

Week 3: Renaissance, Recovery and Reform 1450-1650

The early rise of Northern European economies in the 16th century can be attributed to a combination of factors, including geographic advantages, political developments, economic innovations, and social changes. The **Medieval Warm Period** facilitated trade and growth in the North Atlantic. Here are the key elements that contributed to this economic growth:

1. Geographic and Strategic Advantages

- **Access to the Atlantic:** Northern European countries like the Netherlands, England, and parts of France and Germany benefited from their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. This geographic position facilitated access to the burgeoning Atlantic trade routes, which connected Europe with the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The expansion of trade in these regions provided significant economic opportunities.
- **Navigable Rivers and Ports:** The presence of navigable rivers and natural harbours in Northern Europe also contributed to the development of trade networks and the establishment of prosperous port cities, such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, and London.

2. Political and Religious Developments

- **Rise of Nation-States:** The 16th century saw the consolidation of the territories of nation-states in Northern Europe, particularly in England and the Netherlands. Strong central governments provided political stability, which was conducive to economic growth. These states also supported the development of national economies, fostering trade and commerce.
 - **SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE OBSERVED** → When we think about the idea of nation state this is the part of nation state that
- **The Protestant Reformation:** The Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 16th century, played a significant role in shaping the economic landscape of Northern Europe. Protestant work ethics, particularly Calvinist values that emphasized hard work, frugality, and economic success as signs of divine favor, encouraged economic activity. Additionally, the Reformation led to the weakening of the Catholic Church's economic power, which allowed for greater secular control over economic affairs.

3. Commercial and Financial Innovations

- **Development of Capital Markets:** Northern Europe, particularly the Netherlands, pioneered the development of capital markets. The establishment of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange in 1602 and the issuance of shares by the

Dutch East India Company (VOC) marked the beginnings of modern finance and facilitated the accumulation of capital necessary for large-scale commercial ventures.

- **Banking and Credit Systems:** The expansion of banking and credit systems, particularly in cities like Amsterdam and Antwerp, provided the financial infrastructure needed for international trade and investment. The availability of credit allowed merchants to engage in larger and more complex trading operations, further boosting economic growth.

4. Expansion of Trade and Commerce

- **Global Trade Networks:** Northern European economies were heavily involved in the expansion of global trade networks. The Dutch, English, and French established trading companies, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the British East India Company, which played crucial roles in the global spice trade, colonization, and the triangular trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.
- **Merchant Class and Urbanisation:** The rise of a wealthy and influential merchant class in Northern Europe was both a cause and a consequence of increased trade. The growth of cities like Amsterdam, London, and Hamburg as commercial hubs attracted skilled workers and entrepreneurs, leading to urbanization and further economic development.

5. Agricultural Productivity and Technological Innovation

- **Agricultural Improvements:** Advances in agricultural practices, such as crop rotation, selective breeding, and the introduction of new crops from the Americas (e.g., potatoes and maize), improved agricultural productivity in Northern Europe. This increase in food production supported population growth and freed up labour for industrial and commercial activities.
- **Technological Innovation:** The 16th century saw various technological innovations, including improvements in shipbuilding, navigation (like the compass and astrolabe), and printing technology. These innovations facilitated exploration, trade, and the spread of ideas, all of which contributed to economic growth.

6. Cultural and Intellectual Developments

- **Humanism and the Renaissance:** The Northern European Renaissance, influenced by humanist thought, promoted education, literacy, and the dissemination of knowledge. This intellectual environment encouraged innovation and the exchange of ideas, which had positive effects on economic activities.

- **Education and Literacy:** Increased emphasis on education and literacy, partly driven by the Protestant Reformation, created a more skilled workforce capable of contributing to economic development through commerce, industry, and administration.

Across the Holy Roman Empire → Key to urbanisation and German Republic system

Free Imperial Cities were unique urban entities within the Holy Roman Empire that enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy and independence, distinguishing them from other cities and territories in the empire. These cities played a crucial role in the political, economic, and cultural landscape of medieval and early modern Europe.

- The concept of Free Imperial originated during the Middle Ages, particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries, as part of the broader political evolution of the Holy Roman Empire. These cities were granted a special legal status by the Emperor, which allowed them to be directly subject to his authority rather than being controlled by regional lords, bishops, or dukes. This status meant that Free Imperial Cities were effectively self-governing entities within the empire, with the right to elect their own councils, make their own laws, and manage their own finances.
- The autonomy of these cities was often a result of negotiations between the emperor and the cities themselves, as the emperors sought to strengthen their influence over the empire by supporting urban centres that could act as counterweights to the power of regional nobility. In return for their autonomy, Free Imperial Cities were expected to support the emperor, particularly in terms of providing military aid and paying taxes directly to the imperial treasury.

Political and Administrative Structure

- Free Imperial Cities had their own administrative and judicial systems, which were typically managed by elected councils composed of local elites, including merchants, guild leaders, and patricians. These councils were responsible for governing the city, administering justice, maintaining public order, and overseeing economic activities. The head of the city government was usually a mayor (Bürgermeister), who acted as the chief executive.
- In some cases, Free Imperial Cities also had the right to mint their own coins, enter into alliances with other cities or states, and even conduct foreign policy, albeit within the limits imposed by the overarching authority of the emperor. This level of autonomy made Free Imperial Cities significant players in the political dynamics of the Holy Roman Empire.

Economic Importance

- Economically, Free Imperial Cities were among the most prosperous and dynamic regions of the Holy Roman Empire. They were centers of trade, craftsmanship, and industry, benefiting from their strategic locations along important trade routes. Many of these cities were members of the Hanseatic League, a powerful commercial and defensive confederation of merchant guilds and market towns in Northern Europe.
- The economic success of Free Imperial Cities was closely linked to their autonomy, as it allowed them to regulate their own markets, protect their economic interests, and develop infrastructure such as ports, roads, and bridges. This economic strength, in turn, reinforced their political independence and ability to resist external pressures from both the nobility and the emperor.

Cultural and Intellectual Centers

- In addition to their economic and political significance, Free Imperial Cities were often cultural and intellectual hubs. They were home to universities, printing presses, and artistic communities, contributing to the cultural flourishing of the Renaissance and Reformation periods. Cities like Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Augsburg became known for their contributions to the arts, sciences, and the spread of humanist ideas.
- **The Imperial city ran a Imperial Diet system, which is a precursor to many mainland European parliament idea.**

The 1450 to 1650 was a tumultuous time in world history.

In Europe, England was waking up to a period of drastic reformation, wars, expansions, and changes.

The English monarch went from a personal monarchy in the 1500s to a constitutional monarchy by the 1700. The political life of England shifted away from the court

Curia Regis, Latin for "King's Court," was a key institution in medieval European governance, particularly in England and France. The Curia Regis served as the royal council and was one of the central components of the monarchy's administrative and judicial systems. It played a crucial role in advising the king, making decisions on matters of state, administering justice, and managing the kingdom's affairs.

Origins and Evolution

- **Anglo-Saxon Roots:** The concept of a royal council predates the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, with roots in the Anglo-Saxon *Witenagemot*, a council of nobles and clergy that advised the king. However, the Curia Regis as it is recognized today developed more fully after the Norman Conquest.

- **Norman and Angevin England:** The Curia Regis was formalized in England by the Norman and Angevin kings. Under William the Conqueror and his successors, the Curia Regis became a more structured institution, serving as the king's advisory body and as a court of law.

Functions of the Curia Regis

1. Advisory Council:

1. The Curia Regis functioned primarily as a royal council where nobles, clergy, and royal officials would gather to advise the king on matters of governance, policy, and military affairs. The members of the Curia Regis included the most powerful and influential figures in the kingdom, such as barons, bishops, and key royal officers.

2. Judicial Role:

1. One of the most important functions of the Curia Regis was its judicial role. It served as the highest court in the land, where the king or his appointed justices presided over important legal cases, particularly those involving the nobility or matters of national importance.
2. The Curia Regis heard appeals from lower courts and decided on disputes that could not be resolved elsewhere. Over time, its judicial functions became more specialized, leading to the development of distinct courts such as the Court of King's Bench and the Court of Common Pleas.

3. Administrative Functions:

1. The Curia Regis was also responsible for the administration of the kingdom, including financial matters. It played a role in managing the royal treasury, collecting taxes, and overseeing the king's lands and revenues.
2. The Exchequer, a financial body that evolved from the Curia Regis, handled the kingdom's finances, including the auditing of royal accounts and the collection of taxes.

4. Legislative Role:

1. While not a legislative body in the modern sense, the Curia Regis had a role in the making of laws and the issuance of royal decrees. The king, with the advice of the Curia Regis, could issue proclamations, charters, and writs that had the force of law.
2. The Curia Regis also played a part in the early development of the English Parliament. Over time, the council's composition expanded to include

representatives from the counties and towns, leading to the creation of the English Parliament, with the Curia Regis as one of its predecessors.

Decline and Legacy

- **Specialisation and Institutional Evolution:** Over time, the functions of the Curia Regis became increasingly specialized, leading to the development of separate institutions for administration, finance, and justice. By the late 13th century, the Curia Regis had largely evolved into distinct bodies such as the Exchequer for financial matters and the courts for judicial functions.
- **Impact on Governance:** The Curia Regis laid the foundation for the development of more complex and specialized government institutions in England. It influenced the evolution of the English legal system, the financial administration of the state, and the early parliamentary system.
- **Comparative Development:** In France, the Curia Regis also played a significant role in the development of the French monarchy. However, the French version of the Curia Regis evolved differently, leading to the establishment of the Parlement as a distinct judicial body.

Christendom:

The pope, when he is elected, is answerable to no human power. He has absolute authority over the entire Roman Catholic Church, direct authority that reaches down to individual members. = Papal Supremacy

The Pope had greater power than kings and military generals.

Scandal with the Borgia family:

The Borgia family, one of the most infamous families of the Italian Renaissance, played a significant albeit indirect role in creating the conditions that led to the Protestant Reformation. The Borgias, particularly Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia), became emblematic of the corruption, nepotism, and moral decay within the Catholic Church during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This corruption significantly undermined the credibility of the Church and contributed to the growing discontent that eventually fuelled the Reformation.

Summary Historical Context:

Corruption and Nepotism: Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia): Rodrigo Borgia's election as Pope Alexander VI in 1492 marked one of the most notorious periods of papal corruption. Alexander VI was infamous for his blatant nepotism, appointing his illegitimate children to powerful positions within the Church and Italian politics. His son, Cesare Borgia, was made a cardinal at a young age and given control over

various territories, while his daughter, Lucrezia Borgia, was used as a pawn in political marriages.

Moral Decay: The Borgia papacy became synonymous with moral decadence. Alexander VI was known for his extravagant lifestyle, numerous mistresses, and lavish spending, all of which were funded by selling church offices (simony) and indulgences. This blatant disregard for ecclesiastical standards greatly disillusioned many devout Christians and highlighted the need for reform within the Church.

Public Outrage and Calls for Reform:

- Erosion of Church Authority: The corruption and moral failures of the Borgia family, particularly under Pope Alexander VI, contributed to a widespread erosion of trust in the Church's leadership. The Church was supposed to be the spiritual and moral authority in Christendom, but the actions of the Borgia pope and his family starkly contradicted the teachings of the Church, leading to growing dissatisfaction among both the laity and the clergy. One of the most impactful criticism that set a stage for later reformers (Catholic reform) came from a Dominican friar by the name of Girolamo Savonarola. He was subsequently executed for his criticism.

The Broader Context of Church Corruption:

- The problems exemplified by the Borgias were not isolated. The late medieval Church was plagued by widespread corruption, including the sale of indulgences, absenteeism, and the accumulation of wealth by the clergy. These issues were increasingly being questioned by scholars, theologians, and laypeople who sought a more genuine and spiritually fulfilling practice of Christianity. By the time **Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517**, there was already a strong desire for reform within the Church. The scandals associated with the Borgias were fresh in the memory of many and served as a stark reminder of the urgent need for change.

Influence on Martin Luther and Other Reformers:

The corruption of the Borgia papacy provided concrete examples of the moral and theological critiques that reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others would later articulate. The sale of indulgences, nepotism, and moral corruption within the Church were central issues that Luther addressed in his call for reform.

➔ Important take away***

- The Papacy continuous rule over Europe started waning because of the protestant reformation. However, the reformation movement also led to continental wide persecution of both protestant and catholic (mostly, protestant)

- The idea of *tolerance* developed during this time. Noting that tolerance is a concept derived to solve problems within Christendom. It is not inclusive of orthodox or Jewish communities.
- Many protestants: for example, Calvinists and Lutherans fled persecution to the Americas.
- Lords in the Northern part of the Holy Roman empire adopted Protestantism
 - The protestant movement started a long period of warfare and communal violence between the Catholics and Protestants
 - Protestants persecuted Catholics, while Catholics persecuted protestants
 - **Prior to the Peace of Westphalia** different states entered 'lapses' of tolerance agreement between the community.
 - **The Peace of Westphalia was an attempt to make tolerance an empire wide treaty.**

Peace of Westphalia

- Not the beginning of sovereign state but a shuffling of territory in Europe close to the modern map of Western Europe
- It was largely about territories related to the Holy Roman Empire, and the application of tolerance policy
- Sweden and France entered the European stage as a powerful political player (France prior role was more to do with territorial fights with the Brits)

*** European history and its transformation ***

Balance of powershift towards the Atlantic front → Economic rise of North Atlantic cities → territorial consolidation → European experience → territorial organisation allowed North Atlantic states to push towards guns and ships policy (trade and conquest) → parliament organisation in the UK (Glorious Revolution) facilitated centralisation of tax power at the hands of capitalists (lords and powerful merchants) → birth of 'East India' companies like VOC and EIC

- Elsewhere, you don't have the same consolidation of power but bureaucratic states ruled by Empires
- Old empires became more rigid (internal focused) → Shiite Transformation, establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate
- While the little Ice Age (1300-1850) led to several famines and crop failures (this facilitated religious persecution and witch hunts in Europe)
- The cooler climate also led to the decline of the Ming Dynasty with repeated crop failure and food shortages, leading to widespread unrest and uprising. Monsoon disruptions led to droughts and floods in much of South Asia.

Americas

The age of North European expansionism to the Americas led to one of the largest human destructions in history. At its height population in the Americas was around 50 to 100 million. In North America, you have three large population groups

- ➔ Iroquois confederacy (powerful confederacy around modern day New York and Illinois)
- ➔ Pueblans
- ➔ Dakota and Mississippian Culture (includes Cahokia)

As climate change dynamics created changes in Eurasia, it also impacted the Americas.

One of the largest cultures in North America, the Pueblans faced severe agricultural shortages → people started nomadism

- Inter-state conflict grew in the Meso-America (along with human sacrifices!) in places like Cahokia and Aztec

The Europeans introduced new disease (small-pox, measles, influenza, typhus, and malaria. → weakened the natives militarily, politically, and economically

- They also brought along new domesticated animals which led to further crop failures (pigs became wild pigs that ate the native crops)