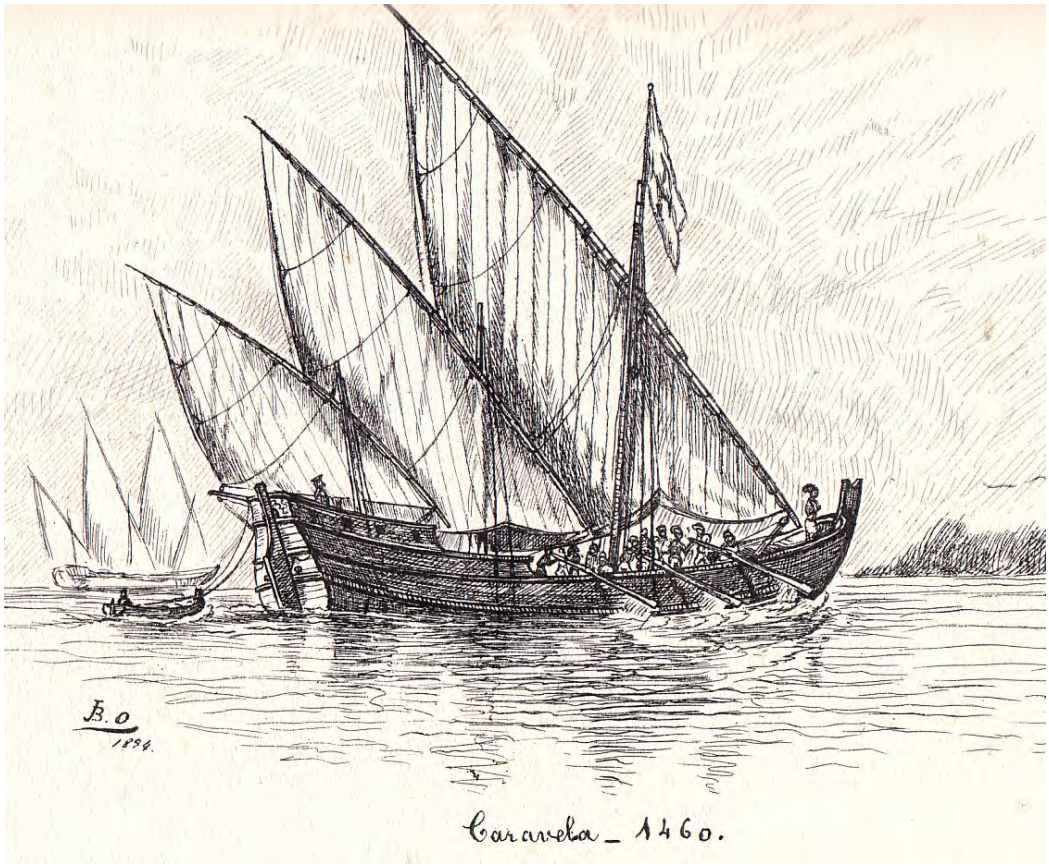
The demand for trade with the east was limitless in European society. Luxury goods from south and east Asia were always among the most sought-after commodities in Europe, stretching all the way back to Roman times. Spices were worth far more than their weight in gold, and Chinese goods like porcelain and silk were also highly prized. Enterprising merchants who were able to position themselves somewhere along the Indian Ocean trade routes or the famous Silk Road between Europe and China stood to make a fortune, but the distances

covered were so vast that it was very difficult and perilous to take part in mercantile ventures. Thus, Isabella of Spain was not alone in funding explorers who sought to reach the east via easier routes when she hired Columbus.

The situation became even more difficult for Europeans thanks to the rise of the Ottoman Empire, as well. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, the traditional trade routes to Asia were disrupted, particularly as the Turks started taking over the Venetian maritime empire. Likewise, Europeans had long traded with Muslim merchants in North Africa for gold, ivory, and spices, and they longed to cut out the middlemen and get to the sources farther south. Some of this was doubtless born of anti-Muslim prejudice, but there was also the simple fact that the Ottomans now directly controlled a major link in the East - West trade axis, deriving profits that Europeans desired for their own.

In addition, the crusading tradition, especially that inspired by the Reconquest of Spain and Portugal, served as an inspiration for European explorers. The Reconquest was only completed in 1492, the same year that Columbus sailed in search of a western route to Asia, and many of the Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) who invaded South and Central America afterwards had acquired their military experience from what they considered to be the holy wars against the Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula. That crusading ideology was easily adapted for the purposes of conquering vast American territories and forcibly converting the Native American inhabitants to Christianity.

There were thus economic and cultural reasons that Europeans *wanted* to reach African and Asian commodities and wealth. They were *able* to access that wealth thanks to technological advances. Until about 1400, Europeans had no ships capable of sailing across an entire ocean (the Viking longboats of the Middle Ages were an exception, but they were no longer in use by the Renaissance era), and the European understanding of geography and navigation was extremely primitive. From about 1420 on, however, maritime technology improved dramatically and it became feasible to launch voyages that could cross the entire Atlantic Ocean with a reasonable degree of certainty that they would succeed. The key here was the invention of the caravel, a new kind of ship that was able to sail both with the wind and against lateral winds; as long as the wind was not blowing in the opposite direction one wanted to travel in, it was possible to keep moving in the right direction. Reasonably effective compasses and a device to measure latitude called the astrolabe came into European hands from the Middle East around 1400 as well. Thus, by 1400 Europeans had both a number of reasons to want to explore and for the first time had the technological means to do so.



Nineteenth-century drawing of a Portuguese caravel, based on the designs used during the early Portuguese expeditions of the fifteenth century.

Despite those advances, the European grasp of geography remained very shaky. As of 1400, Europeans had terribly imprecise knowledge about the rest of the world. They did not, of course, know anything about the Americas. They tended to confuse “India,” “Cathay,” and “Japan” with “Asia” itself. They had a vague notion that all of Asia was ruled by Khans, in part because of the popularity of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo’s famous account of his travels undertaken in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Polo was a Venetian merchant who had traveled to the court of the Mongol Khan Kublai and eventually returned to Europe, but his account merely reinforced just how far away, and difficult to reach, Asia was taking the usual eastern routes. Many sincerely believed that monsters occupied the interiors of Africa and Asia, and besides Polo, no Europeans had ever made the trek to the far east and returned to tell the tale.

Africa and India

Europeans did, of course, know about North Africa. The Mediterranean had served as the crossroads of the civilized Western World since ancient times, and despite North Africa being ruled by Muslim kingdoms, Europeans regularly traded with Muslim merchants. As noted above, there were many lucrative commodities (like gold and ivory) that Europeans coveted and were only available from North African merchants. Europeans knew that these commodities originated somewhere across the Sahara desert, but were unable to access their sources directly.

During the European middle ages, Sub-Saharan Africa was dominated by various medium-sized kingdoms, most of which had converted to Islam. The largest was that of Mali, which oversaw a lucrative trade in gold and various luxury goods north via caravan to North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean. Likewise, other kingdoms traded with one another and, via caravans, the Middle East and Europe. These kingdoms also engaged in frequent warfare against one another (just as the states of Europe did).

Drawn by the gold they were able to acquire via merchants in North Africa, Europeans had tried in the late Middle Ages to sail down the west coast of the continent, but their naval technology was insufficient. In the fifteenth century that changed with the introduction of the caravel; the same thing that made it possible for Europeans to reach the Americas allowed them to make reliable journeys along the African coast. Along with new compasses and the astrolabe, Europeans were able to make long-distance trips by the mid-fifteenth century that far exceeded their earlier maximum ranges.

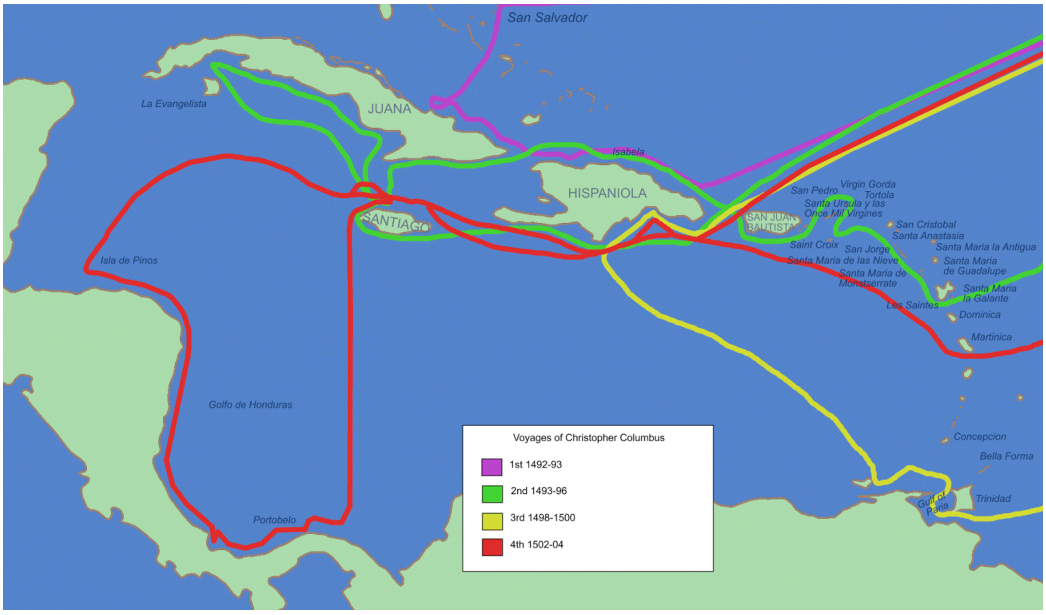
The beginning of the ongoing contact between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe happened under the auspices of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394 – 1460), the governor of the southernmost province of Portugal. He sponsored numerous Portuguese expeditions along the west coast of Africa, hoping to somehow seize lands or at least find routes to lucrative sources of gold and spices. In 1497, Vasco Da Gama, a Portuguese nobleman, was sponsored by the Portuguese crown and sailed around Africa and as far as India, in the process claiming various territories for Portugal. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese maintained a lucrative monopoly on trade between Europe and West African kingdoms, East African kingdoms, and Indian merchants. This amounted to a royally-controlled, militarily-enforced monopoly of waterborne trade between Europe and India and Africa that lasted well into the sixteenth century. Thus, tiny Portugal was, for a time, one of the wealthiest states in Europe.

It should be emphasized that this Portuguese “monopoly” was first and foremost a monopoly between the Indian Ocean trade and Europe, *not* a monopoly of trade within the Indian Ocean itself (despite the best efforts of the Portuguese). Indian, African, and Middle Eastern merchants continued to exchange goods and wealth whose value greatly exceeded that of the trade between Europe and the Indian Ocean region. What changed, however, was that Europeans were for the first time able to directly access the sources of luxury commodities like spices, indigo, ivory, and gold, and Portugal was in the forefront of the European states that sought to reach those sources. Other states were quick to follow once the sheer extent of African and Indian wealth was revealed through Portuguese trade, and soon first the Dutch and then the English started taking over the oceanic trade routes from the Portuguese.

Spain, Columbus, the Great Dying, and the Columbian Exchange

The most important voyages of discovery of the early modern period were undertaken by agents of the Spanish monarchy, starting with that of Christopher Columbus in 1492. They were inspired by religious fervor as much as a practical desire for riches – fresh off the successful Reconquest, Queen Isabella agreed with Columbus’s vision of flanking the Muslim forces of the Middle East and recapturing the Holy Land as much as she also wanted new trade routes to Asia. The voyage was thought to be feasible both because all educated people already accepted that the world was round (common knowledge since the days of ancient Greece) and because the circumference of the globe was not really clear to them; it simply was not known how long one would have to sail west to reach the east.

Columbus himself had totally inaccurate beliefs about the distance between Europe and Asia – he based his geography on an ancient (and completely inaccurate) account by the Greek philosopher Ptolemy and he thought that Asia was not far west of Europe. Despite being disliked and distrusted by most of the rulers he had approached in the past, Columbus succeeded in winning Isabella over to his vision, and she paid to outfit him with a tiny fleet (she sent him with letters of introduction to the Great Khan, who she presumed still ruled in Asia). Columbus departed in August of 1492 with three small boats – the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria - and 90 men. They arrived in the Bahamas in October.



The four voyages of Columbus between 1492 and 1504. 'Juana' is present-day Cuba, and 'Hispaniola' is present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Columbus ended up spearheading everything the Spanish empire was to represent in the Americas: brutality against the native "Indians," attempts to convert Indians by force, intense greed for precious metals, and the introduction of pathogens against which the native people had absolutely no resistance. With Columbus, the traffic in goods and commodities between the two hemispheres began. While Europeans at the time were obsessed with the vast mineral wealth found in the Americas, it is clear in historical hindsight that far more important than precious metals were the living things exchanged between the western and eastern hemispheres of the globe starting in 1492. Historians now refer to that enormous distribution of plant and animal species, as well as bacteria and viruses, as the Columbian Exchange.

From the New World, Europeans brought back corn, potatoes, tobacco, chocolate, and tomatoes, just to name the most important of the crops that soon flourished across Africa and Eurasia. From the Old World, Europeans imported all of the large domesticated animals - horses, cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and sheep - as well as numerous crops like rice, wheat, sugarcane, and coffee. Potatoes alone would go on to reshape the demographics of all of northern Europe and various other regions in the world because they provide a great deal of nutrition and calories and can grow in poor, rocky soils. The poor of many European regions (Ireland, most famously) became largely dependent on potatoes for nourishment by the eighteenth century.

That noted, the single most significant biological entity to be exchanged between the hemispheres was the smallpox virus, which was at the heart of the worst epidemic in world history. Isolated from the western hemisphere for thousands of years, Native Americans had no resistance to Eurasian diseases. Because almost all diseases that affect humans are mutated strains of diseases affecting domestic animals, referred to as zoonotic diseases, and all of the large animal species that can be domesticated were Eurasian in origin except llamas, Eurasians and Africans had spent thousands of years both suffering from and building up resistances to epidemics while Native Americans did not. Those epidemic pathogens arrived all at once with the European invasion of the New World that began with Columbus.

Historians refer to the demographic catastrophe that accompanied the European encounter with the Americas as the Great Dying. As much as 90% of the native people of the Americas died within a few generations of Columbus's arrival. While the Spanish and Portuguese did win some noteworthy military engagements with native forces, due largely to their use of steel weapons and horses, their true military advantage lay in germ warfare, something they certainly did not anticipate unleashing on their arrival. Spanish explorers in the early sixteenth century encountered whole vast swaths of land with abundant evidence of sophisticated cultures that were already abandoned, their former inhabitants decimated by disease. In other words, the conquest of the Americas by Europeans was shockingly swift not because Europeans were significantly more militarily powerful than were Native Americans, but because most of the latter were already dead thanks to disease.

The Columbian Exchange, and the Great Dying that was part of it, began with Columbus's initial voyage. Almost immediately after Columbus's return to Spain after his expedition, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain grasped the significance of his discovery and actively funded more expeditions and, soon, colonists. The Spanish crown also quickly tried to cement its hold on the New World – they petitioned the pope to grant them everything across the Atlantic. After papal intervention and negotiations between the Spanish and Portuguese, the Spanish were to receive everything west of an arbitrary line on the map 1,100 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands, with everything to the east granted to the Portuguese. Practically speaking, this meant that the Portuguese concentrated their colonization efforts on Brazil, Africa, and India, while the Spanish concentrated on the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Needless to say, the other European powers were not about to honor this agreement, called the Treaty of Tordesillas and dating to 1494, but it gave the Spanish and Portuguese a considerable head start.

By the 1520s, Europeans recognized that Columbus had been completely wrong about the New World being part of Asia. The term "America" was invented by another Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, who was another early explorer (he led two expeditions between 1497 and 1503) and the first to grasp the immensity of the western hemisphere. Vespucci coined the phrase "New World" in the first place, hence “America” rather than “Columbia” – Vespucci’s accounts were printed first. He was also a relentless self-promoter, whereas Columbus did not attempt to publicize his discoveries with the same focus.

Even though Europeans quickly realized that the Americas were whole new continents, they persisted in their quest to find a western route to Asia. The Spanish dispatched explorers and sailors who sought Asia by going around the Americas, even as they were also busy conquering the great empires of the Aztecs and Incas. This led to the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan (1480 – 1521), who commanded a small fleet of five ships funded by the Spanish crown and tried to find a western route to Asia in 1519. He succeeded in rounding South America and crossing the Pacific, but was then killed by natives of the Philippines in 1521. The remnants of his fleet limped back to Spain in 1522, proving that it was possible to sail around the world. The Spanish would subsequently use the Philippines as the basis of their Pacific trade network, ultimately linking together Europe, the Americas, and Asia and fulfilling the original vision of a western route to Asia that had inspired Columbus’s expedition in the first place.

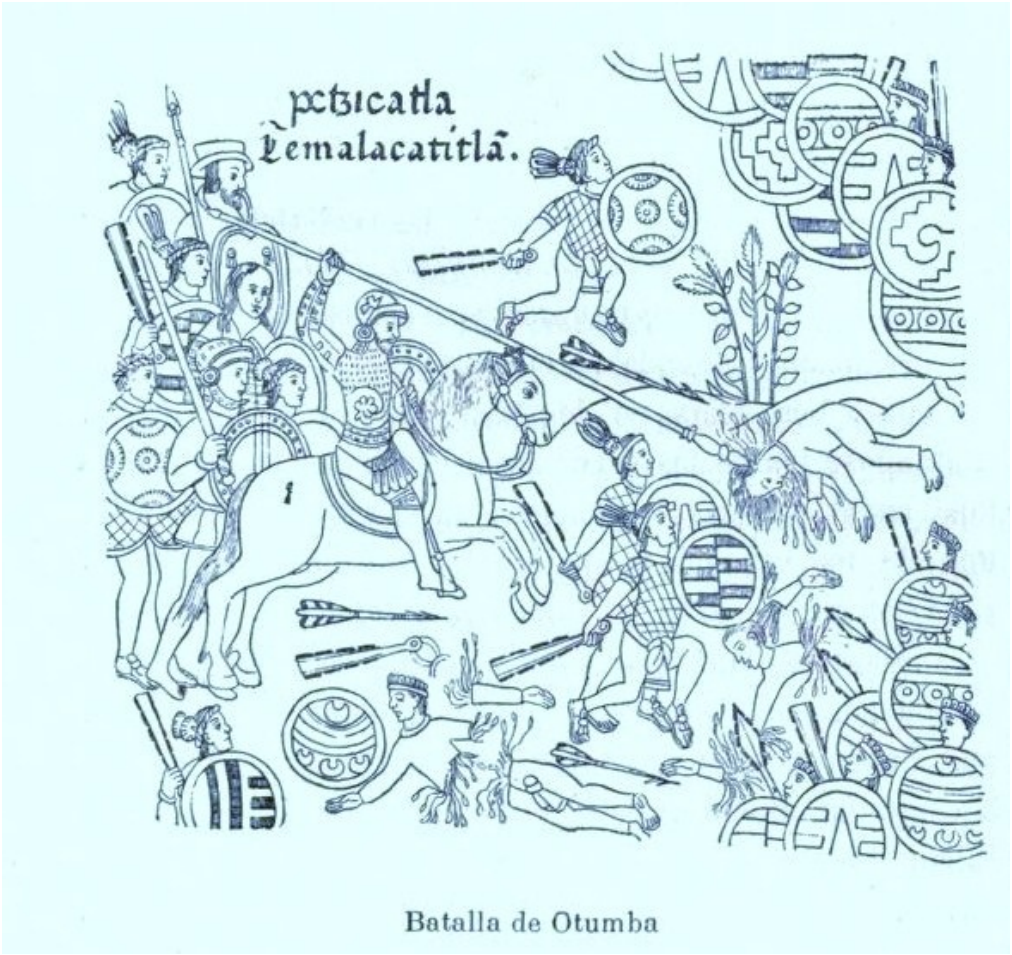
The Conquistadors

The Conquistadors were the military explorers sent by the Spanish crown to the Americas to claim land, convert "heathens," and enrich both themselves and the crown. They were usually poor noblemen with few prospects back in Spain; in the first generation of explorers many were essentially unemployed knights. Some conquistadors simply launched expeditions to the New World without royal authorization, hoping to seize enough plunder to receive retroactive royal approval; official ones were obliged to turn over the “royal fifth” - 20% of all precious metals discovered or mined - of all loot to the crown.

The most significant conquistador was Hernan Cortes (1485 – 1547). A poor knight who had fought in the aftermath of the Reconquest as a young man, he jumped at the chance to travel to the New World. Cortes proved brilliant at manipulating the native groups he encountered in Mexico, where he arrived in 1519 with 450 Spanish troops and 15 horses. There, a powerful empire under the Aztecs had recently seized control of a large swath of territory. The Aztecs did not directly rule their subjects but instead demanded a constant flow of

tribute, including captives who were destined for human sacrifice. Needless to say, the Aztecs were not popular with their subjects.

Working through a native translator, Malinche, who had already learned Spanish, Cortes was able to convince native groups resentful of the Aztecs to fight alongside the Spanish; practically speaking this meant that the native groups suffered most of the casualties. He fought his way to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where he was initially welcomed by the emperor Montezuma II. Once the Aztecs realized the extent of the rapacious designs of the Spanish they chased them from the city, but then an epidemic of smallpox undermined their ability to fight. Cortes was able to achieve the surrender of the surviving Aztec forces by 1522 and founded the Spanish colony of New Spain in the center of Mexico.



Batalla de Otumba

A later Spanish illustration of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. Note the allied Native Mexican troops both behind and in front of the charging Spanish soldier.

The other noteworthy conquistador of the first generation following Columbus was Francisco Pizarro (1478 – 1541). Inspired by Cortes' success in Mexico, Pizarro set off (with 180 Spanish troops and 30 horses) for an empire the Spanish had learned of in the Andes of western South America in 1531. This was the Incan empire, also a relatively young state that encompassed territory along the Andes through present-day Chile, Ecuador and Peru. Pizarro ambushed the Inca emperor Atahualpa and captured him, demanding a building full of gold for his release. Instead, once the ransom was paid, Pizarro had the emperor killed and then marched on the Inca capital of Cuzco. By 1533, Spanish forces were in control of the empire and began sending enormous quantities of bullion back to Spain.

Thus, less than fifty years after Columbus's initial landing, the two greatest empires of Central and South America had already fallen to the Spanish. By 1600, practically every part of Central and South America was at least nominally under Spanish (or, in the case of Brazil, Portuguese), control.

New World Wealth

The Spanish discovered huge sources of wealth in South and Central America. The most important source of wealth in all of the Americas for the Spanish crown was discovered in 1545: the mountain of Potosi in present-day Bolivia. Potosi had the most enormous silver deposits in the world at the time, producing thousands of tons of silver for the crown. It also represented a horrible site of slave labor for the native peoples of the entire extended area, in which the Spanish forced them to toil in atrocious conditions, often until they died from exhaustion. Whereas the Great Dying might be the most iconic aspect of the Columbian Exchange, Potosi is probably the greatest symbol of the humongous influx of mineral wealth that flooded into Spanish coffers for over a century, as well as the site of the greatest human misery caused by that lust for bullion.

The irony of the wealth generated by American mines is that it undermined the vitality of the Spanish state itself in the long run – Spain did not have to cultivate trade or pursue technological or bureaucratic innovation in the same manner as the rest of the European powers because it had such an enormous surplus of precious metals. Thus, even though Spain was the most powerful state in Europe in the sixteenth century, its longer-term trajectory was one of decline, in large part because of its commercial stagnation. In addition, so much bullion was shipped back to Europe that inflation undermined its value, another factor that weakened Spanish power over time.

Much of the story of Spanish conquest is one of the abuse of the native peoples of the Americas. Part of that abuse grew out of the crusading tradition, but part of it also came out of the discomfort many of the Spanish felt in discovering people who had quite obviously never been in contact with the Christian world. The Bible did not explain their origins, so the Spanish invented various hypotheses: Native Americans were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel described in the Old Testament of the Bible, they were somehow created and ruled by the Devil, they simply were not human beings but strange, human-like animals, and so on. The consensus by the 1530s was that, wherever they were from, Native Americans were blank slates who had to be conquered for their own good; the Pope recognized the humanity of the Indians in 1537, but the church continued to support forcible conversion. Native Americans were referred to as the “justly conquered" and either enslaved outright or conscripted as serfs in service to Spanish colonial masters.

Back in Europe, funded by the incredible wealth of the New World, the still recently-united Spain became the greatest European power in the sixteenth century. In the New World, royal authority was enforced by two viceroys, royal officials who ruled over the northern and southern parts of the territory. Under them, rich nobles (often originally successful conquistadors) ran *encomiendas*, feudal estates with the legal right to exploit native labor. Those often evolved into the even larger *haciendas*, the size of whole states back in Europe.

Because the vast majority of Spanish immigrants were men, even a formal ban of marriage between Spanish men and native women did not prevent the growth of a large “mixed” class of *mestizos*, the children of Spanish – American unions who were often recognized as the legitimate children of the former. There was still a racialized hierarchy in New World society, but more ethnic mixing occurred in Central and South America than in North America.

Conclusion

The Spanish and Portuguese invasions of the Americas were nothing less than a catastrophe for the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Whole cultures were obliterated, empires fell, and the survivors found themselves at the mercy of conquerors whose major priorities were the extraction of mineral wealth and the exploitation of labor. To those ends, the Native peoples were frequently enslaved outright to work on plantations or mines. The use of slave labor only grew over time, although by the middle of the sixteenth century Europeans were increasingly turning to African slaves, spawning one of the most horrendous injustices in history: the Transatlantic Slave Trade (considered in a following chapter).

European states in the Americas were thus built on the backs and with the blood of both the Native inhabitants and enslaved Africans.

The impact of the conquests on Europe took longer to become entirely evident, but in the long run the conquest of the Americas sparked the beginning of the process by which Europe became one of the dominant global regions. Europeans now had access to not only enormous quantities of precious metal, but vast new natural resources (from huge stocks of fish to millions of acres of fertile land) that were to bolster European power for centuries to come. It is no coincidence that the year 1492 is often used as the starting point of the early modern period: when both global hemispheres came into sustained contact for the first time, it was the starting point of massive change for the human species as a whole.

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Columbus voyages - Roke

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Chapter 7: The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was the permanent split within the Catholic church that resulted in multiple competing denominations (versions, essentially) of Christian practice and belief. From the perspective of the Catholic hierarchy, these new denominations - lumped together under the category of "Protestant" - were nothing more or less than new heresies, sinful breaks with the correct, orthodox beliefs and practices of the Church. The difference between Protestant churches and earlier heretical movements was that the Church proved unable to stamp them out or re-assimilate them into mainstream Catholic practice. Thus, what began as a protest movement against corruption within the Church very quickly evolved into a number of widespread and increasingly militant branches of Christianity itself.

The Context of the Reformation

The context of the Reformation was the strange state of the Catholic Church as of the late fifteenth century. the Church was omnipresent in early-modern European society. About one person in seventy-five was part of the Church, as priests, monks, nuns, or members of lay orders. Practically every work of art depicted Biblical themes. the Church oversaw births, marriages, contracts, wills, and deaths - all law was, by implication, the law of God Himself. Furthermore, in Catholic doctrine, spiritual salvation was only accessible through the intervention of the Church; without the rituals (sacraments) performed by priests, the soul was doomed to go to hell. Finally, popes fought to claim the right to intervene in secular affairs as they saw fit, although this was a fight they had never had much luck with, losing even more ground as the new, more powerful and centralized, monarchies rose to power in the fifteenth century.

Simply put, as of the Renaissance era, all was not well with the Church. The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism both undermined the Church's authority. The stronger states of the period claimed the right to appoint bishops and priests within their kingdoms, something that the monarchs of England and France were very successful in doing. This led both laypeople and some priests themselves to look to monarchs, rather than the pope, for patronage and authority.

At the same time, elite churchmen (including the popes themselves) continued to live like princes. The papacy not only set a bad example, but attempts to reform the lifestyles and relative piety of priests generally failed; the papacy was simply too remote from the everyday life of the priesthood across Europe, and since elite churchmen were all nobles, they usually continued to live like nobles. In many cases, they openly lived with concubines, had children, and worked to ensure that their children receive lucrative positions in the Church. Laypeople were well aware of the slack morality that pervaded the Church. Medieval and early-modern literature is absolutely shot through with satirical tracts mocking immoral priests, and depictions of hell almost always featured priests, monks, and nuns burning alongside nobles and merchants.

These patterns affected monasticism as well. The idea behind monastic orders had been imitating the life of Christ, yet by the early modern period, many monasteries (especially urban ones) ran successful industries, and monks often lived in relative luxury compared to townspeople. Furthermore, the monasteries had been very successful in buying up or receiving land as gifts; by the late fifteenth century a full 20% of the land of the western kingdoms was owned by monasteries. The contrast between the required vow of poverty taken by monks and nuns and the wealth and luxury many monks and nuns enjoyed was obvious to laypeople.

The result of this widespread concern with corruption was a new focus on the inner spiritual life of the individual, not the focus on and respect for the priest, monk, or nun. New movements sprung up around Europe, including one called Modern Devotion in the Netherlands, that focused on moral and spiritual life of laypeople outside of the auspices of the Church. The handbook of the Modern Devotion was called *The Imitation of Christ*, written in the mid-fifteenth century and published in various editions after that, which was so popular that its sales matched those of the Bible at the time. It promoted the idea of salvation without needing the Church as an intermediary at all.

Within the Church, there were widespread and persistent calls for reform to better address the needs of the laity and to better live up to the Church's own moral standards. Numerous devout priests, monks, and nuns abhorred the corruption of their peers and superiors in the Church and called for change - the Spanish branch of the Church enjoyed a strong period of reform during the fifteenth century, for example. Despite this reforming zeal within the Church and the growing popularity of lay movements outside of it, however, almost no one anticipated a permanent break from the Church's hierarchy itself.

Indulgences

The specific phenomenon that brought about the Protestant Reformation was the selling of indulgences by the Church. An indulgence was a certificate offered by the Church that offered the same spiritual power as the sacrament of confession and penance: to have one's sins absolved. Each indulgence promised a certain amount of time that the individual would not have to spend in purgatory after death. Catholic doctrine held that even the souls of those who avoided hell did not go straight to heaven on death. Instead, they would spend years (centuries, usually) in a spiritual plane between earth and heaven called purgatory - there, their sins would be purged (note the overlap between the words "purge" and "purgatory") through fire until they were purified. Only then could they ascend to heaven. Naturally, most people would much rather proceed directly to heaven if possible, and so the Church found that the sale of indulgences to avoid time in purgatory was enormously popular.

At first, indulgences were granted by the pope for good acts that were supported by the Church; they were heavily associated with the crusades, both in terms of mitigating the normal spiritual consequences of the atrocities committed by the crusaders and in rewarding the crusaders for trying to recapture the Holy Land for the Church. Later, popes came to succumb to the temptation to sell them in order to raise revenue, especially as the Renaissance-era popes built up both their own secular power and patronized the art and architecture associated with the Vatican. By the early sixteenth century the practice was completely out of control. Roaming salesmen, contracted by the Church, sold indulgences without the slightest concern for the moral or spiritual status of the buyer, and even invented little jingles like "when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" – that was the jingle of John Tetzel, the specific indulgence salesman who infuriated the key figure in the Reformation, Martin Luther.

The concept of indulgences relied on the notion of a "treasury of merit" – a kind of spiritual bank – whose savings had been deposited by the sacrifices made by Christ and the saints. When someone bought an indulgence, she drew against that treasury in order to avoid time in purgatory. Another way to gain access to the treasury of merit was to possess , or even come into contact with, holy relics (typically the bones of saints). Thus, many rulers did everything in their power to create large collections. One German prince had his court preacher calculate the total number of years that his (the ruler's) large collection of relics would eliminate from his and his subjects' time in Purgatory; the total was 1,902,202 years and 270 days. There was another prince whose total was 39,245,120 years of get-out-of-Purgatory-free time. From

this context, of widespread corruption and the fairly blatant abuse of the notion of spiritual salvation through the Church, Martin Luther emerged.

Lutheranism

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) was a German monk who endured a difficult childhood and a fraught relationship with his father. He suffered from bouts of depression and anxiety that led him to become monk, the traditional solution to an identity crisis as of the early modern period. Luther received both a scholastic and a humanistic education, eventually becoming a professor at the small university in the city of Wittenberg in the Holy Roman Empire. There, far from the centers of both spiritual and secular power, he contemplated the Bible, the Church, and his own spiritual salvation.

Luther struggled with his spiritual identity. He was obsessively afraid of being damned to hell, feeling totally unworthy of divine forgiveness and plagued with doubt as to his ability to achieve salvation. The key issue for Luther was the concept of good works, an essential element of salvation in the early-modern church. In Catholic doctrine, salvation is achieved through a combination of the sacraments, faith in God, and good works, which are good deeds that merit a person's admission into heaven. Those good works could be acts of kindness and charity, or they could be gifts of money to the Church - a common "good work" at the time was leaving money or land to the Church is one's will. Luther felt that the very idea of good works was ambiguous, especially because works seemed so inadequate when compared to the wretched spiritual state of humankind. He could not understand how *anyone* merited admittance to heaven no matter how many good work they carried out while alive - the very idea seemed petty and base compared to the awesome responsibility of living up to Christianity's moral standards.

A 1528 portrait of Luther.

In about 1510 Luther began to explore a possible answer to this quandary: the idea that salvation did not come from works, but from grace, the limitless love and forgiveness of God, which is achievable through faith alone. Over time, Luther developed the idea that it takes an act of God to merit a person's salvation, and the reflection of that act is in the heartfelt faith of the individual. A person's willed attempts to do good things to get into heaven were always inadequate; what mattered was that the heartfelt faith of a believer might inspire an infinite act of mercy on the part of God. This idea - salvation through faith alone - was a major break with Catholic belief.

This concept was potentially revolutionary because in one stroke it did away with the entire edifice of church ritual. If salvation could be earned through faith alone, the sacraments were at best symbolic rituals and at worst distractions - over time, Luther argued that only baptism and communion were relevant since they were very clearly inspired by Christ's actions as described in the New Testament. In Luther's vision, the priest was nothing more than a guide rather than a gatekeeper who could grant or withhold the essential rituals, and a believer should be able to read the Bible directly rather than be forced to defer to the priesthood.

Having developed the essential points of his theology, Luther then confronted what he regarded as the most blatant abuse of the Church's authority: indulgences. In 1517, Pope Leo X issued a new indulgence to fund the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Luther was incensed at how crass the sale of indulgences was (it was as bad as a carnival barker's act in nearby Wittenberg) and at the fact that this new indulgence promised to absolve the purchaser of all sins, all at once. Furthermore, the indulgence could be purchased on behalf of those who were already dead and "spring" them from purgatory in one fell swoop. Luther responded by posting a list of ninety-five attacks against indulgences to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral. These "95 Theses" are considered by historians to be the first official act of the Protestant Reformation.

The 95 Theses were relatively moderate in tone. They attacked indulgences for leading to greed instead of piety, for leading the laity to distrust the Church, and for simply not working - they did not, Luther argued, absolve the sins of those who purchased them. Written in Latin, the 95 Theses were intended to spark debate and discussion within the Church. And, while he criticized the pope's wealth and (implied) greed, Luther did not attack the office of the papacy itself. Soon, however, the 95 Theses were translated into German and reprinted, which led to an unexpected and, at least initially, unwanted celebrity.

Within two years, Luther was forced to publicly defend his views and, in the process, to radicalize them. A fellow professor and member of the Church, Johann Eck, publicly debated Luther and forced him to admit that the pope had the authority issue indulgences. This, however, led Luther to argue that the pope could be wrong if his position was not authorized by the Bible itself. In the end, Luther argued that the pope, and by extension the entire Church, were irrelevant to to spiritual salvation. He argued that true Christians were part of the priesthood of believers, united by their faith and without need for the Catholic Church.

By 1520 Luther was actively engaged in writing and publishing inflammatory pamphlets that attacked the pope's authority and the corruption of the Church. He was summoned to Rome to recant, but refused to go. In turn, the secular authorities stepped in. In 1521 Luther was tried at the Diet of Worms, the Holy Roman Empire's official meeting of princes, where the emperor Charles V ordered him to recant. Luther refused and was declared an "outlaw" by the emperor, stipulating that no subject of the Empire was to offer Luther food or water, and suffer no legal penalty should Luther be murdered. Luther was swiftly taken into the custody of a sympathetic German prince, Frederick the Wise of Saxony, who spirited Luther away and allowed him to continue his work writing anti-papal propaganda.

A (highly dramatized) portrayal of Luther at the Diet of Worms painted in the nineteenth century.

Much of Luther's, and Protestantism's, survival owes to the simple fact that both the pope and Charles V were reluctant to threaten Frederick the Wise, who was one of the electors of the empire and one of its most powerful nobles – essentially a king in his own right. Frederick both genuinely supported and agreed with Luther's views and also realized that he could benefit from rejecting the authority of the pope and, to a lesser extent, the emperor. Charles V had enormous prestige and some ability to influence his subjects, but practically speaking each prince was sovereign in his own domain. This loose overall control was disastrous for Catholic uniformity in the empire, as Luther's doctrines, soon referred to as Lutheranism, rapidly spread. To make matters worse, Charles V was too preoccupied with wars against France to spearhead a genuine effort to crush Lutheranism; in turn, the French King Francis I extended royal protection to Lutherans in France, since doing so undermined the authority of Charles.

Luther's position continued to radicalize after 1521. He claimed that the pope was, in fact, the anti-Christ foretold in the Book of Revelations, and he came to believe that it was the End Times. He also personally translated the Bible into German and he happily met with his ever-growing group of followers. Initially a slur against heretics, the term "Protestant" was soon embraced by those followers, who used it as a defiant badge of honor.

Very quickly, Protestantism caught on across the empire, especially among elites, churchmen, and the educated urban classes. In the 1520s most Lutherans were reform-minded

clerics; they saw Luther's movement as an effective and radical protest against all of the problems that had plagued the Church for centuries. Part of the appeal of Lutheranism to priests was that it legitimized the lifestyle many of them were already living; they could get married to their concubines and acknowledge their children if they left the Church, which droves of them did starting in the 1520s. Thanks both to the perceived purity of its doctrine and the support of rulers, nobles, and converted priests, Lutheranism started spreading in earnest among the general population starting in the 1530s.

Charles V was in an unenviable position. As Holy Roman Emperor, he felt honor-bound to defend the Church, but he could not do so through force of arms. He spent most of his reign fighting against both France and the Ottoman Empire, which besides Spain were the greatest powers of the era. Thus, in 1526 he allowed the German princes to choose whether or not to enforce his ban on Lutheranism as they saw fit, in hopes that they would continue to offer him their military assistance – he tried unsuccessfully to repeal this reluctant tolerance in 1529, but it was too late. Practically speaking, the German states ended up being divided roughly evenly, with a concentration of Lutheranism in the north and Catholicism in the south.

Luther was elated by the success of his message; he happily accepted the use of the term "Lutheranism" to describe the new religious movement he had started, and he felt certain that the correctness of his position was so appealing that even the Jews would abandon their traditional beliefs and convert (they did not, and Luther swiftly launched a vituperative anti-Semitic attack entitled *Against the Jews and their Lies*). Much to his chagrin, however, Luther watched as some groups who considered themselves to be Lutherans took his message in directions of which he completely disapproved.

Luther himself was a deeply conservative man; his attack on Catholic doctrine was fundamentally based on what he saw as a "return" to the original message of the Bible. Many Protestants interpreted his message as indicating that true Christians were only accountable to the Bible and could therefore reject the existing social hierarchy as well. In 1524, an enormous peasant uprising occurred across Germany, inspired by this interpretation of Lutheranism and demanding a reduction in feudal dues and duties, the end of serfdom, and greater justice from feudal lords. In 1525, Luther penned a venomous attack against the rebels entitled *Against the Thieving, Murderous Hordes of Peasants* which encouraged the lords to slaughter the peasants like dogs. The revolt was put down brutally, with over 100,000 killed, and Lutheranism was able to keep the support of the elites like Frederick the Wise who sheltered it.

Still, the uprising indicated that the movement Luther had begun was not something he could control, despite his best efforts. The very nature of breaking with a single authoritarian

institution brought about a number of competing movements, some of which were directly inspired by and connected to Luther, but many of which, soon, were not.

Calvinism

The most important Protestant denomination to emerge after the establishment of Lutheranism was Calvinism. Jean Calvin, a French lawyer exiled for his sympathy with Protestantism, settled in Geneva, Switzerland in 1536. Calvin was a generation younger than Luther, and hence was born into a world in which religious unity had already been fragmented; in that sense, the fact that he had Protestant views is not as surprising as Luther's break with the Church had been. In Geneva, Calvin began work on Christian theology and soon formed close ties with the city council. The result of his work was Calvinism, a distinct Protestant denomination that differed in many ways from Lutheranism.

Calvin accepted Luther's insistence on the role of faith in salvation, but he went further. If God was all-powerful and all-knowing, and he chose to extend his grace to some people but not to others, Calvin reasoned, it was folly to imagine that humans could somehow influence Him. Not only was the Catholic insistence on good works wrong, the very idea of free will in the face of the divine intelligence could not be correct. Calvin noted that only some parishioners in church services seemed to be able to grasp the importance and complexities of scripture, whereas most were indifferent or ignorant. He concluded that God, who transcended both time and space, chose some people as the "elect," those who will be saved, before they are even born. Free will is merely an illusion born of human ignorance, since the fate of a person's soul was determined before time itself began. This doctrine is called "predestination," and while the idea of the absence of free will and predetermined salvation may seem absurd at first sight, in fact it was simply the logical extension of the very concept of divine omnipotence according to Calvin.

Sixteenth-century portrait of Calvin. Austere black clothing became associated with Calvinists, who rejected ostentatious dress and decoration.

Practically speaking, however, Calvinism involved a kind of circular argument about salvation. Those who were among the elect acted in certain ways: they lived according to the standards of behavior defined in the Bible, they refrained from worldly pleasures, and they strove to conduct themselves within the legal and social framework of their societies. Thus, good Calvinists were supposed to devote themselves to the study of scripture, temperate living, and hard work. Counterintuitively, it was not that these behaviors would lead to salvation, it is that the already-saved acted morally according to God's will. Furthermore, one sign of being a member of the elect was financial success, because success was a side-effect of the focus and hard work that the elect naturally, again through God's will, exhibited.

After developing his theology and winning many converts, Calvin colluded with the city council of Geneva to enforce a whole set of moralistic laws that regulated almost every aspect of behavior. He was originally asked to reform the local church by the city fathers, then in 1555 he worked with a group of fellow French exiles to stage a coup d'etat. He created the Consistory, a group of Calvinist ministers who scrutinized the behavior of Geneva's citizens,

fining or imprisoning people for intemperate or ungodly behavior. The idea was that, predestination or not, Geneva would be the model Christian community.

While Lutheranism spread to northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries, Calvinism caught on not just in Switzerland, but in France (where Calvinists were known as Huguenots) and Scotland, where the Scottish Calvinists became known as Presbyterians. Everywhere, Calvinists set themselves apart by their plain dress and their dour outlook on merriment, celebrations, and the pleasures of the flesh. The best known Calvinists in the American context were the Puritans, English Calvinists who left Europe (initially fleeing persecution) to try to create a perfect Christian community in the new world.

It should be emphasized that Lutherans and Calvinists quickly came to regard one another as rivals, even enemies, rather than as "fellow" Protestants. Luther and Calvin came to detest one another, finding each other's respective theology as flawed and misleading as that of Catholicism. While some pragmatic alliances between Protestant groups would eventually emerge because of persecution or war, for the most part each Protestant denomination claimed to have exclusive access to religious truth, regarding all others as hopelessly ignorant and, in fact, damned to hell.

The English Reformation

Whereas Lutheranism and Calvinism had both come about as protests against the perceived moral and doctrinal failings of the Catholic church, the English Reformation happened because of the selfish desires of a king. Henry VIII (r. 1509 – 1547) had received a special dispensation from the papacy to marry his brother's widow (a practice banned in the Old Testament of the Bible), Catherine of Aragon, aunt of Charles V and hence a member of the most powerful royal line in Europe. Catherine, however, was only able to bear Henry a daughter, Mary, and failed to produce a son. Henry decided he needed a new wife and another chance at a male heir, so he started an affair with Anne Boleyn, a young noblewoman in his court. Simultaneously, Henry petitioned the pope for a divorce - a practice that was strictly forbidden. The pope refused, and in defiance in 1531 Henry, under the auspices of a compliant local Catholic leader, divorced Catherine and married Anne.

When Anne did not produce a male heir in a timely manner, Henry trumped up charges of adultery and had her beheaded. In 1534, as papal threats escalated over his impiety, Henry issued the Acts of Supremacy and Succession, effectively separating England from the Catholic Church and founding in its stead the Church of England. the Church of England was almost

identical to the Catholic Church in its doctrine and rituals, it simply substituted the king at its apex and discarded allegiance to the Roman pope. It also gave Henry an excuse to seize Catholic lands and wealth, especially those of England's rich monasteries, which funded the crown and its subsequent military and naval buildup into the reign of his daughter Elizabeth.

Easily the best-known portrait of Henry VIII in the prime of life.

Henry went on to marry an astonishing total of six wives over the course of his life, with two divorced, two executed, one dying of natural causes, and the last, Katherine Parr, surviving him. In the end, Henry had three children: a young son, Edward, and two older half-sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. They each took the throne in fairly rapid succession after his death in 1547; under Edward and Mary (both of whom died of natural causes after only a few years), the kingdom oscillated between a more extreme form of Protestantism and then an attempted Catholic resurgence. Elizabeth I went on to rule for decades (r. 1558 – 1603) as one of Europe's most effective monarchs. Part of her success was in stabilizing the religious issue in England: she insisted that her subjects be part of the Church of England, but she did not actively persecute Catholics.

The end result of the English Reformation was that England and Scotland were divided between competing Christian factions, but ones very distinct to the British Isles in comparison to the more straightforward Catholic versus Protestant conflicts on the continent of Europe. The

Church of England, whose adherents are known as Anglicans, had an official "high church" branch supported by the nobility and the monarchy itself. A growing movement within the Church of England, however, openly embraced Calvinism, and that movement became known as Puritanism (or "low church") - still technically Anglican, but rejected by the Church hierarchy. Meanwhile, numerous Catholics continued to worship in secret. Finally, most of Scotland became devoutly Calvinist, under the Presbyterian branch of the Calvinist movement (many Scottish nobles remained Catholic until well into the seventeenth century, however).

The Effects of the Reformation

By the late sixteenth century, the lines of division within western Christianity were permanently drawn. Christianity was (and remains, although the enmity between the different groups is much less pronounced in the modern era) divided as follows:

The Catholic (Roman/Latin) Church

The Catholic Church remained dominant in almost all of southern Europe, including Italy, Spain, Austria, parts of the Balkans, and kingdoms like Poland as well. Catholic minorities existed either openly or in secret depending on the relative hostility of the local rulers throughout much of the rest of Europe.

The Eastern Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church was the product of medieval divisions within the Church itself, pitting the western papacy against the Byzantine emperors. It was unaffected by the Protestant Reformation, since the Reformation occurred in Western Europe. Thus, the Orthodox church remained in place in Greece, parts of the Balkans, and Russia.

The Protestant Churches

"Protestant" came to mean all of the different groups that broke away from the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. These denominations included Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and other (generally smaller and less historically significant at the time) denominations like Anabaptism. Protestant churches dominated in northern Europe, including much of Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, England and Scotland. There was also a very significant minority of Huguenots - French Calvinists - in the southern half of France.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Luther - Public Domain

Diet of Worms - Public Domain

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Henry VIII - Public Domain

Chapter 8: The Catholic Reformation

Historians have traditionally referred to the major changes that took place in the Catholic Church in response to the Protestant Reformation as the “Counter-Reformation,” a movement that was essentially reactionary. More recently, however, historians have come to recognize that it is probably more accurate and useful to see this period of church history as a Catholic Reformation unto itself – the culmination of the reformist trends that had been present in the Church for centuries before Martin Luther set off the Protestant break with the Roman Church.

Luther, after all, had not set out to split the Church, but to reform it - hence the very term "Reformation." His positioned radicalized quite quickly, however, and he did openly defy both the pope and the Church hierarchy within just a few years of the posting of the 95 Theses. That being noted, one of the reasons that Lutheranism caught on so quickly was that there were large numbers of people within the Church who had long fought for, or at least hoped for, significant changes. Thus, while the Catholic Reformation began as a reaction against Protestantism, it culminated in reforming the Church itself.

The Initial Reaction

Initially, most members of the Church hierarchy were overwhelmed and bewildered by the emergence of Protestantism. All of the past heresies had remained limited in scope as compared with the incredible rapidity with which Lutheranism spread. For practical political reasons, the pope and various rulers were either unwilling or unable to use force to crack down on Protestantism at first, as witnessed with Charles V’s failed attempts to curtail Lutheranism’s spread. Lutheranism also spread much more quickly than had earlier heresies, which tended to be limited to certain regions; here, the fact that Luther and his followers readily embraced the printing press to spread their message made a major impact, with word of the new movement spreading across Europe over the course of the 1520s.

In historical hindsight, the shocking aspect of the Catholic Church’s initial reaction to the emergence of Protestantism is that there *was* no reaction. For decades, popes remained focused on the politics of Central Italy or simply continued beautifying Rome and enjoying a life of luxury; this was the era of the “Renaissance popes,” men from elite families who regarded the papal office as little more than a political position that happened to be at the head of the Church.

Likewise, there was no widespread awareness among most Church officials that anything out of the ordinary was taking place with Luther; despite the radicalism of his position, most of the clergy assumed that Lutheranism was a “flash in the pan,” doomed to fade back into obscurity in the end. By the 1540s, however, church officials began to take the threat posed by Protestantism more seriously.

The initial period of Catholic Reformation, from about 1540 – 1550, was a fairly moderate one that aimed to bring Protestants back into the fold. In a sense, the very notion of a permanent break from Rome was difficult for many people, certainly many priests, to conceive of. After about 1550, however, when it became clear that the split was permanent, the Church itself became much more hardline and intolerant. The subsequent reforms were as much about imposing a new internal discipline as they were in making membership appealing to lay Catholics.

The same factors that had made the Church difficult to reform before the Protestant break made it strong as an institution that opposed the new Protestant denominations: habit, ritual, organization, discipline, hierarchy, and wealth all worked to preserve the Church’s power and influence. Likewise, many princes realized that Protestantism often led to political problems in their territories; even though many of the German princes had originally supported Luther in order to protect their own political independence, many others came to realize that the last thing they wanted were independent-minded denominations in their territories, some of which might reject their worldly authority completely (as had the German peasants who rose up in 1524).

Among Catholics at all levels of social hierarchy, Catholic rituals were comforting, and even though rejecting the excesses in Catholic ritual had been part of the appeal of Protestantism to some, to many others it was precisely those familiar rituals that made Catholicism appealing. The Catholic Reformation is often associated with the “baroque” style of art and music which encouraged an emotional connection with Catholic ritual and, potentially, with the experience of faith itself. the Church continued to fund huge building projects and lavish artwork, much of which was aimed to appeal to laypeople, not just serve as pretty decorations for high-ranking churchmen.

Likewise, there was a wave of Protestant conversions that spread very rapidly by the 1530s, but then as the Protestant denominations splintered off and turned on one another, the “purity” of the appeal of Protestantism faded. In other words, when Protestants began fighting each other with the same vigor as their attacks on Rome, they no longer seemed like a clear and simple alternative to Roman corruption.

The Inquisition and the Council of Trent

The individual who launched the “hardline” movement of Catholic Reformation was Pope Paul III (r. 1534 – 1549). Almost from the beginning of his rule, Paul was on the offensive: he commissioned a report in 1536 to evaluate the possibility and necessity of reform, which concluded that there were numerous abuses within the Church that had to be corrected (e.g. the lack of education of the clergy, the practice of earning incomes from parishes that bishops never visited, etc.), but there was no budging on doctrine. In other words, the essential beliefs and practices of the Church were judged to be entirely correct and Luther (and soon, Calvin) was judged to be entirely wrong.

In 1542 Paul III approved the creation of a permanent branch of the Church devoted to holding Protestantism in check: the Holy Office, better known as the Inquisition. The Inquisition existed to search out signs of heresy, including Protestantism, in areas under Catholic control. It had the right to subject people to interrogation and torture and in extreme cases, to execute them. The (in)famous Spanish branch of the Inquisition was under the control of the Spanish crown, but its methods and goals were essentially the same. Inquisitions had been around since the Middle Ages - the first one was in 1184 and targeted a heretical movement in southern France - but they had always been short-term responses to heresy. Under Paul III, the Inquisition became a permanent part of the Church.

The popes that followed Paul III were similar in their focus on re-emphasizing orthodoxy and creating institutions to combat heresy. Paul IV (r. 1555 – 1559) created the “Index” of forbidden books (in 1549) that would go on to form the basis of royal censorship in all Catholic countries for the next two centuries. He also enforced the stance of the Church that the Bible was not to be translated into vernacular languages but had instead to remain in Latin, an explicit rejection of the Protestant practice of translating the Bible into everyday language for Christians to read and interpret themselves. According to Catholic belief, reiterated under Paul IV, the Bible had to remain in Latin because only trained priests had the knowledge and authority to interpret it for laypeople. Laypeople, left to their own devices, would simply get the Bible’s message wrong and endanger their souls in the process.

Paul III, Paul IV, and the subsequent pope, Pius IV, all oversaw an ongoing series of meetings, the Council of Trent, that took place periodically between 1545 – 1563. There, Church officials debated all of the articles and charges that had been leveled against the Church, from the sale of indulgences, to the importance of good works in salvation, to the

spiritual necessity of the sacraments. While it was initially organized to try to reconcile, at least in part, with Protestantism, hardliners within the Church won out in the subsequent debates and the Council reaffirmed almost all of the controversial parts of church doctrine and disputed articles of faith; the major exception was that the cardinals and bishops banned the sale of indulgences in the future (the Church still issued them, but they were no longer simply sold for cash). This was distressing to Emperor Charles V, who had earnestly hoped that the Church would give ground on some of the doctrinal issues and thereby win back Protestants in his lands; he even tried to prevent Pope Paul IV from taking office because the latter was so intransigent.

A depiction of the Council of Trent (in the background) painted in 1588, when wars between Protestants and Catholics were raging.

While the Council of Trent would not budge on doctrine, it did propose one monumental change to the Church: henceforth, priests would be formally trained for the job. After Trent, the Church organized and funded seminaries, colleges whose express purpose was the training of new priests. There, all priests would acquire a strong scholastic education (and, soon, most

seminaries also included a humanistic education as well), fluency in Latin, and a deep understanding of the Bible and the writings of major Christian thinkers. The ad hoc nature of higher education for priests gave way to a formal and universal requirement: *all* priests would be well educated, not just those who had sought out a university themselves. While abuses of power and moral laxness were not eliminated from the Church, the one definitive change for the better in terms of the experience of lay Catholics was that their priests were now supposed to be experts in Christian theology.

The Jesuits

In addition to the edicts and councils convened by the popes, the Catholic Reformation benefited from a resurgence of Catholic religious orders. The most important new religious order, by far, was the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits. The Jesuits were founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556), a kind of Catholic counterpart to Luther or Calvin, in 1540. A Spanish knight, Loyola was injured in battle. During his recovery, Loyola read books on the life of Christ and the saints, which inspired him to give up his possessions and take a pilgrimage across Spain and Italy. He soon attracted a following and was even briefly imprisoned on suspicion of heresy, since he claimed to offer "spiritual conversion" to those who would follow his teachings.

Loyola wrote a book, the *Spiritual Exercises*, that encouraged a mystic veneration of the Church and a single-minded devotion to its institutions. The Exercises were based on an imaginary recreation of the persecution and death of Christ that, when followed, led many new members of the Jesuits to experience an emotional and spiritual awakening. That awakening was explicitly focused on what he described as the "Church Hierarchical": not just a worldly institution that offered guidance to Christians, but the sole path to salvation, imbued by God Himself with spiritual authority.

As a former soldier, he founded the Jesuits to be "faithful soldiers of the pope." The purpose of the Jesuits was to fight Protestantism and heresy, forming a militant arm of scholar-soldiers available to the pope. What made the Jesuits distinct from the other religious orders was that they were responsible to the pope, not to kings. They came to live and work in kingdoms all over Europe, but they bypassed royal authority and took their orders directly from Rome – this did not endear them to many kings in the long run.

By Loyola's death in 1556, there were about 1,000 Jesuits; that number rapidly increased by the end of the century. Many became influential advisors to kings across Europe, ensuring that Catholic monarchs would actively persecute and root out heresy (including, of

course, Protestantism). They also began a missionary campaign that sought to rekindle an emotional connection to the Church through its use of passionate sermons.

Statue of Ignatius of Loyola at the Church of the Gesù in Rome, one of the original Jesuit churches. The statues are in the baroque style noted above, practically dripping with ornamentation and gilding.

Ultimately, the most important undertaking of the Jesuits was the creation of numerous schools. The Jesuits themselves were required to undergo an eleven-year period of training and education before they were full members, and they insisted on the highest quality of rigor and scholarship in their training and in the education they provided others. They raised young men, often nobles or rich members of the non-noble classes, with both an excellent humanist education and a fierce devotion to the Church. By 1600 there were 250,000 students in Jesuit

schools across continental Europe. The schools were noteworthy for being free, funded by the Church and private gifts. Students had to apply for admittance, and the Jesuits working at the schools were far closer to their students than were the very aloof professors at traditional universities at the time. The products of Jesuit schools were thus young men who had received both an excellent education and a deep indoctrination in Catholic belief and opposition to Protestantism. Those young men, drawn as they were from families of social elites, often went on to positions of considerable political and commercial power.

Jesuits were also active missionaries, soon traveling all over the known world. Unlike many other orders of missionaries, the Jesuits distinguished themselves by not only learning the native languages of the people they ministered to, but of adopting their customs as well. They were the first successful missionaries in East Asia, founding Christian communities in Japan (in 1549) and China (in 1552). In the Chinese case, the Jesuits failed to make many converts, but they did bring back an enormous amount of information about China itself. The most noteworthy Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, lived in the court of the Chinese emperor, was fluent in Chinese, and served as a court astrologer. It was Jesuits who brought back the puzzling (to Europeans) reports of a highly sophisticated, rich, ancient culture that had achieved its power without Christianity.

Effects of the Catholic Reformation

The Catholic Reformation was happening in earnest by the 1530s. the Church adopted the use of the printing press and began reaching out to both priests and educated laypeople, often in the vernacular languages rather than Latin (although, as noted above, the Bible itself was to remain untranslated). The new fervor led to a revival of religious orders focused on reaching out to the common people rather than remaining sequestered from the public in monasteries and convents. One significant new order along those lines was the Carmelites, an order of nuns reformed by St. Teresa of Avila starting in 1535. St. Teresa led a major reform that redoubled the nuns' vow of poverty and their focus on prayer and purity (the reforms also abolished separate residences and lifestyles for nuns from rich and poor families). Likewise, many orders started opening hospitals and orphanages in the cities that provided care for both the sick and the poor and indigent. The early decades of the Counter-Reformation thus saw an "opening up" of the Church to its followers and a greater emphasis on the duties of the Church to laypeople.

A famous depiction of St. Teresa at the moment she later claimed to have been overwhelmed by the divine presence. Like the statue of Ignatius of Loyola, the statue above is in the highly dramatized and emotional baroque style.

A major focus of the Church was reconnecting with common people, something that many reformers (including popes) believed was only possible if the Church "put its house in order." While Catholic monarchs continued to almost completely control the Church in their kingdoms (this was especially true of France), popes had at least moderate success in forcing bishops to stop living like princes, to have priests remain at least nominally celibate, and for church officials to actually live in the places they were supposed to represent. The moral qualities of members of the Church, while not universally exemplary, did come to more closely resemble their purported standards over time as a result.

To better connect with laypeople, the Church began to sponsor a counter-propaganda campaign following, inspired by the success that Protestantism had enjoyed through the use of cheap print. Lives of saints, prayer books, and anti-Protestant propaganda were printed and distributed throughout Europe. The Church began to stage plays not just of Biblical scenes, but of great moments in the Church's history. The new religious orders, including not just the

Jesuits but the Capuchins, the Ursulines, and the followers of Vincent de Paul (who lived in the late sixteenth century) sponsored major charitable works, reconnecting the poor to the Church. All of these activities amounted to a cultural reaction to the Reformation that took from Protestantism its focus on the individual's spiritual connection to God. In contrast to the austerity and even harshness of Lutheranism and (especially) Calvinism, the Catholic Church came to offer a mystical, emotional form of both worship and religious experience that was very appealing to many who may have originally been alienated from the institution.

One social phenomenon that definitely benefited from both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations was literacy. More schools and universities – both church-supported and private – continued to come into being throughout the sixteenth century. All Protestant denominations emphasized the importance of reading the Bible, and as the Catholic Church waged its counter-propaganda campaign, the Church hierarchy came to regard general literacy as desirable as well. Overall, literacy climbed to between 5 – 10% of the population by 1600 across Central and Western Europe.

Conclusion

The battle lines between Protestantism and Catholicism were firmly set by the 1560s. The Catholic Reformation established Catholic orthodoxy and launched a massive, and largely successful, campaign to re-affirm the loyalty and enthusiasm of Catholic laypeople. Meanwhile, Protestant leaders were equally hardened in their beliefs and actively inculcated devotion and loyalty in their followers. Nowhere was there the slightest notion of "religious tolerance" in the modern sense - both sides were convinced that anyone and everyone who disagreed with their spiritual outlook was damned to an eternity of suffering. The wars of propaganda and evangelism gave way to wars of muskets and pikes soon enough.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):
Council of Trent - Public Domain
Ignatius of Loyola - Roy Sebastian
The Ecstasy of St. Theresa - Napoleon Vier

Chapter 9: Religious Wars

By 1560, Europe was divided by religion as it had never been before. Protestantism was now a permanent feature of the landscape of beliefs and even the most optimistic Catholics had to abandon hopes that they could win many Protestants back over to the Roman church through propaganda and evangelism. A patchwork of peace treaties across most of Europe had established the principle of princes determining the acceptable religion within their respective territories, but those treaties in no way represented something recognizable today as "tolerance" – in fact, all sides believed they had exclusive access to spiritual truth. Simply put, the very notion of tolerance, of "live and let live," was almost nonexistent in early-modern Europe. Exceptions did exist, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, but beliefs clearly hardened over the course of the sixteenth century: what tolerance had existed in the early decades of the Reformation era tended to fade away.

This was not just about Catholic intolerance; while the Catholic Inquisition is an iconic institution in the history of persecution, most Protestants were equally hostile to Catholics. This was especially true among Huguenots in France, who aggressively proselytized and who imposed harsh social and, if they could, legal controls of behavior in their areas of influence, which included various towns in southern France, not just Switzerland. In addition, while actual wars between Protestant sects were rare (the English Civil War of the sixteenth century being something of an exception), different Protestant groups usually detested one another.

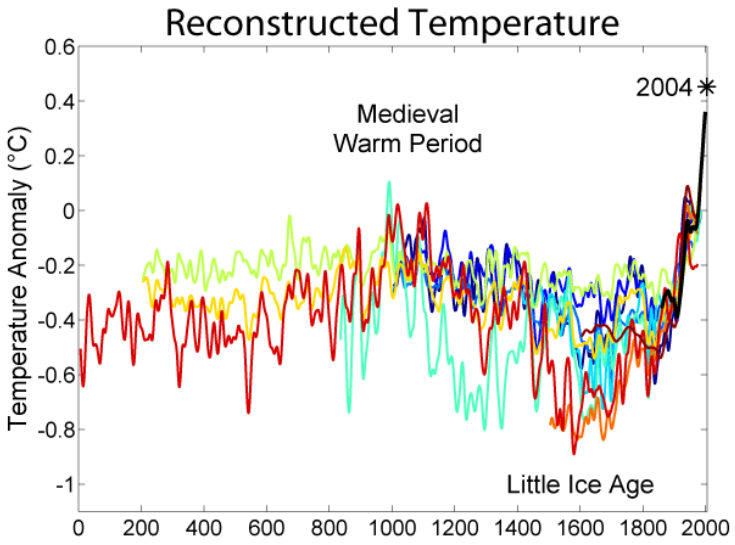
Why was religion so divisive? It was more than just incompatible belief-systems, with some of the reasons being very specific to the early modern period. First, religion was "owned" by princes. A given territory's religion was deeply connected to the faith of its leader. Princes often held some authority in church lands, and priests had always served as important royal officials. There were also numerous ecclesiastical territories, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, that were wholly controlled by "princes of the church." Likewise, only states had the resources to reform whole institutions, replacing seminaries, universities, libraries, and so on with new material in the case of Protestant states. This necessitated an even closer relationship between church and state. In turn, an individual's religious confession was concomitant with loyalty or disloyalty to her prince - someone following a rival branch of Christianity was, from the perspective of a ruler, not just a religious dissenter, but a political rebel.

At the same time, over the course of the sixteenth century, specific, hardened doctrines of belief were nailed down by the competing confessions. The Lutherans published a specific

creed defining Lutheran beliefs known as the Augsburg Confession in 1530, and the Catholic Council of Trent in the following decades defined exactly what Catholic doctrine consisted of. There was thus a hardening of beliefs as ambiguities and points of common agreement were eliminated. With all sides holding to their own.

The Little Ice Age

Religion was thus more than sufficient as a cause of conflict in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As it happens, however, there was another major cause of conflict, one that lent to the savagery of many of the religious wars of the period: the Little Ice Age. A naturally occurring fluctuation in earth's climate saw the average temperature drop by a few degrees during the period, enhancing the frequency and severity of bad harvests. In the Northern Hemisphere, that change began in the fourteenth century but became dramatically more pronounced between 1570 and the early 1700s, with the single most severe period lasting from approximately 1600 until 1640, precisely when the most destructive religious war of all raged in Europe, the Thirty Years' War that devastated the Holy Roman Empire.



Overlay of different historical reconstructions of average temperatures over the last two thousand years. Temperatures continue to climb rapidly in the present era.

Lower temperatures meant that crop yields were lower, outright crop failures more common, and famines more frequent. In societies that were completely dependent on agriculture for their very survival, these conditions ensured that social and political stability was severely undermined. To cite just one example, the price of grain increased by 630% in

England over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, driving peasants on the edge of subsistence to even greater desperation. Indeed, historians have now demonstrated that not just Europe, but major states across the world from Ming China, to the Ottoman Empire, to European colonial regimes in the Americas all suffered civil wars, invasions, or religious conflicts at this time, and that climate was a major causal factor. Historians now refer to a "general crisis of the seventeenth century" in addressing this phenomenon.

Thus, religious conflict overlapped with economic crisis, with the latter making the former even more desperate and bloody. The results are reflected in some simple statistics: from 1500 to 1700, some part of Europe was at war 90% of the time. There were only four years of peace in the entire seventeenth century. The single most powerful dynasty, the Habsburgs, were at war two-thirds of the time during this period.

The French Wars of Religion

Against this backdrop of crisis, the first major religious wars of the period were in France. France was, next to Spain, one of the most powerful kingdoms in Europe. It was the most populous and had large armies. It had a dynamic economy and significant towns and cities. It also had a very weak monarchy under the ruling Valois dynasty, who were kept in check by the powerful nobility. The Valois kings were often no more powerful than their most powerful noblemen, some of the latter of whom had armies as large as that of the king himself, and many Valois kings had little skill for practical politics. For example, the Valois king Henry II ignored affairs of state in favor of hunting and was killed in a tournament (during a joust, a splinter from a broken lance flew in through the eye-slit of his helmet, impaling his eye - he died two weeks later from the subsequent infection), and other members of the dynasty were little more effective.

France was divided between two major factions, led by the fanatically Catholic Guise family and the Huguenot Bourbon family. The former were advised by the Jesuits and supported by the king of Spain, while the latter represented the growing numbers of economically dynamic Huguenots concentrated in the south (they were especially numerous in Navarre, a small independent kingdom between France and Spain that was soon embroiled in the war). As of 1560 fully 10% of the people of France were Huguenots, many of whom represented its dynamic middle class: merchants, lawyers, and prosperous townsfolk. In addition, between one-third and one-half of the lower nobility were Huguenots, so the Huguenots as a group were more powerful than their numbers might initially indicate. Fearing the power of the Huguenots and detesting their faith, the Guises created the Catholic League,

an armed militia of Catholics that included armed monks, townsfolk, and soldiers. In 1562 a Guise nobleman sponsored a massacre of Huguenots that sparked decades of war.

From 1562 to 1572 there was on-again, off-again fighting between the Catholic League and Huguenot forces. The French king, Charles X, was a child when the fighting started and the state was thus run by his mother, Catherine de Medici, who tended to vacillate between supporting her fellow Catholics and supporting Protestants who were the enemies of Spain, France's rival to the south. Despite their own professed Catholicism, neither Charles nor Catherine were fanatical in their religious outlook, much to the frustration of the nobles of the Catholic League.

Hoping to end the conflict, Charles and Catherine invited the Huguenot Prince Henry of Navarre, leader of the Protestant forces, to Paris in 1572 to marry Charles' sister Margaret. Henry arrived in Paris with some 2,000 Huguenot followers, all of whom had agreed to arrive unarmed. The Duke of Guise led a conspiracy, however, to convince the king that only the death of Henry and his followers would truly end the threat of religious division, and with the king's approval Catholic forces launched a massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, in which more than 2,000 Protestants were killed. That day, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, would live in infamy in French history as a stark example of religiously-fueled hatred.

A gruesome depiction of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre painted by a Huguenot.

The events in Paris, in turn, sparked massacres all over the country with at least 20,000 more deaths (supposedly, the pope was so pleased with the news that he gave 100 gold coins to the messenger who brought it to him). The one important person who survived was the leader of the Huguenot cause, Henry of Navarre, who half-heartedly "converted" to Catholicism to ensure his safety but then escaped to the south and rallied the Huguenot resistance. Charles died in 1574 of an illness, leaving his younger brother Henry as the last male member of his family line available for the throne. After a lull in the fighting, the war resumed in 1576.

In the years that followed, the French Wars of Religion turned into a three-way civil war pitting the Catholic League against the legitimate king of France (both sides were Catholic, but as focused on destroying each other as they were fighting Huguenots) with the Huguenots fighting both in turn. There was almost a macabre humor to the fact that the leaders of the three factions were all named Henry - King Henry III of Valois, Prince Henry IV of Navarre, and the leader of the Catholic League, Henry, Duke of Guise. Further assassinations followed, including those of both the Duke of Guise and the King. The only heir to the throne was Henry of Navarre himself, since he had married into the royal family, so after a climactic battle in 1594 he was declared Henry IV of France. He realized that the country would never accept a Huguenot king, so he famously concluded that "Paris is worth a mass" and converted to Catholicism on the spot.

Henry IV went on to become popular among both Catholics and Protestants for his competence, wit, and pragmatism. In 1598 he issued the Edict of Nantes that officially propagated toleration to the Huguenots, allowing them to build a parallel state within France with walled towns, armies, and an official Huguenots church, but banning them from Paris and participation in the royal government. He was eventually assassinated (after eighteen previous attempts) in 1610 by a Catholic fanatic but, by his death, the pragmatic necessity of tolerance was accepted even by most French Catholics. Ultimately, the "solution" to the French Wars of Religion ended up being political unity instead of religious unity, a conclusion reached out of pure pragmatism rather than any kind of heartfelt toleration of difference.

Spain and the Netherlands

Following Henry IV's victory, the royal line of the Bourbons would rule France until the French Revolution that began in 1789. The Bourbons' greatest rivals for most of that period were the Habsburg royal line, who possessed the Austrian Empire, were the nominal heads of the Holy Roman Empire, and by the sixteenth century had control of Spain and its enormous colonial empire as well.

The Spanish king in the mid-sixteenth century was Philip II (r. 1556 – 1598), son of the former Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Philip regarded his place in Europe, and history, as being the most staunch defender of Catholicism possible. This translated to harsh, even tyrannical, suspicion and persecution of not only non-Catholics, but those Catholics suspected of harboring secret non-Catholic beliefs. He viciously persecuted the *Moriscos*, the converted descendants of Spanish Muslims, and forced them to turn their children over to Catholic schools for education. He also held the *Conversos*, converted descendants of Spanish Jews, as suspect of secretly continuing to practice Judaism, with the Spanish Inquisition frequently trying Conversos on suspicion of heresy.

Philip was able to exercise a great deal of control over Spanish society. He had much more trouble, however, in imposing similar control and religious unity in his foreign possessions, most importantly the Netherlands, a collection of territories in northern Europe that he had inherited from his various royal ancestors. The Netherlands was an amalgam of seventeen provinces with a diverse society and religious denominations, all held in a delicate balance. It was also rich, boasting significant overseas and European commercial interests, all led by a dynamic merchant class. In 1566, Spanish interference in Dutch affairs led to Calvinist attacks on Catholic churches, which in turn led Philip to send troops and the Inquisition to impose harsher control. The most notorious person in this effort was the Spanish Duke of Alba, who sat at the head of a military court called the Council of Troubles, but known to the Dutch as the Council of Blood. Alba executed those even suspected of being Protestants, which accomplished little more than rallying Dutch resistance.

A Dutch Prince, William the Silent (1533 – 1584), led counter-attacks against Spanish forces, and Alba was recalled to Spain in 1573. Spanish troops, however, were no longer getting paid regularly by the crown and revolted, sacking several Dutch cities that had been loyal to Spain, including Brussels, Ghent, and especially Antwerp. These attacks were described as the “Spanish fury” by the Dutch, and they not only permanently undermined the economy of the cities that were sacked, they lent enormous fuel to the Dutch Revolt itself.

The Spanish Fury.

In 1581 the northern provinces declared their independence from Spain, then in 1588, they organized as a republic led by wealthy merchants and nobles. Flooded with Calvinist refugees from the south, the Dutch Republic became staunchly Protestant and a strong ally of Anglican England. Spain, in turn, maintained an ongoing and enormously costly military campaign against the Republic until 1648. The supply train for Spanish armies, known as the Spanish Road, stretched all the way from Spain across west-central Europe, crossing over both Habsburg territories and those controlled by other princes. It was hugely costly; despite the enormous ongoing shipments of bullion from the New World, the Spanish monarchy was wracked by debts, many of which were due to the Dutch conflict.

England

Even as Spain found itself mired in an ongoing and costly conflict in the Netherlands, hostility developed between Spain and England. Philip married the English queen Mary Tudor in part to try to bring England back to Catholicism after Mary's father Henry VIII had broken with the Roman church and created the Church of England. Mary and Philip persecuted Anglicans, but Mary died after only five years (r. 1553 – 1558) without an heir. Her sister, Elizabeth,

refused Philip's proposal of marriage and rallied to the Anglican cause. As hostility between England and Spain grew, Elizabeth's government sponsored privateers - pirates working for the English crown - led by a skillful and ruthless captain named Sir Francis Drake. These privateers began a campaign of raids against Spanish possessions in the New World and even against Spanish ports, culminating in the sinking of an anchored Spanish fleet in Cadiz in 1587. Simultaneously, the English supported the Dutch Protestant rebels who were engaged in the growing war against Spain. Infuriated, Philip planned a huge invasion of England.

This conflict reached a head in 1588. Philip spent years building up an enormous fleet known as the Spanish Armada of 132 warships, equipped not only with cannons but designed to carry thousands of soldiers to invade England. It sailed in 1588, but was resoundingly defeated by a smaller English fleet in a sea battle in the English Channel. The English ships were smaller and more maneuverable, their cannons were faster and easier to reload, and English captains knew how to navigate in the fickle winds of the Channel more easily than did their Spanish counterparts, all of which spelled disaster for the Spanish fleet. The Armada was forced to limp around England, Scotland, and Ireland trying to get back to Spain, finally returning having lost half of its ships and thousands of men. The debacle conclusively ended Spain's attempt to invade England and eliminated the threat to the Anglican church.

The end result of the foreign wars that Spain waged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was simple: bankruptcy. Despite the enormous wealth that flowed in from the Americas, Spain went from being the single greatest power in Europe as of about 1550 to a second-tier power by 1700. Never again would Spain play a dominant role in European politics, although it remained in possession of an enormous overseas empire until the early nineteenth century.

The Thirty Years' War

The most devastating religious conflict in European history happened in the middle of the Holy Roman Empire; it ultimately dragged on for decades and saw the reduction of the population in the German Lands of between 20 – 40%. That conflict, the Thirty Years' War, saw the most horrific acts of violence, the greatest loss of life, and the greatest suffering among both soldiers and civilians of any of the religious wars of the period.

Leading up to the outbreak of war, there was an uneasy truce in the Holy Roman Empire between the Catholic emperor, who had limited power outside of his own ancestral (Habsburg) lands, and the numerous Protestant princes in their respective, mostly northern, territories. As of 1618, that compromise had held since the middle of the sixteenth century and seemed

relatively stable, despite the religiously-fueled wars across the borders in France and the Netherlands.

The compromise fell apart because of a specific incident, the attempted murder of two Catholic imperial officials by Protestant nobles in Prague, when the emperor Ferdinand II attempted to crack down on Protestants in Bohemia (corresponding to the present-day Czech Republic). Ferdinand sent officials to Prague to demand that Bohemia as a whole renounce Protestantism and convert to Catholicism. The Bohemian Diet, the local parliament of nobles, refused and threw the two officials out of the window of the building in which they were meeting; that event came to be known as the Defenestration of Prague - "defenestration" literally means "un-windowing."

The Diet renounced its allegiance to the emperor and pledged to support a Protestant prince instead. A flurry of attacks and counter-attacks ensued, ultimately pitting the Catholic Habsburgs against the German Protestant princes and, soon, their allied Danish king. The Habsburgs led a Catholic League, supported by powerful Catholic princes, while Frederick of the Palatinate, a German Calvinist prince, led the Protestant League against the forces of the emperor.

From 1620 – 1629, Catholic forces won a series of major victories against the Protestants. Bohemia itself was conquered by Catholic forces and over 100,000 Protestants fled; during the course of the war Bohemia lost 50% of its population. Catholic armies were particularly savage in the conflict, living off the land and slaughtering those who opposed them. The Danish king, Christian IV, entered the war in 1625 to bolster the Protestant cause, but his armies were crushed and Denmark was briefly occupied by the Catholic forces. This period of Catholic triumph saw the Emperor Ferdinand II issue an Edict of Restitution in 1629 that demanded the return of all Church lands seized since the Reformation – this was hugely disruptive, as those lands had been in the hands of different states for over 80 years at that point!

In 1630, the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, received financial backing from the French to oppose the Habsburgs and their forces. Under the leadership of its savvy royal minister, Cardinal Richelieu, France worked to hold its Habsburg rivals in check despite the shared Catholicism of the French and Habsburg states. Adolphus invaded northern Germany in 1630, then won a major victory against the Catholic forces in 1631. He went on to lead a huge Protestant army through the Empire, reversing Catholic gains everywhere and exacting the same kind of brutal treatment against Catholics as had been inflicted on Protestants. In 1632,

Adolphus died in battle and the military leader of the Catholics, a nobleman named Wallenstein, was assassinated, leaving the war in an ongoing, bloody stalemate.

In 1635 the French entered the war on the Protestant side. At this point, the war shifted in focus from a religious conflict to a dynastic struggle between the two greatest royal houses of Europe: the Bourbons of France and the Habsburgs of Austria. It also extended well beyond Germany; follow-up wars were fought between France and Spain even after the 30 Years' War itself ended in 1648, and Spain provided both troops and financial support to the Habsburg forces in Germany as well.

For the next thirteen years, from the French intervention in 1635 until the war finally ended in 1648, armies battled their way across the Empire, funded by the various elite states and families of Europe but exacting a terrible toll on the German lands and people. From 1618 – 1648, the population of the Empire dropped by 8,000,000. Whole regions were depopulated and massive tracts of farmland were rendered barren; it took until close to 1700 for the Empire to begin to recover economically. In 1648, exhausted and deeply in debt, both sides finally met to negotiate a peace. The result was the Treaty of Westphalia, which was negotiated by a series of messages sent back and forth between the two sides, since the delegations refused to be in the same town.

The end result was that the already-weak centralized power of the Holy Roman Empire was further reduced, with the constituent states now enjoying almost total autonomy. In terms of the religious map of the Empire, there was one major change, however: despite the fact that the Catholic side had not "won" the war per se, Catholicism itself did benefit from the early success of the Habsburgs. Whereas roughly half of Western and Central Europe was Protestant in 1590, only one-fifth of it was in 1690; that was in large part because few people remained Protestants in Habsburg lands after the war.

The "winners" of the war were really the relatively centralized kingdoms of France and Sweden, with Austria's status as the most powerful individual German state also confirmed. The big loser was Spain: having paid for many of the Catholic armies for thirty years, it was essentially bankrupt, and its monarchy could not reorganize in a more efficient manner as did its French rivals. Likewise, Spain missed out on the subsequent economic expansion of Western Europe; the war had undermined the economy of Central Europe, and the center of economic dynamism thus shifted to the Atlantic seaboard, especially France, England, and the Netherlands. There, a mercantile middle class became more important than ever, while Spain remained tied to its older agricultural and bullion-based economic system.

If the war had a positive effect, it was that it spelled the end of large-scale religious conflict in Europe. There would be harsh, and official, intolerance well into the nineteenth century, but even pious monarchs were now very hesitant to initiate or participate in full-scale war in the name of religious belief. Instead, there was a kind of reluctant, pragmatic tolerance that took root across all of Europe - the same kind of tolerance that had emerged in France half a century earlier at the conclusion of the French Wars of Religion.

Soldiers robbing, murdering, and raping peasants during the War. The conduct of soldiers was so horrific that many Europe elites came to believe that better-regulated and led armies were essential to prevent chaos in the future.

Perhaps the most important change that took place in the aftermath of the wars was that European elites came to focus as much on the way wars were fought as the reasons for war. The conduct of rapacious soldiers had been so atrocious in the wars, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, that many states went about the long, difficult process of creating professional standing armies that reported to noble officers, rather than simply hiring mercenaries and letting them run amok.

Conclusion

Obviously, neither Catholics nor Protestants "won" the wars of religion that wracked Europe from roughly 1550 - 1650. Instead, millions died, intolerance remained the rule, and the major states of Europe emerged more focused than ever on centralization and military power. If there was a silver lining, it was that rulers did their best to clamp down on explosions of religiously-inspired violence in the future, in the name of maintaining order and control. Those

concepts - order and control - would go on to inspire the development of a new kind of political system in which kings would claim almost total authority: absolutism.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Little Ice Age - Robert A. Rohde

St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre - Public Domain

The Spanish Fury - Public Domain

Marauding Soldiers - Public Domain

Chapter 10: Absolutism

"Absolutism" is a concept of political authority created by historians to describe a shift in the governments of the major monarchies of Europe in the early modern period. In other words, while the monarchs of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries certainly knew they were doing something differently than had their predecessors, they did not use the term "absolutism" itself. The central idea behind absolutism was that the king or queen was, first, the holder of (theoretically) absolute political power within the kingdom, and second, that the monarch's every action should be in the name of preserving and guaranteeing the rights and privileges of his or her subjects, occasionally even including the peasants.

Absolutism was in contrast to medieval and Renaissance-era forms of monarchy in which the king was merely first among equals, holding formal feudal authority over his elite nobles, but often being merely their equal, or even inferior, in terms of real authority and power. As demonstrated in the case of the French Wars of Religion, there were often numerous small states and territories that sometimes rivaled larger ones in power, and even nobles that were part of a given kingdom had the right to raise and maintain their own armies outside of the direct control of the monarch.

That changed starting in the early seventeenth century, primarily in France. What emerged was a stronger, centralized form of monarchy in which the monarch held much more power than even the most powerful nobleman. Royal bureaucracies were strengthened, often at the expense of the decision-making power and influence of the nobility, as non-noble officials were appointed to positions of real power in the government. Armies grew and, with them, the taxation to support them became both greater in sheer volume and more efficient in its collection techniques. In short, more real power and money flowed to the central government of the monarch than ever before, something that underwrote the expansion of military and colonial power in the same period, as well as a dazzling cultural show of that power exemplified by the French "sun king," Louis XIV.

France

The exemplary case of absolutist government coming to fruition was that of France in the seventeenth century. The transformation of the French state from a conventional Renaissance-era monarchy to an absolute monarchy began under the reign of Louis XIII, the son of Henry IV (the victor of the French Wars of Religion). Louis XIII came to the throne as an eight-year-old when his father was assassinated in 1610. Following conventional practice when a king was too young to rule, his mother Marie de Medici held power as regent, one who rules in the name of the king, enlisting the help of a brilliant French cardinal, Armand de Richelieu. While Marie de Medici eventually stepped down as regent, Richelieu joined the king as his chief minister in 1628 and continued to play the key role in shaping the French state.

Cardinal Richelieu, in many ways the architect of absolute monarchy in France.

Richelieu deserves a great deal of the credit for laying the foundation for absolutism in France. He suppressed various revolts against royal power that were led by nobles, and he created a system of royal officials called *Intendants*, royal governors who were men who were usually not themselves noble but were instead drawn from the mercantile classes. They collected royal taxes and oversaw administration and military recruitment in the regions to which they were assigned; they did not have to answer to local lords.

Richelieu's major focus was improving tax collection. To do so, he abolished three out of six regional assemblies that, traditionally, had the right to approve changes in taxation. He made himself superintendent of commerce and navigation, recognizing the growing importance of commerce in providing royal revenue. He managed to increase the revenue from the *taille*, the direct tax on land, almost threefold during his tenure (r. 1628 – 1642). That said, while he did curtail the power of the elite nobles, most of those who bore the brunt of his improved techniques of taxation were the peasants; Richelieu compared the peasants to mules, noting that they were only useful for working.

Richelieu was also a cardinal: one of the highest-ranking "princes of the church," officially beholden only to the pope. His real focus, however, was the French crown. It was said that he "worshiped the state" much more than he appeared to concern himself with his duties as a cardinal. He even oversaw French support of the Protestant forces in the Thirty Years' War as a check against the power of the Habsburgs, and also supported the Ottoman Turks against the Habsburgs for the same reason. Just to underline this point: a Catholic cardinal, Richelieu, supported Protestants and Muslims against a Catholic monarchy in the name of French power.

Louis XIV - the Sun King

Louis XIII died in 1643, and his son became king Louis XIV. The latter was still too young to take the throne, so his mother became regent, ruling along Richelieu's protégé, Jules Mazarin, who continued Richelieu's policies and focus on taxation and royal centralization. Almost immediately, however, simmering resentment against the growing power of the king exploded in a series of uprisings against the crown known as The Fronde, essentially a noble-led civil war against the monarchy (the rebels even formed a formal alliance with Spain). They were defeated by loyal forces in 1653, but the uprisings made a profound impression on the young king, who vowed to bring the nobles into line.

When Mazarin died in 1661, Louis ascended to full power (he was 23). Louis went on to a long and dazzling rule, achieving the height of royal power and prestige not just in France, but in all of Europe. He ruled from 1643 – 1715 (including the years in which he ruled under the guidance of a regent) meaning he was king for an astonishing 54 years; consider the fact that the average life expectancy for those surviving infancy was only about 40 years at the time(!) Louis was called the Sun King, a term and an image he actively cultivated, declaring himself "without equal," and being depicted as the sun god Apollo (he once performed as Apollo in a ballet before his nobles, to rapturous applause – he was an excellent dancer). He was, among other things, a master marketer and propagandist of himself and his own authority. He had

teams of artists, playwrights, and architects build statues, paint pictures, write plays and stories, and build buildings all glorifying his image.

Famously, Louis developed what had begun as a hunting lodge (first built by his father) in the village of Versailles, about 15 miles southeast of Paris, into the most glorious palace in Europe, built in the baroque style and lavishly decorated with ostentatious finery. Over the decades of his long rule, the palace and grounds of the Palace of Versailles grew into the largest and most spectacular seat of royal power in Europe, on par with any palace in the world at the time. There were 1,400 fountains in the gardens, 1,200 orange trees, and an ongoing series of operas, plays, balls, and parties. 10,000 people could live in the palace, counting its additional buildings, since Louis ultimately had 2,000 rooms built both in the palace and in apartments in the village, all furnished at the state's expense. The grounds cover about 2,000 acres, or just over 3 square miles (by comparison, Central Park in New York City is a mere 843 acres in size).

A contemporary photograph of the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, a spectacular example of baroque architecture and interior design.

Louis expected high-ranking nobles to spend part of the year at Versailles, where they were lodged in apartments and spent their days bickering, gossiping, gambling, and taking part in elaborate rituals surrounding the person of the king. Each morning, high-ranking nobles

greeted the king as he awoke (the “rising” of the king, in parallel to the rising of the sun), hand-picked favorites carried out such tasks as tying the ribbons on his shoes, and then the procession accompanied him to breakfast. Comparable rituals continued throughout the day, ensuring that only those nobles in the king’s favor ever had the opportunity to speak to him directly. The rituals were carefully staged not only to represent deference to Louis, but to emphasize the hierarchy of ranks among the nobles themselves, undermining their unity and forcing them to squabble over his favor. One of the simplest ways in which Versailles undermined their power was that it cost so much to maintain oneself there – about 50% of the revenue of all but the very richest nobles present in the town or the château was spent on lodging, clothes, gifts, and servants.

Around the king’s person, courtiers had to be very careful to wear the right clothes, make the right gestures, use the correct phrases, and even display the correct facial expressions. Deviation could, and generally did, lead to humiliation and a sometimes permanent loss of the king’s favor, to the delighted mockery of the other nobles. This was not just an elaborate game: anyone wishing to "get" anything from the royal government (e.g. having a son appointed as an officer in the army, joining an elite royal academy of scholars, securing a lucrative royal pension, serving as a diplomat abroad, etc.). had to convince the king and his officials that he was witty, poised, fashionable, and respected within the court. One false move and a career could be ruined. At the same time, the rituals surrounding the king were not invented to humiliate and impoverish his nobles per se; instead, they celebrated each noble’s power in terms of his or her proximity to the king. Nobles at Versailles were reminded of two things at once: their dependence and deference to the king, but also their own dignity and power as those who had the *right* to be near the king.

Not just nobles participated in the dizzying web of favor-trading, gossip, and bribery at Versailles, however. Perhaps surprisingly, any well-dressed person was welcome to walk through the palace and the grounds and confer with those present (Louis XIV prided himself on the “openness” of his court, contrasting it with the closed-off court of a tyrant). Both men and women from very humble origins sometimes rose to prominence, and made a healthy living, at Versailles by serving as go-betweens for elites seeking royal positions through the bureaucracy. Others took advantage of the state’s desperate need for revenue by proposing new tax schemes; those that were accepted usually came with a payment for the person who submitted the scheme, so it was possible to make a living by “brainstorming” for tax revenue on behalf of the monarchy. Despite the vast social gap between the nobility and commoners, many nobles

were perfectly happy to form working relationships with useful social inferiors, and in some cases real friendships emerged in the process.

Some aspects of life at Versailles seem comic today: the palace is so huge that the food was usually cold before it made it from the kitchens to the dining room; on one occasion Louis' wine froze en route. Some of the nobles who lived on the palace or its grounds would use the hallways to relieve themselves instead of the privies because the latter were so inadequate and far from their rooms. The palace had been designed for display, not comfort.

The costs of building and maintaining such an enormous temple to monarchical power were enormous. During the height of its construction, 60% of the royal revenue went to funding the elaborate court at Versailles itself (this later dropped to 5% under Louis XVI, but the old figure was well-remembered and resented), an enormous ongoing expenditure that nevertheless shored up royal prestige. Louis himself delighted in the life at court, refusing to return to Paris (which he hated) and dismissing the financial costs as beneath his dignity to take notice of. At Versailles, life orbited around his person and, by extension, his power, which was never seriously challenged during his lifetime.

Louis did not just preside over the ongoing pageant at Versailles, however. He was dedicated to glorifying French achievements in art, scholarship, and his personal obsession: warfare. He created important theater companies, founded France's first scientific academy, and supported the *Académie Française*, the body dedicated to preserving the purity of the French language founded earlier by Richelieu (during Louis XIV's reign, the Academy published the first official French dictionary). French literature, art, and science all prospered under his sponsorship, and French became the language of international diplomacy among European states.

The above martial portrait of Louis XIV depicts him, symbolically, in his role as supreme military commander. He is dressed in full (ceremonial) armor, holding a sword, and presiding over a battle in the background.

To keep up with costs, Louis continued to entrust revenue collection to non-noble bureaucrats. The most important was Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619 – 1683), who doubled royal revenues by reducing the cut taken by tax collectors (only a quarter of revenue used to reach royal coffers; he got it up to 80% in some cases), increasing tariffs on foreign trade going to France, and greatly increasing France's overseas commercial interests. Colbert was the model of a powerful commoner despised by the nobility: not only was he part of the system that held noble power in check, he was a mere shopkeeper's son.

While Louis' primary legacy was the image of monarchy that he created, his practical policies were largely destructive to France itself. First, he relentlessly persecuted religious minorities, going after various small groups of religious dissenters but concentrating most of his attention and ire on the Huguenots. In 1685 he officially revoked the Edict of Nantes that his

grandfather had created to grant the Huguenots toleration, and he offered them the choice of conversion to Catholicism or exile. While many did convert, over 200,000 fled to parts of Germany, the Netherlands, England, and America. In one fell swoop, Louis crippled what had been among the most commercially productive sectors of the French population, ultimately strengthening his various enemies in the process.

Second, he waged constant war. From 1680 – 1715 Louis launched a series of wars, primarily against his Habsburg rivals, which succeeded in seizing small chunks of territory on France's borders from various Habsburg lands and in saddling the monarchy with enormous debts. Colbert, the architect of the vastly more efficient systems of taxation, repeatedly warned Louis that these wars were financially untenable; Louis simply ignored the question of whether he had enough money to wage them. The threat of France was so great that even traditional enemies like England and the Netherlands on one hand and the Habsburgs on the other joined forces against Louis, and after a lengthy war, the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 forced Louis to abandon further territorial ambitions. Furthermore, the costs of the wars were so high that his government desperately sought new sources of revenue, selling noble titles and bureaucratic offices, instituting still new taxes, and further trampling the peasants. When he died in 1715, the state was technically bankrupt.

Elsewhere in Europe

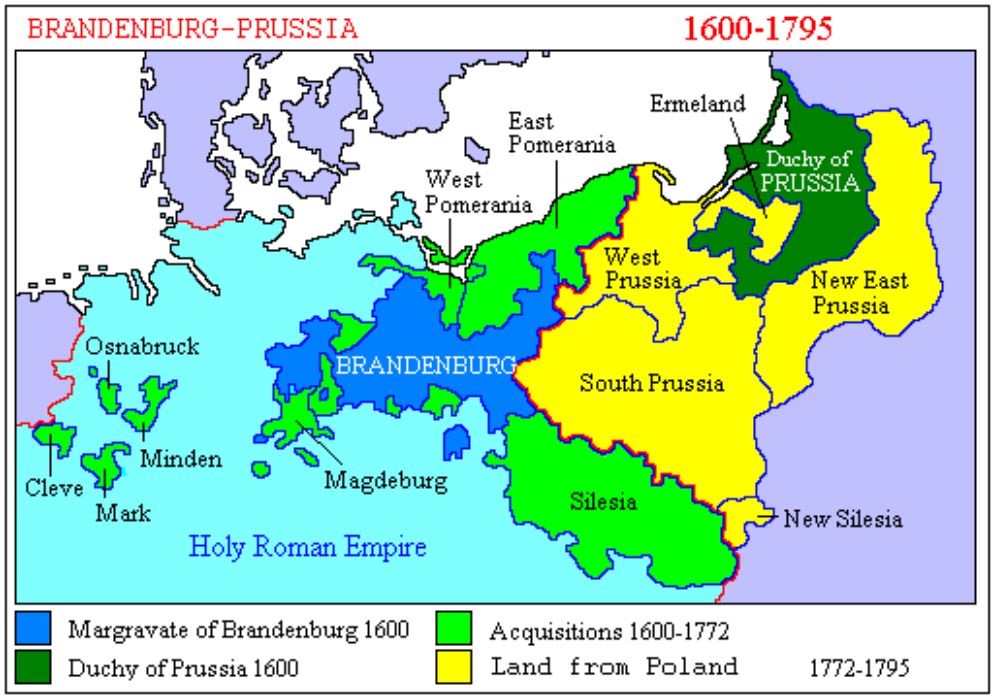
Almost everywhere in Europe, other monarchies tried to imitate both the style and the substance of Louis XIV's court and style of rule. They built palaces based on Versailles even as the early-modern military revolution, not to mention Louis' constant wars, obliged them to seek out new forms of taxation and reliance on royal officials to build up their armies and fortifications. In most cases, from Sweden to Austria, monarchs worked out compromises with their nobles that saw both sides benefit, generally at the expense of the peasantry.

Prussia

Arguably the most successful absolutist state in Europe besides France was the small northern German kingdom of Brandenburg, the forerunner of the later German state of Prussia. In 1618, the king of Brandenburg inherited the kingdom of East Prussia, and in the following years smaller territories in the west on the Rhine River. From this geographically unconnected series of territories was the country now known as Germany to evolve.

In 1653, the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm struck the “Great Compromise” with his nobles . He received a military subsidy in the form of taxes, along with the right to make law independent of noble oversight. In return, the nobility received confirmation that only nobles could own land and, further, that they had total control over the peasants on their land. In essence, the already-existing status of serfdom on Prussian lands was made permanent. Serfs could not inherit property or even leave the land they worked without the permission of their lord. One Prussian recalled being taught, presumably in a church-run primary school, that “the king could cut off the noses and ears of all his subjects if he wished to do so, and that we owed it to his goodness and his gentle disposition that he had left us in possession of these necessary organs.”

In turn, Friedrich Wilhelm oversaw the creation of the first truly efficient state apparatus in Europe, with his tax collection agency (which grew out of the war office) operating at literally twice the efficiency of the French equivalent. The major state office was called General Directory Over Finance, War, and Royal Domains; it was perhaps one of the original sources of the stereotypes of ruthless German efficiency. His son, Frederick I (r. 1688 – 1713) further consolidated the power of the monarchy, built up the royal capital of Berlin, and received the right to claim the title of “King of Prussia” from the Holy Roman Emperor.



Prussia began as the union of Brandenburg and the Duchy of Prussia, eventually growing to become one of the most powerful German states.

His grandson, confusingly also named Friedrich Wilhelm (“Friedrich Wilhelm I” as opposed to just “Friedrich Wilhelm,” r. 1713 – 1740) built on the work of his grandfather and father primarily by concentrating all state power on the military. He more than doubled the size of the Prussian army (from 30,000 to 83,000, making it the fourth largest in Europe), lived modestly in a few rooms in the palace, wore his officer’s uniform everywhere, and occasionally punched out the teeth of judges whose sentences he disagreed with. It was said during his rule that “what distinguishes the Prussians from other people is that theirs is not a country with an army. They have an army and a country that serves it.” Most importantly, Frederick Wilhelm created formal systems of conscription (i.e. "the draft"), meaning more men in Prussia served in the military than did men anywhere else in Europe, and he established the first system of military reserves, with reservists drilling for two months a year during the summers. In short, Prussia became the most militarized society in Europe.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Prussia was embroiled in a series of wars that confirmed its status as a European "great power." Its version of absolutism, one centered on the authority of the king, the rights of the nobles, and an overwhelming focus on the military, proved effective in transforming it from backwater to the only serious rival to Austria for dominance in Central Europe. Notably, Prussia joined Austria and Russia in dividing up the entire kingdom of Poland in 1772, extinguishing Polish independence until the twentieth century.

Austria

Prussia’s great rival in the eighteenth century was Austria. Austria, as the ancestral state of the Habsburgs, had always been the single most powerful German state within the Holy Roman Empire. The Habsburgs, however, found that the diversity of their domains greatly hampered their ability to develop along absolutist lines. In some cases, they were able to reduce the power and independence of some of their nobles by supporting even more onerous control of peasants: for example, in Bohemia, peasants were made to work three days a week for their nobles, for free, and in return the Bohemian nobles allowed the emperor more control of the territory itself. In other territories like Hungary, however, nobles successfully resisted the encroachment of their Habsburg rulers.

The long-term pattern was that, especially after the Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years’ War in 1648 rendered the political structure of the Holy Roman Empire virtually meaningless, “Habsburg” meant “Austrian.” The Habsburgs ruled Austria itself and exercised real control over the constituent kingdoms of their empire like Hungary and Bohemia, but had virtually no authority over the other Holy Roman states. With the Spanish branch of the family

dying off in 1700 (the last Spanish Habsburg, Charles II, died without an heir in 1700), this identification was even stronger.

Spain

Practically every other kingdom in Europe saw at least an attempt by a king or queen to reorganize the state along the absolutist lines followed by France. From Sweden, to England, to Spain, monarchs tried to consolidate royal power at the expense of their nobles and on the backs of their peasants. Those efforts were at least partly successful in places like Sweden and Denmark, but were disastrous failures in places like Spain and England.

Spain had been the most powerful kingdom in Europe in the sixteenth century. Thanks to its takeover of Central and South America, it had enormous reserves of bullion in the sixteenth century, and thanks to shrewd marriages by the Habsburgs, Spain was part of the largest dynastic system in Europe. However, both the failed invasion of England in 1588 and the ongoing debacle of the Dutch Revolt resulted in enormous losses of both wealth and prestige by the Spanish. By the 1620s and against the backdrop of the Thirty Years' War, the monarchy was bankrupt and Spain itself was divided between numerous small but mostly independent kingdoms and territories. Spain became almost like a smaller version of the Holy Roman Empire, with the Spanish king only directly ruling the central territory of Castile (it was the Castilian dialect, centered on Madrid, that became the official Spanish language).

Spanish nobles came to hold their own kings in contempt and asserted their own sovereignty against the pretensions of the monarchy. Attempts by royal officials to enact reforms similar to those undertaken by Richelieu in France met with failure; even as Spain was losing the Dutch Revolt, it was trying to bankroll the Catholic forces of the Thirty Years' War, thereby undermining its own financial reserves and stretching its military power to the breaking point. The regional parliaments of various Spanish territories revolted against the central monarchy in the mid-seventeenth century, with Portugal achieving complete independence in 1640.

Simultaneously, there was little economic dynamism in Spain. There was a small middle class, and Spain's conservative nobility succeeded in preventing non-nobles from achieving positions of authority within the Spanish royal bureaucracy. The earlier assaults on Jews and Muslims had already driven out the most dynamic economic elements from Spain, and the attack on the Moriscos and Conversos (descendants of the Muslims and Jews who had converted to Catholicism) drove many of them away as well. Spain's vast empire continued to produce great wealth, but relatively little of that wealth ended up in the coffers of the monarchy,

and the sheer scale of the slave-based extraction of precious metals from the New World ran up against simple economics laws: by the seventeenth century this bullion-based system was in dire straits thanks to the inflation silver imports introduced to the European economy.

There was a strong mood of depression and nostalgia among elite Spaniards of the time, most memorably expressed in one of the great works of Spanish literature, Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (published in two parts, 1605 and 1615), portraying a delusional minor nobleman trying to live out a glorious tale of fighting giants and dragons while actually attacking windmills. Especially as its royal line grew moribund in the second half of the seventeenth century, and following the inconclusive end of the Thirty Years' War Spain had largely financed, the power of the Spanish state grew ever weaker.

The English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution

England was perhaps the most outstanding example of a state in which the absolutist form of monarchy resolutely failed during the seventeenth century, and yet the state itself emerged all the stronger. Ironically, the two most powerful states in Europe during the following century were absolutist France and its political opposite, the first major *constitutional* monarchy in Europe: the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

Some of the characteristics that historians often associate with modernity are representative governments, capitalist economies, and (relative, in the case of early-modern states) religious toleration. All of those things first converged in England at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries. Likewise, England would eventually evolve from an important but secondary state in terms of its power and influence to *the* most powerful nation in the world in the nineteenth century. For those reasons it is worthwhile to devote considerable attention to the case of English politics during that period.

The irony of the fact that England was the first state to move toward "modern" patterns and political dominance is that, at the start of the seventeenth century, England was a relative backwater. Its population was only a quarter of that of France and its monarchy was comparatively weak; precisely as France was reorganizing along absolutist lines, England's monarchy was beset by powerful landowners with traditional privileges they were totally unwilling to relinquish. The English monarchy ran a kingdom with various ethnicities and divided religious loyalties, many of whom were hostile to the monarchy itself. It was an unlikely candidate for what would one day be the most powerful "Great Power" in Europe.

The English King Henry VIII had broken the official English church - renamed the Church of England - away from the Roman Catholic church in the 1530s. In the process, he had seized an enormous amount of wealth from English Catholic institutions, mostly monasteries, and used it to fund his own military buildup. Subsequently, his daughter Elizabeth I was able to build up an effective navy (based at least initially on converted merchant vessels) that fought off the Spanish Armada in 1588. While Elizabeth's long reign (r. 1558 – 1603) coincided with a golden age of English culture, most notably with the works of Shakespeare, the money plundered from Catholic coffers had run out by the end of it.

Despite Elizabeth's relative toleration of religious difference, Great Britain remained profoundly divided. The Church of England was the nominal church of the entire realm, and only Anglicans could hold public office as judges or members of the British parliament, a law-making body dominated by the gentry class of landowners. In turn, the church was itself divided between an "high church" faction that was in favor of all of the trappings of Catholic ritual versus a "Puritan" faction that wanted an austere, moralistic approach to Christianity more similar to Calvinism than to Catholicism. The Puritans were, in fact, Calvinist in their beliefs (concerning the Elect, predestination, and so on), but were still considered to be full members of the church. Meanwhile, Scotland was overwhelmingly Presbyterian (Scottish Calvinist), and Ireland - which had been colonized by the English starting in the sixteenth century - was overwhelmingly Catholic. Within English society there were numerous Catholics as well, most of whom remained fairly clandestine in their worship out of fear of persecution.

Thus, the monarchy oversaw a divided society. It was also relatively poor, with the English crown overseeing a small bureaucracy and no official standing army. The only way to raise revenue from the rest of the country was to raise royal taxes, which were resisted by the very proud and defensive gentry class (the landowners) as well as the titled nobility. The traditional right of parliament was to approve or reject taxes, but an open question as of the early seventeenth century was whether it had the right to set laws as well. The bottom line is that English kings or queens could not force lawmakers to grant them taxes without having to beg, plead, cajole, and bargain. In turn, the stability of government depended on cooperation between the Crown and the House of Commons, the larger of the two legal bodies in the parliament, which was populated by members of the gentry.

The Stuarts and the English Civil War

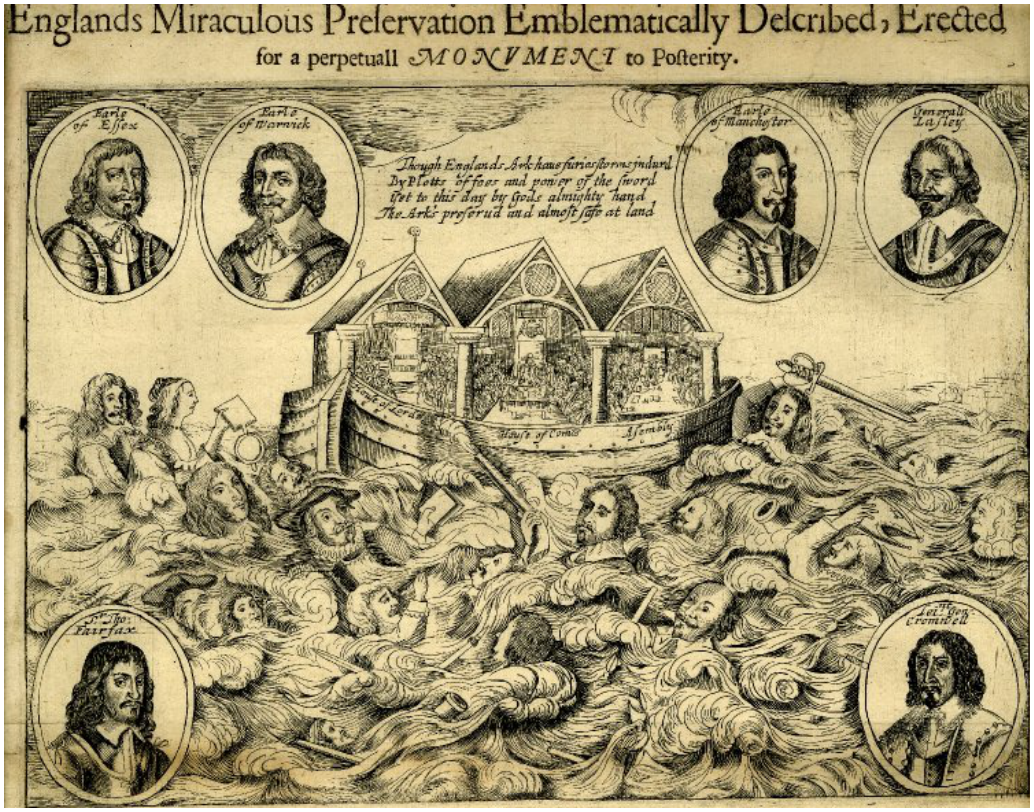
While her reign was plagued by these issues, Elizabeth I was a savvy monarch who was very skilled at reconciling opposing factions and winning over members of parliament to her perspective. She also benefited from what was left of the moneys her father had looted from the English monasteries. This delicate balance started to fall apart with Elizabeth's death in 1603. She died without an heir (she had never married and was, probably falsely, sometimes called the "virgin queen" as a result), so her successor was from the Scottish royal house of the Stuarts, fellow royals related to the Tudors. The new king was James I (r. 1603 – 1625), the first of the new royal line to rule England. James was already the king of Scotland when he inherited the English crown, so England and Scotland were politically united and the kingdom of "Great Britain" was born (it was later ratified as a permanent legal reality in 1707 with the "Act of Union" passed by parliament).

James, inspired by developments on the continent, tried to insist on the “royal prerogative,” the right of the king to rule through force of will. He set himself up as an absolute monarch and behaved with noticeable contempt towards members of parliament. Still, England was at peace and James avoided making demands that sparked serious resistance. While members of parliament grumbled about his heavy-handed manner of rule, there were no signs of actual rebellion.

His son, Charles I (r. 1625 – 1649), was a much greater threat from the perspective of parliament. He strongly supported the “high church” faction of the Anglican church just as Puritanism among the common people was growing, and he began to openly encroach on parliamentary authority. While styling himself after Louis XIII of France (to whom he was related), he came to be feared and hated by many of his own people. Charles imposed taxes and tariffs that were not approved by parliament, which was technically illegal, and then he forced rich subjects to grant the crown loans at very low interest rates. In 1629, after parliament protested, he dismissed it and tried to rule without summoning it again. He was able to do so until 1636, when he tried to impose a new high church religious liturgy (set of rituals) in Scotland. That prompted the Scots to openly break with the king and raise an army; to get the money to fund an English response, Charles had to summon parliament.

The result was civil war. Not only were the Scots well trained and organized, when parliament met it swiftly turned on Charles, declaring his various laws and acts illegal and dismissing his ministers, an act remembered as “The Grand Remonstrance.” Parliament also

refused to leave, staying in session for years (it was called “the long parliament” as a result). Meanwhile, a huge Catholic uprising took place in Ireland and thousands of Protestants there were massacred. Many in parliament thought that Charles was in league with the Irish. War finally broke out in 1642, pitting the anti-royal “round-heads” (named after their bowl cuts) and their Scottish allies against the royalist “cavaliers.” In 1645, a Puritan commander named Oliver Cromwell united various parliamentary forces in the “New Model Army,” a well-disciplined fighting force whose soldiers were regularly paid and which actually paid for its supplies rather than plundering them and living off the land (as did the king’s forces). Thanks to the effectiveness of Cromwell, the New Model Army, and the financial backing of the city of London, the round-heads gained the upper hand in the war. In the end, Charles was captured, tried, and executed by parliament in 1649 as a traitor to his own kingdom.



An engraving celebrating the victory of the parliamentary forces as “England’s Miraculous Preservation,” with the royalist forces drowning in the allegorical flood while the houses of parliament and the Church of England float on the ark.

During the English civil war, England went from one of the least militarized societies in Europe to one of the most militarized; one in eight English men were directly involved in fighting, and few regions in England were spared horribly bloody fighting. Simultaneously, debates arose among the round-heads concerning what kind of government they were fighting for; some, called the Levelers, argued in favor of a people's government, a true democratic republic. The most radical were called the Diggers, who try to set up what amounts to a proto-communist society in which goods and land were held in common. Those more radical elements were ultimately defeated by the army, but the language they use in discussing justice and good government survived to inspire later debates, ultimately informing the concept of modern democracy itself.

Thanks in large part to the ongoing political debates of the period, the Civil War resulted in an explosion of print in England. Various factions attempted to impose and maintain censorship, but they were largely unsuccessful due to the political fragmentation of the period. Instead, there was an enormous growth of political debate in the form of printed pamphlets; there were over 2,000 political pamphlets published in 1642 alone. Ordinary people had begun in earnest to participate in political dialog, another pattern associated with modern politics.

After the execution of the king in 1649, England became a (technically republican) dictatorship under Cromwell, who assumed the title of Lord Protector in 1649. He ruled England for ten years, carrying out an incredibly bloody invasion of Ireland that is still remembered with bitterness today, and ruling through his control of the army. Following his death in 1658, parliament decided to reinstate the monarchy and the official power of the Church of England (which took until 1660 to happen), essentially because there was a lack of consensus about what could be done otherwise. None of the initial problems that brought about the civil wars in the first place were resolved, and Cromwell himself had ended up being as authoritarian and autocratic as Charles had been.

The Glorious Revolution

Thus, in 1660, Charles II (r. 1660 – 1685), the son of the executed Charles I, took the throne. He was a cousin of Louis XIV of France and, like his father, tried to adopt the trappings of absolutism even though he recognized that he could never achieve a Louis-XIV-like rule (nor did he try to dismiss parliament). Various conspiracy theories surrounded him, especially ones that claimed he was a secret Catholic; as it turns out, he *had* drawn up a secret agreement with Louis XIV to re-Catholicize England if he could, and he proclaimed his Catholicism on his deathbed. A crisis occurred late in his reign when a parliamentary faction called the Whigs tried

to exclude his younger brother, James II, from being eligible for the throne because he was openly Catholic. They were ultimately beaten (legally) by a rival faction, the Tories, that supported the notion of the divine right of kings and of hereditary succession.

When James II (r. 1685 – 1688) took the throne, however, even his former supporters the Tories were alarmed when he started appointing Catholics to positions of power, against the laws in place that required all lawmakers and officials to be Anglicans. In 1688, James's wife had a son, which thus threatened that a Catholic monarchy might remain for the foreseeable future. A conspiracy of English lawmakers thus invited William of Orange, a Dutch military leader and lawmaker in the Dutch Republic, to lead a force against James. William was married to Mary, the Protestant daughter of James II, and thus parliament hoped that any threat of a Catholic monarchy would be permanently defeated by his intervention. William arrived and the English army defected to him, forcing James to flee with his family to France. This series of events became known as the Glorious Revolution - "glorious" because it was bloodless and resulted in a political settlement that finally ended the better part of a century of conflict.

William and his English wife Mary were appointed as co-rulers by parliament and they agreed to abide by a new Bill of Rights. The result was Europe's first constitutional monarchy: a government led by a king or queen, but one in which lawmaking was controlled by a parliament and all citizens were held accountable to the same set of laws. Even as absolutism became the predominant mode of politics on the continent, Britain set forth on a different, and opposing, political trajectory.

Great Britain After the Glorious Revolution

One unexpected benefit to constitutional monarchy was that British elites, through parliament, no longer opposed the royal government but instead *became* the government. After the Glorious Revolution, lawmakers in England felt secure enough from royal attempts to seize power unlawfully that they were willing to increase the size and power of government and to levy new taxes. Thus, the English state grew very quickly, whereas it had been its small size and the intransigence of earlier generations of member of parliament in raising taxes that had been behind the conflicts between king and parliament for most of the seventeenth century.

The English state *could* grow because parliament was willing to make it grow after 1688. It *did* grow because of war. William of Orange had already been at war with Louis XIV before he came to England, and once he was king Britain went to war with France in 1690 over colonial

conflicts and because of Louis's constant attempts to seize territory in the continent. The result was over twenty years of constant warfare, from 1690 – 1714.

To raise money for those wars, private bankers founded the Bank of England in 1694. While it was not created by the British government itself, the Bank of England soon became the official banking institution of the state. This was a momentous event because it allowed the government to manage state debt effectively. The Bank issued bonds that paid a reasonable amount of interest, and the British government stood behind those bonds. Thus, individual investors were guaranteed to make money and the state could finance its wars through carefully regulated sales of bonds. In contrast, Louis XIV financially devastated the French government with his wars, despite the efforts of his Intendants and other royal officials to squeeze every drop of tax revenue they could out of the huge and prosperous kingdom. Britain, meanwhile, remained financially solvent even as their wars against France grew larger every year. Ultimately, this would see the transformation of Britain from secondary political power to France's single most important rival in the eighteenth century.

The Overall Effects of Absolutism

While Britain was thus the outstanding exception to the general pattern of absolutism, the growth in its state was comparable to the growth among its absolutist rivals. As an aggregate, the states of Europe were transformed by absolutist trends. Some of those can be captured in statistics: royal governments grew roughly 400% in size (i.e. in terms of the number of officials they employed and the tax revenues they collected) over the course of the seventeenth century, and standing armies went from around 20,000 men during the sixteenth century to well over 150,000 by the late seventeenth century.

Armies were not just larger - they were better-disciplined, trained, and "standardized." For the first time, soldiers were issued standard uniforms. Warfare, while still bloody, was nowhere near as savage and chaotic as it had been during the wars of religion, thanks in large part to the fact that it was now waged by professional soldiers answering to noble officers, rather than mercenaries simply unleashed against an enemy and told to live off of the land (i.e. the peasants) while they did so. Officers on opposing sides often considered themselves to be part of a kind of extended family; a captured officer could expect to be treated as a respected peer by his "enemies" until his own side paid his ransom.

What united such disparate examples of absolutism as France and Prussia was a shared concept of royal authority. The theory of absolutism was that the king was above the

nobles and not answerable to anyone in his kingdom, but, he owed his subjects a kind of benevolent protection and oversight. “Arbitrary” power was not the point: the power exercised by the monarch was supposed to be for the good of the kingdom – this was known as *raison d’etat*, right or reason of the state. Practically speaking, this meant that the whole range of traditional rights, especially those of the nobles and the cities, had to be respected. Louis XIV famously claimed that "*L'etat, c'est moi*" - I am the state. His point was that there was no distinction between his own identity and the government of France itself, and his actions were by definition for the good of France (which was not always true from an objective standpoint, as was starkly demonstrated in his wars).

Those who lost out in absolutism were the peasants: especially in Central and Eastern Europe, what freedoms peasants had enjoyed before about 1650 increasingly vanished as the newly absolutist monarchs struck deals with their nobility that ratified the latter’s right to completely control the peasantry. Serfdom, already in place in much of the east, was hardened in the seventeenth century, and the free labor, fees, and taxes owed by peasants to their lords grew harsher (e.g., the Austrian labor obligation was known as the *robot*, and it could consist of up to 100 days of labor a year). The general pattern in the east was that nobles answered to increasingly powerful kings or emperors, but they were themselves “absolute” rulers of their own estates over their serfs.

The irony of the growth of both royal power and royal tax revenue was that it still could not keep up with cost of war. Military expenditures were enormous; in a state like France the military took up 50% of state revenues during peacetime, and 80% or more during war (which was frequent). Thus, monarchs granted monopolies on products and then taxed them, and they frequently sold noble titles and state offices to the highest bidder (the queen of Sweden doubled the number of noble families in ten years). They relentlessly taxed the peasantry as well: royal taxes doubled in France between 1630 – 1650, and the concomitant peasant uprisings were ruthlessly suppressed.

One aspect of the hardening of social hierarchies, necessitated in part by the great legal benefits enjoyed by members of the nobility in the absolutist system, was that the rights and privileges of nobility were codified into clear laws for the first time. Most absolutist states created “tables of ranks” that specified exactly where nobles stood vis-à-vis one another as well as the monarch and “princes of the blood.” Louis XIV of France had a branch of royal government devoted entirely to verifying claims of nobility and stripping noble titles from those without adequate proof.

Conclusion

The process by which states went from decentralized and fairly loosely organized to "absolutist" was a long one. Numerous aspects of government even in the late eighteenth century remained strikingly "medieval" in some ways, such as the fact that laws were different from town to town and region to region based on the accumulation of various royal grants and traditional rights over the centuries. That being noted, there is no question that things *had* changed significantly over the course of the seventeenth century: governments were bigger, better organized, and more explicitly hierarchical in organization.

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Chapter 11: Trade Empires and Early Capitalism

European society underwent a major change during the early modern period with regards to its outlook on wealth and property. Along with that change came the growth of a new kind of state and society, one not only defined by the growth of bureaucracy seen in absolutism, but in the power of the moneyed classes whose wealth was not predicated on owning land. The rise of that class to prominence in certain societies, especially those of the Netherlands and England, accompanied the birth of the most distinctly modern form of economics: capitalism.

In the Middle Ages, wealth, land, and power were intimately connected. Nobles were defined by their ownership of land and by their participation in armed conflict. That changed by the early modern period, especially as it became increasingly common for monarchs to sell noble titles to generate money for the state. By the seventeenth century the European nobility were split between “nobles of the sword” who inherited their titles from their warlike ancestors and “nobles of the robe” who had either been appointed by kings or purchased titles. Both categories of nobility were far more likely to be owners of land exploiting their peasants than warriors. Among almost all of them, there was considerable contempt for merchants, who were often seen as parasites who undermined good Christian morality and the proper order of society. Even nobles of the robe who had only joined the nobility within the last generation tended to cultivate a practiced loathing for mere merchants, their social inferiors.

In addition, the economic theory of the medieval period posited that there was a finite, limited amount of wealth in the world, and that the only thing that could be done to become wealthier was to get and hold on to more of it. In the medieval and even Renaissance-era mindset, the only forms of wealth were land and bullion (precious metals), and since there is only so much land and so much gold and silver out there, if one society grew richer, by definition every other society grew poorer.

According to this mindset, kingdoms could only increase their wealth by seizing more territory, especially territory that would somehow increase the flow of precious metals into royal coffers. Trade was only important insofar as trade surpluses with other states could be maintained, thereby ensuring that more bullion was flowing into the economy than was flowing out. Colonies abroad provided raw materials and, hopefully, bullion itself. As a whole, this

concept was called mercantilism: an economic system consisting of a royal government controlling colonies abroad and overseeing land-holdings at home. The ultimate example of this system was the biggest owner of colonies that produced bullion: Spain.

Mercantilism worked well enough, but commerce fit awkwardly into its paradigm. Trade was not thought to generate new wealth, since it did not directly dig up more silver or gold, nor did it seize wealth from other countries. Trade did not "make" anything according to the mercantilist outlook. Of all classes of society, bankers in particular were despised by traditional elites since they not only did not produce anything themselves, instead (seemingly) profiting off of the wealth of others.

These attitudes started undergoing significant changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mostly as a result of the incredible success of overseas corporations, groups that generated enormous wealth outside of the auspices of mercantilist theory. Many of the beneficiaries of the new wealth of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not noblemen, but were instead wealthy merchant townsfolk, especially in places like the Dutch Republic and, later, England, men who amassed huge fortunes but did not fit neatly into the existing power structure of landholding nobles, the church, and the common people. These changes inspired an increasingly spirited battle over the rights of property, the idea that not just land but wealth itself was something that the state should protect and encourage to grow.

Early Capitalism

The growth of commercial wealth was closely tied to the growth of overseas empires. Whereas the initial wave of European colonization (mostly in the Americas) had been driven by a search for gold and a desire to convert foreigners to Christianity, European powers came to pursue colonies and trade routes in the name of commodities and the wealth they generated by the seventeenth century. In this period of empire-building, European states sought additional territory and power overseas primarily for economic reasons. Because of the enormous wealth to be generated not from gold and silver themselves, but from commodities like sugar, tobacco, and coffee (as well as luxury commodities like spices that had always been important), the states of Europe were willing to war constantly among themselves as well as to perpetrate one of the greatest crimes in history: the Atlantic Slave Trade.

In short, we see in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the first phase of a system that would later be called capitalism: an economic system in which the exchange of commodities for profit generated wealth to be reinvested in the name of still greater profits. In turn, capitalism is dependent on governments that enforce legal systems that protect property

and, historically, by wars that tried to carve out bigger chunks of the global market from rivals. To reiterate, capitalism was (and remains) a combination of two major economic and political phenomena: enterprises run explicitly for profit and a legal framework to protect and encourage the generation of profit. The pursuit of profit was nothing new, historically, but the political power enjoyed by merchants, the political focus on overseas expansion for profit, and the laws enacted to encourage these processes *were* new.

Overseas Expansion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The development of early capitalism was intimately connected with overseas expansion - Europe was an important node of a truly global economy by the seventeenth century, and it was that economy that fueled the development of capitalistic, commercial societies in places like the Netherlands and England. While the original impulse behind overseas expansion during this period was primarily commercial, focused on the search for commodities and profit, it was also a major political focus of all of the European powers by the eighteenth century. In other words, European elites actively sought not just to trade with, but to conquer and control, overseas territories both for profit and for their own political "glory" and aggrandizement. The result was a dramatic expansion of European influence or direct control in areas of the globe in which Europe had never before been an influence. The result: by 1800, roughly 35% of the globe was directly or indirectly controlled by European powers. How did that happen?

The first part of the answer is simple: military technology and organization. The early-modern military revolution (i.e. the evolution of gunpowder warfare during and after the Renaissance period) resulted in highly-trained soldiers with the most advanced military technology in the world by the late seventeenth centuries. As European powers expanded, they built fortresses in the modern style and defended them with cannons, muskets, and warships that often outmatched the military forces and technology they encountered. In the case of China, Japan, and the Philippines, for instance, local rulers learned that the easiest way to deal with European piracy was not to try to fight European ships, but instead to cut off trade with European merchants until restitution had been paid.

European states also benefited from the relative political fragmentation of parts of the non-European world. There were powerful kingdoms and empires in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia that defied European attempts at hegemony, but much of the world was controlled by smaller states. A prime example is India, which was divided up into dozens of small kingdoms,

along with a few larger ones (the Mughal Empire that ruled much of the subcontinent early in the period of British expansion was in decline by the early eighteenth century even before the British controlled much territory). When the British and French began taking control of Indian territory, it was against the resistance of small Indian kingdoms, not some kind of (nonexistent) overall Indian state.

An important note regarding European colonial power: this period saw the consolidation of European holdings in the New World and the beginning of empires in places like India, but it did not include major land-holdings in Africa, the Middle East, or East Asia. In places with powerful states like China, the Ottoman Empire, and Japan, even the relative superiority of European arms was not sufficient to seize territory. Likewise, not only were African states able to successfully fight off Europeans as well, but African diseases made it impossible for large numbers of Europeans to colonize or occupy much African territory. As the Slave Trade burgeoned, Europeans did launch slave raids, but most slaves had been captured by African slavers who enjoyed enormous profits from the exchange.

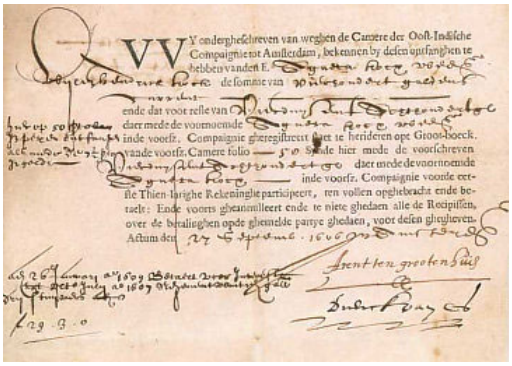
Likewise, European states and the corporations they supported worked diligently to establish monopolies on trade with various parts of the world. However, "monopolies" in this case only meant monopolies in trade going to and from Europe. There were enormous, established, and powerful networks of trade between Africa, India, South Asia, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and the Pacific, all of which were dominated by non-European merchants. To cite one example, the Indian Ocean had served as an oceanic crossroads of trade between Africa and Asia for thousands of years. Europeans broke into those markets primarily by securing control of goods that made their way back to Europe rather than seizing control of intra-Asian or African trade routes, although they did try to dominate those routes when they could, and Europeans were able to seize at least some territories directly in the process.

The Netherlands

The Dutch were at the forefront of these changes. During their rebellion against Spain in the late sixteenth century, the Dutch began to look to revenue generated from trade as an economic lifeline. They served both as the middlemen in European commerce, shipping and selling things like timber from Russia, textiles from England, and wine from Germany, and they also increasingly served as Europe’s bankers. The Dutch invented both formalized currency exchange and the stock market, both of which led to huge fortunes for Dutch merchants. A

simple way to characterize the growth of Dutch commercial power was that the Netherlands replaced northern Italy as the heart of European trade itself after the Renaissance.

In 1602, Dutch merchants with the support of the state created the world's first corporation: the Dutch East India Company (VOC in its Dutch acronym). It was created to serve as the republic's official trading company, a company with a legal monopoly to trade with a certain region: India and Southeast Asia. The VOC proved phenomenally successful in pushing out other European merchants in the Indies, through a combination of brute force and the careful deployment of legal strategies. A common approach was to offer “protection” from the supposedly more rapacious European powers like Portugal in return for trade monopolies from spice-producing regions. In many cases, the VOC simply used the promise of protection as a smokescreen for seizing complete control of a given area (especially in Indonesia, which eventually became a Dutch colony), while in other areas local rulers remained in political control but lost power over their own spice production and trade. For the better part of the seventeenth century, the Dutch controlled an enormous amount of the hugely profitable trade in luxury goods and spices from the East Indies as a result.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An early stock certificate from the VOC.

The profits for Dutch merchants and investors were concomitantly high. As an example, above and beyond direct profits by individual members of the company, all stockholders in the VOC received dividends of 30% on their investments within the first ten years, in addition to a dramatic boost in value of the stocks themselves. The other states of Europe were both aghast at Dutch success and grudgingly admiring of it. In 1601, there were 100 more Dutch ships in the port of London at any given time than there were English ships, and by 1620 about half of all European merchant vessels were Dutch.

In 1652, the Dutch seized control of the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, allowing them to control shipping going around Africa en route to Asia, and they exerted additional military force in the Indies to force native merchants to trade only with them (among Europeans). Note here that the Dutch takeover of the Cape of Good Hope was the historical origin of the modern nation of South Africa – these were the first permanent European settlers. The Dutch were also the only European power allowed to keep a small trading colony in Japan, which was otherwise completely cut off to westerners after 1641 (thanks to a failed Portuguese-sponsored Christian uprising against the Japanese shogun).

The iconic moment in the history of the Dutch golden age of early capitalism was the tulip craze of the 1620s – 1630s. Tulips grow well in the Netherlands and had long been cultivated for European elites. A tulip fad among Dutch elites in the 1620s drove up the price of tulip bulbs dramatically. Soon, enterprising merchants started buying and selling bulbs with no intention of planting them or even selling them to someone who would - they simply traded the bulbs as a valuable commodity unto themselves.

In 1625, one bulb was sold for 5,000 guilders, about half the cost of a mansion in Amsterdam. It went up from there – the real height of the craze was the winter of 1636 – 1637, when individual bulbs sometimes changed hands ten times in a day for increasing profits. This was the equivalent of “flipping” bulbs; it had nothing to do with the actual tulips any longer. The element to emphasize is not just the seemingly irrational nature of the boom, but of the mindset: the Dutch moneyed classes were already embracing speculative market economies, in which the value of a given commodity has almost nothing to do with what it *does*, but instead from what people are willing to spend on it. In capitalist economies this phenomenon often leads to "bubbles" of rising values that then eventually collapse. In this case, the tulip craze did indeed come crashing down in the winter of 1637 - 1638, but in the meantime it presaged the emergence of commodity speculation for centuries to come.

The development of this early form of capitalism unquestionably originated in the Netherlands, but it spread from there. One by one, the other major states of Europe started to adopt Dutch methods of managing finances: sophisticated accounting, carefully organized tax policy, and an emphasis on hands-on knowledge of finances up to the highest levels of royal government. For example, Louis XIV insisted that his son study political economy and Colbert, Louis’ head of finance, wrote detailed instructions on how a king should oversee state finances. This was a significant change, since until the mid-seventeenth century at the earliest, to be a king was to refuse to dirty one’s hands with commerce. It was because of the incredible success of the Dutch that kings and nobles throughout Europe began to change their outlooks

and values. Ultimately, at least among some kings and nobles in Western Europe, humanistic education and the traditional martial values of the nobility were combined with practical knowledge, or at least appreciation, of mercantile techniques.

Ultimately, the Dutch Golden Age was the seventeenth century. The other states of Europe began to focus their own efforts on trade, and when the Netherlands was dragged into the wars initiated by Louis XIV toward the end of the seventeenth century, it spelled the beginning of the end for their dominance (although not their prosperity - the Netherlands has remained a resolutely prosperous country ever since). During that period, however, the Dutch had created a global trade network, proved that commercial dominance would play a crucial factor in political power in the future, and overseen a cultural blossoming of art and architecture.

One of the many self portraits of the Dutch master Rembrandt, the most prominent painter associated with the golden age of Dutch culture in the seventeenth century.

Britain and the Slave Trade

Of the other European states, the British were the most successful at imitating the Dutch. In 1667 the British king Charles II officially designated the royal treasury as the coordinating body of British state finances and made sure that officials trained in the Dutch style of political economy ran it. The British parliament grew increasingly savvy with financial issues as well, with numerous debates emerging about the best and most profitable use of state funds.

In 1651, both to try to seize trade from the Dutch and to fend off Britain's traditional enemies, France and Spain, parliament passed the English Navigation Acts, which reserved

commerce with English colonies to English ships. This, in turn, led to extensive piracy and conflict between the powers of Europe in their colonial territories as they tried to seize profitable lands and enforce their respective monopolies. Ultimately, the British fought three wars with the Dutch, defeating them each time and, among other things, seizing the Dutch port of New Amsterdam in North America (which the English promptly renamed New York). Britain also fought Spain in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ultimately acquiring Jamaica and Florida as colonies.

In terms of trade, the major prize, at least initially, was the Caribbean, due to its suitability for growing sugar. Sugar quickly became *the* colonial product, hugely valuable in Europe and relatively easy to cultivate (compared to exotic products like spices, which were only available from Asian sources). In Europe, sugar consumption doubled every 25 years during this period and it was ultimately the profits of sugar that helped bankroll the British growth in power in the seventeenth and, especially, the eighteenth centuries. The only efficient way to grow sugar was through proto-industrialized plantations with rendering facilities built to extract the raw sugar from sugar cane. That, in turn, required an enormous amount of back-breaking, dangerous labor. Most Native American slaves quickly died off or escaped and hence the Atlantic Slave Trade between Africa and the New World began in earnest by the early seventeenth century.

The Slave Trade between Africa and the New World was, quite simply, one of the worst injustices of human history. Millions of people were ripped from their homeland, transported to a foreign continent in atrocious conditions, and either worked to death or murdered by their owners in the name of "discipline." The contemporary North American perception of the life of slaves, that of incredibly difficult but not always lethal conditions of work, is largely inaccurate because only a small minority of slaves were ever sent to North America. The immense majority of slaves were instead sent to the Caribbean or Brazil, both areas in which working conditions were far worse than the (still abysmal) working conditions present in North America. The average life of a slave once introduced to sugar cultivation was seven years before he or she died from exhaustion or injury, and sugar was the major crop of the Caribbean and one of the major crops of Brazil. In sum, most slaves were sent to be worked to death on sugar plantations.

The slave trade was part of what historians have described as the “triangle trade” between Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Slaves from Africa were shipped to the New World to work on plantations. Raw goods (e.g. sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee, etc.). were processed and shipped to Europe. Finished and manufactured goods were then shipped to Africa to

exchange for slaves. This cycle of exchange grew decade-by-decade over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The "triangle trade" led to tremendous profits in Europe, horrendous human suffering, and the eventual depopulation of much of West Africa over the centuries.

The leg of the triangle trade that connected Africa and the Americas was known as the Middle Passage because slave ships went directly across the middle of the Atlantic, most traveling to Brazil or the Caribbean as noted above. Slaves on board ships were packed in so tightly they could not move for most of the voyage, with slave ship captains calculating into their profit margins the fact that a significant percentage of their human cargo would die en route - over a million slaves died during the Middle Passage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result.

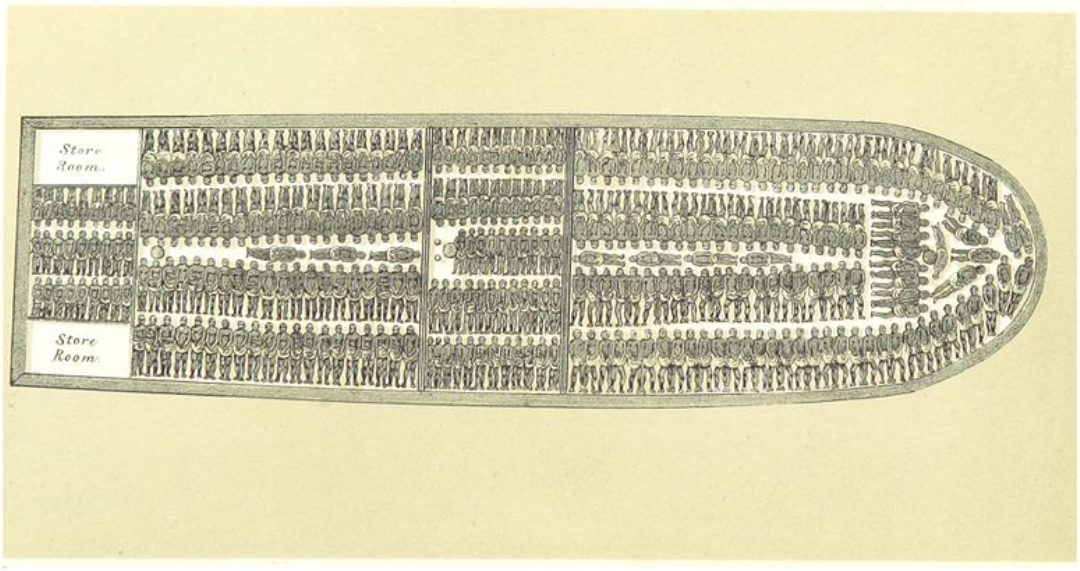

Illustration of a slave ship's human cargo under conditions that often saw more than 10% of the slaves on board perish.

The current data (available on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, which was created and is maintained by professional historians of the Slave Trade) suggests that well over twelve million people were enslaved and transported to the new world from the sixteenth century through the early nineteenth. That number is lower than the actual total, since roughly 20% of transported slaves were in undocumented (i.e. smuggled and technically "illegal" from the standpoint of the slave-trading states) voyages. Thus, the real number is probably closer to fifteen million. In turn, over 90% of slaves were sent to the Caribbean or Brazil, because the sugar crop, as well as coffee cultivation and mining in Brazil, demanded constant replacements as slaves perished from exhaustion or injury.

The topic of slavery is vast; it was a huge economic engine and a major part of life in the entire New World. It shaped the demography and the culture of every American society, and its sheer scale dwarfs every other pattern of slavery in world history. That said, of its various aspects, the one that probably casts the longest shadow in terms of its historical significance is the fact that the Atlantic Slave Trade was the first time in history that slavery was specifically racial in character. Because it was Africans who were enslaved to work in the Americas under the control of Europeans, Europeans developed a range of racist theories to excuse the practice from its obvious immorality. In fact, the whole idea of human "race" is largely derived from the Slave Trade - biologically, "race" is nothing more than a handful of unimportant cosmetic

differences between people, but thanks to the history of the enslavement of Africans, Europeans in the early modern period led the charge in describing "race" as some kind of fundamental human category, with some races supposedly enjoying "natural" superiority. That conceit would obviously cast a perverse shadow up the present.

Around the Globe

Even as the British were actively participating in the Slave Trade in the Atlantic region, they began the process of seizing control of territory in India as well. There, they set up self-contained merchant colonies (called factories) run by the English East India Company (EIC), which had a legal monopoly of trade just as its Dutch counterpart did in the Netherlands. The original impetus behind the EIC was profitable trade, not political power per se.

Britain, however, eventually came to control India outright. As of the mid-eighteenth century, however, British power in India was limited to its factories, which served as clearinghouses for trade with Indian merchants. In 1756, however, an Indian prince sent an army to Calcutta to drive out the British, whom he hated and resented, resulting in the massacre of hundreds of English noncombatants and thousands of their Indian colleagues and allies. The next year, a small British force of 800 men with 2,000 Indian mercenary troops (called *sepoys*) defeated the prince at the Battle of Plassey, then began the process of taking over the entire province of Bengal.

The takeover of Bengal started the slow creep of British power: tax revenue supplemented mercantile revenue, which allowed the British to hire tens of thousands of sepoys, who they armed with modern European weapons. That, in turn, both allowed the British to drive out the French from Indian territories and to dominate Indian princes, thereby seizing yet more Indian territory. In this patchwork fashion, the EIC expanded its power in India over the next century, directly controlling some territories, indirectly controlling others through Indian puppet princes, and economically dominating others. The result was that the EIC, a private corporation backed by the British state, controlled almost all of the Indian subcontinent by the middle of the nineteenth century.

On the other side of the world, while far less economically important than the Caribbean, North America was still a focus of European colonization. Britain was one of the two major powers – France the other – that colonized areas of the eastern seaboard of North America. While initial attempts at colonization either failed or struggled to survive (e.g. almost all of the original settlers at Jamestown in Virginia were dead by the time more arrived in 1610), the

survivors discovered that they could at least grown one cash crop that would both enrich themselves and tempt other Europeans to immigrate: tobacco. Likewise, a relatively small part of the slave trade soon included the importation of slaves to work first the tobacco fields, and then later cotton fields, farther south. Simultaneously, a French explorer named Samuel de Champlain founded the colony of Quebec on the St. Lawrence river. That soon became the center of New France, and its cash "crop" consisted of furs gained through barter with Native American groups or taken by French trappers.

Until the latter half of the seventeenth century, these were small-scale colonies compared to the vast states of Central and South America. Slowly but surely, however, colonists did arrive in North America, and not always for economic reasons. Britain came to boast the largest population of colonists among Europeans in North America in the seventeenth century because English religious dissenters, Puritans, fled persecution from the Anglican state and began to settle in Massachusetts by the thousands in the 1620s (this was during the period under James I and Charles I before the English Civil War). That said, the North American colonies all remained small and economically unimportant compared to the colonies of Latin America and the Caribbean until well into the eighteenth century.

Spain, of course, still held the largest overseas empire. The Spanish not only held almost all of South America, all of Central America, and the American West as far north as Oregon, but they held territory in the Pacific island chain of the Philippines as well. South American silver passed through both Spain and the Philippines en route to China, where it paid for luxury goods that were shipped back to Spain. The Spanish crown, especially under a branch of the Bourbon royal family that became the royal dynasty of Spain in 1700, exercised direct control over colonial trade and taxation (rather than relying on a corporation as did the Dutch and English).

Spanish territories in the Americas in the eighteenth century, at the height of their territorial expanse.

What set the Spanish empire apart from the other overseas empires was the fact that its colonial system suffered from infighting between Spanish-born royal bureaucrats and the creole elites who dominated the Spanish New World itself. Many of these creole elites lived more like traditional nobles in Europe, dominating land-based economies, rather than overseers of a more commercially-based agriculture like the plantations of the Caribbean or Brazil.

To be clear, South and Central America were important regions within the global trade network, but the Spanish state itself did not enjoy the same level of direct control over, or power derived from, its colonial possessions as did its European rivals over theirs. Instead, the vast Spanish empire was relatively fragmented, with regional elites exercising a high degree of local autonomy. Thus, even the vast wealth still generated within the Spanish empire did not translate into an equivalent degree of state or military power for the Spanish monarchy.

Meanwhile, the overseas empire of Portugal steadily shrank as its colonies and factories were seized or handed over to the Dutch and British in the seventeenth century. While Portugal had enjoyed a (relatively brief) period of ascendancy that began with the remarkable voyage of Vasco Da Gama in the fifteenth century, it was not able to complete with the better-funded and equipped forces of the Netherlands and Britain, and thus most Portuguese colonies and trading posts were lost over time to its rivals. The major exception was Brazil, which was hugely

profitable, and which imported staggering quantities of slaves; Brazil was also the last European state to outlaw slavery, in 1888.

Finally, while Russia's emergence as an independent state is considered in in a later chapter, it should be noted here that Russian explorers moved eastward across Siberia from the period of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries in search of furs. Furs were so critical to the Russian economy at the time that they were often used in lieu of currency outside of the major cities. In turn, Russian fur trappers and traders arrived at the Pacific in the late seventeenth century. From there, they sailed across to Alaska and then down the west coast of North America, establishing small churches and forts but not colonizing territory (i.e. for the most part, they did not stay and establish families). By the early eighteenth century, the various branches of European exploration and expansion converged in the Pacific Northwest of what later became the United States: in the eighteenth century, Russian fur trappers, French fur trappers, Spanish missionaries, and English explorers all arrived in what eventually became the American states of Washington and Oregon.

Conclusion

The greatest changes in world history during the early modern period have to do with the ongoing contact between the different regions of the globe that began with Columbus's (quite literally) misguided voyage in 1492. By the seventeenth century, the peoples of Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia were all linked by commerce, trade, politics, slavery, and warfare. Obviously, those contacts would only grow stronger going into the modern period.

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Chapter 12: The Scientific Revolution

During the seventeenth century, changes in how educated Europeans understood the natural world marked the emergence of a recognizably modern scientific perspective. The practical impact of that shift was relatively minor at the time, but the long-term consequences were enormous. For the first time, a culture emerged in Europe in which empirical observations served as the basis for logical conjecture about how natural laws operated, leading to the possibility of a vast range of scientific discovery.

For well over a thousand years, Europeans had looked backwards for insights into the natural world. They relied on Aristotle and accounts by other ancient authors to explain how the universe functioned, how physics operated, and how the human body regulated itself. These teachings were supplemented by Christian scholarship that sought to find the hand of God in the natural world. There was a marked absence of empirical research: observing, from a neutral and objective standpoint, natural phenomena and using those observations as the basis of informed experimentation as to their causes and operation.

Medieval and early-modern Europeans had never developed an empirical scientific culture because the point of science had never been to *discover* the truth, but to *describe* it. In other words, practically every pre-modern person already knew how the world worked: they knew it from myth, from the teachings of ancient authorities, and from religion. In a sense, all of the answers were already there, and thus empirical observation was seen as redundant. The term used at the time for "science" was "natural philosophy," a branch of philosophy devoted to observing and cataloging natural phenomena, for the most part without attempting to explain those observations outside of references to ancient authorities and the Bible.

The Scientific Process, Mentality, and Method

The Scientific Revolution grew out of Renaissance humanism. Humanistic scholars by the late sixteenth century were increasingly dissatisfied with some ancient authors, since those authors did not, in fact, explain everything. While ancient authors wrote about astronomy, for instance, they did not adequately explain the observed movements of the stars and planets. Likewise, with the explosion of new translations of classical works, it became clear that ancient

scholars had actively debated and even rejected the teachings of figures like Aristotle. This suggested that it was legitimate to question even the most fundamental ancient ideas.

Even to scholars who respected and deferred to ancient authors, much of ancient astronomy was based on some fairly questionable speculations, like the idea that the Earth sits on top of a giant sea that occasionally sloshes around, causing earthquakes. Thus, the first major discoveries in the Revolution had to do with astronomy, as scholars started carrying out their own observations and advancing theories to explain what they saw happening in the heavens. This process is known as inductive reasoning: starting with disparate facts, then working toward a theory to explain them. It is the opposite of deductive reasoning, which starts with a known theory and then tries to prove that observations fit into it. The classic example of the latter was taking the idea that the Earth is the center of the universe as a given, then trying to force the observed movements of the heavenly bodies to make sense through elaborate explanations.

That being noted, deductive reasoning is still an important part of "real" science in that it allows for proofs: in mathematics, for instance, one can start with a known principle and then use it to prove more complex formulas. Mathematics itself played a key role in the Scientific Revolution, since many thinkers insisted that mathematics was part of a divine language that existed apart from, but was as nearly important as, the Bible itself. God had designed the universe in such a way that mathematics offered the possibility of real scientific certainty. The close relationship between math, physics, and engineering is obvious in the work of people like Da Vinci, Galileo, and Isaac Newton, all of whom combined an advanced understanding of mathematics and its practical applications.

That being said, it would be wrong to claim that the Scientific Revolution sparked a completely objective, recognizably "modern" form of science. What early-modern scientists hoped to do was understand the secrets of the universe. Isaac Newton was a scientist but also an alchemist, devoting considerable time and effort to trying to figure out how to "transmute" base metals like lead into gold. Likewise, many thinkers were intensely interested in the works of an ancient (and, as it turns out, fictional) philosopher and magician named Hermes Trismagistus, Hermes the "Thrice-Blessed," who had supposedly discovered a series of magical formulas that explained the universe. There was a great deal of crossover between what we might think of as magic and spirituality on the one hand and "real" science on the other. This is evident not only with Newton, but with other scientists of the era – many were astronomers *and* astrologers, just as many were mathematicians and engineers while also being alchemists. The point here is that, ultimately, even though it turns out that magic does not

exist, the interest in discovery piqued by the idea of probing the universe's secrets still led to genuine scientific discovery.

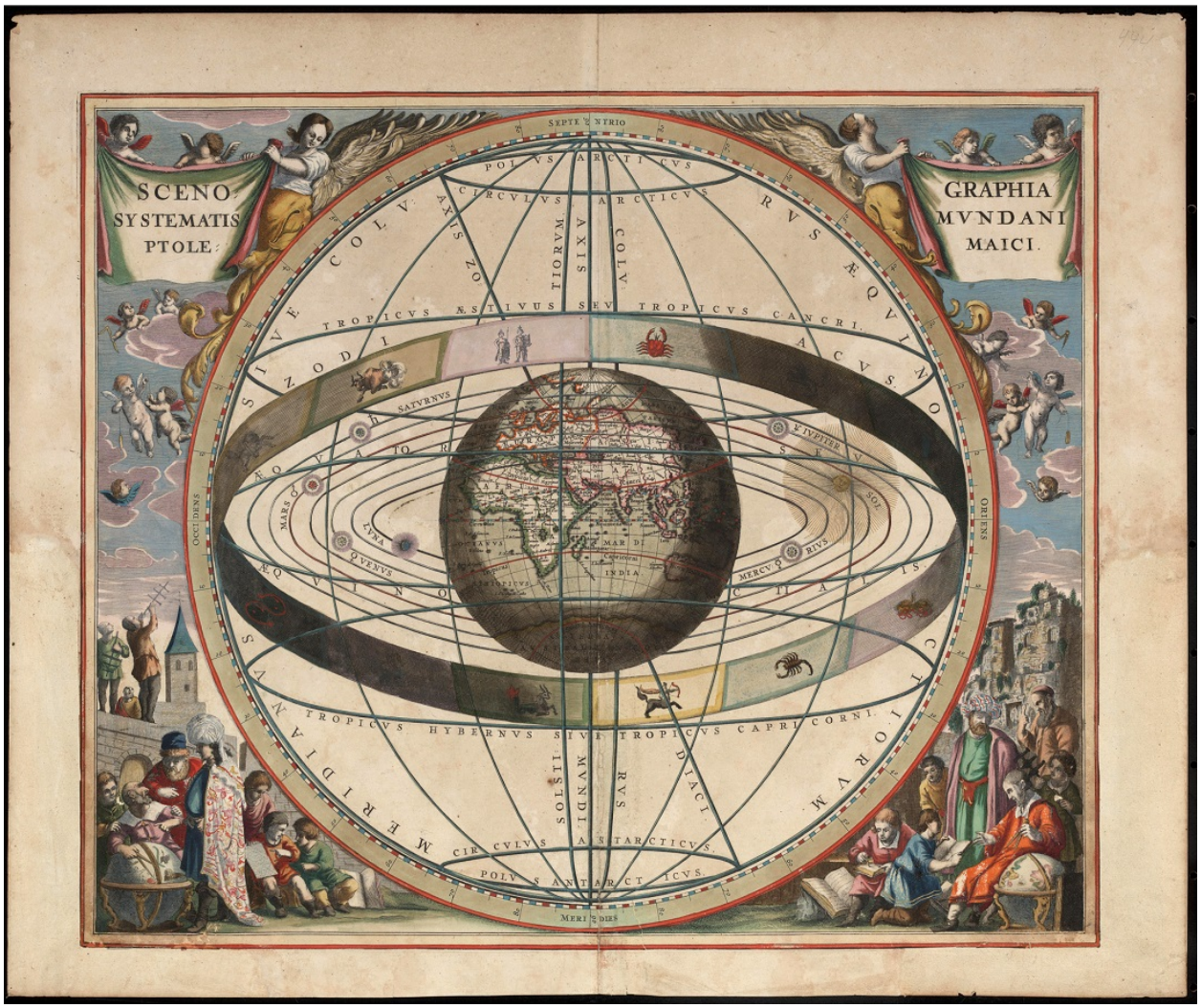
The major figure in codifying and popularizing the new empirical, inductive process was Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), an English nobleman. Bacon is best remembered for "creating" the scientific method: advancing a hypothesis to explain observed data, but then trying to disprove the hypothesis rather than trying to force the facts to prove it. In this way, the best that could be hoped for was a highly likely, not-yet-disproven theory, rather than a flimsy, vulnerable theory that needed artificial defenses. Over time, the scientific method came to include a corollary requirement: the results of an experiment had to yield the same results consistently in order for a hypothesis to be considered viable.

Bacon took the radical step of breaking even with the Renaissance obsession with ancient scholarship by arguing that ancient knowledge of the natural world was all but worthless and that scholars in the present should instead reconstruct their knowledge of the world based on empirical observation. Bacon was a kind of prophet of the movement, not a scientist himself – he was fired as the Lord Chancellor of King James I after accepting bribes, and he died after catching a cold stuffing snow into a dead chicken as some kind of ill-conceived biological experiment. Regardless, he codified the new methodology and worldview of the Scientific Revolution itself.

Scientific Discoveries

Astronomy

The most influential ancient sources of scientific knowledge were Ptolemy, a Greek astronomer and mathematician, and Aristotle. Both argued that the Earth was at the center of the universe, which consisted of a giant crystal sphere studded with the stars. That sphere slowly rotated, while the sun, moon, and planets were suspended above the earth within the sphere and also rotated around the Earth. Ptolemy, who lived centuries after Aristotle, elaborated on the Aristotelian system and claimed that there were not just one but close to eighty spheres, one within the other, which explained the fact that the different heavenly bodies did not all move in the same direction or at the same speed. The idea that the earth is at the center of the universe is known as *geocentrism*.



The geocentric universe illustrated, with the sun and planets revolving around the Earth. Interestingly, the illustration above was created in 1660, a few decades after Galileo popularized the fact that heliocentrism was completely inaccurate.

In this model of the universe, the earth was distinct from the other heavenly bodies. The earth was imperfect, chaotic, and changing, while the heavens were perfect and uniform. Thus, Christian thinkers embraced the Aristotelian model in part because it fit Christian theology so well: God and the angels were on the outside of the most distant crystal sphere in a state of total perfection, while humans and the devil were on, or inside in the case of Satan, the imperfect world. This Christianized version of an ancient Greek model of the universe is where the concept that God and heaven are "up in the sky" and hell is "below the ground" originated. When the astronomers of the Scientific Revolution started detecting irregularities in the

heavens, this totally contradicted how most learned people thought about, and had thought about, the essential characteristics of the universe.

The problem with this model is that it did not match the observed paths taken by the stars and, especially, the planets, which do not follow regular, circular orbits. Medieval astronomers tried to account for these differences by ever-more-elaborate caveats and modifications to the idea of simple perfect orbits, positing the existence of hugely complex paths supposedly taken by various heavenly objects. A Polish priest, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543), was the first to argue in a book published just before his death that the whole system would match reality if the sun was at the center of the orbits instead of the earth: this concept is called heliocentrism. He retained the idea of the crystal spheres, and he also used Ptolemy's calculations in his own work, but his was nevertheless the first work to propose the concept of a heliocentric universe. Copernicus himself was a quintessential Renaissance man; he was a medical doctor, an accomplished painter, fluent in Greek, and of course, as an astronomer.

Copernicus's theory was little known outside of astronomical circles, with most astronomers expressing dismay and skepticism at the idea of heliocentrism. A Danish astronomer named Tycho Brahe (1546 – 1601) tried to refute the Heliocentric theory by publishing a massive work of astronomical observations and corresponding mathematical data that attempted to demonstrate that the Earth was indeed at the center of the universe but that the heavenly bodies followed monstrously complex orbits. He spent twenty years carefully observing the heavens from his castle on an island near Copenhagen. The major importance of Brahe's work for posterity was that it provided a wealth of data for later astronomers to work from, even though his central argument turned out to be inaccurate.

A German astronomer, Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630), who had been Brahe's assistant late in his life, ended up using Brahe's data to argue against Brahe's conclusion, demonstrating that the data actually proved that the sun was indeed at the center of the universe. Kepler also noticed that there was some kind of force emanating from the sun that seemed to hold the planets in orbit; based on the recent work of another scientist concerning magnets, Kepler concluded that some form of magnetism was likely the cause (in fact, Kepler had noticed the role of gravity in space). Interestingly, Kepler did his work while holding a position as the official imperial mathematician of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II, who overlooked the fact that Kepler was a Protestant because he (Rudolph) was so interested in science - and this was against the backdrop of the Thirty Years' War, no less!

In the end, the most significant publicist of heliocentrism was an Italian, Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642). Galileo built a telescope based on a description he had heard and was delighted

to discover previously unknown aspects of the heavenly bodies, such as the fact that the moon and sun did not have smooth, perfect surfaces, and that Jupiter had its own moons. He publicly demonstrated his telescope and quickly became well known among educated elites across Europe. His first major publication, *The Starry Messenger* in 1610, conclusively demonstrated that the heavens were full of previously unknown objects (e.g. the moons of Jupiter) and that planets and moons appeared to be "imperfect" in the same manner as the earth.

In 1632 he published a work, the *Dialogue*, that used the work of earlier astronomers and his own observations to support the heliocentric view of the universe; this work quickly became much better known than had Copernicus's or Kepler's. The Dialogue consisted of two imaginary interlocutors, one of whom presented the case for heliocentrism, the other for geocentrism. The supporter of heliocentrism wins every argument, and his debate partner, "Stupid" (*Simplicio*) is confounded. In publicizing his work, Galileo undermined the idea that the heavens were perfect, that the earth was central, and by extension, that ancient knowledge was reliable. Few things could have been more disruptive.

Galileo was tried by the Inquisition in 1633, in part because his former patron, the pope Urban VIII, thought that Galileo had been mocking him personally by naming the imaginary defender of the Ptolemaic view Stupid. Specifically, Galileo was accused of supporting a condemned doctrine, heliocentrism, not of heresy per se. Galileo was forced to recant and his book was placed on the Catholic *Index* of banned books, where it would remain until 1822. Much of the explanation for this persecution can be found in the fact that his work was published against the backdrop of religious war then engulfing Europe; the Catholic Church was not in a tolerant mode in the seventeenth century.

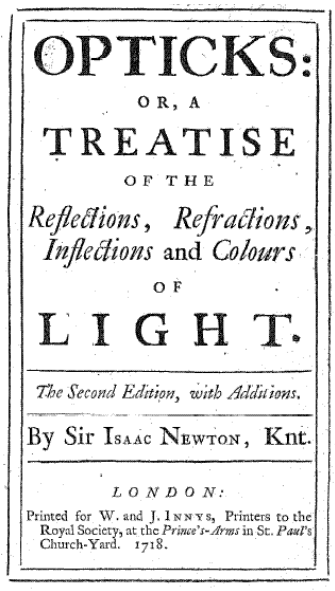
Galileo is less well remembered for his work in physics, but his work there was as important as his astronomy. Six years after the Dialogue was put on the Index, he published another work, *Two New Sciences of Motion and Mechanics*, that provided a theory and mathematical formulas of inertia and aspects of gravity. These theories refuted Aristotelian physics, which had claimed that objects only stay in motion when there is direct impetus; Galileo demonstrated through experiments the principles of inertia and acceleration and began the task of defining their operation mathematically.

Isaac Newton

Perhaps the single most important figure of the Scientific Revolution was Sir Isaac Newton, an English mathematician (1642 – 1727). Newton was, simply put, a genius. He was a chaired professor of mathematics at Cambridge University at the age of 27 and was renowned

within his own lifetime for being one of the great minds of his age. In 1687 he published the *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, which posited a single universal law of gravitation that applied equally to enormous objects like the planet Earth and tiny objects that could barely be detected by human senses. The entire system of physics was mapped out and described in precise, and accurate, mathematical formulas in the Mathematical Principles. It was one of the single greatest works of science of all time: its importance was not just in being "right," but in providing a comprehensive system that could replace the work of ancient authors like Aristotle. Following Newton, figures like Aristotle and Ptolemy were increasingly regarded in the manner they are today: important individuals in the history of thought, especially philosophy, but not sources of accurate scientific information.

Newton was one of the great intellectual over-achievers of all time. He correctly calculated the relative mass of earth and water, deduced that electrical impulses had something to do with the nervous system, and figured out that all colors are part of the larger spectrum of light. He personally designed and built a new and more effective kind of telescope, and wrote the founding paper of the modern science of optics.



OPTICKS:
OR, A
TREATISE
OF THE
Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and *Colours*
OF
LIGHT.

The Second Edition, with Additions.

By Sir Isaac Newton, Knt.

LONDON:
Printed for W. and J. Innys, Printers to the Royal Society, at the *Prince's-Arms* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard. 1718.

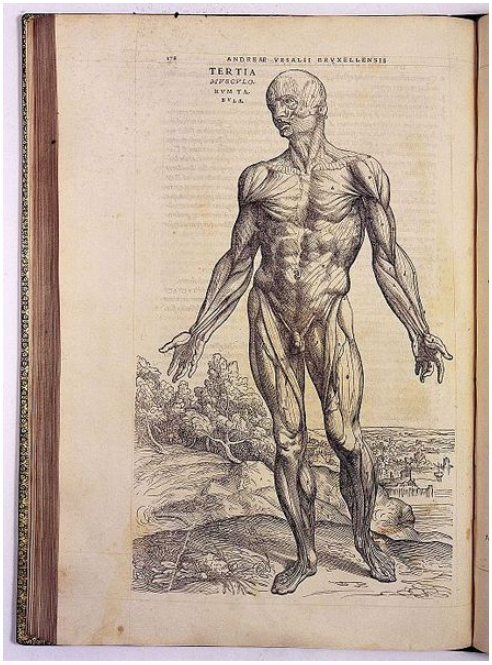
Newton's treatise on the properties of light, the founding document of optics.

Newton, personally, was a humorless curmudgeon. While he was famous in his own lifetime, ultimately being knighted by King William and serving as the chair of Britain's first scientific society, he only reluctantly published his work, and that only after fearing that his self-understood "rivals" would steal it if he did not. He was also completely chaste his entire life and had what might charitably be described as a "disagreeable" temperament.

Medicine

While astronomy and physics advanced by leaps and bounds during the period of the Scientific Revolution, other scientific disciplines such as medical science and biology advanced much more slowly. At the time there were a host of received notions and prejudices, especially against work on human cadavers, that prevented large-scale experimentation. Instead, most doctors continued to rely on the work of the Greek physician Galen, who in the second century CE had elaborated on the Aristotelian idea of the four “humors” that supposedly governed health: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. According to that theory, illness was the result of an overabundance of one humor and a lack of another - hence the centuries-old practice of bleeding someone who was ill in hope of reducing the "excess" blood.

While belief in humors continued to hold sway in the absence of more compelling theories, important advances did occur in anatomy. The Italian doctor Andreas Vesalius (1514 – 1564) published a work on anatomy based on cadavers. Another doctor, William Harvey (1578 – 1657), conclusively demonstrated that blood flows through the body by being pumped by the heart, not emanating out of the liver as had been believed before. Shortly after his death, other doctors used a new invention, the microscope, the detect the capillaries that connect arteries to other tissues. Increasingly, physicians began to consider the human body as an item written into the Book of Nature as well.



One of Vesalius’s illustration, in this case of human musculature.

Many medical advances would not have been possible without Renaissance-era advances in other fields. Renaissance artistic techniques made precise, accurate anatomical drawings possible, and print ensured that works on medicine could be distributed across Europe rapidly after their initial publication. Thus, scientists and doctors were able to contribute their discoveries to a growing body of work, all of which led to a more widespread understanding of how the body worked. Even though the concept of the humors (as well as other ideas like miasmas causing disease) remained prevalent, doctors now had a better idea of how the body was designed and what its constituent parts actually did.

Unfortunately for the health of humankind, the new understanding of anatomy did not lead to an understanding of contagion. The Dutch scientist Antonie Van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) invented the microscope, and in the 1670s he was able to identify what were later referred to as bacteria. Unfortunately, he did not deduce that bacteria were responsible for illness; it would take until the 1860s with the French doctor and scientist Louis Pasteur for definitive proof of the relationship between germs and sickness to be established.

Science and Society

Women

An often-overlooked facet of the Scientific Revolution was the participation of aristocratic women. Noblewomen were often the collaborators of their husbands or fathers – for example, it was a husband and wife team, the Lavoisiers, in France that invented the premises of modern chemistry in the eighteenth century. In some cases, such as the early entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian, women struck out on their own and conducted experiments and expeditions – Merian took a research trip to South America and did pioneering work on the life cycles of various insect species.

One of Merian's illustrations, depicting the life cycle of butterflies and moths.

A few male theorists supported a proto-feminist outlooks as well. The French scholar François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1725) concluded that empirical observation demonstrated that the custom of male dominance in European society was just that: a custom. Nothing about pregnancy or childbearing made women inherently unsuitable to participate in public life. De la Barre applied a similar argument to non-European peoples, arguing that there were only cosmetic differences between what would later be called "races." His work was almost unprecedented in its egalitarian vision, anticipating the ideas of human universalism that only really came of age in the nineteenth century, and only became dominant views in the twentieth.

Despite the existence of highly-qualified and educated women scientists, informal rules banned them from joining scientific societies or holding university positions. In general, in one of the most obvious failures of the Scientific Revolution to overcome social prejudices was in the marked tendency of male scientists to use the new science to reinforce rather than overthrow sexist stereotypes. Anatomical drawings drew attention to the fact that women had wider hips than did men, which supposedly "destined" them for a primary function of childbearing. Likewise, they (inaccurately) depicted women as having smaller skulls, supposedly implying lower intelligence. In fields in which women had held very important social roles in the past, such as midwifery, male scientists and doctors increasingly pushed them to the side, insisting on

a male-dominated “scientific” superiority of technique. In short, it proved easier to overthrow the entire vision of the universe than to upset sexual roles and stereotypes.

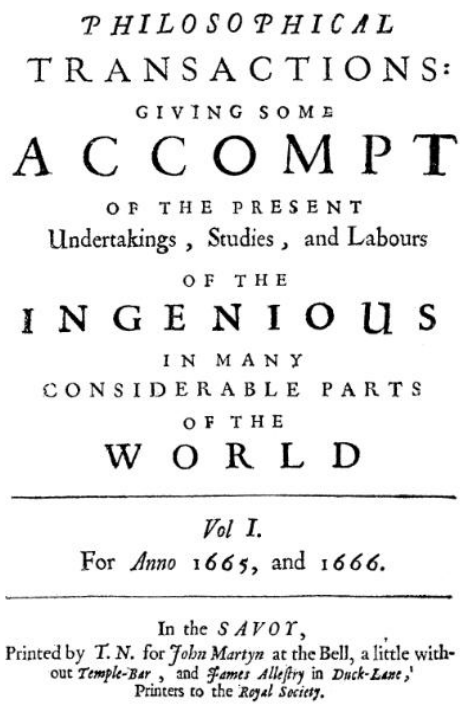
Scientific Institutions and Culture

Many developments in the early part of the Scientific Revolution occurred in Catholic countries such as Italy, but over time the center of scientific development shifted north and west. While many Protestants, including Luther himself, were just as hostile as were Catholics to new scientific ideas at first, in the long term Protestant governments proved more tolerant of ideas that seemed to violate the literal truth of the Bible. This had less to do with some kind of inherent tolerance in Protestantism than to the fact that Protestant institutions were less powerful and pervasive than was the Roman church in Catholic countries.

In the Netherlands and England in particular it was possible to openly publish and/or champion scientific ideas without fear of a backlash; in the case of Newton, it was possible to be outright famous. In general, Protestant governments and elites were more open to the idea that God might reveal Himself in nature itself, not just in holy scripture, and thus they were sympathetic to the piety of scientific research. Ultimately, this increased tolerance and support of science would see the center of scientific innovation in the northwest of Europe, not in the heart of the earlier Renaissance in Italy.

That being noted, France was not to be underestimated as a site of discovery, due in part to the cosmopolitanism of Paris and the traditional power of the French kings in holding the papacy at arm’s length. The Royal Academy of Sciences in France was opened in the same year as its sister organization, the Royal Society, in England (1662). Both funded scientific efforts that were “useful” in the sense of serving shipping and military applications as well as those which were more purely experimental, as in astronomy. The English Royal Society was particularly focused on military applications, especially optics and ballistics, setting a pattern of state-funded science in the service of war that continues to this day.

The English and French scientific societies were important parts of the development of a larger “Republic of Science,” the predecessor to present-day “academia.” Learned men (and some women) from all over Europe attended lectures, corresponded, and carried out their own scientific experiments. Newton was the president of the Royal Society, which published Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, the forerunner to academic journals that remain the backbone of scholarship today.


PHILOSOPHICAL
TRANSACTIONS:
GIVING SOME
ACCOMPT
OF THE PRESENT
Undertakings, Studies, and Labours
OF THE
INGENIOUS
IN MANY
CONSIDERABLE PARTS
OF THE
WORLD

Vol I.
For Anno 1665, and 1666.

In the SAVOY,
Printed by T. N. for John Martyn at the Bell, a little without Temple-Bar, and James Allestry in Duck-Lane,
Printers to the Royal Society.

The cover of the first volume of the Philosophical Transactions, arguably the first formal academic journal in history.

The importance of the Republic of Science cannot be overstated, because the ongoing exchange of ideas and fact-checking among experts allowed science to progress incrementally and continually. In other words, no scientist had to "start from scratch," because he or she was already building on the work of past scholars. Rather than science requiring an isolated genius like Da Vinci, now any intelligent and self-disciplined individual could hope to make a meaningful contribution to a scientific field. Newton explicitly acknowledged the importance of this incremental growth of knowledge when he emphasized that “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

The Republic of Science also inaugurated a shift away from the use of Latin as the official language of scholarship in learned European culture. Scientific essays were often written in the vernacular by scientists like Kepler and Galileo in part because they wanted to differentiate their work from church doctrine (which, of course, was traditionally written in Latin). Newton initially wrote in Latin so that it could be read by his peers on the continent, but his later works were in English. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Latin steadily declined as the practical language of learning, replaced by the major vernaculars, especially French and English.

The Philosophical Impact of Science

One of the effects of the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth century was a growing belief that the universe itself operated according to regular, predictable, "mechanical" laws that could be described through mathematics. This outlook lent itself to one in which God could be seen as a great scientist or clockmaker: the divine intelligence who created a perfect universe and then set it in motion. In this sense, then, the new scientific discoveries in no way undermined religious belief at the time, despite the fact that they contradicted certain specific passages of the Bible. This kind of religious outlook became known as *deism*, and its proponents deists, people who believed that God did not intervene in everyday life but instead simply set the universe in motion, then stepped back to watch.

Some thinkers, most notably the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), tried to apply this new logical outlook to theology itself. Descartes tried to subject belief and doubt to a thorough logical critique, asking what he could be absolutely sure of as a philosophical starting-point. His conclusion was that the only thing he really knew was that he doubted, that there was something thinking and operating skeptically, which in turn implied that there was a thing, himself, capable of thought. This led to his famous statement "I think, therefore I am." Descartes went on to follow a series of logical "proofs" from this existing, thinking being to "prove" that God Himself existed, as the original source of thought. This was a philosophical application not just of the new mechanical and mathematical outlook, but of deductive reasoning. Descartes, personally, embraced the view that God was a benevolent and reasonable power of creation, but one who did not lower Himself to meddle in the universe.

Perhaps the most important cultural change that emerged from the Revolution was the simple fact that science acquired growing cultural authority. The results of the new science were demonstrable; Galileo delighted onlookers by allowing them to use his telescope not just to look at the sky, but at buildings in Rome, thereby proving that his invention worked. The possibility that science could, and in fact already had, disproved claims made in the Bible laid the foundation for a whole new approach to knowledge that threatened a permanent break with a religiously-founded paradigm. In other words, scientific advances inadvertently led to the growth in skepticism about religion, sometimes up to and including outright atheism: the rejection of the very idea of the existence of God.

The most extreme figure in this regard was Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677), a Sephardic Jew who was born and raised in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Spinoza took the insights of the era and applied them wholeheartedly to religion itself, arguing that the universe of natural,

physical laws was synonymous with God, and that the very idea of a human-like God with a personality and intentions was superstitious, unprovable, and absurd. He was excommunicated from Judaism itself when he was only twenty-four but went on to continue publishing his works, in the process laying the groundwork for what were later known as “freethinkers” – people who may or may not have been actual atheists, but who certainly rejected the authority of holy writings and churches.

Spinoza’s work was controversial enough that he was condemned as an atheist not only by the Jewish community, but by both the Catholic church and various Protestant churches as well. One of the things about his thought that infuriated practically everyone was that Spinoza claimed that there was no such thing as “spirit” or “the soul” – all of the universe was merely matter, and the only way to truly learn about its operation was to combine empirical experimentation with mathematics. This “materialism” as it was called at the time was so close to outright atheism as to be almost indistinguishable.

The other side of skepticism was a kind of cynical version of religious belief that dispensed with the emotional connection to God and reduced it to a simple act of spiritual insurance: the French mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623 – 1662), inventor of the field of probability, postulated “Pascal’s Wager.” In the Wager, Pascal argued that either God does or does not exist, and each person can choose either to acknowledge Him or not. If He does exist, and one acknowledges Him, then one is saved. If He does exist, and one rejects Him, then one is damned. If He does not exist and one acknowledges Him, nothing happens, and if He does not exist and one does not acknowledge Him, nothing happens either. Thus, one might as well worship God in some way, since there is no negative fallout if He does not exist, but there is (i.e. an eternity of torment in hell) if He does.

Pascal applied an equally skeptical view to the existing governments of his day. He noted that “We see neither justice nor injustice which does not change its nature with change in climate. Three degrees of latitude reverse all jurisprudence; a meridian decides the truth. Fundamental laws change after a few years of possession...a strange justice that is bounded by a river! Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on the other side.” In other words, there was no fixed or eternal or God-given about royal decrees and laws; they were arbitrary customs enforced through the state.

Conclusion

The Scientific Revolution, while it certainly achieved many important breakthroughs and discoveries, was as much about a cultural and intellectual shift as the discoveries themselves. It was not, for example, accompanied by technological advances of note with a few exceptions like telescopes. Instead, its importance lay in the fact that, first, educated people came to believe that the workings of the universe could be discovered through inquiry and experimentation, and second, that the universe itself was structured along rational lines. Those conclusions would in turn lead to a monumental movement of philosophy and thought during the eighteenth century: the Enlightenment.

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Chapter 13: The Enlightenment

In 1784, a Prussian philosopher named Immanuel Kant published a short essay entitled *What is Enlightenment?* He was responding to nearly a century of philosophical, scientific, and technical advances in Central and Western Europe that, he felt, had culminated in his own lifetime in a more enlightened and just age. According to Kant, Enlightenment was all about the courage to think for one's self, to question the accepted notions of any field of human knowledge rather than relying on a belief imposed by an outside authority. Likewise, he wrote, ideas were now exchanged between thinkers in a network of learning that itself provided a kind of intellectual momentum. Kant's point was that, more than ever before, thinkers of various kinds were breaking new ground not only in using the scientific method to discover new things about the physical world, but in applying rational inquiry toward improving human life and the organization of human society. While Kant's essay probably overstated the Utopian qualities of the thought of his era, he was right that it did correspond to a major shift in how educated Europeans thought about the world and the human place in it.

Following Kant, historians refer to the intellectual movement of the eighteenth century as the Enlightenment. Historians now tend to reject the idea that the Enlightenment was a single, self-conscious movement of thinkers, but they still (usually) accept that there were indeed innovative new themes of thought running through much of the philosophical, literary, and technical writing of the period. Likewise, new forms of media and new forums of discussion came of age in the eighteenth century, creating a larger and better-informed public than ever before in European history.

The Enlightenment: Definitions

The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement that lasted about one hundred years, neatly corresponding to most of the eighteenth century; convenient dates for it are from the Glorious Revolution in Britain to the beginning of the French Revolution: 1688 - 1789. The central concern of the Enlightenment was applying rational thought to almost every aspect of human existence: not just science, but philosophy, morality, and society. Along with those philosophical themes, central to the Enlightenment was the emergence of new forms of media

and new ways in which people exchanged information, along with new "sensibilities" regarding what was proper and desirable in social conduct and politics.

We owe to the Enlightenment fundamental modern beliefs. Enlightenment thinkers embraced the idea that scientific progress was limitless. They argued that all citizens should be equal before the law. They claimed that the best forms of government were those with rational laws oriented to serve the public interest. In a major break from the past, they increasingly claimed that there was a real, physical universe that could be understood using the methods of science, in contrast to the false, made-up universe of "magic" suitable only for myths and storytelling. In short, Enlightenment thinkers proposed ideas that were novel at the time, but were eventually accepted by almost everyone in Europe (and many other places, not least the inhabitants of the colonies of the Americas).

The Enlightenment also introduced themes of thought that undermined traditional religious beliefs, at least in the long run. Perhaps the major theme of Enlightenment thought that ran contrary to almost every form of religious practice at the time was the rejection of "superstitions," things that simply could not happen according to science (such a virgin giving birth to a child, or wine turning into blood during Communion). Most Enlightenment thinkers argued that the "real" natural universe was governed by natural laws, all watched over by a benevolent but completely remote "supreme being" - this was essentially the same as the Deism that had emerged from the Scientific Revolution. While few Enlightenment thinkers were outright atheists, almost all of them decried many church practices and what they perceived as the ignorance and injustice behind church (especially Catholic) laws.

The Enlightenment was also against "tyranny," which meant the arbitrary rule of a monarch indifferent to the welfare of his or her subjects. Almost no Enlightenment thinkers openly rejected monarchy as a form of government - indeed, some Enlightenment thinkers befriended powerful kings and queens - but they roundly condemned cruelty and selfishness among individual monarchs. The perfect state was, in the eyes of most Enlightenment thinkers, one with an "enlightened" monarch at its head, presiding over a set of reasonable laws. Many Enlightenment thinkers thus looked to Great Britain, since 1689 ruled by a monarch who agreed to its written constitution and worked closely with an elected parliament, as the best extant model of enlightened rule.

Behind both the scientific worldview and the rejection of tyranny was a focus on the human mind's capacity for reason. Reason is the mental faculty that takes sensory data and orders it into thoughts and ideas. The basic argument that underwrote the thought of the Enlightenment is that reason is universal and inherent to humans, and that if society could strip

away the pernicious patterns of tradition, superstition, and ignorance, humankind would arrive naturally at a harmonious society. Thus, almost all of the major thinkers of the Enlightenment tried to get to the bottom of just that task: what is standing in the way of reason, and how can humanity become more reasonable?

Context and Causes

One of the major causes of the Enlightenment was the Scientific Revolution. It cannot be overstated how important the work of scientists was to the thinkers of the Enlightenment, because works like Newton's *Mathematical Principles* demonstrated the existence of eternal, immutable laws of nature (ones that may or may not have anything to do with God) that were completely rational and understandable by humans. Indeed, in many ways the Enlightenment begins with Newton's publication of the *Principles* in 1687.

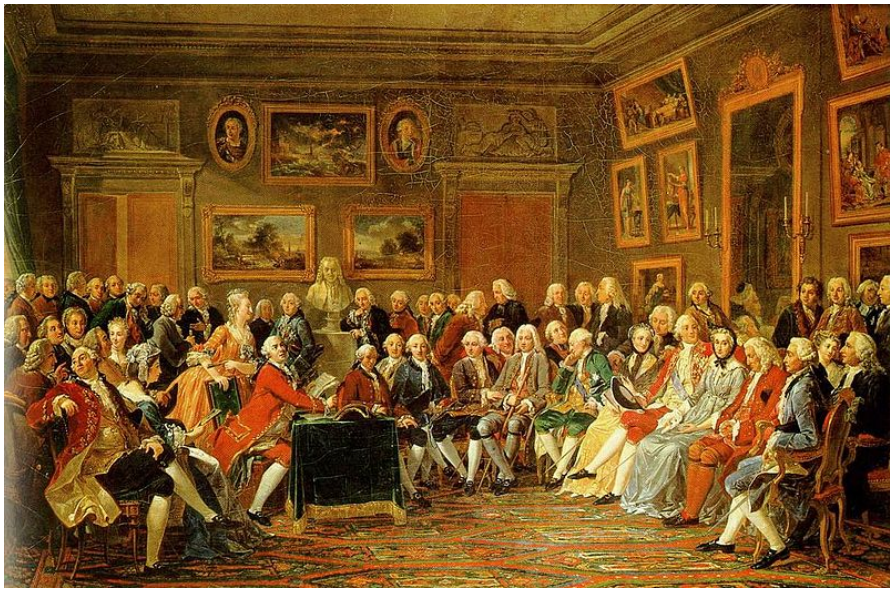
Having thus established that the universe was rational, one of the major themes of the Enlightenment was the search for equally immutable and equally rational laws that applied to everything else in nature, most importantly *human* nature. How do humans learn? How might government be designed to ensure the most felicitous environment for learning and prosperity? If humans are capable of reason, why do they deviate from reasonable behavior so frequently?

Among the other causes of the Enlightenment, perhaps the most important was the significant growth of the urban literate classes, most notably what was called in France the *bourgeoisie*: the mercantile middle class. Ever since the Renaissance era, elites increasingly acquired at least basic literacy, but by the eighteenth century even artisans and petty merchants in the cities of Central and Western Europe sent their children (especially boys) to schools for at least a few years. There was a real reading public by the eighteenth century that eagerly embraced the new ideas of the Enlightenment and provided a book market for both the official, copyrighted works of Enlightenment philosophy and pirated, illegal ones. That same reading public also eagerly embraced the quintessential new form of fiction of the eighteenth century: the novel, with the reading of novels becoming a major leisure activity of the period.

Thus, the Enlightenment thought took place in the midst of what historians call the “growth of the public sphere.” Newspapers, periodicals, and cheap books became very common during the eighteenth century, which in turn helped the ongoing growth of literacy rates. Simultaneously, there was a full-scale shift away from the sacred languages to the vernaculars (i.e. from Latin to English, Spanish, French, etc.)., which in turn helped to start the spread of the modern state-sponsored vernaculars as spoken languages in regions far from royal capitals. For the first time, large numbers of people acquired at least a basic knowledge of the official

language of their state rather than using only their local dialect. Those official languages allowed the transmission of ideas across entire kingdoms. For example, by the time the French Revolution began in the late 1780s, an entire generation of men and women was capable of expressing shared ideas about justice and politics in the official French tongue.

There were various social forums and spaces in which groups of self-styled "enlightened" men and women gathered to discuss the new ideas of the movement. The most significant of these were coffee houses in England and salons in France and Central Europe. Coffee houses, unlike their present-day analogs, charged an entry fee but then provided unlimited coffee to their patrons. Those patrons were from various social classes, and would gather together to discuss the latest ideas and read the periodicals provided by the coffee house (all while becoming increasingly caffeinated). Salons, which were common in the major cities of France and Germany, were more aristocratic gatherings in which major philosophers themselves would often read from their latest works, with the assembled group then engaging in debate and discussion. Salons were noteworthy for being led by women in most cases; aristocratic, educated women were thought to be the best moderators of learned discussion by most Enlightenment thinkers, men and women alike.



One of the best-known salons, run by Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin, seated on the right. All of the men pictured are their actual likelinesses. Two are of particular note: seated under the marble bust is Jean le Rond D'Alembert, noted below, and the bust is of Voltaire (also described below), whose work is being read to the gathering in the picture.

Outside of the gatherings at coffee houses and salons, the ideas and themes of the Enlightenment reached much of the reading public through the easy availability of cheap print, and it is also clear that even regular artisans were conversant in many Enlightenment ideas (to cite a single example, one French glassworker, Jacques-Louis Menetra, left a memoir in which he demonstrated his own command of the ideas of the period and even claimed to have chatted over drinks with the great Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau). The major thinkers of the Enlightenment considered themselves to be part of a “republic of letters,” similar to the "republic of science" that played such a role in the Scientific Revolution. They wrote voluminous correspondence and often sent one another unpublished manuscripts. Thus, from the thinkers themselves participating in the republic of letters down to artisans trading pirated copies of enlightenment works, the new ideas of the period permeated much of European society.

Enlightenment *Philosophes*

The term most often used for Enlightenment thinkers is *philosophe*, meaning simply "philosopher" in French. Many of the most famous and important philosophes were indeed French, but there were major English, Scottish, and Prussian figures as well. Some of the most noteworthy philosophes included the following.

John Locke: 1637 – 1704

Locke was an Englishman who, along with Newton, was among the founding figures of the Enlightenment itself. Locke was a great political theorist of the period of the English Civil Wars and Glorious Revolution, arguing that sovereignty was granted by the people to a government but could be revoked if that government violated the laws and traditions of the country. He was also a major advocate for religious tolerance; he was even bold enough to note that people tended to be whatever religion was prevalent in their family and social context, so it was ridiculous for anyone to claim exclusive access to religious truth.

Locke was also the founding figure of Enlightenment educational thought, arguing that all humans are born “blank slates” – *Tabula Rasa* in Latin – and hence access to the human faculty of reason had entirely to do with the proper education. Cruelty, selfishness, and destructive behavior were because of a lack of education and a poor environment, while the right education would lead anybody and everybody to become rational, reasonable individuals. This idea was

hugely inspiring to other Enlightenment thinkers, because it implied that society could be perfected if education was somehow improved and rationalized.

Voltaire: 1694 – 1778

The pen name of François-Marie Arouet, Voltaire was arguably the single most influential figure of the Enlightenment. The greatest novelist, poet, and philosopher of France during the height of the Enlightenment period, Voltaire became famous across Europe for his wit, intelligence, and moral battles against what he perceived as injustice and superstition.
In addition to writing hilarious novellas lambasting everything from Prussia's obsession with militarism to the idiotic fanaticism of the Spanish Inquisition, Voltaire was well known for publicly intervening against injustice. He wrote essays and articles decrying the unjust punishment of innocents and personally convinced the French king Louis XV to commute the sentences of certain individuals unjustly convicted of crimes. He was also an amateur scientist and philosopher - he wrote many of the most important articles in the "official" handbook of the Enlightenment, the Encyclopedia (described below).

Voltaire

While he was a tireless advocate of reason and justice, It is also important to note the ambiguities of Voltaire's philosophy. He was a deep skeptic about human nature, despite believing in the existence and desirability of reason. He acknowledged the power of the ignorance and outmoded traditions to govern human behavior, and he expressed considerable

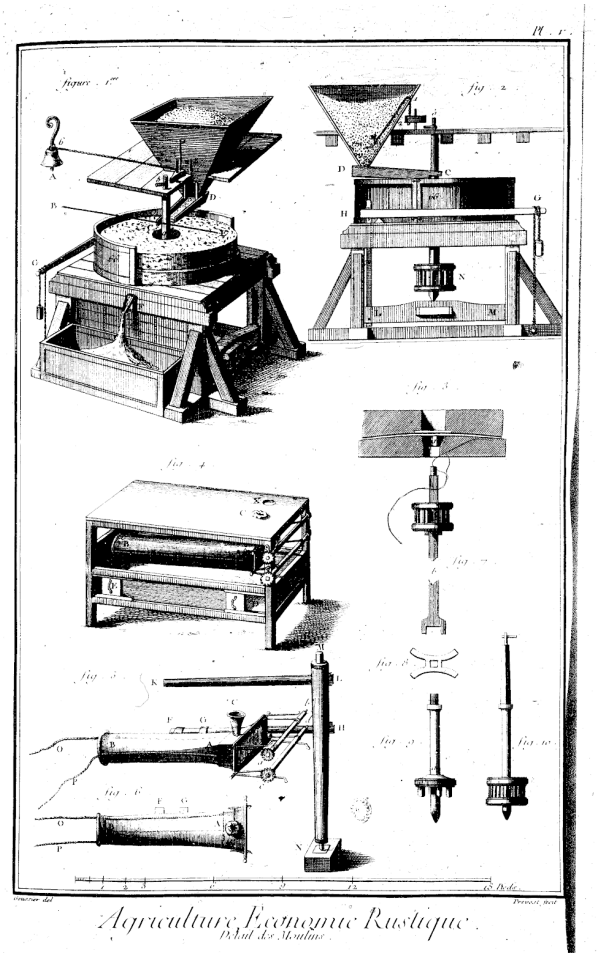
skepticism that society could ever be significantly improved. For example, despite his personal disdain for Christian (especially Catholic) institutions, he noted that "if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him," because without a religious structure shoring up their morality, the ignorant masses would descend into violence and barbarism.

Emilie de Châtelet: 1706 - 1749

A major scientist and philosopher of the period, Châtelet published works on subjects as diverse as physics, mathematics, the Bible, and the very nature of happiness. Perhaps her best-known work during her lifetime was an annotated translation of Newton's *Mathematical Principles* which explained the Newtonian concepts to her (French) readers. Despite the gendered biases of most of her scientific contemporaries, she was accepted as an equal member of the "republic of science." In Châtelet the link between the legacy of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment is clearest: while her companion (and lover) Voltaire was keenly interested in science and engaged in modest efforts at his own experiments, Châtelet was a full-fledged physicist and mathematician.

The Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert (1751)

The brainchild of two major French philosophes, the Encyclopedia was a full-scale attempt to catalog, categorize, and explain all of human knowledge. While its co-inventors, Jean le Rond D'Alembert and Denis Diderot, themselves wrote many of the articles, the majority were written by other philosophes, including (as noted above) Voltaire. The first volume was published in 1751, with other volumes following. In the end the Encyclopedia consisted of 28 volumes containing 60,000 articles with 2,885 illustrations. While its volumes were far too expensive for most of the reading public to access directly, pirated chapters ensured that its ideas reached a much broader audience.



One of the illustrations from the Encyclopedia, in this case diagrams of (at the time, state of the art) agricultural equipment.

The Encyclopedia was explicitly organized to refute traditional knowledge, namely that provided by the church and (to a lesser extent) the state. The claim was that the application of reason to any problem could result in its solution. It also attempted to be a technical resource for would-be scientists and inventors, not only describing aspects of science but including detailed technical diagrams of everything from windmills to mines. In short, the Encyclopedia was intended to be a kind of guide to the entire realm of human thought and technique - a cutting-edge description of all of the knowledge a typical philosophe might think necessary to improve the world.

David Hume: 1711 – 1776

Hume was the major philosopher associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, an outpost of the movement centered in the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. Hume was one of the most powerful critics of all forms of organized religion, which he argued smacked of superstition. To him, any religion based on "miracles" was automatically invalid, since miracles do not happen in an orderly universe knowable through science. In fact, Hume went so far to suggest that belief in a God who resembled a kind of omnipotent version of a human being, with a personality, intentions, and emotions, was simply an expression of primitive ignorance and fear early in human history, as people sought an explanation for a bewildering universe.

Hume also expressed enormous contempt for the common people, who were ignorant and susceptible to superstition. Hume is important to consider because he embodied one of the characteristics of the Enlightenment that often seems the most surprising from a contemporary perspective, namely the fact that it did *not* champion the rights, let alone anything like the right to political expression, of regular people. To a philosopher like Hume, the average commoner (whether a peasant or a member of the poor urban classes) was so mired in ignorance, superstition, and credulity that he or she should be held in check and ruled by his or her betters.

Adam Smith: 1723 - 1790

Smith was another Scotsman who did his work in Edinburgh. He is generally credited with being the first real economist: a social scientist devoted to analyzing how markets function. In his most famous work, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that a (mostly) free market, one that operated without the undue interference of the state, would naturally result in never-ending economic growth and nearly universal prosperity. His targets were the monopolies and protectionist taxes and tariffs that limited trade between nations; he argued that if states dropped those kind of burdensome practices, the market itself would increase wealth as if the general prosperity of the nation was lifted by an "invisible hand."

Smith's importance, besides founding the discipline of economics itself, was that he applied precisely the same kind of Enlightenment ideas and ideals to market exchange as did the other philosophes to morality, science, and so on. Smith, too, insisted that something in human affairs - economics - operated according to rational and knowable laws that could be discovered and explained. His ideas, along with those of David Ricardo, an English economist a generation younger than Smith, are normally considered the founding concepts of “classical” economics.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 - 1778)

Rousseau was the great contrarian philosophe of the Enlightenment. He rose to prominence by winning an essay contest in 1749, penning a scathing critique of his contemporary French society and claiming that its so-called "civilization" was a corrupt facade that undermined humankind's natural moral character. He went on to write both novels and essays that attracted enormous attention both in France and abroad, claiming among other things that children should learn from nature by experiencing the world, allowing their natural goodness and character to develop. He also championed the idea that political sovereignty arose from the "general will" of the people in a society, and that citizens in a just society had to be fanatically devoted to both that general will and to their own moral standards (Rousseau claimed, in a grossly inaccurate and anachronistic argument, that ancient Sparta was an excellent model for a truly enlightened and moral polity). Rousseau's concept of a moralistic, fanatical government justified by a "general will" of the people would go on to become of the ideological bases of the French Revolution that began just a decade after his death.

Politics and Society

The political implications of the Enlightenment were surprisingly muted at the time. Almost every society in Europe exercised official censorship, and many philosophes had to publish their more provocative works using pseudonyms, sometimes resorting to illegal publishing operations and book smugglers in order to evade that censorship (not to mention their own potential arrest). Philosophes tended to openly attack the most egregious injustices they perceived in royal governments and the organized churches, but at the same time their skepticism about the intellectual abilities of the common people was such that almost none of them advocated a political system besides a better, more rational version of monarchy. Likewise, philosophes were quick to salute (to the point of being sycophantic at times) monarchs who they thought were living up to their hopes for the ideal of rational monarchy.

In turn, various monarchs and nobles were attracted to Enlightenment thought. They came to believe in many cases in the essential justice of the arguments of the philosophes and did not see anything contradictory between the exercise of their power and enlightenment ideas. That said, monarchs tended to see "enlightened reforms" in terms of making their governments more efficient. They certainly did not renounce any of their actual power, although some did at least ease the burdens on the serfs who toiled on royal lands.

One major impact that Enlightenment thought unquestionably had on European (and, we should note, early American) politics was in the realm of justice. A noble from Milan, Cesare Bonesana, wrote a brief work entitled *On Crimes and Punishment* in 1764 arguing that the state's essential duty was the protection of the life and dignity of its citizens, which to him included those accused of crimes. Among other things, he argued that rich and poor should be held accountable before the same laws, that the aim of the justice system should be as much to prevent future crimes as to punish past ones, and that torture was both barbarous and counter-productive. Several monarchs in the latter part of the eighteenth century did, in fact, ban torture in their realms, and "rationalized" justice systems slowly evolved in many kingdoms during the period.

Perhaps the most notable "enlightened monarch" was Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia (r. 1740 – 1786). A great lover of French literature and philosophy, he insisted only on speaking French whenever possible (he once said that German was a language only useful for talking to one's horse), and he redecorated the Prussian royal palace in the French style, in which he avidly hosted Enlightenment salons. Frederick so impressed the French philosophes that Voltaire came to live at his palace for two years until the two of them had a falling out. Inspired by Enlightenment ideas, he freed the serfs on royal lands and banned the more onerous feudal duties owed by serfs owned by his nobles. He also rationalized the royal bureaucracy, making all applicants pass a formal exam, which provided a limited path of social mobility for non-nobles.

Another ruler inspired by Enlightenment ideas was the Tsarina Catherine the Great (r. 1762 - 1796) of Russia. Catherine was a correspondent of French philosophes and actively cultivated Enlightenment-inspired art and learning in Russia. Hoping to increase the efficiency of the Russian state, she expanded the bureaucracy, reorganized the Russian Empire's administrative divisions, and introduced a more rigorous and broad education for future officers of the military. She also created the first educational institution for girls in Russia, the Smolny Institute, admitting the daughters of nobles and, eventually, well-off commoners. Her enthusiasm for the Enlightenment dampened considerably as the French Revolution began in 1789, however, and while Russian nobles found their own privileges expanded, the vast majority of Russian subjects remained serfs. Like Frederick of Prussia, Catherine's appreciation for "reason" had nothing to do with democratic impulses.

One major political theme to emerge from the Enlightenment that did not require the goodwill of monarchs was the idea of human rights (or "the rights of man" as they were generally known at the time). Emerging from a combination of rationalistic philosophy and what

historians describe as new “sensibilities” - above all the recognition of the shared humanity of different categories of people - concepts of human rights spread rapidly in the second half of the eighteenth century. In turn, they fueled both demands for political reform and helped to inspire the vigorous abolitionist (anti-slavery) movement that flourished in Britain in particular. Just as torture came to be seen by almost all Enlightenment thinkers as not just cruel, but archaic and irrational, so slavery went from an unquestionable economic necessity to a loathsome form of ongoing injustice. Just as the idea of human rights would soon inspire both the American and French Revolutions in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the antislavery movements of the time would see many of their objectives achieved in the first few decades of the nineteenth (Britain would ban the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in 1833, although it would take the American Civil War in the 1860s to end slavery in the United States).

The Radical Enlightenment and The Underground

While the mainstream Enlightenment was definitely an elite affair conducted in public, there were other elements to it. The so-called Radical Enlightenment (the term was invented by historians, not people involved in it) had to do with the ideas too scandalous for mainstream philosophes to support, like outright atheism. One examples of this phenomenon was the emergence of Freemasonry, "secret," although not difficult to find for most male European elites, groups of like-minded Enlightenment thinkers who gathered in "lodges" to discuss philosophy, make political connections, and socialize.

Some Masonic lodges were associated with a much more widespread part of the "radical" Enlightenment: the vast underground world of illegal publishers and smugglers. In areas with relatively relaxed censorship like the Netherlands and Switzerland, numerous small printing presses operated throughout the eighteenth century, cranking out illegal literature. Some of this literature consisted of the banned works of major philosophes themselves, but much of it was simply pirated and "dumbed-down" versions of things like the Encyclopedia. This illegal industry supplied the reading public, especially the reading public with little money to spend on books, with their essential access to Enlightenment thought.

For example, as noted above, an actual volume (let alone the entire multi-volume set) of the Encyclopedia was much too expensive for a common artisan or merchant to afford. Such a person *could*, however, afford a pamphlet-sized, pirated copy of several of the articles from the Encyclopedia that might interest her. Likewise, many works that were clearly outside of the acceptable bounds of legal publishing at the time (including both outright attacks on Christianity

as a fraud as well as a shocking amount of pornography) were published and smuggled into places like France, England, and Prussia from the underground publishing houses. Perhaps the greatest impact of the Radical Enlightenment at the time is that it made mainstream Enlightenment ideas - however poorly summarized they might have been in pirated works - more accessible to far more of European society as a whole than they would have been otherwise.

Conclusion: Implications of the Enlightenment

The noteworthy philosophes of the Enlightenment rarely attacked outright the social hierarchy that they were part of. The abuses of the church, the ignorance of the nobility, even the injustices of kings might be fair game for criticism, but none of the better-known philosophes called for the equivalent of a political revolution. Only Rousseau was bold enough to advocate a republican form of government as a viable alternative to monarchy, and his political ideas were far less well-known during his lifetime than were his ruminations on education, nature, and morality. Even Kant's essay celebrated what he described as the "public use of reason," namely intellectuals exchanging ideas, while defending the authoritarian power of the (Prussian, in his case) king to demand that his subjects "obey!"

The problem was that even though most of the major figures of the Enlightenment were themselves social elites, their thought was ultimately disruptive to the Christian society of orders. Almost all of the philosophes claimed that the legitimacy of a monarch was based on their rule coinciding with the prosperity of the nation and the absence of cruelty and injustice in the laws of the land. The implication was that people have the right to judge the monarch in term of his or her competence and rationality. Likewise, one major political and social structure that philosophes *did* attack was the fact that nobles enjoyed vast legal privileges but had generally done nothing to deserve those privileges besides being born a member of a noble family. In contrast, philosophes were quick to point out that many members of the middle classes were far more intelligent and competent than was the average nobleman.

In addition, despite the inherent difficulty of publishing against the backdrop of censorship, philosophes did much to see that organized religion itself was undermined. The one stance all of the major Enlightenment thinkers agreed on regarding religion was that "revealed" religion - religion whose authority was based on miracles - was nonsense. According to the philosophes, the history of miracles could be disproved, and contemporary miracles were usually experienced by lunatics, women, and the poor (and were thus automatically suspect

from their elite, male perspective). Miracles, by their very nature, purported to violate natural law, and according to the very core principles of Enlightenment thought, that simply was not possible.

Thus, the Enlightenment did more to disrupt the social and political order by the late eighteenth century than most of its members ever intended. The most obvious and spectacular expression of that disruption took place in a pair of political revolutions: first in the American colonies of Great Britain in the 1770s, then in France starting in the 1780s. In both of those revolutions, ideas that had remained in the abstract during the Enlightenment were made manifest in the form of new constitutions, laws, and principles of government, and in both cases, one of the byproducts was violent upheaval.

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Chapter 14: The Society of Orders

The eighteenth century was the (last) great century of monarchical power and the aristocratic control of society in Europe. It was also the end of the early modern period, before industrialism and revolution marked the beginning of the modern period at the end of the century. Ironically, the enormous changes that happened at the end of the century were totally unanticipated at the time. No one, even the most radical political philosopher, believed that the political order or the basic technological level of their society would be fundamentally changed.

One example of that outlook is that of a philosopher and writer, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who in 1781 published *The Painting of Paris*, which depicted a more orderly and perfect French society of the future. In the Paris of the future, an enlightened king oversees a rationally-governed society and extends personal audiences to his subjects. The streets are clean, orderly, well-lit, and (unlike the Paris of his day) houses are numbered. Religious differences are calmly discussed and never result in violence. Strangely, from a present-day perspective, however, there is no new technology to speak of, and the political and social order remains intact: a king, nobility, clergy, and commoners occupy their respective places in society - they simply interact more "rationally."

The *Painting of Paris* depicted an idealized version of Mercier's contemporary society. With the exception of Britain's constitutional monarchy and strong parliament, the monarchs of the major states of Europe succeeded in the eighteenth century in controlling governments that were at least "absolutist" in their pretensions, even though the nobility and local assemblies had a great deal of real power almost everywhere. In turn, the social orders were starkly divided, not just by wealth but by law and custom as well. This set of divisions was summarized in the system of "Estates" in France, the societal descendants of the divisions between "those who pray, those who fight, and those who work" in the Middle Ages.

A late-medieval portrayal of the three orders or estates. A reasonably accurate take on social divisions in the Middle Ages, but one that was increasingly out of date by the eighteenth century.

The First Estate, consisting of the clergy, oversaw not just the churches, but education, enormous tracts of land held by the church and the monasteries, orders like the Jesuits and Benedictines, and great influence in royal government. In Protestant lands, there was the equivalent in the form of the official Lutheran or Anglican churches, although the political power of the clergy in Protestant countries was generally weaker than was the Roman Church in Catholic countries.

The Second Estate, the nobility, was itself divided by the elite titled nobility with hereditary lordships of various kinds (Dukes, Counts, etc.) and a larger group of lesser nobles who owned land but were not necessarily very wealthy. In Britain, the latter were called the gentry and controlled the House of Commons in parliament; the House of Lords was occupied by the "peers of the realm," the elite families of nobles often descended from the ancient Normans. Generally, the nobility as a whole represented no more than 4% of the overall population (with peculiar exceptions such as Poland and Hungary that had large numbers of nobles, most of whom were scarcely wealthier than peasants).

The Third Estate was simply everyone else, from rich bankers and merchants without titles down to the destitute urban poor and landless peasant laborers. During the Middle Ages, the Third Estate was represented by wealthy elites from the cities and large towns, with the

peasantry - despite being the majority of the population - enjoying no representation whatsoever. By the eighteenth century, the Third Estate was far more diverse, dynamic, and educated than ever before. It did not, however, enjoy better political representation. As the century went on, a growing number of members of the Third Estate, especially those influenced by Enlightenment thought, came to chafe at a political order that remained resolutely medieval in its basic structure.

Social Orders and Divisions

The Nobility

In most countries, the nobility maintained an almost complete monopoly of political power. The higher ranks of the clergy were drawn from noble families, so the church did not represent any kind of check or balance of power. The king, while now generally standing head-and-shoulders above the aristocracy individually, was still fundamentally the first among equals, “merely” the richest and most powerful person of the richest and most powerful family: the royal dynasty of the kingdom.

Despite the social and political changes of the preceding centuries, European nobles continued to enjoy tremendous legal and social privileges. Nobles owned a disproportionate amount of land, and in some kingdoms (like Russia), only nobles *could* own land. Only nobles could serve as officers in the army, reaping the spoils of war and generous salaries in the process. Only nobles had political representation in various parliamentary bodies, with the notable caveat that cities still held privileges of their own (the *parlement* of Paris, for example, wielded a great deal of meaningful power in French politics). Nobles had their own courts, were tried by their peers, and would subject to more humane treatment than were commoners. Perhaps most importantly, nobles everywhere paid few taxes, especially in comparison to the taxes, fees, and rents that beleaguered the peasantry.

A whole system of status symbols was maintained by both law and custom as well - to cite just a few, only members of the aristocracy could wear masks at masquerade balls, nobles led processions in towns and had special places to sit at operas and churches alike, and only nobles could wear swords during peacetime. Some of these legal separations were not trivial; only nobles could hunt game, and the legal systems of Europe viciously persecuted poachers even if the poachers were motivated by famine. Non-nobles were constantly reminded of their

inferior status thanks to both the legal privileges enjoyed by nobles and the array of visible status symbols.

By the eighteenth century, the nobility actively cultivated learning and social grace, hearkening back to the glory days of the Renaissance courtier and bypassing the relatively uncouth period of the religious wars. Education, music, and art became fashionable in Europe in the eighteenth century, and being witty, well-dressed, musically talented, and well read became a status symbol almost as important as owning a lavish estate. The eighteenth century was the height of so-called “polite society” among the nobility: a legally-reinforced elite that fancied themselves possessed of true "good taste."

The Common People

The nobility also exercised considerable power over the (mostly rural) common people: peasants in the west and serfs in the east. Landowning lords had the right to extract financial dues, fees, and rents on peasants in the west. In the east, they had almost total control over the lives and movements of their serfs, including the requirement for serfs to perform lengthy periods of unpaid labor on behalf of their lords. In its most extreme manifestations, serfdom was essentially the same thing as slavery. Russian estates were even sold according to the number of serfs (“souls”) they contained rather than the physical size of the plot.

Starting in the late seventeenth century and culminating in the eighteenth, many kingdoms saw the gradual elimination of the common lands that had been an essential economic safety net for the peasantry in the earlier centuries. The nobility proved astute at reorganizing agriculture along more capitalistic lines, and in turn their land-hunger prompted laws of “enclosure,” especially in Britain. The result was ongoing, sometimes debilitating, pressure on the peasants. Many peasant families who had once owned small plots of their own had to sell them to rich nobles and became landless agricultural laborers, only one step up from the truly destitute who fled to the cities in search of either work or church charity.

Peasants often fought back, especially when the nobility tried to impose new fees or tried to cut them off from the commons. There were cases of rural revolts, of peasants hiring lawyers and taking their lords to royal courts, and other forms of resistance. There were also truly enormous uprisings in the east – in both the Austrian Empire and Russia, giant peasant uprisings succeeded in killing thousands of nobles, only to be eventually put down by brutal government suppression. Thus, the nobility were in increasing conflict with the peasantry, largely because the former were trying to extract more wealth from the latter.

Another new factor was the rise of the bourgeoisie, the non-noble urban mercantile class. The bourgeoisie became a very important class in terms of the economies of the kingdoms of Europe, especially in the west, yet it did not "fit" into the society of orders. While wealthy members of the bourgeoisie blended in with and sometimes married into the nobility, others thought of themselves as being distinct, celebrating a life of productive work and serious education over what they saw as the foppery and excess of the aristocracy. It was this latter self-conscious bourgeoisie that would play an important role in the revolutions of the end of the century. The (literate and urban) bourgeois class were also among those most keenly interested in Enlightenment ideas.

The Great Powers

The eighteenth century saw the emergence of five states, all of which were monarchies, comprising what would eventually be referred to as the Great Powers. Each of these states had certain characteristics: a strong ruling dynasty, a large and powerful army, and relative political stability. Over the course of the century, they jockeyed for position and power not only in Europe itself, but overseas: whole wars were fought between the Great Powers thousands of miles from Europe itself.

Of the Great Powers, France was regarded as the greatest at the time. France had the largest population, the biggest armies, the richest economy, and the greatest international prestige. Despite the fact that the crown was hugely debt-ridden, following Louis XIV's wars and the fact that the next two kings were little better at managing money than he had been, the French monarchy was admired across Europe for its sophistication and power. French was also the international language by the eighteenth century: when a Russian nobleman encountered an Austrian and an Englishman, all three would speak French with one another.

In fact, the nobles of Europe largely thought of themselves in terms of a common aristocratic culture that had its heartland in France – Russian nobles often spoke Russian very poorly, and nobles of the German lands often regarded the German language as appropriate for talking to horses or commoners, but not to other nobles (supposedly, Frederick the Great of Prussia claimed that he used German to speak to his horse and other languages to speak to people). The French dynasty of the Bourbons, the descendants of Henry IV, continued the practice of keeping court at Versailles and only going into Paris when they had to browbeat the Parisian city government into ratifying royal laws.

Great Britain was both the perennial adversary of France in war during the eighteenth century and the most marked contrast in politics. As a constitutional monarchy, Britain was a major exception to the continental pattern of absolutism. While still exercising considerable power, the German-born royal line of the Hanovers deferred to parliament on matters of law-making and taxation after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. A written constitution reigned in anything smacking of "tyranny" and wistful continental philosophers like Voltaire often looked to Britain as the model of a more rational, fair-minded political system against which to contrast the abuses they perceived in their own political environments.

In addition to warring with France, the focus of the British government was on the expansion of the commercial overseas empire. France and Britain fought repeatedly in the eighteenth century over their colonial possessions. Britain enjoyed great success over the course of the century in pushing France aside as a rival in regions as varied as North America and India. On the verge of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in the last decades of the century, Britain was poised to become *the* global powerhouse.

France's traditional rival was the Habsburg line of Austria. What had once been the larger and more disparate empire of the Habsburgs was split into two different Habsburg empires in 1558, when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V abdicated. Charles V handed his Spanish possessions to his son and his Holy Roman imperial possessions to his younger brother. The Spanish line died off in 1700 when the last Spanish Habsburg, Charles II, died without an heir, which prompted the War of the Spanish Succession as the Bourbons of France fought to put a French prince on the Spanish throne and practically every other major power in Europe rallied against them.

The Holy Roman Empire in 1789. The territories depicted in dark yellow were those of the Habsburgs. The territory marked in blue in the northeast is the kingdom of Prussia, the great rival of Habsburg Austria. Note also that the Kingdom of Poland outside of the Holy Roman Empire was soon to be partitioned out of existence, its territory divided between Prussia, Russia, and Austria. That process was complete in 1795.

The Holy Roman line of Habsburgs remained strongly identified with Austria and its capital of Vienna. That line continued to rule the Austrian Empire, a political unit that united Austria, Hungary, Bohemia and various other territories in the southern part of Central Europe. While its nominal control of the Holy Roman Empire was all but political window dressing by the eighteenth century, the Austrian empire itself was by far the most significant German state and the Habsburgs of Austria were often the greatest threat to French ambitions on the continent.

The other German state of note was Prussia, the “upstart” great power. As noted in the discussion of absolutism, the Prussian royal line, the Hohenzollerns, oversaw the transformation of Prussia from a poor and backwards set of lands in northern Germany into a major military power, essentially by putting all state spending into the pursuit of military perfection. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Prussian army was a match of the much larger Austrian force, with the two states emerging as military rivals.

Russia

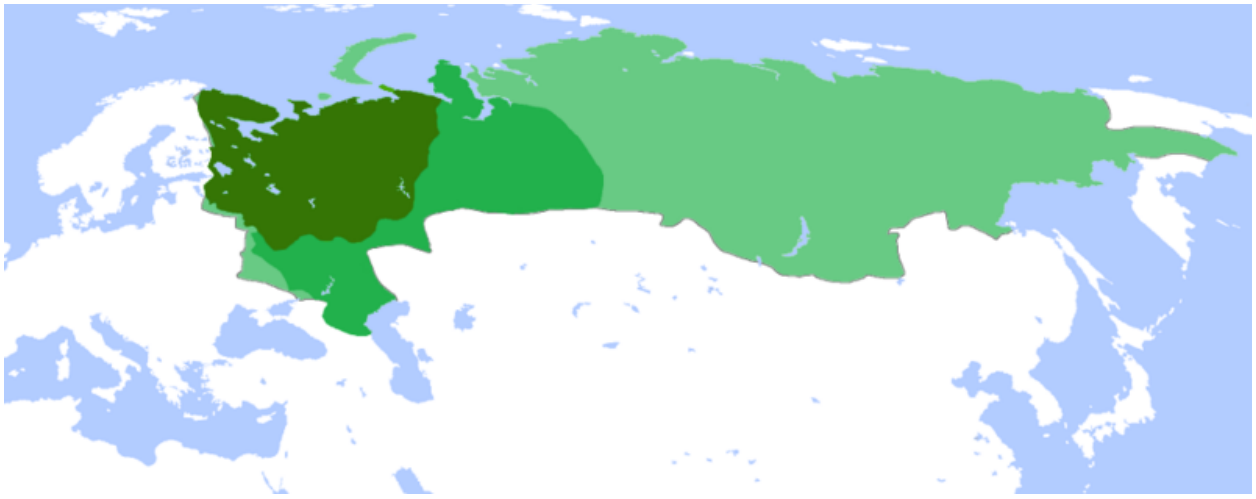
While this textbook has traced the development of the other Great Powers, it has not considered the case of Russia to this point. That is simply because there was no unified state called "Russia" before the late fifteenth century. Originally populated by Slavic tribal groups, Swedish Vikings called the Rus colonized and then mixed with the native Slavs over the course of the ninth century. The Rus were led by princes who ruled towns that eventually developed into small cities, the most important of which was Kiev in the present-day country of Ukraine. The Rus were eventually converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity thanks to the influence of Byzantium and its missionaries, but their historical development was undermined by the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century. The period of Mongol rule is still referred to as the "Mongol Yoke" in Russian history, meaning a period in which the Russian people were used as beasts of burden and sources of wealth by their Mongol lords, like animals yoked to plows.

Russia emerged from the “Mongol yoke” thanks to the efforts of the Grand Prince of the city of Moscow, Ivan III (r. 1462 – 1505) and his grandson Ivan IV – “the Terrible” (r. 1533 – 1584). Ivan III was the prince of Muscovy, the territory around the city of Moscow, but thanks to his ruthless militarism, he expanded Muscovy’s influence to the Baltic Sea, fighting the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth to the west and conquering the prosperous city of Novgorod and its territories. He also overthrew the authority of the Mongol Golden Horde in his lands and began the process of permanently ending Mongol control in Russia. For the first time, a Russian prince had carved out a significant territory through conquest.

Two generations later, Ivan IV came to power in Muscovy. Ivan IV was, like his grandfather, a highly successful leader in war. Muscovy conquered a large part of the Mongol Golden Horde’s territory and also pushed back Turkic khans in the south. He dispatched explorers and hunters into Siberia, beginning the long process of the conquest of Siberia by Russia. He was also the first Russian ruler to claim the title of Tsar (also anglicized as Czar), meaning "Caesar." Because Russia had adopted the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity centuries earlier, and because Constantinople (and the last remnant of the *actual* Roman Empire) fell to the Turks in 1453, Russian rulers after Ivan claimed that *they* were the true inheritors of the political power of the ancient Roman emperors. Just as the Holy Roman Emperors in the west claimed to be the political descendants of Roman authority (the German word “Kaiser,” too, means “Caesar”) so too did the Tsars of Russia.

Ivan IV was called The Terrible because of his incredible sadism: he had the beggars of Novgorod burned to death, he had nobles that displeased him ripped apart by wolves and dogs,

and he crushed his own son's skull with a club while in a rage. He had whole noble families slaughtered when he thought they posed a threat to his authority or were simply slow to respond to his demands that they serve him personally at his court. His overall goal was the transformation of the Russian nobles – called *boyars* – into servants of the state, one in which their power was based only on their loyalty to the Tsar. During his reign, he succeeded in asserting his authority through sheer brutality and terror.



The expansion of Russian imperial control from the early sixteenth century until 1700, with earlier territories marked in darker shades of green on the map. Imperial power reached the Pacific by the end of the seventeenth century.

After Ivan's death in 1584, Russia was plunged into a thirty-year period of anarchy called the Time of Troubles in which no one reigned as the recognized sovereign. Nobles reasserted their independence and Russia existed in a state of civil war (or armed anarchy, depending on one's perspective) for decades. The period between rulers ended in when an assembly of nobles elected the first member of the Romanov family to hold the title of Tsar in 1613 – Michael I – but the Tsars remained weak and plagued by both resistance by nobles and huge peasant uprisings for many decades. One enormous peasant uprising, led by a man who claimed to be the "true" Tsar, threatened to overwhelm the forces of the real Tsar before being defeated in 1670.

The institution of serfdom was cemented in the midst of the chaos of the seventeenth century. When times were hard for Russian peasants, they frequent fled to the frontier, either Siberia or what would later be called the Ukraine (meaning "border region"). Since Russia was so enormous, this exacerbated an ongoing labor shortage problem. Unlike in the west, there was more than enough land in Russia, just not enough peasants to work it. Thus, the Tsarist

state instituted serfdom in 1649 across the board, formalizing what was already a widespread institution. This made peasants legally little better than slaves, forced to work the land and to serve the state in war when conscripted.

Russia's transformation and engagement with the rest of Europe began in earnest under Tsar Peter I (the Great), r. 1682 – 1725. Up to that point, so little was known about Russia in the west that Louis XIV once sent a letter to a Tsar who had been dead for twelve years. Russian nobles themselves tended to be uneducated and uncouth compared to their western counterparts, and the Russian Orthodox Church had little emphasis on the learning that now played such a major role in both the Catholic and Protestant churches of the west. Peter learned about Western Europe from visiting foreigners in his early twenties and decided to go and see what the west had to offer himself – he disguised himself as a normal workman (albeit one who was seven feet tall) and undertook a personal journey of discovery.

The young Peter the Great, in a portrait he presented to the English King William III (whom he was visiting during his travels around Western Europe).

In the process, Peter personally learned about shipbuilding and military organization, returning intent on transforming the Russian state and military. He forced the Russian nobility to dress and act more like Western Europeans, sent Russian noble children abroad for their education, built an enormous navy and army to fight the Swedes and the Turks, and (on the backs of semi-slave labor) created the new port city of St. Petersburg as the new imperial capital. His military reforms were huge in scope – he instituted conscription in 1705 that

required one out of every twenty serfs to serve for life in his armies, and he oversaw the construction of Russia's navy from nothing. Over two-thirds of state revenues went to the military even after he instituted new taxes and royal monopolies. He also forced the boyars to undergo military education and serve as army officers, with all male nobles after 1722 required to serve the state either as civil officials or military officers.

Peter fought an ultimately-unsuccessful war against the Ottomans in 1711, but he did capture some Turkish territory in the process; likewise, he seized the Baltic territories of Livonia and Estonia from what was then the unified kingdom of Poland – Lithuania (a state that began a rapid, painful decline over the course of the century). His major enemy, though, was Sweden. Sweden was a powerful late-medieval and early-modern kingdom. By the 1650s, Sweden ruled Denmark, Norway, Finland, and the Baltic region. The king Charles XI (r. 1660 – 1697) successfully imitated Louis XIV's absolutism by pitting lesser nobles against greater ones, forcing the nobles to serve him directly. His son Charles XII (r. 1697 – 1718) was so arrogant that he snatched the crown from the hand of the Lutheran minister at his own coronation and put it on his head; he also refused to swear the normal coronation oath. He was the true paragon of Swedish absolutism.

Charles XII faced by an attempt by Denmark, joined by the German princedom of Saxony, to reassert its sovereignty in 1700. This turned into the Great Northern War (1700 – 1721) when Peter the Great joined in, intent on seizing Baltic territory for a permanent port. The Swedes defeated a large Russian army in 1700, but then Charles shifted his focus to Poland and Saxony rather than invading Russia itself. The Russians rallied and, in 1703, captured the mouth of the Neva River; Tsar Peter ordered the construction of his new capital city, St. Petersburg, the same year. The war dragged on for years, with Charles XII dying fighting a rebellion in Norway in 1718, leaving no heir. The Swedish forces were finally and definitively beaten in 1721, leaving Russia dominant in the Baltic region.

By the time Peter died (after contracting pneumonia or a flu from diving into the freezing Neva to save a drowning man) in 1725, the Russian Empire was now six times larger than it had been under Ivan the Terrible. Thanks to its territorial gains on the Baltic and the construction of St. Petersburg, it was now a resolutely European power, albeit an unusual one. While Russia suffered from a period of weak rule after Peter's death, it was simply so large and the Tsar's authority so absolute that it remained a great power.

In 1762, the Prussian-born empress Catherine (who later acquired the honorific "the Great") seized power from her husband in a coup. Catherine would go on to introduce reforms meant to improve the Russian economy, creating the first state-financed banks and welcoming

German settlers to the region of the Volga River to modernize farming practices. She also modernized the army and the state bureaucracy to improve efficiency. Despite being an enthusiastic supporter of "Enlightened" philosophy (as noted in the last chapter), Catherine was as focused on Russian expansion as Peter had been half a century earlier, seizing the Crimean Peninsula from the Ottoman Empire, expanding Russian power in Central Asia, and extinguishing Polish independence completely, with Poland divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1795. By her death in 1796 Russia was more powerful than ever before.

Wars

Raw economics became a major focus of war in the seventeenth century, when the rival commercial empires of Europe fought over territory and trade routes, not just glory and dynastic lines. The Dutch and British fought repeatedly from 1652 – 1675, conflicts which resulted in the loss of Dutch territory in North America (hence the city of New York instead of New Amsterdam). The British also fought the Spanish over various territories. The noteworthy result was that the formerly-Spanish territory of Florida was handed over to the British in return for the Cuban port of Havana.

The most significant conflicts, however, were the ongoing series of wars between the two greatest powers of the eighteenth century: Britain and France. Britain had established naval dominance by 1700, but the French state was richer, its army much larger, and its navy almost Britain's match. The French monarchy was also the established model of absolutism. Despite the financial savvy of the British government, most Europeans looked to France for their idea of a truly glorious state.

France became a highly aggressive power under Louis XIV, who saw territorial gains as essential to his own glory (he had the phrase "The Last Argument of Kings" stamped onto his cannons). His "grand strategy" was to seize territory from Habsburg Spain and Habsburg Austria by initiating a series of wars; he planned to force conquered populations to help pay for the wars and ultimately hoped to expand France to the Pyrenees in the south and the Rhine in the east. His wars in the late seventeenth century resulted in the seizure of small territories around the existing French borders, most notably in the Pyrenees. These wars, however, also drove the other powers of Europe into a defensive alliance against France, since it was clear that France threatened all of their interests (at one point Louis even tried to invade England; this would-be invasion was so unsuccessful it exists as a footnote in military history rather than the major event of something like the Spanish Armada).

The most significant war started by Louis was the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 – 1713). The last Spanish Habsburg died in 1700, and the heir was Louis' grandson Philip. The Austrian Habsburgs rejected the legitimacy of the claim, and soon they recruited the British to help defeat France. The fighting dragged on for a decade as more European powers were drawn in. Finally, with France teetering on the edge of bankruptcy and Louis himself now old and ill, the powers agreed to negotiate. The results of the war were that Britain acquired additional territory in the Americas and a member of the Bourbon line was confirmed as the new Spanish king. However, the French and Spanish branches of the Bourbons were to be permanently distinct from one another: France would not control Spain, in other words. In addition, the Austrian Habsburgs absorbed the remaining Spanish possessions in Italy and the Hapsburg-controlled parts of the Netherlands, meaning Spain was now bereft of its last European territories outside of the Iberian peninsula itself.

Conflicts continued on and off between the Great Powers even after the War of the Spanish Succession. The next major conflict was the Seven Years War (1756 – 1763), better known in America as the French and Indian War. The war began when Prussia attempted a blatant land-grab from Austria, which quickly led to the involvement of the other Great Powers. This was a particularly bloody conflict, especially for the Native American tribes that allied with French or British colonial forces. The results of this war, another British victory, were far-reaching: France lost its Canadian possessions, including the entire French-speaking province of Quebec, it lost almost all of its territories in India, and Britain achieved dominance of commercial shipping to the Americas. While France was still the most powerful kingdom on the European continent, there were now no serious rivals to Britain on the oceans, something that allowed it to become the predominant imperial power in the world in the nineteenth century.

In turn, the Seven Years War directly led to the American Revolution (1775 – 1783). The British Parliament tried to impose unpopular taxes on the American colonists to help pay for the British troops garrisoned there during and after the Seven Years War. Open revolt broke out in 1775 and the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. The French provided both material and, then, actual military aid to the Americans starting in 1778, and Britain was finally forced to concede American independence in 1783. Significantly, this was the only war that France "won" over the course of the eighteenth century, and it gained nothing from it but the satisfaction of having finally beaten its British enemy. The real winners were the American colonists who were now able to go about creating an independent nation.

Conclusion

The eighteenth century was the culmination of many of the patterns that first came about in the late medieval and early Renaissance periods. The Great Powers were centralized, organized states with large armies and global economic ties. The social and legal divisions between different classes and categories were never more starkly drawn and enforced than they were by the eighteenth century. Wars explicitly fought in the name of gaining power and territory, often territory that spanned multiple continents (as in Britain's seizure of French territory in both the Americas and India).

Ironically, given the apparent power and stability of this political and social order, everything was about to change. As the ideas of the Enlightenment spread and as the groups that made up the Third Estate of commoners grew increasingly resentful of their subservient political position, a virtual powder keg was being lit under the political structure of Europe. The subsequent explosion began in France in 1789.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Three Social Orders - Public Domain

Holy Roman Empire - Robert Alfers

Expansion of Russia - Dbachmann

Peter the Great - Public Domain

Chapter 15: The French Revolution

The French Revolution was a radical political transformation of what had been one of the most traditional and most powerful of the great European states in the space of a few short years. France went from a Catholic absolute monarchy to a radical, secular republic with universal manhood suffrage, a new calendar, a new system of weights and measures, and the professed goal of conquering the rest of Europe in the name of freedom, all in about five years. Even though the Revolution "failed" to achieve the aims of its most radical proponents in the short term, it set the stage for everything else that happened in Europe for the rest of the nineteenth century, with major consequences for world history.

The Causes of the Revolution

The immediate case of the French Revolution was the dire financial straits of the French state after a century of war against Britain and an outdated system of taxation. As noted in the last chapter, starting at the end of the seventeenth century there was an (on-again, off-again) century of warfare between France and Britain, almost all of it fought overseas (in India, the Caribbean, and North America). With the noteworthy exception of the American Revolution, Britain won every single war. The major impact of the colonial wars between France and Britain in the eighteenth century on France was to push the state to the brink of bankruptcy - even as Britain funded its wars through the sale of bonds from the official national bank, the French state struggled to raise revenue. The loans it desperately sought had to be found from private banks, traders, and wealthy individuals, and the interest rates it was obliged to pay were punishingly high.

Not only did France lose much of its empire in Canada, the Caribbean, and India to the British, the state also accumulated a huge burden of debt which consumed 60% of tax revenues each year in interest payments. In turn, the problem for the monarchy was that there was no way to raise more money: taxes were tied to land and agriculture, rather than to taxes on commerce, and nobles and the church were exempt from taxation. As they had been since the Middle Ages, taxes were drawn almost entirely from peasant agriculture, supplemented by a few special taxes on commodities like salt. Since the nobility and church were all but tax-exempt, and the monarchy did not have a systematic way to tax commerce, there was a lot of wealth in France that the crown simply could not access through taxation.

In turn, the power of the nobility ensured that any dream of far-reaching reform was out of the question. There were about 200,000 nobles in France (which had a population of 26 million at the time). All of the senior members of the administration, the army, the navy, and the Catholic Church were nobles. The nobility owned a significant percentage of the land of France outright - about one-third - and had lordly rights over most of the rest of it. The pageantry around the person of the king and queen first established by Louis XIV continued at the palace of Versailles, but nothing changed the fact that noble wealth remained largely off-limits to the state and nobles exercised a great deal of real political power.

The one war in which France managed to defeat Britain was the American Revolutionary War of the 1770s and early 1780s. France subsidized the American Revolution and offered weapons, advisers, and naval support. The result was to push the state to the verge of outright bankruptcy, with no direct economic benefit to France from American victory. Traditionally, the French kings dismissed financial concerns as being beneath their royal dignity, but the situation had reached such a point of desperation that even the king had to take notice.

Starting In the early 1780s, the French King Louis XVI (great-great-great grandson of Louis XIV) appointed a series of finance ministers to wade through the mountains of reports and ledgers to determine how much the state owed, to whom, and how paying it back would be possible. Attempts to overhaul the tax system as a whole were shouted down by the major city governments and powerful noble interests alike. By 1787, it was clear that the financial situation was simply untenable and the monarchy had to secure more revenue, somehow. The king was at a loss of what to do. He reluctantly came to realize that only taxing the nobility and, perhaps, the church could possibly raise the necessary revenue. Thus, Louis XVI was up against the entrenched interests of the most powerful classes of his kingdom.

Events of the Early Revolution

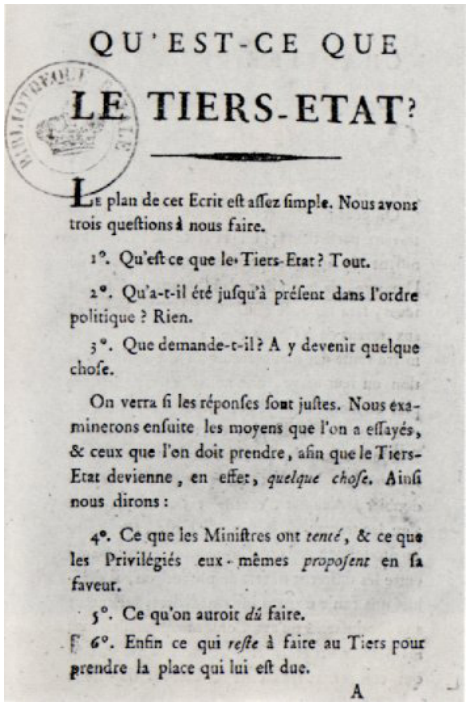
When his efforts to increase tax receipts met with resistance from the nobility, Louis XVI first called an Assembly of Notables to deliberate with him. That Assembly consisted of the most powerful noblemen in France, who outright refused to grant new revenues to the crown. Louis reluctantly agreed to revive France's ancient representative assembly, the Estates General, in the hope of persuading that body to provide more revenue. For the first time in the history of French absolutism, a king was thus required to formally negotiate with his subjects simply to stave off bankruptcy.

The Estates General had not met since 1614. Like the British parliament, its original function was to serve as a venue for the French king to bargain with the entire nation for money,

almost always in the service of war. The Estates General was a gathering of representatives of the three estates - clergy, nobility, and everyone else - in which the French king could ask for tax revenue in return for various bargains and promises (often the promise not to ask for more taxes in the future). This had not happened for over 150 years, and thus no living French person had any experience of what to expect.

The result in the spring of 1789 was a surprisingly democratic election, with the majority of the male population voting for delegates to the Estates General. Many hoped that the meeting would result in royal intervention in a host of perceived injustices, not just more money for the state. Before the estates met, many voters and their representatives drew up lists of grievances demanding relief from unfair financial burdens imposed by the nobility, of better representation of townsfolk and peasants, and of royal intervention on behalf of the people of France, among other things. These political expectations rose at the very moment when the price of bread was skyrocketing - 1787 and 1788 had both seen very poor harvests, and there was widespread fear of outright famine. Even as members of the Third Estate drew up their lists of grievances, rumors were spreading that nobles and wealthy merchants were hoarding grain to drive up prices.

In the past, the Estates General had consisted of three separate groups, representing the clergy (the First Estate), the nobility (the Second Estate), and prosperous townsfolk (the Third Estate). In turn, voting was done by estate, not by proportional representation, with the first and second estates generally joining together to outvote the third. Thus, the small minority of the population that consisted of nobles and clerics could always outvote the majority of the population in this traditional system of voting. The problem for the political stability of the kingdom was that French society had changed enormously since the last meeting of the Estates General. Many of the representatives of the Third Estate thought of themselves as the representatives of France *itself*, since the immense majority of the population consisted of commoners and laypeople. The key issue was whether the king would allow voting to follow the number of representatives, which would give the Third Estate a clear majority, or if he would insist on the old model in which the clergy and nobility dominated.



QU'EST-CE QUE

LE TIERS-ETAT?

Le plan de cet Ecrit eſt aſſez ſimple. Nous avons trois queſtions à nous faire.

1°. Qu'eſt ce que le Tiers-Etat? Tout.

2°. Qu'a-t-il été juſqu'à préſent dans l'ordre politique? Rien.

3°. Que demande-t-il? A y devenir quelque choſe.

On verra ſi les réponſes ſont juſtes. Nous examinerons enſuite les moyens que l'on a eſſayés, & ceux que l'on doit prendre, afin que le Tiers-Etat devienne, en effet, *quelque choſe*. Ainſi nous dirons:

4°. Ce que les Miniſtres ont *tenté*, & ce que les Privilégiés eux-mêmes *propoſent* en ſa faveur.

5°. Ce qu'on auroit *dû* faire.

6°. Enfin ce qui *reſte* à faire au Tiers pour prendre la place qui lui eſt due.

A

The cover of What Is The Third Estate?, *a highly influential pamphlet written by a liberal clergyman, the Abbe Abbé Sieyès, in the lead-up to the meeting of the Estates General. His argument: the Third Estate was "everything," representing the nation of France as a whole.*

The king vacillated on this question for weeks, but as the representatives came together in June of 1789 he confirmed that voting would be by estate. This prompted a spontaneous, and for the moment peaceful, act of defiance on the part of many of the representatives of the Third Estate, joined by some sympathetic nobles and priests. First, they declared themselves to be not just the representatives of the Third Estate, but of France itself as a whole: they were the "National Assembly" in whom the will of the French people would be expressed. Then, discovering on the morning of June 20 that their meeting hall was locked (by accident, as it turned out, although they feared royal interference), they occupied the tennis court of Versailles and pledged not to leave until they had drafted a constitution and the king had accepted it - this came to be known as the Tennis Court Oath, generally considered to be the moment at which the French Revolution truly began.

The greatest painter of the revolutionary era, Jacques-Louis David, captured the moment in which the Tennis Court Oath was declared. Note the Catholic priest, Protestant minister, and agnostic "freethinker" embracing in the front of the crowd: religious divisions were to be laid aside in the name of national unity.

The King was, as was typical for Louis XVI, unsure of how to proceed. He addressed representatives of all three estates a few days later, promising reform, and when faced with continued defiance, he ordered the representatives of all three estates to join together in the National Assembly. As the crucial weeks of late June and early July unfolded, however, a faction of conservative nobles and the queen tried to persuade Louis to use force to eliminate what they correctly perceived to be a fundamental challenge to royal authority, and he cautiously moved forward with a plan to summon troops to watch over the proceedings.

In Paris, about twenty miles away, rumors spread that the king was going to crush the new National Assembly with force. As a result, crowds took to the streets on July 12th. On the 14th, a crowd searching for weapons overwhelmed the Bastille, a royal prison and arsenal, and murdered its guards. Soon, royal troops started abandoning their posts and joining with the rebels. This event, when a popular uprising in Paris spontaneously employed force to stave off

the threat of a royalist crackdown, remains the national holiday of the French Republic to this day, commemorated as Bastille Day. On July 16th the war minister advised the king that the army could no longer be relied upon. The king accepted the appointment of a liberal nobleman, Lafayette, as commander of a new "National Guard" and, reluctantly, committed himself to working with the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, rioting had spread to the countryside as peasants, learning of the developments in Versailles and Paris, sought to both feed themselves and to lash out against the nobility who, they thought, were driving them into destitution. Rumors spread among the peasantry that nobles were hoarding stores of grain, driving up prices and starving the peasants into submission. The result was the “Great Fear,” in which peasants attacked and looted noble manors. Their main target was the debt ledgers that nobles kept on their peasants, which the peasants gleefully burned (thereby erasing their debts entirely - there was no such thing as a "backup copy" in 1789).

Under these circumstances of anarchy in the countryside, the National Assembly needed to do something dramatic to maintain control of the situation. On August 4, 1789, it voted to end feudal privilege (the landlords' rights to coerce labor and fees of various kinds from the peasantry), on August 14th it abolished the sale of offices, and on August 26th it issued a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, modeled in part on the American Bill of Rights. In October, in a single bold stroke, the Assembly seized church lands and property, selling them at auction to fund the Revolutionary state itself. Finally, in early 1790 it abolished noble titles altogether, something that was almost redundant since those titles no longer had legal privileges associated with them.

The abolition of privilege meant that government - especially in the matter of taxation and law - should treat people as individual citizens rather than as members of social classes. People differed quantitatively in the amount of wealth they owned, but not qualitatively according to social rank or estate. Thus, in a shockingly short amount of time, the French state was forced to accept that legitimate power belongs to the nation as a whole, not to the king, and that every citizen should be equal before the law. The Revolutionaries summarized their ideals with the motto of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” - to this day, the official credo of the French state.

“Equality”

Of the three elements of the Revolutionary motto, “equality” was in some ways the most fraught with implications. All of the members of the National Assembly were men. Almost all were Catholic - a few were Protestants, but none were Jews. All were white as well, despite the existence of a large population of free blacks and mixed-race inhabitants of the French colonies (especially in the Caribbean). The initial claim that all citizens ought to be equal before the law seemed straightforward enough until the Assembly had to decide if that equality extended to those besides the people who had held a monopoly on political representation of any kind in most of French history: property-owning male Catholics. The eminent historian of France, Lynn Hunt, in her *The Invention of Human Rights*, traces some of the ways in which the promise of “equality” brought about changes that the members of the Assembly had never anticipated early on - some of her arguments are presented below.

While some of the early Revolutionaries had spoken in favor of the extension of rights to Protestants before the Revolution, fewer had spoken on behalf of France’s Jewish minority. Despite misgivings from Catholic conservatives in the Assembly, Protestants saw their rights recognized by the end of 1789 thanks in part to the fact that Protestants already exercised political rights in parts of southern France. In turn, while the idea of legal equality for Jews was practically unthinkable before the Revolution, the logic of equality seemed to acquire its own momentum over the course of 1789 - 1791, with French Jews winning their rights as French citizens in September of 1791.

For both Protestants and Jews, the members of the Assembly concluded that religious faith was essentially a private matter that did not directly impact one’s ability to exercise political rights. Having already broken with the Catholic church - and seized much of its property - the Assembly now created a momentus precedent for religious tolerance. Religion was now officially stripped of its political valence for the first time in European history. This was more than a “separation of church and state”: it suggested that religious belief was in fact irrelevant to political loyalty and public conduct. Clearly, much had changed in the centuries since the Protestant Reformation unleashed its firestorm of controversy and bloodshed.

In the case of the blacks and mixed-race peoples of the French colonies, however, the Assembly at first showed little interest in extending any form of political rights. Several

members of the Assembly argued that slavery should be abolished, but they were in the minority. France's Caribbean colonies, above all its sugar-producing plantation colony of St. Domingue (present-day Haiti), produced enormous wealth for the French state and for numerous slave-based plantation owners and their French business partners. Thus, even those in favor of major reforms in France itself often balked at the idea of meddling with the wealth of the slave economies of the Caribbean. Once again, however, the logic of equality worked inexorably to upset centuries-old political hierarchies. Free blacks and mixed-race inhabitants of the colonies, once learning of the events in France, swiftly petitioned to have their own rights recognized. Much more alarmingly to the members of the Assembly, the slaves of St. Domingue (who comprised approximately 90% of its population) also learned of the Revolution and of its egalitarian promise.

The Assembly took steps to recognize the rights of free people of color only slowly at first. In the summer of 1791, however, a slave uprising in St. Domingue forced the issue. The Assembly desperately scrambled to maintain control of the situation, hoping in part to win over the free people of color in the colony to fight alongside white plantation owners to maintain control. Over the course of the following years, the rebellion in St. Domingue saw French authority destroyed, plantations overrun, and hundreds of thousands of slaves seizing their freedom. Having already lost control, the Assembly finally voted to abolish slavery entirely in February of 1794. Thus, unlike the cases of Protestant and Jewish enfranchisement, racial equality was only "granted" by the Assembly because it could not be maintained by force.

The slave rebellion in St. Domingue, soon to be the nation of Haiti, was led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave himself.

In the rhetoric of the Assembly, missing from the emancipatory logic entirely however, were women. There were no debates on the floor of the Assembly having to do with women's rights, in stark contrast to the lengthy arguments over religious minorities and the black inhabitants of the colonies. French men, radicals very much included, simply took it for granted that women were incapable of exercising political independence. Some women both in France and abroad, however, forcefully drove home the implication of the Revolution's promise of "equality," with the playwright Olympe de Gouges issuing a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* in 1791 in parallel to the Assembly's 1789 *Rights of Man and Citizen*. In England, the writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote one of the founding texts of modern feminism, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in 1792, that made a straightforward claim: the liberation of women would play a key role in the disintegration of unwarranted social and political hierarchy for all.

Neither work, however, inspired sympathy among the vast majority of the male population of France (or Britain), and as the Revolution grew more radical (see below), the members of the Assembly grew ever-more hostile to the demand for rights for women. De Gouges was eventually executed on orders from the Assembly as a "counter-Revolutionary," and the political clubs of women that had sprung up since 1789 were shut down. It would take the better part of a century for women to force the issue and begin the long, arduous process of seizing political rights.

The Radical Phase and the Terror

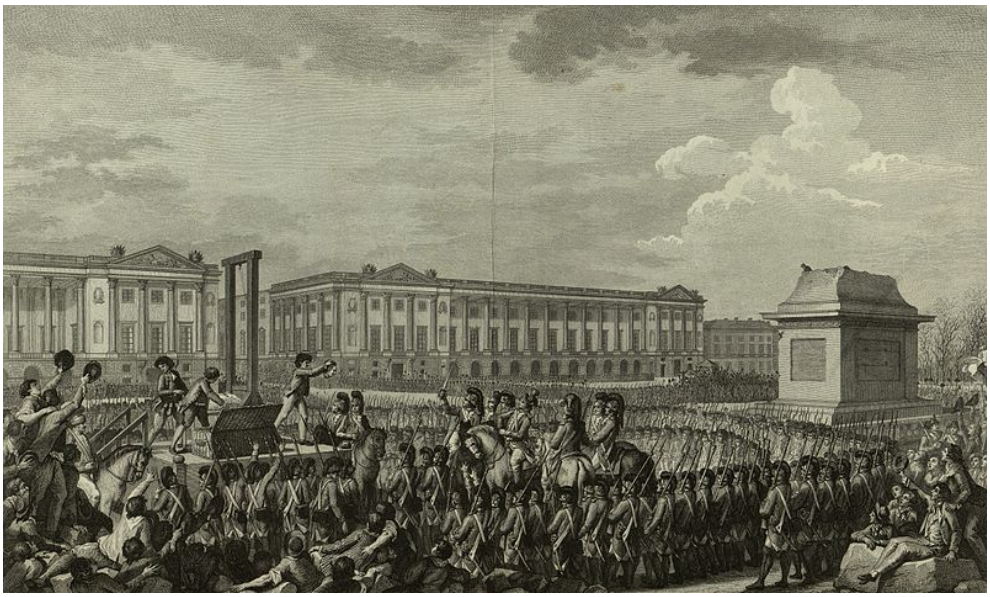
Until June of 1791, the National Assembly tried to build a constitutional monarchy, even as it faced increasing hostility among the great powers of Europe, all of which were monarchies, along with problems with inflation and hunger in the countryside. In June of 1791, the king and his family fled Paris, but were caught on the border (supposedly by a postal worker who recognized the king from his portrait on coins). It was soon discovered that the royal family had been corresponding with foreign monarchs and nobles, hoping to inspire an invasion from abroad to restore the king to the throne and to end the Revolution by force. The situation rapidly radicalized as the prestige of the king was destroyed overnight; even as the new French Constitution was formally passed in October of 1791, making France a constitutional monarchy, the king himself was under house arrest.

The latter situation prompted the kings of Austria and Prussia to call upon the monarchs of Europe to fully restore Louis XVI to control of his country, although they did not yet declare

war on France. Radical elements of the National Assembly, however, anticipated war and convinced the Assembly to declare a preemptive war on Austria in April of 1792; Prussia soon joined in an alliance with Austria against France. The Assembly dispatched the new National Guard and a hastily-assembled army, many of whom were former soldiers of the royal army, against the forces of Austria and Prussia along the French border.

In September of 1792, as the war began in earnest and the king languished in prison, a new constitution was instituted that formally abolished the monarchy and made France into a republic with universal manhood suffrage. This was the first time in the history of Europe that every adult male was allowed the right to vote regardless of wealth or status. In just over three years, France had gone from an absolute monarchy to the first major experiment in democracy since the days of the Roman Republic nearly two thousand years earlier.

In January of 1793, Louis XVI was executed as a traitor to the republic after heated debate and a close vote in the Assembly. The war grew as Britain and the Dutch Republic joined with Prussia and Austria against France, further increasing the military pressure on the French borders. The middle part of 1793 saw fear of foreign invasion and food shortages, along with royalist uprisings in parts of France itself. The result was the appointment of a dictatorial emergency committee, the Committee for Public Safety, headed by twelve of the most radical members of the republican government.



The aftermath of the execution of Louis XVI, with his head displayed to the crowd. He was executed by guillotine, the newly-invented 'humane' method of execution favored by the Revolutionary government.

The twelve members of this committee would rule France from September 1793 to July 1794 as a dictatorial council, charged with defending the Revolution from both its external enemies and internal rebels. It was extremely successful in the former regard, issuing a *levée en masse*, or total mobilization for war, which swelled the ranks of the French forces and held the Austrian and Prussian armies in check. Meanwhile, the Revolutionary government set up a subsistence committee to develop and elaborate a system of price controls, requisitions, and currency regulation, backed by police power. The committee restored order to rebellious areas by sending its members on missions with instructions for ruthless repression, again backed by violence.

Thus, just five years after the Revolution had begun, control was now in the hands of a small dictatorial committee of radicals who used violent repression to hold the nation together, continue the war against almost all of Europe, and soon, to pass even more radical measures. They made extensive use of the guillotine, a new “humane” technology of execution named after the medical doctor who invented it, and their leader was the (in)famous Maximilien Robespierre, whom his followers called "the Incorruptible" for his single-minded focus on seeing the Revolution succeed.

Under Robespierre's leadership, the Committee for Public Safety attempted to reorganize and "rationalize" French society as a whole, not just win wars. The Revolutionary government passed a number of radical measures under Robespierre’s leadership. First, it sponsored the creation of the metric system. From a unsystematic smattering of different standards of weights and measures across France, the Revolutionary government oversaw the invention and use of a simple, unified system based on increments of ten (i.e. 100 centimeters is equal to 1 meter, 1,000 meters is equal to one kilometer, 1,000 grams is equal to 1 kilogram, etc.). Of all the changes instituted by the Revolutionary government during its radical phase, this was to be the most successful and long-lasting.

Since the members of the committee believed that not just France, but the world was on the threshold of a new era, they proclaimed the creation of a new calendar that began on September 22, 1792 (Day 1, Year 1), the day that the republic had been declared. All of history was to follow from that first day. Likewise, new ten-day weeks were introduced, with new four-week months named after their weather rather than arbitrary historical figures (e.g. the month of August, named after Augustus Caesar, was renamed "Thermidor," which means "hot." February became "Brumaire," which means "foggy," and April became "Prairial," meaning "springlike.") Year-end celebrations were planned to pay tribute to the Revolution itself in quasi-religious ceremonies presided over by republican officials.

In perhaps the most astonishing campaign, the Revolutionary state launched a major attempt to “de-Christianize” the nation, removing crosses from buildings and graveyards and renaming churches “temples to reason.” The cathedral of Notre Dame in the center of Paris was stripped of its Christian iconography, and Robespierre oversaw new ceremonies meant to worship a (newly invented) supreme being of reason. This was the culmination of the anticlerical measures that had begun in first year of the Revolution, with the seizure of church lands and property, but it now aimed at nothing less than the suspension of Christianity itself in France. In something of a symbolic parallel, the committee also had the bodies of dead French kings disinterred and dumped into a common grave (the corpse of Louis XIV landed on that of his grandfather, Henry IV).

To enforce its will and ensure “security,” the Committee for Public Safety oversaw what was later dubbed "The Terror," as suspected traitors were arrested, interrogated, and confronted with the possibility of imprisonment or execution. While estimates vary considerably, somewhere between 35,000 - 55,000 accused enemies of the Revolution were executed or died in prison during the Terror, which was further intensified by widespread imprisonment (totaling half a million people, 3% of the adult population). To impose its policies on grain procurement and prices, the government had to rely largely on local organizations of militants who often terrorized the very peasants they were supposed to represent. Likewise, the most significant battles fought by French troops were against royalist (French) rebels, not foreign soldiers.

In fact, the bloodiest repression seen during the Terror happened far from Paris, and did not involve any guillotines. A western region of France, the Vendée, had been the site of the largest royalist insurrection against the Revolution in early 1793, featuring a rebel army of conservative peasants. It took until the summer for the royalists to be defeated, and in the aftermath of that defeat the revolutionary army inflicted a form of revenge against the people of the region that came close to outright genocide. Men and women were slaughtered regardless of whether or not they had participated in the uprising, villages were burned to the ground, and the death toll easily exceeded 100,000 people (some estimates place the number far higher).

Against the backdrop of the Terror, many members of the Revolutionary government itself began to fear for their lives. Likewise, the mandate for the committee’s very existence - protecting the Revolution against its foreign and domestic enemies - was made somewhat obsolete when French forces won major victories against Prussia and Austria in the summer of 1794. Robespierre inspired revulsion and fear among even some of his erstwhile supporters because of his fanatical devotion to the Revolutionary cause and his overt attachment to using terror to achieve his ends. Thus, in July of 1794 a conspiracy of worried Revolutionaries

succeeded in arresting, briefly trying, and then executing Robespierre as a tyrant. The Committee of Public Safety was dissolved.

After the fall of Robespierre the Revolution began to slide away from its most radical positions. A government of property owners took over under a new “Directory” in 1795, which rescinded price controls and ended the abortive attempt to de-Christianize the nation. A wave of reprisals against former radicals known as the “white terror” saw tens of thousands murdered (as many died in the white terror as had under the Committee of Public Safety’s campaigns of persecution). France remained at war with most of the rest of the Europe, even as royalist uprisings continued in areas across the nation itself. It was in this context of violence and insecurity that, In October of 1795, a young, accomplished general named Napoleon Bonaparte put down a royalist insurrection in Paris and came to the attention of ambitious politicians within the Directory.

Conclusion

The influence of the ideals of the French Revolution was fairly limited outside of France in its early years. Monarchs and social elites watched in horror as the Revolution radicalized, and the armies of states like Prussia and Austria sought to contain it even as their police forces cracked down on would-be sympathizers. All too soon, however, the Revolutionary armies had a new leader, one who would ultimately bring radical reform to much of Europe at the point of bayonet: Napoleon.

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