Chp. 7 Age of Absolutism

Theories of Absolutism

* Thomas Hobbes “Leviathan” 1651 argued that absolutism alone could prevent society from lapsing into a constant warfare of every man versus every man.
* People would only obey if they were afraid of the consequences of not doing so.
* Seeking individual security individuals would enter into a social contract with their ruler, surrendering their rights in exchange for protections.
* Hobbes and other theorists recognized the difference between absolute and arbitrary or despotic rule.
* They argued that rulers were responsible for the needs of the people.

Characterizing absolute rule

* Strong, ambitious dynasties, through marriages, inheritance, warfare, and treaties added to their domains and prestige.
* The nobilities accepted monarchical authority in exchange for a guarantee of their status, ownership of land, and privileges within the state over the peasants whether they were legally free like in Western Europe or Serfs in Eastern Europe.
* Prussia, Austria, Poland, and Russia had similar social structures with serfs at the bottom.
* Some western powers were constrained by representative bodies; in France no one called the Estates General from 1614 to 1788.

Monarchs and Nobles

* The relationship in each state between king and nobility determined the type of absolutism.
* Nobles frightened by the social and political turmoil that shook Europe were more willing to serve rulers as royal officials and military commanders.
* Tables of Ranks dividing nobles into distinct grades or ranks were established by the kings of Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, and Russia.
* This made it clear the nobles privileges were bestowed by the king.
* Louis XIV asserted the right to monitor the legitimacy of all titles.
* In 1668, he ordered the investigation of dubious titles and this helped him maintain the loyalty of the nobles who had been upset as those with suspect titles.
* Rulers also placated nobles by ending turbulent period of peasant uprisings against taxes, obligations, and grain prices.
* Insurrections occurred less frequently and were put down brutally.
* Russian, Polish, and Prussian nobles made a lot of money shipping grain to the west as their population grew.
* They also limited the rights of the peasants to move from land they worked or even to inherit property.
* Impoverished and virtually powerless to resist, peasants lost their personal freedom.
* As feudalism disappeared in the west if became more prevalent in the east.
* The Ottoman Empire was even more despotic.
* All land was the Sultan’s personal property.
* He granted land to those who served him but there were no hereditary nobility so no one challenged his authority.
* No representative institutions and the towns had no authority or rights.

Expanding State Structures

* Administering, taxation, and conscription gradually ended up in the hands of absolute rulers.
* As a result government offices grew fourfold.
* To fill the jobs, kings gave positions to people who paid for them or friends.
* Some king gave some jobs to commoners in an effort to collect information on them for purposes of taxation and conscription.
* Tax revenue went up as result this policy.
* To raise money absolute rulers sold monopolies; imposed taxes on trading towns, selling hereditary offices and titles.
* James I doubled the knights in the country in the first four months of his reign.
* Queen Christina of Sweden doubled the number of noble families in ten years.
* In addition to this, monarchs found wealthy families who gave them loans for tax exemptions, titles, or other privileges.

Absolutism and Warfare

* Regular collection of taxes and expansion of sources of revenue increased the capacity of absolute rulers to maintain standing armies and wage war.
* Kings no longer had to rely on armies supplied to them by nobles and mercenaries.
* Standing armies continued to grow.
* Uniforms became standard for every soldier.
* The two non-absolutist nations, England and the Dutch Republic had small armies by contrast.
* Reasons for wars changed from Religion as the primary cause to “reasons of state.”
* England and the Dutch Republic used its considerable economic wealth to fight sustained wars but France for example was a bad credit risk often paying higher rates of interest.
* Maintaining a military became the largest expense in absolutist countries up to 50% and 80% during a war.
* Inevitably even in absolutist states there came a point when wealthy families began to grumble about the constant war and money needed to fight.

Absolutism and Religion

* An alliance with established churches helped absolute monarchs to achieve and maintain absolute rule.
* In Catholic states, the churches need for uniformity and the monarch’s need for eliminating challenges to authority seemed to go hand in hand.
* The Church helped to create the king as a sacred figure.
* In turn, absolute monarchs obliged the church by persecuting religious minorities.
* The church lost power to absolute monarchs though.
* Monarchs appointed church officials, eliminated the inquisition in France and Spain, closing monasteries and expelling religious orders in France and Austria, assuming control over censorship, reducing church authority over marriage, establishing the principle of state supervision of education.
* Ottomans remained a theocracy.
* The subjects believed that the Sultan was divine.

Monumentalism in Architecture and Art

* Absolute monarchs used extravagant emotional appeal of Monumentalism.
* They designed their capitals to reflect the imperatives of monarchical authority.
* Madrid, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Versailles were planned, shaped and invested with symbols of absolute monarchs.
* Big wide boulevards where imperial armies could parade down were built as opposed to most cities with narrow streets that developed naturally from the Middle Ages.

The Fronde

* Nobles of the Sword (nobles who held ancient titles) tried to regain influence as the wars against the Hapsburgs dragged on.
* People began to demand lower taxes.
* The revolt came to be known as the Fronde, named after boys who used slingshots in Paris to attack authorities.
* Mazarin and Anne of Austria, Louis XIV’s mother, borrowed money to fight these wars.
* They expected to sell titles and offices to pay these loans.
* Nobles did not mind paying large taxes during war but now that war was over, nobles were upset that they were still paying.
* They were also upset that they were being excluded from prestigious and lucrative offices.
* Nobles now denounced Mazarin, his patronage, and his financier friends.
* Mazarin was forced to flee to Germany.
* The parliament of Paris tried to call other lesser parliaments in the country to reform finances.
* Support for reform waned as Louis XIV declared his right to rule even though he was only 13.
* He recalled Mazarin and declared that all parliaments no longer had the right to issue remonstrances.
* The king disbanded private armies, tightened control over provincial governments, and he no longer felt necessary to consult on important matters with nobles.
* The Fronde broke resistance to absolute monarchy unlike the in England where the Parliament won its rebellion.

Mercantilism

* France’s firm financial footing was realized by controller of the realm Jean Baptiste Colbert.
* He directed administration, taxation, and public works.
* He sent out surveyors and assessors to map out the provinces and now four fifths of revenue reached the royal coffers unlike before when only a quarter reached the king.
* Colbert was a Mercantilist.
* Mercantilism was an idea where all resources should be put into service of the state and that a state’s wealth was measured only by its ability to import more gold than it exported.
* Jealous of English and Dutch prosperity, Colbert emphasized self-sufficiency.
* He founded commercial trading companies where the king granted monopolies on trade.
* Levied protective tariffs on Dutch and English goods.
* He encouraged the textile industry and improved roads and canals.
* The French East India Company could not compete against the Dutch and English.
* While the king could extract money from his own people he was even better at spending money.
* Louis XIV and his successors plunged the monarchy into a disastrous financial crisis.

Absolute Louis XIV

* Louis was handsome, proud, energetic, and decisive.
* He loved Gambling, hunting, and women.
* He spent a lot of money but he did keep an eye on the accounts of his realm.
* He did not let himself be dependent on one person like his mother and father had been.
* He visited his minister of finance Nicolas Fouquet, who served him solid gold tableware and viewed large pools of fresh and saltwater fish.
* Louis arrested him immediately and took possession of the Chateau.
* Louis took away the last vestiges of autonomy from the nobility.
* He selected men to positions that were loyal to him; mayors now became officials of state who had to purchase their titles.
* Wealthy merchants now sought becoming nobles instead of securing trading rights.
* He had military garrisons in every town.
* Nobles got used to the idea instead of fearing it.
* He appointed man in charge of the police of Paris who was now in charge of arresting, street cleaning, and firefighting.
* Paris soon had thousands of glass enclosed candles during the early evening hours.
* Louis once said “I am the state”, he showed this through his representation as god’s representative.
* Censors suppressed everything by prohibiting imported books, and limiting the number of printers.
* The goal was protect the honor and reputation of the king.
* He took control of the army making seniority the determining factor in rank.
* He charged nobles for the right to command their own regiments.
* He had barracks, military academies, drilling grounds, and fortifications at border towns constructed.
* Louis sale of offices (500 in one edict in 1696) added to the royal coffers but upset the nobles of the sword who distinguished themselves from nobles of the robe (new nobility).
* Very few families could trace their nobility back more than a few generations.

Versailles

* Louis XIV was nervous having his palace in Paris so he moved it 12 miles west of Paris to Versailles.
* Louis XIV and his successors worked to ensure the capital had enough provisions in an effort to reduce the chance of revolt.
* He built the Chateau of Versailles from 1669-86.
* It had 1400 fountains run the by largest pumps in the western world.
* Sculptures in the gardens made the identification of Louis with the Greek and Roman sun god clear.
* The dining room was so far away that the food often got to the table cold.
* Wine even showed up frozen at the table once.
* The corridors were so long that nobles sometimes used them as urinals instead of making the long walk.
* Louis invited the most powerful nobles to live at Versailles.
* This was done also to keep an eye on them.
* 10,000 people lived in or near Versailles.
* Each day there was elaborate routines.
* The ultimate honor was to be named to the royal household.
* He allowed nobles to form alliances against each other but never against him.
* This left the nobles with little to do except eat, sleep, drink, hunt, gamble, and chase each other’s wives.
* Other imitated Versailles, Phillip V of Spain among others.

Louis XIV and Minorities

* Louis XIV reversed the tolerant policies of Louis XIII and Henry IV.
* He launched persecutions against Huguenots.
* Closing protestant churches, forced conversions.
* He revoked the Edict of Nantes by which Henry IV extended religious toleration of Huguenots.
* Merchants and skilled craftsmen were among the 200,000 that fled in the next forty years.
* He tried to get rid of another sect called Jansenists.
* Louis began to persecute them and even go the pope to issue a papal bull condemning them.
* The people of Paris did not go along with this which showed that even Louis XIV had limits to what he could do.

Limits to French Absolutism

* The people of France did not classify themselves as French yet.
* More than half of the country did not speak French yet.
* Inadequate roads and communication hampered the Absolute monarchy.
* Louis’s intendants still hat to take local interests into concern when carrying out their duties.

Balance of Power

* The idea of a balance of power slowly developed as the 1650s passed.
* European monarchies were trying to add to their territories by trade and war.
* The idea that no country should be so large as to threaten all countries took hold.
* The decline of one power was bad too if it tipped the balance of power in the favor of another.
* Europe’s main threat to peace ceased to be religion and became the power of Louis XIV.

The Hapsburg Monarchy

- “The Holy Roman Empire that cumbersome Federal structure of European States that once served as protector of

the Papacy has ceased to be Holy, Roman, or an Empire.” Voltaire

- It was made up of 300 states whose emperor was elected by eight electors and was always a Hapsburg.

- On a continent of absolute monarchies, The Holy Roman Empire seemed out of place.

- In principle it still commanded the allegiance of some pretty strong states like Austria, Bavaria, and Saxony.

- The Treaty of Westphalia showed that the Holy Roman Empire was more like a shadow empire in reality.

- The Imperial assembly had no power to conduct foreign policy; the army was too small and difficult to mobilize,

and the imperial court of law was powerless to enforce its decisions.

- The strongest state in the HRE was Hapsburg Austria.

- Its borders extended outside of the empire.

- Through marriages they gained Burgundy and the Netherlands in the 15th century.

- In 1519, Charles V added Hungary and Bohemia, and counting Spain and its colonial holdings, he reigned over ¼ of

the population of Europe.

- When Charles V abdicated he split his empire in two parts: his brother Ferdinand I inherited Austria, Bohemia, and

Hungary, while Charles son Phillip II became king of Spain, the Netherlands, and colonial holdings.

- They became two separate branches but sometime their Catholic and dynastic ideals mixed.

- Austrian Hapsburgs directed foreign policy and directed the army but the nobles would band together to protect

themselves against the monarchy.

- Austria had a problem with Turkish incursions and French expansionism along with dealing the increasingly

difficult politics within the German state.

- The Hapsburg Empire contained many nationalities and this was a weakness for them.

- Because the empire contained more than 11 nationalities the Emperor had to consider local authorities and this

impeded an absolute monarchy.

- The Ottoman Turks attacked in 1684 and besieged Vienna the Hapsburg capital.

- With help from Austrians, Germans, and Poles Vienna was spared.

- The Ottomans were also driven out of Hungary and the Turk expansion into Europe was stopped.

- The Hungarians conceded that their throne was now a hereditary possession of the Hapsburgs.

- In return the Hungarian nobles received concessions to give them some autonomy within the empire and this also

limited Austrian absolutism.

- Hapsburgs lost the struggle to hang on to the Spanish throne as it slipped into Bourbon possession.

- Austria lost prominence to Prussia as the 1700s moved on.

Rise of Prussia

- Prussia had all the components of an absolutist country.

- A proud, ambitious dynasty the Hohenzollern family.

- Their estates dominated a downtrodden peasantry devoid of rights.

- An increasingly centralized bureaucracy and a large standing army.

- They became good competition for the Hapsburgs.

- Prussian nobles accepted Hohenzollern authority in return for a guarantee of their privileges.

- The Prussian nobles, Junkers, were securing their rights at the same time peasants were losing their eventually

becoming Serf.

- Burghers, middle class merchants, had no rights in the face of the Junkers.

- Frederick William gained an army by bargaining with his nobles to supply one in exchange for powers over the

peasants.

- Frederick William’s son became King Frederick I of Prussia.

- His son Frederick William I continued centralization policies and had a bad temper often beating officials and

knocking out the teeth of judges who displeased him.

- A description of the Prussian government at the time went like this: The army doesn’t serve the government. The

Government serves the army.

- The army accounted for half of the budget.

- He increased the army from 39,000 to 80,000

- He only employed those over 6 feet tall as his royal guard, essentially giants of the time.

- He ordered all men to register for the army and organized a system of conscription.

- He had the first military reserves in European history and ordered them to drill for two months in the summer.

- Prussian men had more military training than any other country in Europe.

Russia

* Muscovy began a rise to prominence in the 1300s.
* It slowly gained power over most of its rivals including Poland-Lithuania.
* The Russian Orthodox Church became centered in Moscow and now claimed the title as the third Rome.
* Ivan III began using the title “Lord of all Russia”.
* Russia as an absolute monarchy rose with the reign of Ivan IV.
* He was the first to use the title Czar or Tsar.
* He was given the nickname the Terrible.
* He was raised in a climate of violence as nobles or Boyars competed to control him and his family.
* His mother poisoned when he was eight.
* He ordered another noble teen to be ripped apart by dogs.
* He also ordered an archbishop to be sewn into a bear skin and ripped apart by wolves.
* Ivan decimated noble families that he thought too powerful or slow to obey.
* Ivan alternated between moods of religious fervor, drunken passion, and stormy brutality.
* He killed his own son in a rage.
* After Ivan IV, a group of nobles elected a new imperial family the Romanovs.
* They then regained land that they had lost to Sweden and Poland.
* For most peasant life was horrible as they had no rights and were treated brutally by their lords.
* They declared serfdom in 1649 condemning millions into servitude.
* 90% of peasant became serfs assuring a constant labor supply.
* Russia absorbed the Ukraine and territories south.
* People resisted to the south though, Turks, Tatars, and Cossacks.

Sweden

* Sweden added to their land in mid-1600s by taking Denmark, Norway, Estonia, and Lithuania.
* Charles XI became an absolute monarch by gaining the loyalty of the lesser nobles, peasants, Burghers, and Clergy who all wanted protection from the powerful nobles.
* Charles XII became king when he was 15.
* He was a military man his whole life and preferred fighting instead of reflection and thought.
* He fought wars against Russia trying to regain lost lands but failed.
* He died in battle without an heir.
* Swedish noble established a parliamentary system.
* King Gustavus III overthrew this system bring back absolutism.
* He thought of himself as the Patriot-King protecting his people from nobility.
* He was assassinated in 1792.

Peter the Great

* So little was known about “barbaric” Russia that Louis XIV sent a letter to Tsar that had been dead for 12 years.
* Russia expanded under Peter the Great at the expense of the Swedes, Poles, and Turks.
* He grew up in violent court politics.
* He became Czar at age 10 after a bloody struggle between his dad’s former wives.
* Peter had his own family killed who might be a threat to him.
* He wore shabby clothes with holes in them and socks he darned himself.
* Was almost 7 feet tall and had chronic back problems.
* He was extremely energetic and had extreme facial tics that became worse when he was nervous or angry.
* He always wore a military uniform.
* He would lash out at people with his fists or clubs when he got angry.
* He even carried out executions himself where he wielded the axe.
* He had visited western Europe dressed as a peasant so he could learn and work ordinary jobs.
* He became shipwright and a fire fighter.
* He shocked western governments with his course manners with people and at the table.
* He preferred the company of ordinary people even marrying a Latvian peasant for his second wife after he ordered his first wife to a convent.
* He wanted to copy the west.
* He ordered his guards to be educated.
* Nobles had to shave off their beards.
* Encouraged the use of napkins, glasses, and bowls at meals.
* He demanded that his nobles build western style houses and women wear westerns style dress.
* He bought European art.
* He created the Russian Academy of Science and Moscow school of Mathematics and Navigation.
* He sent students to Europe to learn their ways.
* He modernized his army forcing conscription.
* He brought in Western commanders and gave his soldiers uniforms and western flintlock muskets with socketed bayonets.
* 2/3 of Russia’s budget went to its armies.
* Peter forced all noble’s sons to go to military and engineering schools before they married.
* Peter opened up mines in the Urals, and taxed every person even serfs.
* Peter divided his country up into 50 districts with a governor.
* They remained weak though.
* He toyed with creating councils who could give him advice if they dared.
* He required all male nobles to enter state service in the army, navy, bureaucracy, and allowed commoners who rose through the ranks to attain noble titles.
* Tsar’s turn toward the west angered the old noble families and the Orthodox Church.
* He put down 4 uprisings and several conspiracies directed against him.
* He had his son tortured and eventually died in prison to give up conspirators.
* He pushed back his neighbors: Sweden, Poland, and Ottoman Turks.
* Peter wanted a “window on the Baltic Sea”.
* After defeated the Swedes he built a new capital city and called it St. Petersburg.
* Broad and wide streets.
* Baroque palaces and in general built a city modeled after Amsterdam.
* Russia then attacked Sweden and accompanied with Swedish Nobles fight to regain their rights, Sweden’s place in Europe deteriorated.
* By the time of Peter’s death the territory Russia controlled multiplied six times.

Louis XIV’s Dynastic Wars

* Louis XIV wanted to expand to its “natural border”, Pyrenees Mts. in the south and the Rhine River to the east.
* He had a grand plan of containing the two Hapsburg powers Spain and Austria.
* He did this by starting wars with Spain or Austria after he had signed a treaty with them.
* He invaded the Netherlands but was turned back by flooding countryside.
* He wanted to have his grandson become king of Spain to end Hapsburg rule.
* His grandson Phillip V became king of Spain but the countries could never unite under an agreement with the Hapsburgs.
* Louis XIV ruled so long that his great-grandson Louis XV became king when he died.
* When Louis XIV became King France was the preeminent power in Europe but that was not true when he died.
* He had some regrets as he tried to burn his memoirs before he died.
* He had said on his deathbed “He loved glory too much”.