

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 actual 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 be 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.

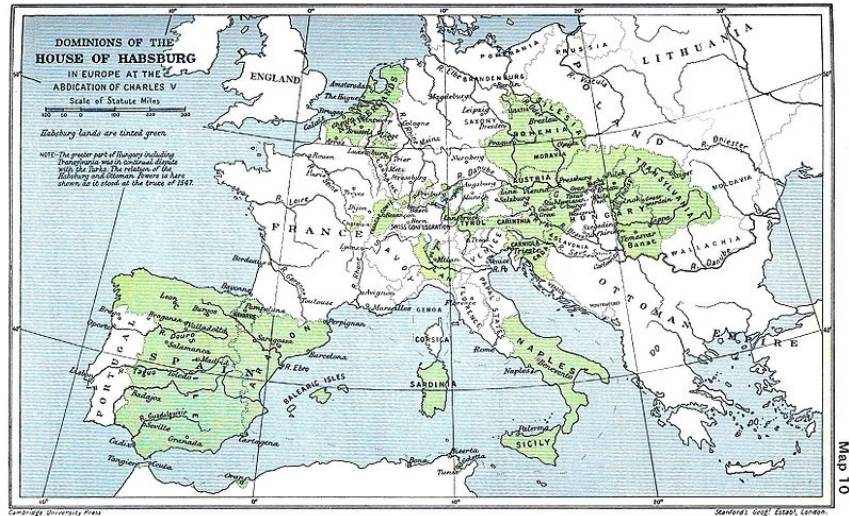
In fact, by the early modern period, emperorship was an elected position. That phenomenon began in 1356 when a pragmatic emperor, Charles IV, issued the Golden Bull, which created a system by which future emperors would be chosen by their most powerful subjects. Seven great rulers scattered across the 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 *millet*s. 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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