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IX. Early Modern Europe, 1500-1789

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Abstract

This chapter is concerned with the major political and economic developments which occurred in Western Civilization between about 1500 and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. In the two preceding chapters we have already traced some of the major religious and scientific movements contemporary with this period, Luther posted his famous theses in 1517. Copernicus' book was published in 1543. In the next chapter we will examine the Enlightenment, the major cultural achievement of the eighteenth century. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Absolutism, European History, Commercial Capitalism, Mercantilism, Parliamentary Government

Disciplines

European History | History

Comments

This is a part of [Section IX: Early Modern Europe, 1500-1789](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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During these three centuries the modern national state appeared in Europe and, with the dynastic monarch as its typical central figure, passed through a period of absolutism. The expansion of Europe into virtually all parts of the world continued, making Western Civilization the first which can be described as truly worldwide in its influence. Many of the features of commercial capitalism already described in a previous chapter underwent further development and new features appeared. For the first time in European history there existed truly national economies, their operations guided by a set of beliefs and practices known as mercantilism. Finally, by 1789 England had moved beyond the rest of Europe in its political evolution and had almost achieved a system of cabinet, or parliamentary government. In the sections which follow, each of these subjects will be discussed.