

## Chapter V. The Transformation of Eastern Europe, 1648-1740 (pp. 210-249)

Three old, increasingly ineffective, loose and sprawling political organizations are in decline--the **Holy Roman Empire**, the **Republic of Poland**, and the empire of the **Ottoman Turks**. Newer and stronger powers are rising to replace them: **Prussia, Austria, and Russia**.

Eastern Europe: more rural, less productive human labor, weaker middle classes. Peasants were governed by their landlords and were losing freedom. The Commercial Revolution strengthened great lords who produced for export and secured their labor through "hereditary subjection," including forced labor.

### 23. Three Aging Empires:

(211-221)

Each of the three was different in origins and traditions but with basic resemblances: **central authority was weak**, with a **nominal head** and **powerful local lords**. All were **outmoded**; none had an efficient administration. All were made up of diverse ethnic/language groups; none had been formed into a compact organization. The whole area was malleable, at the mercy of strong neighbors.

- A. The Holy Roman Empire after 1648: The area had been ruined by the religious divisions produced by the Protestant Reformation, with splinter groups demanding special safeguards. Large areas had suffered in the Thirty Years' War, with vast losses in capital and savings, and a small, static burgher class. Lacking large-scale organization they could not carry on overseas colonization or trade, and internally their commerce was stifled by varying laws, tariffs, tolls and coinage. Culture was at a low ebb, in spite of Leibniz and J. S. Bach.
- B. Germany was composed of 300 sovereign states plus 200 sovereign "free knights"--a bizarre neo-feudalism. Each state was anxious to preserve its "German liberties," and France and others were happy to oblige and weaken the potential threat of a unified nation. Electors required each new emperor to agree to "capitulations," promises to safeguard those liberties. In theory, the Diet could raise an army and taxes, but in reality it was so evenly split between Protestants and Catholics that no decision was possible; the Diet was characterized by wordiness and futility. Each minor state was a petty absolutism, with a court and an army--a vast array of mini-Sun Kings. Ambitious states used the politics of marriage to increase power and territory. **Hohenzollerns** accumulated key territories while Bavarians used the church to gain key cities; Saxons gained the thrones of England and Poland.
- C. Poland was called a Republic because its king was elected; nobles were proud of their liberties. It was large, with a heterogeneous population--Lithuania, the Duchy of Prussia, and Ukraine. Townspeople were largely Germans and Jews. Jews had tended to live apart from religious reasons but were gradually forced to live in ghettos. **Poland lacked a national middle class** and language (except Church Latin). Aristocrats, 8% of the people, held sufficient power to prevent either absolutism or parliamentary government. Royal elections were centers of foreign intrigue and bribery; the people were too split to accept any Polish king under most conditions. The Diet was ineffective since every member held veto power--the right to "explode" the diet. The king lacked an army, law courts, officials and income. Nobles were highly cultured and cosmopolitan. They paid no taxes, and top aristocrats had their own army and foreign policy. "Poland was, in short, a power vacuum...and as centers of higher pressure developed, notably around Berlin and Moscow, the push against the Polish frontiers became steadily stronger." Talk began of partitioning Poland.
- D. The Ottoman Empire was the largest and most solid of the territories. It had a strong army with janissaries. It had developed the best artillery, but was already falling toward obsolescence by 1650. The Ottomans controlled many subject peoples, but there was no assimilation. Law was religious, but was only applied to Moslems; non-Moslems were left to settle their own problems by religious groupings. Only in Albania were the subject peoples converted; generally Christian princes were left in control of Christian subjects, with toleration the norm. Overall, Turkish rule was oppressive, arbitrary and brutal--especially since the central authority was corrupt and governors were given a free hand. Border provinces were only loosely attached, serving as battlegrounds--as southern Russia and Hungary. In 1663, Turkey began to modernize under the rule of the Kiuprils, a dynasty of exceptional viziers. The Turks again became a threat to Austria.

## 24. The Formation of an Austrian Monarchy

(221-226)

- A. The Recovery and Growth of Habsburg Power, 1648-1740
  - 1. The Thirty Years' War meant the collapse of the Habsburg hope of twin supports in Spain and the Holy Roman Empire--though the Austrians did maintain an interest in the Germanies until 1870.
  - 2. Main divisions: Austria, the "hereditary provinces" of the Habsburgs; the Kingdom of Bohemia, made up of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia; and the Kingdom of Hungary, made up of Hungary, Transylvania, and Croatia. The Habsburgs had eliminated Protestantism in their territories during the Thirty Years' War, and conquered Hungary soon after from the Turks.
  - 3. Siege of Vienna: One of the great events of the 17th century was the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683 (with the Turks egged on by Louis XIV). An international force, financed by Pope Pius XI, with imperial troops, and led by Duke Charles of Lorraine (who needed Habsburg aid against Louis' attempt to annex Lorraine). The Turks were defeated and driven back, largely through the efforts of Prince Eugene of Savoy, who reorganized the Austrian army along the lines of Louis XIV's army and added Hungary to the Habsburg domains. Taking Croatia gave the Habsburgs Trieste, its window on the Mediterranean.
- B. The Austrian Monarchy by 1740:
  - 1. The Empire was international, though with a strong German influence. It was based on cosmopolitan aristocrats "who felt closer to each other, despite difference of language, than to the laboring masses who worked on their estates." Old Diets remained in place in Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia; there was no overall imperial Diet. National diets retained their "liberties," and "So long as they produced taxes and soldiers as needed, and accepted the wars and foreign policy of the ruling house, no questions were asked in Vienna."
  - 2. Bohemian independence had been crushed in 1620, and the nation became a Catholic state, presided over by landowners who had been officers in the Thirty Years' War. After 1699 Protestant Hungary was given the same treatment, with the old Magyar aristocracy severely weakened. A rebellion in 1703 (encouraged by Louis XIV) was crushed. The Hungarians remained proud, nationalistic, and distinct. Each constituent country had its own law, diet, and political life; no feeling in the people held these regions together. To give a semblance of unity, emperor Charles VI in 1713 produced the **Pragmatic Sanction**: every diet and all Habsburg archdukes were to agree that the Habsburg territories were indivisible with only one line of heirs. But Charles' only heir was his daughter, Maria Theresa; to secure her succession, Charles got all major foreign powers to sign a guarantee as well.

## 25. The Formation of Prussia

(226-234)

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- A. Influence of small states in European affairs basically stemmed from the problems of maintaining a large army in the field. Armies were therefore relatively small but heavily capitalized: importance of expensive training and weaponry. Sweden, under two talented rulers, Gustavus Adolphus (r. 1611-1632) and Charles XII (r. 1697-1718), expanded greatly before checked by the growing power of Prussia and Russia.
- B. Growth of Brandenburg-Prussia:
  - 1. In spite of an unpromising site, Prussia likewise expanded because of the "rules of the game" and a several key rulers. Its population was small, its farmland was poor, and it generally lacked the key natural resources. It was composed of two basic territories: Brandenburg, which was a "march state," and Prussia, an eastern territory carved out from the barbaric Slavs by the Teutonic knights, who had become "Baltic Barons."
  - 2. The ruling family was the **Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg** who had **inherited Prussia**. They began expanding by the Treaty of Westphalia and had unified their disparate and divided land into a solid nucleus. Most importantly, they had built on militaristic traditions to develop a small, effective army, which they used parsimoniously but well in the "balance of power" politics of the age. The base was built by Frederick William, the Great Elector.
  - 3. The main identifiable features of this new Prussia were: the disproportion between the size of the army and the resource base; the use of this army as the main all-Prussian institution and basis of the state; and the state-based economy. In Prussia the manors and most productive enterprises

were part of the Crown Domain, property of the ruler; civil servants were the largest body in the tiny middle class. Taxes were collected by and for the army, and military needs dominated the market for goods; “the state requirement for food, uniforms, and weapons was a strong force in shaping the economic growth of the country.” **Rulers recruited the skilled immigrants which less astute nations forced out, especially Huguenots and Jews.**

4. The dominant class were the **Junkers**, a landlord gentry which was given control of the peasants in exchange for military service; their code of “duty, service, obedience, and sacrifice” molds Germany to this day. A balancing middle class couldn’t grow because of the lack of towns and wealth and prohibition against selling land to commoners
5. Frederick William I (1713-1740): With the death of Louis XIV and English attention in America, Prussia was able to use “balance of power” politics superbly under this able ruler who essentially produced the base that made his son Frederick “the Great.”
6. Final statement: “Judged simply as a human accomplishment, Prussia was a remarkable creation, a state made on a shoestring, a triumph of work and duty.”

## 26. The “Westernizing” of Russia

(pp. 234-245)

- A. Between 1650 and 1750, the old Tsardom of Muscovy turned into modern Russia, both reaching eastward across Siberia to the Bering Sea and westward toward contact with Europe. To what extent Russia became westernized is still debated. Russia had long been Christian, but it had not participated in the development of Western Europe for a number of reasons: Russia was converted to Greek Orthodox Christianity; the Mongol conquest in 1240 brought an eastern orientation lasting until Ivan III; Russian geography made communication with the West difficult
- B. A comparison of Russia and Prussia is also instructive: Both lacked natural frontiers, consisting of a wide plain (“march state”); the state arose as a means to support the army; had an autocratic government and landlord class in service of the state; imported skills for Europe for the army and the state; and neither developed a commercial class (bourgeoisie) of any size.
- C. Russia before Peter the Great
  1. Peoples included the Great Russians of Muscovy; assimilated Tartars of the Volga regions; Cossacks of the area between the Volga and Black Sea. White Russians (Byelorussians) were south and west of Moscow, with Lesser Russians (Ukrainians) under Polish rule. In 1650 Swedes controlled the Baltic Coast and Turks the Black Sea.
  2. Russians had little contact with Europeans; most trade routes were north-south. The English had trading companies through Archangel on the White Sea before 1600. Russian culture was essentially crude; religion played a major role but lacked charitable or educational institutions.
  3. Ivan IV “the Terrible” (r. 1533-84) was the first to call himself tsar, with Moscow as the “Third Rome.” Could he be regarded as a New Monarch? His reign was followed by a 10-year “Time of Troubles” in which nobles asserted their power. One result was the beginnings of the **Romanov Dynasty**, able to suppress the **Duma** and develop an autocracy. Peasants were turned into hereditary serfs, fully chattels, able to be bought and sold. The Russian Orthodox Church became divided into an established, upper class church and peasant sects like the Old Believers, at heart ignorant and fanatical. The peasants became “estranged from the established religion.” For them “both church and government seemed mere engines of repression.”
- D. **Peter the Great** (r. 1682-1725): Foreign Affairs and Territorial Expansion
  1. Peter visited Archangel and spent a year in Holland and England--working, talking, and observing. He was crude, practical, and “as little troubled by appearances as by moral scruples.” But he recruited 1000 foreign experts for service in Russia, with many followed later. His sole goal was to build a powerful army and state--partly defensive, partly expansionist; he believed Russia needed “windows on the West,” warm water ports.
  2. Wars: Peter was able to recover Kiev and Smolensk from Polish rule because of Poland’s anarchy. He fought the Turks and discovered the inferiority of his army; he also was defeated by Sweden. He then rebuilt his army with western advisers and weaponry; he defeated Charles XII of Sweden at Poltava by drawing him into Russia in winter. Russia had won its Baltic coast, its window on the West. Peter now built his new capital city of St. Petersburg, the “Venice of the North,” and

forced his nobles to live there. Moscow, center of opposition to his westernization program, was left behind.

E. Internal Changes Under Peter the Great

1. Economy: Raised money by multiplying taxes, mainly on peasants, and by making serfdom even more universal. He encouraged mercantilist policies, forming commercial companies, of mixed foreign and Russian composition--providing them with govt. capital and a labor supply of serfs, all under tight government control.
  2. Government: The Duma and national assembly disappeared, to be replaced by a "senate" controlled by the tsar. The Church was controlled by the Procurator of the Holy Synod, which he appointed. He also ended the rule of hereditary succession.
  3. Thus: "The whole system of centralized absolutism, while in form resembling that of the West...was in fact significantly different, for it lacked legal regularity, was handicapped by the insuperable ignorance of many officials, and was imposed on a turbulent and largely unwilling population. The empire of the Romanovs has been called a state without a people."
  4. Virtually all land-owning, serf-owning aristocrats were required to serve in the army or civil administration. Status was based not on inherited rank but on rank in civil service--with considerable opportunity for talented individuals of lower class rank to rise.
  5. Revolution: Peter worked a revolution against the ways of old Russia; he required schooling, insisted on manners (forbidding beards or spitting on the floor). Though pious, he was also aggressively secular.
- F. Results of Peter's Revolution: Many opposed the speed of change; some adhered to the old ways, others resented the foreigners and their superior attitudes. One center of opposition was the church; another was his son Alexis--whom he ordered executed. Change probably would have come; Russia was on the move before. But by his impatient forcing of a new culture, he "fastened autocracy, serfdom, and bureaucracy more firmly upon his country....he was able to reach only the upper classes...[They] became impatient of the stolid immovability of the peasants around them, sense themselves as strangers in their own country, or were troubled by a guilty feeling that their position rested on the degradation and enslavement of human beings."

## 27. The Partitions of Poland

(pp. 245-249)

- A. Poland was the "classic example, along with the Holy Roman Empire, of an older political structure which failed to develop modern organs of government....Without army, revenue, or administration, internally divided among parties forever at cross-purposes...the country was a perpetual theater for diplomatic maneuvering and was finally absorbed by its growing neighbors."
- B. Partitions (1772, 1793, 1795): Russia under Catherine the Great, preferred the status quo, able to intervene at will, but Prussia wanted specific Baltic territories from Poland. A crisis came in 1772: Russia was crushing Turkey, and Austria and Prussia feared the balance of power would be upset. The decision was made to leave the Ottoman Empire intact, while Russia, Austria, and Prussia each annexed a desired chunk of Polish territory instead. Russia did take the entrance into the Black Sea and seized all Turkish territory north of the Black Sea. A decade later the three powers completed the partition, while western European powers were distracted by the French Revolution. No one reacted, lest of all the Poles; while the upper classes sought to revive the national spirit, the masses of serfs did not care, nor did the numerous Jews. Poland was to remain divided until it was recreated in the redrawing of the map of Eastern Europe after World War I (1919).