

THE AGE OF  
ABSOLUTISM,  
1650–1720

In Louis XIV's France, architects and artists were paid to glorify the monarch. In 1662, the king chose the sun as his emblem; he declared himself *nec pluribus impar*—without equal. To Louis, the sun embodied virtues that he associated with the ideal monarch: firmness, benevolence, and equity. Henceforth, Louis XIV would frequently be depicted as Apollo, the Greek and Roman sun god.

The rulers of continental Europe, including Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715), relentlessly extended their power between 1650 and 1750. The sovereigns of France, Prussia, Russia, Austria, and Sweden, in particular, became absolute rulers, in principle above all challenge from within the state itself. To the east, the power of the Turkish sultan of the Ottoman Empire was itself already in principle absolute. Rulers extended their dynastic domains and prestige, making their personal rule absolute, based on loyalty to them as individuals, not to the state as an abstraction. But at the same time, they helped lay the foundations for the modern centralized state. Absolute rulers asserted their supreme right to proclaim laws and levy taxes, appointing more officials to carry out the details of governance and multiplying fiscal demands on their subjects. They ended most of the long-standing privileges of towns, which had survived longer in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe, such as freedom from taxation, or the right to maintain independent courts.

The absolute state affected the lives of more people than ever before through taxation, military service, and the royal quest for religious orthodoxy. Absolute rule thus impinged directly on the lives of subjects, who felt the extended reach of state power through, for example, more efficient tax collection. A Prussian recalled that in school no child would question “that the king could cut off the noses and ears of all his subjects if he wished to

products. Dutch ships lost control of the Baltic trade. The Dutch faced competition in the herring market from England, France, and Sweden. The protectionist policies of Britain and Sweden protected their own fishermen while cutting off their domestic markets to Dutch herring. English warships destroyed Dutch ships in the wars fought between the two rivals. Furthermore, some Dutch entrepreneurs lent money abroad or invested in the colonies, land, government stocks, and even in English manufacturing, not in Dutch businesses. Investment in agriculture and land reclamation fell off.

Spain's golden age of art coincided with its decline as a great power. In contrast, Dutch painting languished with the nation's decline. Painters began looking abroad for inspiration and, in doing so, lost some originality. In the 1650s, the Amsterdam regents ignored the Dutch school when planning the construction and decoration of the new town hall, which combines Italian classicism and the Flemish baroque flamboyance. Some Dutch leaders now took pride in speaking French, believing it the language of good taste. French classicism overwhelmed Dutch literature and poetry. Although the French military invasion of 1672 failed, a cultural invasion succeeded. Dutch artists began to offer pale imitations of French works. There were fewer paintings of attentive and hardworking municipal and provincial officials.

The originality of Dutch political life also waned with relative economic decline. The great merchant families maintained increasingly tight control over the position of regent and other influential posts. A form of municipal corruption ("contracts of correspondence") allowed them to divide up or even purchase lucrative government positions. More regents were now major landowners and had little in common with merchants, who had vital interests in government policies.

Government became more rigid, more distant from the Dutch people, and less tolerant, persecuting religious dissenters and undertaking a witch hunt against homosexuals. The Dutch army became increasingly one of mercenaries, not citizens. The Dutch Republic's loss of vitality and economic primacy was accompanied by its decline in international affairs.

## CONCLUSION

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, England and the Netherlands remained non-absolutist states. The victory of Parliament in the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the Bill of Rights of 1689, accepted by the monarchy, guaranteed the rights of Parliament and the rule of law. While the Netherlands entered a period of decline, as had Spain, Great Britain (as England became known in 1707 after the formal union with Scotland) would remain a great power in the eighteenth century, enriched by commerce and empire. In the meantime, the kings of Spain and the rulers of France, Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Sweden increased their authority over their subjects as continental Europe entered the age of absolutism.

do so, and that we owed it to his goodness and his gentle disposition that he had left us in possession of these necessary organs."

Absolutism was at least in part an attempt to reassert public order and coercive state authority after almost seventy years of wars that had brought economic, social, and political chaos. England and Spain had been at war in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Wars of religion had raged through much of Europe on and off for more than a century—above all, during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). The Dutch war of independence against Spain began in 1566 and did not officially end until 1648. The tumultuous decade of the 1640s was particularly marked by political crises. Wars had led to often dramatic increases in taxes, which quadrupled in Spain under Philip II, and jumped fivefold in France between 1609 and 1648. During the 1640s, the English Civil War led to the execution of King Charles I in 1649 (see Chapter 6). In France, the period of mid-century rebellion known as the Fronde included a noble uprising against the crown and determined, violent peasant resistance against increased taxation. The multiplicity and seemingly interrelated character of these crises engendered great anxiety among social elites: "These are days of shaking, and this shaking is universal," a preacher warned the English Parliament.

## THEORIES OF ABSOLUTISM

The doctrine of absolutism originated with French jurists late in the sixteenth century. The emergence of theories of absolutism reflected contemporary attempts to conceptualize the significance of the rise of larger territorial states whose rulers enjoyed more power than their predecessors. France was a prime example of this trend. The legal theorist Jean Bodin (1530–1596) had lived through the wars of religion. "Seeing that nothing upon earth is greater or higher, next unto God, than the majesty of kings and sovereign princes," he wrote in the *Six Books of the Republic* (1576), the "principal point of sovereign majesty and absolute power [is] to consist principally in giving laws unto the subjects in general, without their consent." The ruler became the father, a stern but supposedly benevolent figure. Bodin, who like many other people in France longed for peace and order, helped establish the political theory legitimizing French absolute rule.

Almost a century later, the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) emerged as the thundering theorist of absolutism. Hobbes had experienced the turmoil of the English Civil War (see Chapter 6). In *Leviathan* (1651), he argued that absolutism alone could prevent society from lapsing into the "state of nature," a constant "war of every man against every man" that made life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." People would only obey, Hobbes insisted, when they were afraid of the consequences of not doing so. Seeking individual security, individuals would enter into a type of social contract with their ruler, surrendering their rights in exchange for



The illustration for the cover of the Englishman Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) depicts the absolute state. Note how the ruler's body is made up of the masses over whom he rules. England and then Great Britain, however, remained an exception to the absolutist wave that swept across continental Europe.

protection. A ruler's will thus became for Hobbes the almost sacred embodiment of the state. In France, Jacques Bossuet (1627–1704), bishop and tutor to Louis XIV, postulated that kings ruled by “divine right,” that is, by virtue of the will of God. Unlike Hobbes's notion of authority based on a social contract, Bossuet held that the ruler's authority stemmed from God alone.

Yet theorists of absolutism recognized the difference between absolute and arbitrary or despotic rule. Inherent in their theories was the idea that the absolute ruler was responsible for looking after the needs of his people. Bossuet summed up: “It is one thing for a government to be absolute, and quite another for it to be arbitrary. It is absolute in that it is not liable to constraint, there being no other power capable of coercing the sovereign, who is in this sense independent of all human authority.” But he went on, “it does not follow from this that the government is arbitrary, for besides the fact that all is subject to the judgment of God . . . there are also laws, in states, so that whatever is done contrary to them is null in a legal sense; moreover, there is always an opportunity for redress, either at other times or in other conditions.” Thus, even according to one of the most determined propo-

nents of absolutism, the monarch, whose legitimacy came from God, nonetheless was subject to limits imposed by reason through laws and traditions. Western monarchs recognized, at least in theory, the necessity of consulting with institutions considered to be representative of interests such as the Church and nobility: parlements (noble law courts), Estates, the Cortes in Spain, and Parliament, which had been victorious in the English Civil War in non-absolutist England, where the law remained separated from the will of the monarch.

## CHARACTERIZING ABSOLUTE RULE

Absolute states were characterized by strong, ambitious dynasties, which through advantageous marriages, inheritance, warfare, and treaties added to their dynastic domains and prestige. Their states had nobilities that accepted monarchical authority in exchange for a guarantee of their status, ownership of land, and privileges within the state and over the peasantry, whether peasants were legally free, as in Western Europe, or serfs, as in Prussia, Austria, Poland, and Russia. The absolute states of Central and Eastern Europe—Prussia, Austria, and Russia—shared similar social structures: a strong nobility with ties to rulers who granted privileges in exchange for cooperation; a subservient peasantry in the process of losing remaining rights to rulers and landlords, including—by becoming serfs attached to the land they worked—that of personal freedom; and a relatively weak and politically powerless middle class. Unlike England and the Dutch United Provinces, these states had no representative institutions and few towns of sufficient importance to stand in the way of absolute rule.

The Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania was an exception and thus did not fit the Russian or Prussian model. In 1386 the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had been joined in a personal union (Warsaw became the capital in 1595). The Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania was created in 1569 by virtue of the Union of Lublin. In the Commonwealth, the authority of the king was limited by the strength of the landed nobility—the *szlachta*, who dominated the Parliament (the Sejm). Particularly in northern Poland around the port city of Gdańsk, a concept of sovereignty emerged that paralleled similar important transformations in England and the Netherlands. The Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania is thus sometimes referred to as a “gentry democracy.” Here the parliamentary system, which had been founded in the fifteenth century, protected the personal freedom of the citizens of the monarchy.

Although some Western sovereigns were somewhat limited by representative bodies—diets, parlements, Estates—absolute monarchies nonetheless created an unprecedented concentration of governing power. Between 1614 and 1788, no king of France convoked the Estates-General, an assembly of

representatives from the three estates—clergy, nobility, and commoners—that had been created early in the fourteenth century as an advisory council to the king. To take another example, the Portuguese assembly of nobles did not meet at all during the eighteenth century.

### *Monarchs and Nobles*

In each absolute state, the relationship between ruler and nobles determined the specific character of absolutism. This delicate balance is reflected in the oath of loyalty sworn to the king of Spain by the Aragonese nobility: "We who are as good as you swear to you who are no better than we to accept you as our king and sovereign lord, provided you observe all our liberties and laws; but if not, not." Monarchs negotiated compromises with nobles, awarding titles and confirming privileges for obedience, or at least compliance. In some cases, nobles asserted independence vis-à-vis royal authority. But emphatic assertions of royal authority reduced nobles to the role of junior ruling partners in governance, dominating state and local government. Nobles frightened by the social and political turmoil that shook Europe during the first half of the century now more willingly served rulers as royal officials and military commanders.

"Tables of ranks" dividing nobles into distinct grades or ranks were established at the turn of the century by the kings of Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, and Russia, making it clear that noble privileges were bestowed by monarchs. Louis XIV of France asserted the right to monitor the legitimacy of all titles and even to confiscate noble estates. In 1668, he ordered the investigation of "false" nobles holding dubious titles. These measures helped the king maintain the loyalty of nobles, some of whom resented those who held titles they considered suspect. The great noble families thereafter enjoyed an even greater monopoly over the most lucrative and prestigious royal and ecclesiastical posts. Using the augmented power of the state, rulers also placated nobles by ending a turbulent period of peasant uprisings against taxes, obligations to lords, and the high price of grain. Insurrections occurred less frequently and were savagely repressed.

The gradual centralization of authority in Eastern Europe left nobles with even more autonomy than they had in the West, allowing Russian lords, Polish nobles, and Prussian nobles (*Junkers*) the possibility of further increasing their wealth and power through the extension of their estates, which were worked by serfs. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, such seigneurs made fortunes shipping grain to the West, where prices of cereal and food had risen dramatically in response to population growth. Royal decrees in Prussia and Russia and assembly legislation in Poland progressively limited the right of peasants to move from the land they worked, or even to inherit property. Ravaged by hard times, peasant proprietors had to sell their land to nobles. Impoverished and virtually powerless to resist, peasants lost their personal freedom, a process most marked in Russia. Thus, as

feudalism disappeared in Western Europe, it became more prevalent in the East as lords dispossessed peasants from their land and the latter became serfs. The economic crises of the seventeenth century, including the Thirty Years' War and the decline in Western demand for grain imported from the East because of increased production in the West, only made conditions of life harder for serfs.

In the Ottoman Empire, absolutism was even more despotic. All lands were considered the sultan's private imperial possessions. He granted landed estates to those who served him, but because the sultan recognized no rights of property, no hereditary nobility could develop to challenge his authority. No representative institutions existed. Towns in the overwhelmingly rural empire had neither autonomy nor rights.

### *Expanding State Structures*

Absolute monarchs extended their authority within their territories by expanding the structure of the state. The Renaissance city-states of Italy had created relatively efficient civil administrations and had set up the first permanent diplomatic corps. During the seventeenth century, the apparatus of administration, taxation, and military conscription gradually became part of the structure of the absolute states, which were increasingly centralized. The result was that in Europe as a whole, the number of government officials grew about fourfold. To fill the most prestigious offices, monarchs chose nobles for their influence more than for their competence. But some absolute rulers also began to employ commoners as officials to collect vital information—for example, to project revenues or to anticipate the number of soldiers available for war.

One result of these expanding ranks of officials was the tripling of tax revenues between 1520 and 1670 in France and Spain, and in England as well. To raise money, absolute rulers sold monopolies (which permitted only the holder of the monopoly to produce and sell particular goods) on the production and sale of salt, tobacco, and other commodities, and imposed taxes on trading towns. The rulers of France, Spain, and Austria also filled the state coffers by selling hereditary offices. James I of England doubled the number of knights during the first four months of his reign. Queen Christina of Sweden doubled the number of noble families in ten years. In addition, as royal power and prestige rose, the monarchs more easily found wealthy families to loan them money, usually in exchange for tax exemptions, titles, or other privileges.

### *Absolutism and Warfare*

The regular collection of taxes and the expansion of sources of revenue increased the capacity of absolute rulers to maintain standing armies and fortifications, and to wage war. Absolute states were characterized by the

TABLE 7.1. THE SIZE OF EUROPEAN ARMIES, 1690-1814

	1690	1710	1756/60	1789	1812/14
Britain	70,000	75,000	200,000	40,000*	250,000
France	400,000	350,000	330,000	180,000	600,000
Habsburg Emp.	50,000	100,000	200,000	300,000	250,000
Prussia	30,000	39,000	195,000	190,000	270,000
Spain	na	30,000	na	50,000	na
Sweden	na	110,000	na	na	na
United Prov.	73,000	130,000	40,000*	na	na

\* Drop reflects peacetime and non-absolutist character of the state.

na: Figures not available.

Source: Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 99.

deployment of a large standing army capable of maintaining order at home and maintaining or expanding dynastic interests and territories. Absolutist statemaking and warfare had direct and indirect consequences for most of the European population. Kings no longer depended on troops provided by nobles or military contractors, thereby avoiding the risk that private armies might challenge royal power. Standing armies continued to grow in size during the eighteenth century (see Table 7.1). During the 1500s, the peacetime armies of the continental powers had included about 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers; by the 1690s, they reached about 150,000 soldiers. For the first time, uniforms became standard equipment for every soldier. The French army, which soon stood at about 180,000 men in peacetime, rose to 350,000 soldiers during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). The Russian army grew from 130,000 in 1731 to 458,000 in 1796. In contrast, England and the Dutch Republic, two non-absolutist powers, had relatively small armies, and, as sea powers, both depended on their navies.

As absolute monarchs consolidated their power, the reasons for waging international wars changed. The wars of the previous century had been fought, in principle, over the rivalry between the Catholic and Protestant religions, even if dynastic interests were never far from the surface. Now, although religious rivalries still constituted an important factor in international conflict (as in the case of the long struggle between the Muslim Ottoman Empire and the Catholic Habsburg Empire), "reasons of state" became a prevalent justification for the rulers of France, Prussia, and Russia to make war on their neighbors.

Warfare both encouraged and drew upon the development of credit institutions. But as the British and Dutch cases demonstrated, a state did not have to be absolutist to marshal sufficient resources to fight sustained wars. English colonial trade generated excise and customs taxes, permitting the



expansion of the Royal Navy. The crown's reputation for repayment facilitated raising money through loans at home and abroad. Amsterdam's stature as a great banking center contributed to the ability of the Dutch government to fight extended wars. In contrast, the French monarchy lacked the confidence of wary investors, and despite the sale of privileges found itself in an increasingly perilous financial situation. Moreover, the French monarchy often had to pay higher rates of interest than private investors because it was a bad credit risk.

Even in peacetime, military expenditures now took up almost half of the budget of the European state. In times of war, the percentage rose to 80 percent, or even more. By the end of the sixteenth century, Philip II of Spain had allocated three-quarters of state expenditures to pay for past wars or to wage new ones. Appropriately enough, the bureau in Prussia that a century later would oversee tax collection itself evolved from the General War Office, making explicit the close connection between the extraction of state revenue and the waging of dynastic wars. Inevitably, there came a point even in absolute states when noble and other wealthy families upon which monarchies depended for financial support began to grumble.

### *Absolutism and Religion*

An alliance with established churches helped monarchs achieve and maintain absolute rule. Absolute monarchs lent their authority and prestige to the established churches, the support of which, in turn, seemed to legitimize absolute monarchical power. In Catholic states in particular, the Church's quest for uniformity of belief and practice went hand in hand with the absolutist monarch's desire to eliminate challenges to his authority. The Church helped create an image of the king as a sacred figure who must be obeyed because he served God's interests on earth. In turn, absolute monarchs obliged the Church by persecuting religious minorities.

Absolute rulers also reduced ecclesiastical autonomy in their realms. The Catholic Church lost authority to their absolute monarchs. Yet the Church owned as much as two-thirds of the land in Portugal, at least one-tenth of the land in Spain, Austria, and France, half the land in Bavaria and Flanders, and considerable holdings in every Italian state. Moreover, the Church claimed the right to the tithe, the tax of 10 percent on annual resources. But absolute monarchs maintained authority over ecclesiastical appointments, in effect creating national churches, much to the consternation of the papacy in Rome. Signs of the victory of absolute rulers over the Catholic Church included eliminating the Inquisition in France and Spain, closing monasteries and expelling religious orders in France and Austria, assuming control over censorship, reducing ecclesiastical authority over marriage, and establishing the principle of state supervision over education.



The siege of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 from a French manuscript illumination.

In France, the very existence of the French, or Gallican Church, defied papal claims to complete authority over the Church. By the Concordat of Bologna in 1516, the pope had given the kings of France virtual control (subject to papal confirmation) over the appointment of bishops in France and the right to overrule the judgments of ecclesiastical courts. This irritated French "ultramontane" clergy, who recognized only the authority of the pope "beyond the mountains," that is, over the Alps in distant Rome. The provincial parlements, or noble law courts, by contrast, remained defiantly Gallican. The Gallican Church itself was far more likely to remain loyal to the monarchy that defended its prerogatives, even if Gallicans themselves insisted that the pope and

bishops retain spiritual authority, with the king having a monopoly only on temporal power.

Recognizing no distinction between church and state, the Turkish Ottoman Empire remained a theocracy. The sultan's subjects believed his despotic authority to be divine. The Muslim religious hierarchy, which included judges, theologians, and teachers, provided officials for the imperial administration. The supreme religious dignitary occasionally invoked religious law, of which he was the main interpreter, to counter orders of the sultan, but the latter's political authority remained absolute.

The expansion of the Ottoman Empire had been based upon the concept of the crusading "Holy War" against infidels, that is, non-Muslims. As the Turks destroyed the Byzantine Empire, capturing Constantinople in 1453, they confiscated many of the resources of the Orthodox Church and other Christian denominations. The Ottoman Turks enslaved prisoners of war, purchased slaves abroad, and imposed slave levies upon the Christians of the empire. Many Christian children had been trained as officials or soldiers and had converted to Islam. The empire also depended on the contributions of nonslave Christians, including skilled Greek sailors who made

Turkish galleys feared in the Mediterranean. Some joined the “janissary” infantry, a military corps that assumed police duties in periods of peace.

Yet the Ottoman Empire tolerated religious diversity. As long as non-Muslims did not resist Turkish authority, they were free to practice their religion and to become officials within the empire. In Albania (where alone conversions seemed to have been forced), Bosnia, and Herzegovina, many people, including some nobles, converted to the Muslim faith. Young Christians captured by Turkish fleets could convert to Islam to escape a life chained to benches as galley slaves. In contrast, Muslims captured by Christian powers remained galley slaves, even if they converted.

### *Monumentalism in Architecture and Art*

Absolute monarchs utilized the extravagant emotional appeal of monumental architecture. They designed their capitals to reflect the imperatives of monarchical authority. Madrid, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, and Versailles were planned, shaped, and invested with symbols of absolute rule. These cities were laid out according to geometric principles. In contrast to the narrow, winding streets of cities that had evolved organically from medieval times, straight, wide boulevards were created in one fell swoop. These symmetrical boulevards symbolized the organized and far-reaching power of absolutism and the growth of the modern state. Royal armies paraded down boulevards to squares or royal palaces, around which were grouped government buildings and noble residences. Barracks housing standing armies also became a prominent feature of the new urban landscape.

Monarchs paid artists and architects to combine baroque elements with a more restrained, balanced classicism, influenced by the early sixteenth-century Roman style of the High Renaissance. This became known as the Louis XIV style. Thus, the facade completing the Louvre palace in Paris, the work of Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), drew on the architectural style of Roman temples, thereby linking Louis to the glories of Julius Caesar. Hyacinthe Rigaud’s full-length



Hyacinthe Rigaud’s *Louis XIV* (1701).

portrait of Louis XIV in 1701 shows a supremely confident and powerful king standing in a regal pose, wearing luxurious coronation robes, clutching his staff of authority, and looking with condescension at the viewer—his subject.

### *Absolutism in France*

Absolutist France became the strongest state in early modern Europe. Francis I and Henry IV had extended the effective reach of monarchical authority (see Chapter 4). Louis XIII's invaluable minister Cardinal Richelieu had used provincial "intendants" to centralize and further extend monarchical authority. Richelieu's policies led to the doubling of taxes between 1630 and 1650, sparking four major waves of peasant resistance, including one uprising in the southwest in 1636 in which about 60,000 peasants took up arms, some shouting the impossible demand, "Long live the king without taxes!" Upon Louis XIII's death in 1643, the stage was set for Louis XIV to rule as a divine-right king of an absolute state. But before the young Louis could take control of the government, France would first experience the regency of his mother and the revolt known as the Fronde.

### *The Fronde: Taming "Overmighty Subjects"*

Louis XIV was four years old at the time of his accession to the throne. His mother, Anne of Austria (1601–1666), served as regent. She depended on Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) for advice. Mazarin, a worldly, charming, and witty Italian, always dressed in the finest red silk and was well known for his love of money. A master of intrigue, rumor had it that he and Anne had secretly married.

During the Regency period, Anne and Mazarin kept French armies in the field, prolonging the Thirty Years' War, which had become a struggle pitting the dynastic interests of France against the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs (see Chapter 4). Most nobles, with much to lose from civil disturbances, remained loyal to the monarchy. But Mazarin's prolongation of the victorious struggle against Spain generated a political crisis.

Resistance to royal authority culminated in a revolt that shook the Bourbon monarchy at mid-century. Between 1648 and 1653, powerful "nobles of the sword" (those nobles who held ancient titles and whose forebears had gathered retainers to fight for the king) tried to regain the influence lost during the reign of Louis XIII. Ordinary people entered the fray, demanding lower taxes because of deteriorating economic conditions. The revolt became known as the Fronde—named for a slingshot boys in Paris used to hurl rocks.

Mazarin, whom many nobles considered a "foreign plotter" and an outsider like Anne of Austria, had borrowed money for the state from financiers. He did so against expected revenue from new taxes or the sale of offices.

Nobles were willing to suffer extraordinary levies in times of war. But now they complained bitterly that since the wars had ended supplementary impositions were needless. Furthermore, some of the oldest noble families had claimed for some time that they had been systematically excluded from the highest and most lucrative and prestigious offices. In fact, there was some truth in this claim, as the king feared the power of disloyal "overmighty subjects," preferring lesser nobles for military offices and skilled bureaucrats for some civil posts. Now nobles of the sword denounced Mazarin, his system of patronage, and his financier friends, some of whom had made fortunes supplying the royal armies.

In 1648, Mazarin attempted to secure the approval of the Parlement of Paris for increased taxes. The Parlement of Paris, the chief law court in France, was made up of nobles who had purchased their positions from the crown. Wanting to safeguard their privileges and power, the Parlement of Paris defied the Regency by calling for an assembly of the four sovereign courts of Paris to consider the financial crisis. Meeting without royal permission, the assembly proposed that the courts elect delegates to consider financial reforms in the realm. The provincial parlements joined the protest against what seemed to be unchecked royal authority. Financiers who had earlier purchased titles from the crown now refused to loan the state any more money.

When Mazarin ordered the arrest of some of the defiant members of the parlement in August 1648, barricades went up in Paris in support of the parlement. From inside the Louvre palace, Louis XIV, now nine years of age, heard the angry shouts of the crowds. Popular discontent forced the royal court to flee Paris in January 1649.

The role of the prince of Condé (Louis de Bourbon, 1621–1686), head of the junior branch of the Bourbon family, was crucial in the Fronde. Condé's great victory in 1643 over the Spanish at the battle of Rocroi in northern France, which ended any possibility of a successful Spanish invasion of the country, earned him the name of "the Great Condé." But as long as Mazarin had met Condé's demands for money and offices, the latter remained loyal to the young king and in 1648 marched to Paris with his army to defend him. Short-lived tax reforms bought time. But major uprisings against taxes, which had doubled in two decades as Richelieu and Mazarin had in turn raised money to wage war, broke out in several provinces. Relatively poor nobles, who resented that wealthy commoners were able to purchase titles, led other revolts. Condé himself changed sides in 1649 and supported the *frondeurs*.

Fearing Condé's influence, a Spanish invasion, and further insurrections, Anne and Mazarin found noble allies against Condé and early in 1650 ordered him imprisoned. Condé's arrest further mobilized opposition to Mazarin, whose enemies forced the minister to flee the country early the next year. A year later, Condé was released from prison at the demand of the Parlement of Paris. In September 1651, Louis XIV declared his majority

and right to rule, although he was only thirteen. But he faced an immediate challenge from Condé, who marched to Paris in 1652 with the goals of reestablishing the great nobles' political influence and of getting rid of Mazarin (who continued to sway royal policy from his exile in Germany). However, finding insufficient support from the parlement, the municipal government, or ordinary Parisians, Condé fled to Spain. The boy-king recalled Mazarin to Paris.

Louis XIV restored monarchical authority by ending the nobles' rebellion and putting down peasant resistance against taxation. Louis made clear that henceforth the Parlement of Paris could not meddle in the king's business. And in 1673 the king deprived the twelve parlements of their right to issue remonstrances (formal objections to the registration of new royal ordinances, edicts, or declarations, which could be overridden by the king) before they registered an edict. The king also disbanded the private armies of headstrong nobles and tightened royal control over provincial governors.

Unlike the English Parliament's successful rebellion against the crown in defense of constitutional rule (see Chapter 6), royal victory in the Fronde broke French noble resistance to absolute rule. The king's predecessors had frequently consulted with prominent nobles about important matters. Louis XIV felt no obligation to do so. Yet the Fronde also demonstrated that the crown had to rule more subtly with respect to noble interests.

### *Mercantilism under Louis XIV*

Following Mazarin's death in 1661, Louis XIV, now twenty-two years of age, assumed more personal responsibility. The state's firmer financial footing owed much to the cool calculations of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), controller-general of the realm, who directed administration, taxation, and public works. The grandson of a provincial merchant of modest standing, Colbert endured the hostility of the old noble families. His frosty personality led him to be dubbed “the North.” He employed surveyors and mapmakers to assess the economic resources of the provinces. Whereas formerly only about a quarter of revenues reached royal coffers, now as much as four-fifths of what was collected poured into the royal treasury. Even though the direct royal tax on land (the *taille*) had been reduced, state revenues doubled, despite abuses and privileged exemptions (nobles and clergy did not pay the land tax).

Mercantilism underlay the economy of absolutist France, as it did royal economic policies in Europe. Mercantilists posited that all resources should be put into the service of the state and that a state's wealth was measured by its ability to import more gold and silver than it exported. Jealous of English and Dutch prosperity, Colbert became the chief proponent of French mercantilist policies, which emphasized economic self-sufficiency. He founded commercial trading companies to which the king granted monopolies on colonial trade, and levied high protective tariffs on Dutch and English

imports. Louis XIV established the royal Gobelins tapestry manufacture on the edge of Paris and encouraged the textile industry and the manufacture of other goods that could be exported. He improved roads and oversaw the extension of France's network of canals, including the Languedoc Canal (Canal du Midi), which links the Mediterranean to the Garonne River and thus to the Atlantic Ocean.

Yet despite the growth of the French merchant fleet and navy, the French East India Company, established by Colbert in 1664, could not effectively compete with its more efficient and adventurous Dutch and English rivals in the quest for global trade. The monarchy had to bail out the company and later took away its trading monopoly. Moreover, trade within France remained hamstrung by a bewildering variety of restrictions and internal tariffs that in some places were not much different from those that characterized the hodgepodge of German states.

At the same time, while the king was a master of extracting revenue from his subjects, his greatest talent was for emptying the royal coffers with dizzying speed. Louis XIV and his successors plunged the monarchy into an ever-deepening and eventually disastrous financial crisis.

### *The Absolute Louis XIV*

As Louis XIV grew into manhood, he looked the part of a great king and played it superbly. Handsome, proud, energetic, and decisive, the king's love of gambling, hunting, and women sometimes took precedence over matters of state. But he also supervised the work of the high council of his prominent officials, and, although a spendthrift, he closely monitored the accounts of his realm.

The king became a shrewd judge of character, surrounding himself with men of talent. He consciously avoided being dependent on any single person, the way Louis XIII had been on Richelieu, or his mother on Mazarin. During a visit to the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, built by the unpopular minister of finance Nicolas Fouquet, Louis was served with solid gold tableware and viewed large pools filled with seawater and even saltwater fish. The king promptly ordered Fouquet arrested and took the magnificent château for himself.

Having affirmed his authority over Paris, Louis dissolved any remaining pretensions of autonomy held by the elites in the major provincial towns. One result of the Fronde was that the monarchy expanded the narrow social base on which state power had previously rested. Louis selected governors, intendants, and bishops who would be loyal to him. Mayors became officials of the state who had to purchase their titles in exchange for fidelity to the king. Wealthy merchants now preferred to seek ennoblement rather than try to maintain municipal privileges that seemed increasingly archaic. The presence of royal garrisons, which towns once resisted, not only affirmed the sovereign's authority but were welcomed by local elites as protection against

plebeian insurrection. Troops were also good for local business. In 1667, Louis took another important step in affirming his authority by appointing a lieutenant-general of police for Paris, who was given extensive authority ranging from powers of arrest to responsibility for street cleaning and fire fighting. Paris soon had street lighting—thousands of glass-enclosed candles—during the early evening hours.

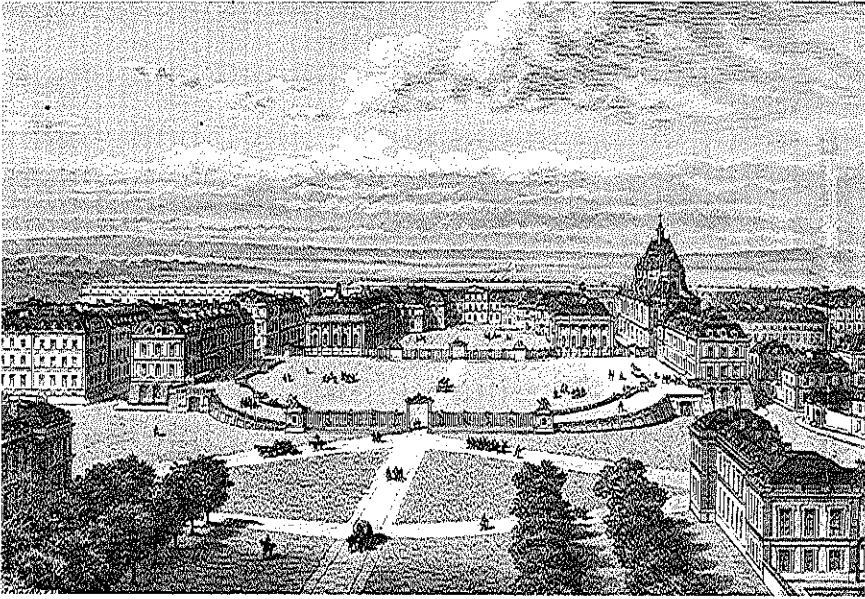
Louis XIV portrayed himself as God's representative, charged with maintaining earthly order. "*L'état, c'est moi*" ("I am the state"), he is said to have remarked. The royal propaganda machine provided ideological legitimacy by cranking out images of the king as a glorious monarch. At the same time, royal censors suppressed publications, prohibited imported books, and limited the number of printers. The goal of censorship was to protect the honor and reputation of the king and religion.

Louis XIV created the first French ministry of war and shaped it into an effective bureaucracy. The king and his ministers brought the noble-dominated officer corps under royal control, making seniority the determinant of rank and charging wealthy nobles handsome sums for the privilege of commanding their own regiments or companies. The ministry of war ordered the construction of military academies, barracks, and drilling grounds, and ordered the brilliant military engineer Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707) to fortify key border towns.

Louis XIV described himself as first seigneur of the realm. Nobles still insisted more than ever—though more quietly than at the time of the Fronde—that institutionalized noble privileges were necessary to counter the excesses of absolute authority. Nobles were almost completely immune from royal taxes (basically paying only indirect taxes) until Louis made them subject to two additional taxes (the *capitation*, a head tax, and the *vingtième*, a tax of 5 percent, usually only on land). They benefited from the economic development the monarchy encouraged, such as the construction of better roads and networks of canals that were largely underwritten by the state.

Since the time of Henry IV, offices had effectively become forms of hereditary property. Louis XIV's lavish sale of offices and titles—500 sold with a single edict in 1696—expanded the nobility. As one minister put it, "as soon as the crown creates an office God creates a fool willing to buy it." Few noble families now could trace their titles back more than several generations. This accentuated differences between nobles of the sword and nobles of the robe (many of whom had purchased their offices). The nobles of the sword dominated court life, but the king did not hesitate to dip into the ranks of commoners to find efficient, loyal officials, exempting them from taxation and providing lucrative posts for their offspring. A noble of the sword denounced the "reign of the vile bourgeoisie," that is, nobles of recent title and other relative upstarts he viewed as unworthy of prominent posts.





The château of Versailles, built by Louis XIV between 1669 and 1686.

### *Louis XIV at Versailles*

Louis XIV never forgot hearing the howling Parisian mob from his room in the royal palace. Resolving to move his court to Versailles, twelve miles west of Paris, he visited Paris only four times during the seventy-two years of his reign. Realizing that an adequately fed population would be less likely to riot, Louis XIV and his successors worked to assure the sufficient provisioning of the capital.

The Sun King followed Colbert's admonition that "nothing marks the greatness of princes better than the buildings that compel the people to look on them with awe, and all posterity judges them by the superb palaces they have built during their lifetime." The staging ground for royal ceremonies was the monumental château of Versailles (constructed 1669–1686), surrounded by geometrically arranged formal gardens, interspersed by 1,400 fountains supplied by the largest hydraulic pumps in the Western world. Sculptures in the gardens made clear the identification of Louis XIV with the Greek and Roman sun god Apollo. In the vast château, the royal dining room was so far from the kitchen that the king's food often arrived at his table cold and, during one particularly cold winter, the wine froze before Louis could taste it. The château's corridors were so long that some nobles used them as urinals, instead of continuing the lengthy trek to a more appropriate place.

Louis summoned the greatest nobles of the realm to Versailles to share in his glory. There they could be honored, but none could become too powerful. More than 10,000 nobles, officials, and servants lived in or near the château. Each day began with the elaborate routine of dressing the king in the company of the richest and most powerful nobles. The ultimate reward for a loyal noble was to be named to a post within the royal household. Louis XIV allowed the nobles to form cabals and conspire, but only against each other.

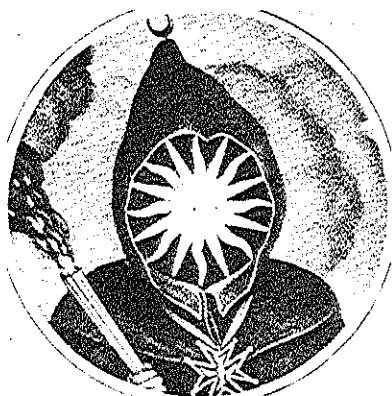
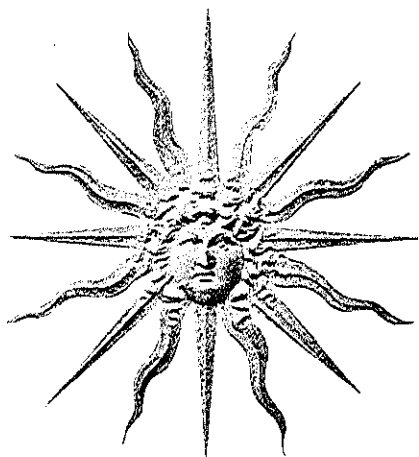
For nobles at Versailles there was little else to do except eat, drink, hunt—in the company of the king, if they were favored—gamble, and chase around each other's wives and mistresses. Nobles also attended the expensive theatrical and operatic productions put on at royal expense. These included the works of Jean-Baptiste Molière (1622–1673) and Jean Racine (1639–1699), master of the tragic dramatic style, who drew themes from the classical Greek poets. Both Molière and Racine wrote effusive praise for the king into some of their plays, the latter dedicating his first great success, *Alexander the Great*, to Louis XIV.

Social struggles mark the plays of Molière. The son of an upholsterer, the playwright started a traveling theatrical company before settling in Paris. The lonely, unhappy Molière poked fun at the pretensions of aristocratic and ecclesiastical society, depicting the private, cruel dramas of upper-class family life. But his popular works also helped reaffirm the boundaries between social classes. He ridiculed burghers, whose wealth could purchase titles but not teach them how to behave as nobles. In *The Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), the parvenu gives himself away with a social gaffe. Molière also detested hypocrisy, which he depicted in *Tartuffe* (1664), a tale of the unfortunate effects of unrestrained religious enthusiasm on a family. *Tartuffe* brought Molière the wrath of the Church, but he had an even more powerful protector in the king.

Louis XIV believed that his court stood as the center and apex of civilization. Indeed, French arts and literature had an enormous influence in Europe. Foreign monarchs, nobles, and writers still considered French the language of high culture. The château of Versailles encouraged imitation. Philip V of Spain, among others, ordered a similar palace built. The duke of Saxony rebuilt his capital of Dresden along neoclassical lines. The château of Versailles also served as a model for noble estates and townhouses built in the classical style.

### *Louis XIV's Persecution of Religious Minorities*

One of the most salient results of the victory of absolute rule in Catholic states was the persecution of religious minorities. Such campaigns in part served to placate the papacy and the Church hierarchy in each Catholic state. Louis XIV had little interest in theology, although he was relatively pious. But as he grew older, the king brought into his inner circle a number



(Left) The symbol of the sun used to glorify the absolute ruler, Louis XIV. (Right) This caricature shows Louis XIV, the Sun King, as the exterminator of Protestantism.

of extremely devout advisers, and into his bedroom a fervently religious mistress.

Reversing the tolerant policies of Henry IV and Louis XIII, Louis XIV launched a vigorous campaign of persecution against Huguenots, closing most Protestant churches and initiating attempts to force conversions to Catholicism. In 1685, he revoked the Edict of Nantes, by which Henry IV in 1598 had extended religious tolerance to Protestants. This pleased the provincial estates in regions where Protestants were a forceful minority and memories of the wars of religion were still fresh. But the economic cost to France was considerable in the long run. Although the king forbade Huguenots from leaving France, many merchants and skilled craftsmen were among the 200,000 Huguenots who emigrated during the next forty years. Many went to England, Prussia, the Dutch United Provinces, and even South Africa.

With the motto "one king, one law, one faith," Louis XIV also persecuted Jansenists in his quest for religious orthodoxy. Jansenists were followers of Cornelis Jansen, bishop of Ypres in the Southern Netherlands (Belgium), who died in 1638. They could be found in France, the Netherlands, Austria, and several Italian states. Seeking reforms within the Church, Jansenists emphasized the role of faith and divine grace in the pursuit of salvation. Believing mankind to be fallen and hapless, incapable of understanding the will of God, Jansenists came close to accepting a Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Their enemies called them "Calvinists who go to Mass." However, Jansenists believed that one should completely withdraw from the world, given the certainty of sin and mankind's ignorance of God's will.

Notoriously ascetic, they criticized the Church for encouraging a lax morality by holding out the possibility of repeated penance and deathbed conversion.

The pope had condemned Jansenism in 1653, perhaps at the insistence of the Jesuits, the Jansenists' most determined enemy. Louis XIV began to persecute them in the name of "one faith" in 1709; he ordered the Jansenist community at Port-Royal outside of Paris evicted and its abbey burned to the ground. He convinced Pope Clement XI to issue a papal bull, *Unigenitus* (1713), which condemned Jansenism. The Parlement of Paris, however, refused to register the edict. Louis was still trying to force compliance two years later when he died. The king's attempt to impose religious orthodoxy in France fell short, indicating that absolute rule had its limits.

### *The Limits of French Absolutism*

France, like other countries, was far from being a nation-state in which most people thought of themselves as French, as well as or instead of Norman, Breton, or Provençal, or from other regions with their own traditions. More than half the population did not speak French. Inadequate roads isolated mountain regions, in particular, limiting the effective reach of absolute rule.

The absolute monarchy stood at the top of a complex network of patronage based on personal ties that reached into every province and every town. But Louis XIV's intendants still had to take local networks of influence into consideration, using intimidation, cajoling, and negotiation to gain their ends in what was then Western Europe's most populous state.

The king played off against one another the jurisdictions and interests of the Estates, parlements, and other provincial institutions dominated by nobles. The provincial Estates were assemblies of nobles of the *pays d'état* (regions more recently integrated into France and retaining a degree of fiscal autonomy, including Brittany, Provence, Burgundy, and Languedoc), which represented each province. The Estates oversaw the collection of taxes and tended to the details of provincial administration and spending. They met annually amid great pageantry and carefully orchestrated ceremony that, like those at Versailles, reaffirmed social hierarchy. In principle, the Estates could refuse to provide the crown with the annual "free grant" (a subsidy provided by each region to the monarch), which was hardly "free," since the king informed the Estates of the amount of money he wanted. Louis XIV abolished the custom of allowing the Estates to express grievances before voting the amount of their "gift" to the monarchy.

The interests of the nobles also prevailed in the parlements, the sovereign law courts that registered, publicized, and carried out royal laws. The parlements, most of whose members were nobles, claimed to speak for their province in legal matters, asserting the right to issue binding commands in cases of emergencies. But, unlike the English Parliament, no national representative political institution existed in France. The Estates-General, which

had met four times between 1560 and 1593, had not been convoked since 1614.

Even the king of France was not as omnipotent or omniscient as he would have liked to think. Jean Bodin had expressed his view that a ruler would be wise to avoid exercising full power—for example, to avoid interfering with his subjects' property. This seeming paradox is perhaps best symbolized by the king's phrase to the Estates of a province: "We entreat you but we also command you. . . ." Even the powerful Bourbons were bound by the so-called fundamental laws of the realm, as well as by those they believed God had established.

## THE BALANCE OF POWER

During the century beginning about 1650, the concept of a balance of power between states gradually took hold in many of the courts of Europe. Like the evolving European state system itself, the emergence of the concept arose in part out of the decline of religious antagonisms as a dominant cause of warfare. The quest of absolute rulers to add to their dynastic territories and the growing global commercial rivalry between the great powers increasingly shaped European warfare.

A diplomatic concept dating from the time of the Renaissance city-states of fifteenth-century Italy, the balance of power principle held that great powers should be in equilibrium, and that one power should not be allowed to become too powerful. The decline of one power could threaten the balance of power if, as a result, another power considerably enhanced its strength. Now the main threat to peace ceased to be religious division but rather the power of Louis XIV of France.

### *The Origins of International Law*

Horried by the Thirty Years' War, two northern European political theorists systematically analyzed questions of international relations, drawing on the recent history of Europe. They helped lay the foundations for the evolution of modern diplomacy. In 1625, the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) sought to establish the foundations of international law by arguing that laws to which nations were subject followed from nature and not from God. Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), a German Protestant, found himself under arrest for eight months when he was caught up in the war between Sweden and Denmark. Pufendorf's *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (1672) postulated legal principles for times of peace—which he argued should be the natural state—and for times of war. He claimed that only a defensive war was justified, pending international arbitration to resolve crises. The problem was, of course, that unless there existed some powerful, impartial body to adjudicate disputes between nations, each side

in any conflict invariably claimed that its cause was just. European power politics swept away such theoretical considerations.

## THE HABSBURG MONARCHY

The eighteenth-century French Enlightenment philosophe Voltaire only somewhat exaggerated when he dismissed the Holy Roman Empire, that cumbersome federal structure of Central European states that once served as a powerful protector of the papacy, as having ceased to be holy, Roman, or an empire. The Holy Roman Empire included almost 300 German states. Seven, and then in 1648, eight electors (princes and archbishops) selected the Holy Roman emperor, invariably the Habsburg ruler. But in a Europe increasingly dominated by absolute monarchs, the Holy Roman Empire seemed an anomaly.

In principle, the Holy Roman emperor still commanded the allegiance of the states of the empire. These included sizable states such as Austria, Bavaria, and Saxony, whose rulers oversaw elaborate courts, maintained standing armies, and paid for all this by levying taxes on their subjects and customs duties and tolls on merchandise being carried through their territories. The Holy Roman Empire also included many small principalities, duchies, and even archbishoprics barely extending beyond the walls of towns like Mainz and Trier. But in reality the empire had increasingly only a shadow existence, despite its mystique as the defender of Catholicism. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which concluded the Thirty Years' War (see Chapter 4), reflected the inability of the Holy Roman Empire to enforce its will, conduct foreign policy, or effectively maintain an army. During the long war, some German princes with powerful allies outside the empire had gone their own way. Indeed, the Treaty of Westphalia specifically empowered each member state to carry out its own foreign policy. The imperial Assembly of the Holy Roman Empire (the Reichstag) thus had virtually no authority to conduct foreign policy with other states. The imperial army was too small and difficult to mobilize to be effective, and the imperial court of law was powerless to enforce its decisions, depending entirely on the good will of the individual states.

The strongest state within the Holy Roman Empire, Habsburg Austria, extended beyond the boundaries of the empire itself. The Habsburgs had ruled Austria without interruption since the thirteenth century. The old Habsburg principle was "Let others wage war. You, happy Austria, marry [to prosper]." Advantageous marriages brought the dynasty the wealthy territories of Burgundy and the Netherlands in the fifteenth century. Charles V, who became Holy Roman emperor in 1519, added Hungary and Bohemia. Counting Spain and its far-flung possessions, he reigned over perhaps a quarter of the population of the European continent, as well as the Spanish Empire in the Americas.

When Charles V abdicated as emperor in 1558, he divided the Habsburg domains into two parts. His brother Ferdinand I inherited the Austrian Habsburg lands (including Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia) and succeeded him as the elected Holy Roman emperor. Charles's son Philip II became king of Spain. His empire included the Netherlands, dependencies in Italy, and colonies in the Americas. The Spanish and Austrian branches of the Habsburgs were henceforth two separate dynasties, although the interests of both as Catholic states and dynastic rivals of France sometimes converged.

The Austrian Habsburg monarchy exercised foreign policy and directed the army, but had less effective authority within its territories than the kings of France had within their realm. Nobles oversaw the court system and policing. When confronted with threats to their traditional prerogatives, nobles put aside differences, such as those between the great landowners and the lower nobility, and formed a common front to preserve their privileges against monarchical erosion.

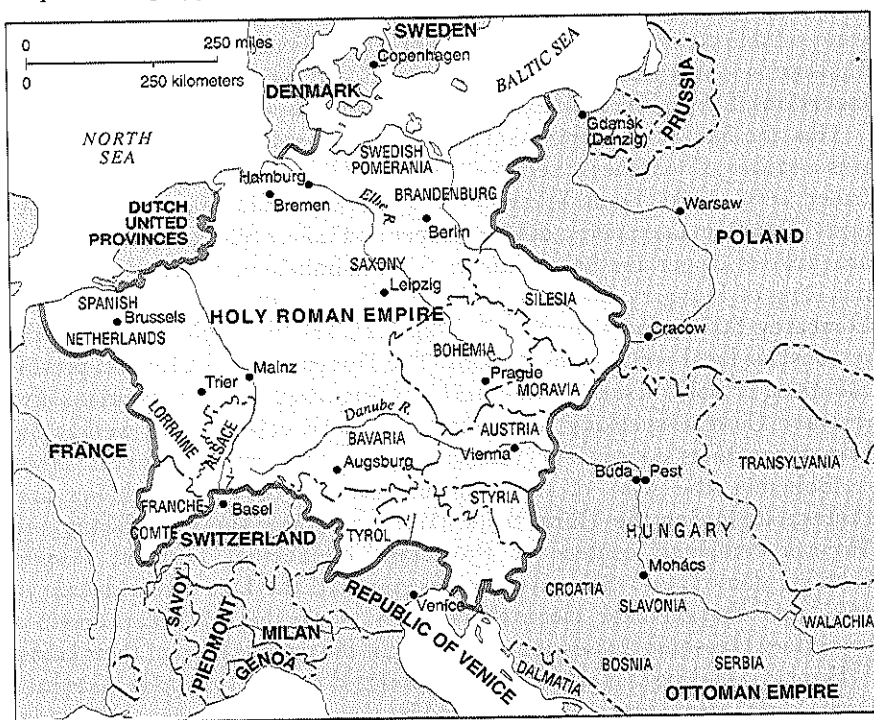
Austria was the only power able to exercise its influence equally in both Western and Eastern Europe. The Austrian Habsburgs successfully implemented an effective state administration, expanded educational opportunities for the upper classes, and brought resistant or even rebellious nobles under dynastic control. But timely marriages were no longer enough. Throughout the sixteenth century and during the first half of the seventeenth century, the Habsburgs had been almost constantly preoccupied with politics within the German states. During the Thirty Years' War, however, the Habsburgs were unable to expand their domination throughout Central Europe. The Habsburgs remained vulnerable to French expansionism and to Turkish incursions, forcing the monarchy to address threats on two fronts.

That the Habsburg empire contained territories of different nationalities was a source of weakness. Leopold I, elected Holy Roman emperor in 1658 (ruled 1658–1705; Louis XIV was the opposing candidate), was simultaneously Holy Roman emperor, duke of Upper and Lower Silesia, count of Tyrol, archduke of Upper and Lower Austria, king of Bohemia, prince of Transylvania, king of Hungary, Slavonia, Dalmatia, and Croatia, and titular ruler of Lombardy, Styria, and Moravia (see Map 7.1). The monarch necessarily had to consider local political institutions. The Hungarian and Croatian provincial diets, or noble Estates, impeded Habsburg absolutism. Hungarians also resented German-speaking administrators and tax collectors, as well as the Habsburg armies stationed in Hungary to protect the empire from the Turks. In Bohemia, the scars of the religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants during the Thirty Years' War healed very slowly. Bohemia and Moravia remained centers of Protestant intellectual ferment, despite Catholic domination. Bohemian nobles resented the fact that a decree in 1627 had abolished the elective monarchy, made the Bohemian crown a hereditary Habsburg possession, and brought the confiscation of their lands.

Hungary had been part of the Habsburg domains since the sixteenth century. The Hungarian crown included Hungary, Transylvania, and Croatia.

The Hungarian nobles, proud of their defense of the Habsburg empire against Turkish incursions, seized every opportunity to extract concessions from the Habsburgs. Unlike their Austrian counterparts, most of the Hungarian, or Magyar, nobles had become Protestant during the Reformation. Habsburg persecution of Hungarian Protestants helped spark an insurrection in 1679 that spread into Moravia, Slavonia, and Silesia. This led Leopold to promise the Hungarian Estates to restore some privileges of landowners that had been suppressed. But dissatisfied Protestants then called for Turkish assistance at a time when the Turks were preparing to attack Habsburg territories. The Ottoman army besieged Vienna, the Habsburg capital, in 1683. It was saved after two months by the arrival of a combined relief army of Austrians, Germans, and Poles under the command of the crusading King John Sobieski (ruled 1674–1696), Catholic ruler of Poland. Pope Innocent XI succeeded in convincing Emperor Leopold I, who saw himself as a prince of the Catholic Reformation, to lead a “Holy League” in 1684 against the Ottoman Turks. In the War of the Holy League (1686–1687), and in subsequent fighting, Habsburg armies recaptured most of Hungary and the eastern province of Transylvania from the Turks, as well as

MAP 7.1 THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE UNDER LEOPOLD I, 1658 The Holy Roman Empire was a polyglot state, made up of territories of different nationalities.





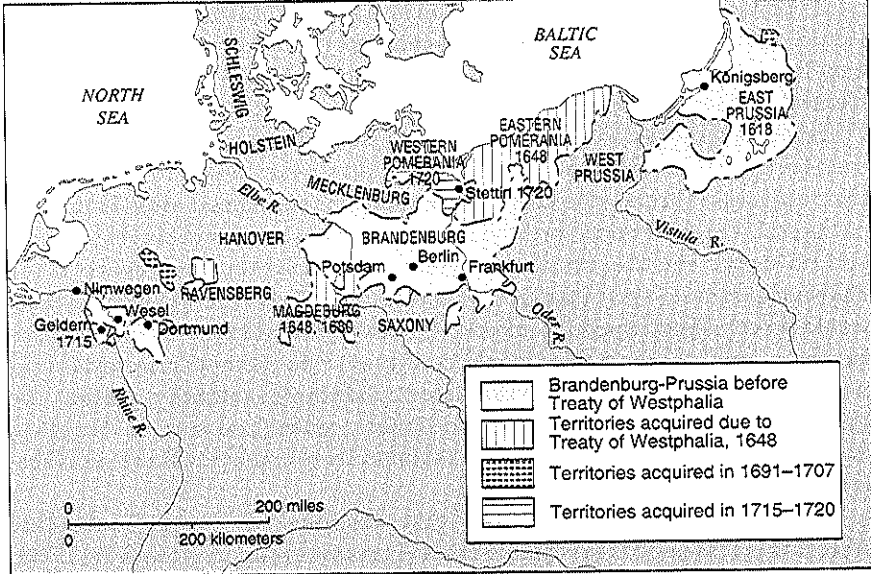
much of Croatia. The Peace of Karlowitz (1699) confirmed the Habsburg victory over the Turks. Although Ottoman garrisons remained in Belgrade and Turkish galleys still roamed the Mediterranean, the Ottoman threat to Central Europe had passed.

The Habsburg victory over the Turks consolidated the dynasty's authority over Hungary. In 1687, the Hungarian Estates were forced to declare that the Hungarian throne (the crown of Saint Stephen, named after Hungary's patron saint) would henceforth be a hereditary possession of the Habsburgs and no longer elective. Hungary thereby recognized the sovereignty of the Habsburg dynasty in exchange for several promises: the Hungarian Diet would be convened at regular intervals; Hungary would have its own administration; and Magyar nobles would continue to be exempt from royal taxation. Thus, although he consolidated Habsburg authority within the dynasty's domains, Leopold failed to impose centralized rule on Hungary. Hungary's special position within the monarchy revealed the limits of Habsburg absolutism and Austrian power.

The Habsburg monarchy, the least absolute of Europe's absolute states, was less successful than France in maintaining its power. In 1700, Austria's Habsburg dynasty lost its long-standing ties to Spain when that country passed from the Habsburg dynasty to the Bourbon dynasty with the death of the childless Charles II (ruled 1665–1700). France's defeat in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), which had been fought to determine who would inherit the Spanish Habsburg territories, enabled the Austrian Habsburgs to pick up some of the remaining pieces of the decimated Spanish Empire in Europe. However, during the eighteenth century Austria ceded its preeminence in Central Europe to Prussia.

## THE RISE OF PRUSSIA

The presence of all the essential components of absolutism explain Prussia's rise as a major European power: a proud, ambitious dynasty, the Hohenzollern family of Brandenburg; privileged but loyal nobles, whose estates formed the base of the economy and who dominated a downtrodden peasantry devoid of rights; an increasingly centralized and efficient bureaucracy; and the emergence of a large standing army. Austrian defeats in the Thirty Years' War and vulnerability to French and Turkish challenges left the way open for a rival to emerge among the German states. Bavaria and Saxony were not strong claimants for primacy among the German states, with weak nobilities and lacking effective bureaucracies or large armies. The Catholic clergy undermined the authority of the Bavarian dukes. The attention of Saxony, subject to Swedish influence, was often turned away from German affairs eastward toward the volatile world of Polish politics.



MAP 7.2 THE RISE OF PRUSSIA, 1648–1720 Territories acquired by Brandenburg-Prussia.

The small north-central German state of Brandenburg-Prussia, stretching across the sandy marshes between the Elbe and Oder Rivers, seemed an unlikely candidate to rival Austria and to grow into a powerful absolute state. In 1618, Brandenburg's ruling Hohenzollern dynasty inherited East Prussia, which lay 100 miles to the east of Brandenburg along the Baltic Sea, bordered by Poland. It then absorbed several smaller territories in the Rhineland, more than 100 miles to the west (see Map 7.2). Consisting of three diverse, noncontiguous realms, Brandenburg-Prussia lacked not only defensible frontiers but also the network of prosperous trading towns of other states in Germany. During the Thirty Years' War, Swedish and Austrian armies took turns ravaging Prussia. But with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), Prussia absorbed much of Pomerania on the coast of the Baltic Sea.

In one of the typical trade-offs that built absolute states in early modern Europe, Prussian nobles accepted Hohenzollern authority as a guarantee of their privileges. At the same time that Junkers were securing their privileges, Prussian peasants were losing their freedom, including their rights to free movement and often even to inheritance. During the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, they became serfs, legally bound to a lord's estate, and could be sold with the land on which they worked. A burgher in a Prussian town in 1614 described serfdom as "this barbaric and Egyptian servitude . . . in our territory serfdom did not exist fifty or a hundred years ago, but lately, it has been brought in on a large scale, with the help of the authorities." The authority of the Hohenzollerns, however, stopped at the gate of the

manor: Junkers retained rights of seigniorial justice over their peasants. Burgers, including merchants and skilled craftsmen, also stood powerless before nobles, in contrast to the middle class in England and the Dutch United Provinces, where they presented an imposing obstacle to the growth of absolutism.

Frederick William (ruled 1640–1688), the “Great Elector” of Brandenburg (so named because the ruler of Brandenburg had the right to cast a ballot in the election of the Holy Roman emperor), initially had neither a standing army nor the resources to raise one. Prussian nobles at first resisted the creation of a standing army, fearful that it might aid Frederick William in reducing their privileges. In 1653, Frederick William convinced the Junkers to grant him funds with which to build an army in exchange for royal confirmation of their privileges over the peasantry and their right to import goods without paying duties. Furthermore, the king agreed to consult the nobles on matters of foreign policy.

Then Frederick William turned to the business of augmenting state authority in his three fragmented territories. He extracted concessions from each of them, including more taxes and the right to recruit soldiers. The Hohenzollern family owned more than half of East Prussia, which provided considerable state revenue. The Great Elector established a centralized administrative bureaucracy, arguably the first modern efficient civil service in Europe. The Prussian bureaucracy was coordinated by an office with the suitably imposing name of “General Directory Over Finance, War, and Royal Domains.” Prussian towns, which paid a disproportionate percentage of taxes, lost their representation in the provincial Estates. In 1701, the Great Elector’s son Frederick III (his title as elector of Brandenburg) took the title of King Frederick I of Prussia (ruled 1688–1713).

Frederick William I (ruled 1713–1740), grandson of the Great Elector, succeeded Frederick III as elector of Brandenburg and king in Prussia. As a boy, Frederick William could not count to ten without his tutor’s assistance, but upon his succession to the throne he continued the centralizing policies of his grandfather and father. The bad-tempered “Sergeant-King” wore his officer’s uniform around the house and turned the royal gardens into a military training ground. Frederick William I was known for fits of screaming rage, calling everyone in sight “blockhead,” sometimes beating officials with a stick, and knocking out the teeth of several judges whose sentences displeased him. Officials known as “fiscals” went around to ensure that the king’s representatives served him well. But the king was astute enough to break with tradition by employing some commoners, many of whom served with uncommon loyalty and efficiency.

A Prussian official described, with some exaggeration, the feature that defined his country’s absolutism and the emergence of Brandenburg-Prussia as a power: “What distinguishes the Prussians from other people is that theirs is not a country with an army. They have an army and a country that serves it.” Military expenditures accounted for half of Prussia’s state budget.

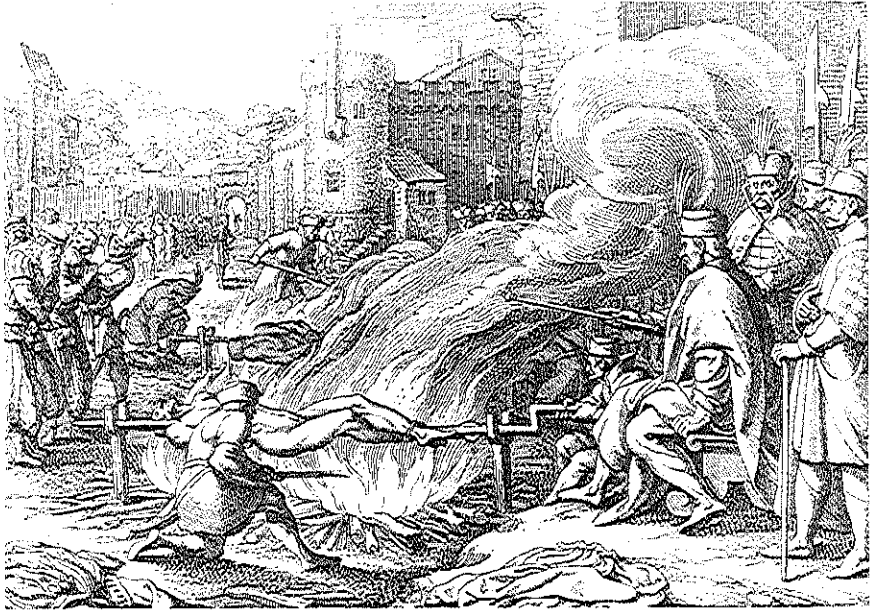
King Frederick William I increased the Prussian army from about 39,000 to 80,000 soldiers. He engaged only tall soldiers for his royal guard, those standing more than six feet in height, virtual giants at the time. One of his first royal acts was to abolish the luxury industries in Berlin, the capital, that catered to court and nobles, and to replace them with workshops that turned out military uniforms. The king ordered all young men in Prussia to register for military service and organized a procedure by which each regiment was assigned a specific region from which to recruit or conscript soldiers. Prussia established the first system of military reserves in Europe: soldiers drilled in the summer for two months. This meant that far more men in Prussia experienced military life than in any other country.

## THE RUSSIAN AND SWEDISH EMPIRES

Two other empires rose in eastern and northern Europe. Early in the sixteenth century, Muscovy was a relatively small state. It stood vulnerable to invasions by the Mongols, who had conquered what is now Russia in the thirteenth century, the Tatars of Crimea on the edge of the Black Sea, and by the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania. That kingdom and grand duchy had been joined in an enormous confederation in 1386, becoming the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania in 1569, with Warsaw becoming the capital in 1595. Twice the size of France, the confederation had only about 8 million inhabitants. Gradually, the duchy of Muscovy, where Orthodox Christianity had taken hold, emerged as the strongest of the states of Russia, absorbing Novgorod and other rivals and principalities late in the fifteenth century. By the early sixteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church had become centered in Moscow, which now claimed the title of the third Rome (the second was Constantinople). Muscovy's ruler Ivan III (ruled 1462–1505) began using the title "lord of all Russia," a title that offended the more powerful state of Poland-Lithuania. In 1500 and again twelve years later, Ivan brazenly attacked Poland-Lithuania, capturing the fortress town of Smolensk, which guarded the upper Dnieper River.

### *The Expansion of Muscovy*

The rise of Russia as an absolute state and empire began with the further expansion of Muscovy in the late sixteenth century. Tsar Ivan IV (ruled 1533–1584) became in 1547 the first to be crowned tsar of Russia. Muscovy conquered the Volga basin, driving back the nomadic Muslim Tatars, conquered the Don and Volga river basins to the south before they could be taken by either the Ottoman Empire or the Safavid rulers of Iran, absorbed parts of the Mongol states to the east, and unsuccessfully battled Poland-Lithuania for control of the Baltic territory of Livonia. Peasants, hunters, and fur traders expanded the domination of Muscovy into the cold and



Ivan the Terrible watching the beggars of Novgorod being tortured to death.

sparingly populated forest reaches of Siberia. Muscovy annexed the steppe khanates of Astrakhan and Kazan at mid-century, reaching the borderlands of China.

Ivan IV truly earned his sobriquet "the Terrible." He was raised in a world of violence marked by the bloody feuds of the Muscovite nobles, some of whom poisoned his mother when he was eight years old. Five years later, Ivan ordered a noble ripped apart by fierce dogs; as an adult, he had an archbishop sewn into a bearskin and thrown to hungry wolves. His goal was to assure himself a reliable military force and revenue. His means was to create a "service state" in which Muscovite nobles, the *boyars*, held their estates in exchange for agreeing to serve in an administrative or military capacity, thus receiving protection against peasant insurrections or other nobles. Allying with a group of military retainers, Ivan decimated noble families he viewed as too powerful or too slow to obey. Ivan alternated between moods of religious fervor, drunken passion, and stormy brutality. After being defeated in Lithuania in 1564, Ivan subjected his people to an eight-year reign of terror. He killed his own son with a massive blow to the skull and routinely ordered anyone who displeased him tortured to death.

Ivan's death in 1584 led, almost unimaginably, to an even worse period for Muscovy. The "Time of Troubles" (1598–1613) was a period of intermittent anarchy. Weak successors allowed nobles to regain control of the now sprawling country. Polish armies took Moscow in 1605 and again five years later. In 1613, the Assembly of Nobles elected the first tsar from the

Romanov family. The next two tsars restored order, regaining some of the lands lost to Poland-Lithuania and Sweden.

For most peasants, life itself was an endless "time of troubles" in the face of state taxation and brutalization at the hands of their lords. Revolts seemed endemic, some led by men who claimed to be the "true" tsar who would restore justice. One of the latter led a huge force of peasants, which captured several cities before being decimated in 1670.

Serfdom emerged as one of the fundamental characteristics of Russia. In times of dearth or crisis, many peasants traditionally had fled the region of Moscow to settle on the frontier lands of Siberia in the east or in Ukraine, standing between Russia, Poland-Lithuania, and a Tatar state on the Crimean peninsula—the word Ukraine itself means "border region." The resulting chronic shortage of rural labor, and the need to provide landed estates to loyal nobles, led the state in 1649 officially to establish serfdom, which had already become widespread in the late sixteenth century. The chronically indebted Russian peasants gave up their freedom in exchange for loans from the crown and from landlords. The Orthodox Church, a major landowner, also contributed to the expansion of serfdom. Nearly 90 percent of peasants in Russia were now bound to the land, assuring the state and nobles of a relatively immobile labor supply. In exchange for the tsar's support of this system, Russian nobles, like their counterparts in Prussia, pledged their service to the state.

In the meantime, the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania to the west, Swedish territories to the north, and the Ottoman Turks to the south blocked Russia's further expansion. The northern port of Archangel on the White Sea, its harbor frozen solid much of the year, offered Muscovy its only access to the sea. Polish territories included much of today's Belarus and Ukraine. Most landowners in Ukraine were Polish Catholics. Most Ukrainian peasants were, like Russians, Orthodox Christians and spoke a language similar to Russian. Peasant revolts rocked Ukraine in the late 1640s, and, after an uprising that drove back the Polish army, Ukraine accepted Russian sovereignty in 1654. Under the Treaty of Andrussovo (1667), which concluded a war with Poland, Russia absorbed Ukraine east of the Dnieper River. To the south, several peoples resisted incorporation into Russia as well as into Poland-Lithuania. These included Turks, Crimean Tatars (an ethnic Turkic group), and Cossacks, a warrior people living on the steppes of southern Russia and Ukraine.

### *The Rival Swedish Empire*

In the 1640s and 1650s, Swedish kings added to their dynastic holdings the regions of Denmark and Norway, Estonia and Lithuania, and West Pomerania in northern Germany. Like the Habsburg empire, the kingdom of Sweden encompassed a farraginous set of languages, including Swedish, Finnish, Latvian, Estonian, and German, the language of administration. Sweden was

a relatively poor state, but revenues from lucrative copper mines, the sale of Swedish iron and steel—the finest in Europe—and trade with Muscovy and then Russia and the West generated enough revenue to finance expansion. But expansion had its costs: Queen Christina (ruled 1632–1654) raised money by selling almost two-thirds of the royal lands, with Swedish nobles becoming the main beneficiaries. Swedish peasants, who had their own Estate in the Swedish Diet (assembly), demanded in vain the return of all alienated lands to the throne. The lower Estates did not dare challenge royal prerogatives: “We esteem Your Majesty’s royal power as the buttress of our liberties, the one being bound up in the other, and both standing or falling together.”

Emboldened by his fledgling empire, King Charles XI (ruled 1660–1697) in the 1680s established absolute rule in Sweden. He overcame the resistance of the wealthiest nobles by winning the support of their jealous colleagues of lesser means, as well as that of the burghers, clergy, and peasants, who increasingly sought royal protection against the most powerful nobles. His son Charles XII (ruled 1697–1718) became king at the age of fifteen. He snatched the crown during his coronation and placed it on his own head, and never convoked the Estates. Having been instructed only in warfare as a youth, he remained a headstrong military man who acted by impulse, not reflection, relying on military force to achieve Swedish ends. Instead of turning Sweden’s full military attention toward Denmark, which sought to recapture lost provinces from Sweden, he spent five years campaigning against Russia (see p. 277), a quest that took him into the Ottoman Empire, where he sought assistance against Russia. But during Charles XII’s reign, the crown added to its wealth by reclaiming land that had been sold to nobles in the previous decades. Gradually the Swedish monarchy established a bureaucracy and increased state revenue. But when Charles XII was killed in a war in Norway, leaving no heir, the Swedish nobility succeeded in imposing a parliamentary regime based on the prerogatives of the Estates and marked by complicated political struggles. In 1772, however, King Gustavus III (ruled 1771–1792) overthrew the parliamentary system, supported by some nobles, and reimposed absolute rule, albeit with a new constitution that reduced the power of the Senate and the Diet. Gustavus III portrayed himself as a “patriot king” protecting peasants from avaricious nobles. By then, however, Sweden’s empire was a fading memory and Gustavus’s aristocratic enemies organized his assassination in 1792.

### *Peter the Great Turns Westward*

In Western Europe so little was known about “barbaric” Russia that Louis XIV sent a letter to a tsar who had been dead for twelve years. Peter the Great (ruled 1682–1725) first imposed order on a state torn by bloody uprisings; then he created an enormous inland Russian Empire. Whereas Ivan the Terrible and several of his successors had been turned back by

Poland and Turkey, Peter's wars brought territorial acquisitions at the expense of Sweden, Poland, and the Turks. No European state more dramatically increased its territory than Russia, which expanded its frontiers at a rapid pace between the 1620s and 1740s. During the seventeenth century, Russian territory increased from 2.1 to 5.9 million square miles, even if in the distant reaches of north Asia this included little more than a series of trade routes.

As a boy growing up in the violent world of Russian court politics, Peter was schooled in all manner of guns, ballistics, and fortifications, and he was fascinated by sailing. Wearing a military uniform, he became tsar at the age of ten after a bloody struggle, which he witnessed firsthand, between the clans of his father's two widows. Seven years later, Peter killed members of his own family whom he perceived to be a threat to his rule.

Tsar Peter, who wore shabby clothes, worn-out boots, socks he had darned himself, a battered hat, and very long hair, stood close to seven feet tall and suffered from chronic back problems compounded by frenetic energy. Facial tics became most apparent when he was anxious or angry, which seemed to be most of the time, as he lashed out with clubs or fists. On several occasions he carried out public executions himself with an axe.

When he was twenty-five, Peter visited Western Europe incognito, dressed as a humble, giant workman. He preferred the company of ordinary people (his second wife was a Latvian peasant), enjoyed wood turning and fire fighting, and was most comfortable in simple Russian wooden houses. In the West, he shocked statesmen and nobles with his dress and coarse manners, snatching meat from dining tables. In London, Peter and his entourage virtually destroyed a rented house with wild parties—the tsar loved to dance and drink—leading an English bishop to worry aloud that this “furious man had been raised up to so absolute an authority over so great a part of the world.”

Peter was not an uncritical admirer of the West, but he borrowed Western technical knowledge as he sought to copy absolutism. In London he became fascinated by the use of mathematics in shipbuilding, and four months on the Dutch docks taught him ship carpentry. Impressed with the military strength and administrative efficiency of the Western powers, Peter emulated what he considered to be more “rational” organization. His turn toward the West represented a monumental cultural change that was secular in character. He ordered nobles to become educated, told his guards and officials to shave off their beards, encouraged the use of glasses, bowls, and napkins at meals, and ordered a Western book of etiquette translated into Russian. Furthermore, he ordered nobles to build Western-style palaces, and he demanded that women wear bonnets, petticoats, and skirts. German and, to a lesser extent, French became the language of court. Purchasing German and Italian paintings and statues, Peter began the royal collection that would later become the renowned Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and he also created the Russian Academy of Science and the Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation.





Peter the Great trimming the long sleeves of the boyars, symbolically reducing noble power in the Russian Empire.

Peter retained a marked ambivalence about the role of tsar, maintaining a “Drunken Assembly,” a kind of mock parallel government of people he trusted with strange statutes and rituals. Presided over by a pretend “prince-pope,” the “All Jesting Assembly” undertook boisterous, bawdy farces that mocked religious ceremonies. Yet Peter the Great’s reforms reflected the influence of Western absolutism on the Russian state. He believed that it was his role to help his people achieve the best living conditions possible. He thus came to a conception of the common good that he closely identified with Russian patriotism. At the time Peter became tsar, only three books considering nonreligious themes had been translated into Russian—a grammar book, a law code, and a military manual. Translations of Western books followed at Peter’s instigation, including works by John Locke. The tsar sent Russian students abroad to learn and, in doing so, helped move Russia away from a uniquely religious culture.

Fearing the military superiority of his rivals, Sweden and Poland-Lithuania, Peter now raised the first Russian standing army, gradually replacing Western mercenary soldiers with Russian troops by implementing military conscription in 1705 in order to have an infantry to complement Cossack cavalymen. Thereafter, one recruit—who would serve for life—had to be provided for every twenty peasant households. Peter brought in Western commanders to train his army and provided soldiers with uniforms and Western flintlock muskets with socket bayonets.

The bustling docks of Amsterdam and London had inspired Peter's interest in building first a river navy and eventually an oceangoing fleet. Skilled workers from Prussia and the Dutch Republic were hired to build warships, and Russian craftsmen were sent abroad to learn new skills. Russians gradually replaced Western Europeans as designers, builders, and ship commanders. By the end of the century, Russia had a naval fleet.

Military might, then, also underlay Russian absolutism. Even in peacetime, at least two-thirds of state revenue went to the army and navy. Peter forced nobles to send their sons to new military and engineering schools by decreeing they could not marry unless they did so. To pay for his army, the tsar tripled state revenues, imposing a direct tax on each male serf, or "soul." Landlords became responsible for the collection of these taxes. He established state monopolies on the production and sale of salt, oil, tobacco, rhubarb, and even dice, awarding the profitable right to collect these revenues to his favorite nobles, to "official" merchants, or to foreigners. The acquisition of new territories helped increase state tax revenues by three times. Hoping to expand Russian industry and attract gold and silver payments from abroad, Peter oversaw the exploitation of mines and the establishment of a metal industry in the Ural Mountains. But even absolute authority could not overcome a primitive transportation system, the lack of capital, and the absence of a sizable merchant class.

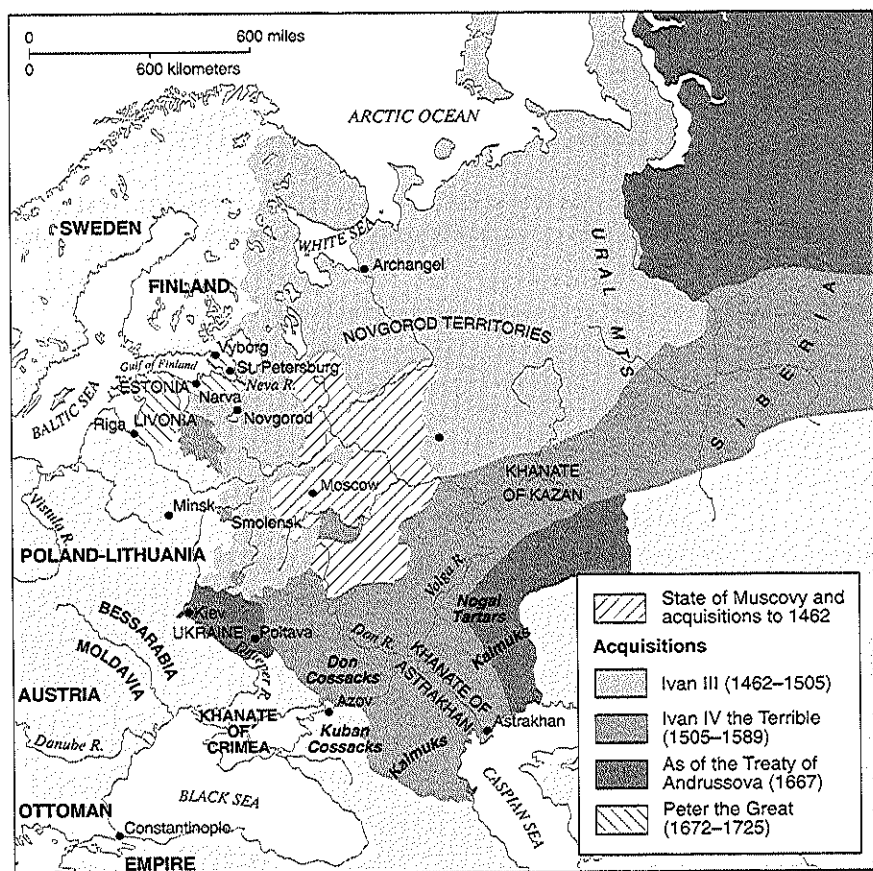
Peter succeeded in managing the often volatile politics of the court and the boyars, the 200 to 300 noble families (some of whom had as many as 40,000 serfs on their lands). While remaining an autocrat, Peter was nonetheless the first tsar to distinguish between his person as ruler and the state itself. Indeed, he made officials take two oaths, one to him and one to the state whose power he enhanced.

Tsar Peter reorganized the civil administration, dividing his domains into fifty administrative districts, each with a governor, although the effective reach of the state over such vast lands remained quite weak. He created a Senate, an administrative body charged with ruling in his absence during wartime and with overseeing state administration in times of peace. He experimented with councils, or committees, whose members could—if they dared—give him advice, representing the equivalent of government ministries. The tsar also put towns under the direct control of provincial governors, although they retained some measure of self-government. The Table of Ranks (1722) required all male nobles to enter state service and serve in the army, navy, or bureaucracy, and allowed commoners who rose through the bureaucracy or military to assume noble titles. Thus, the nobility also became an instrument of the state, and in Moscow nobles sought places on the boyar council (Duma), which met in the throne room of the palace.

The tsar's turn toward the West angered the old noble families of Moscow and the traditional Orthodox Church leaders, despite the fact that Peter himself remained quite pious. In particular, Peter faced the hostility of the Old Believers, dissidents who claimed authority over the tsars and resented

that Peter subordinated the church to his state. They also opposed Greek and Byzantine liturgical forms, as well as the growing influence of baroque art and religious architecture imported to Russia from Central Europe. They considered such reforms, which constituted a "Russian reformation," sacrilegious. For example, they believed that the beards the tsar had ordered shaved had distinguished Russians from people in the West. Peter placed the Orthodox Church fully under state control, first by not naming a new patriarch (the head of the Russian Orthodox Church) upon the death of the incumbent in 1700 and later by simply abolishing the patriarchate. Peter overcame four uprisings and several conspiracies directed against him. In 1716–1718, he suspected his son Alexei, who was influenced by churchmen and boyars who did not support the tsar's wars, of being involved in a plot with the Habsburg monarchy against him. Peter ordered him tortured to reveal his accomplices, who were executed, and Alexei died in a prison cell.

MAP 7.3 THE EXPANSION OF RUSSIA The state of Muscovy was expanded through the acquisitions of Ivan III, Ivan IV (the Terrible), and Peter the Great.

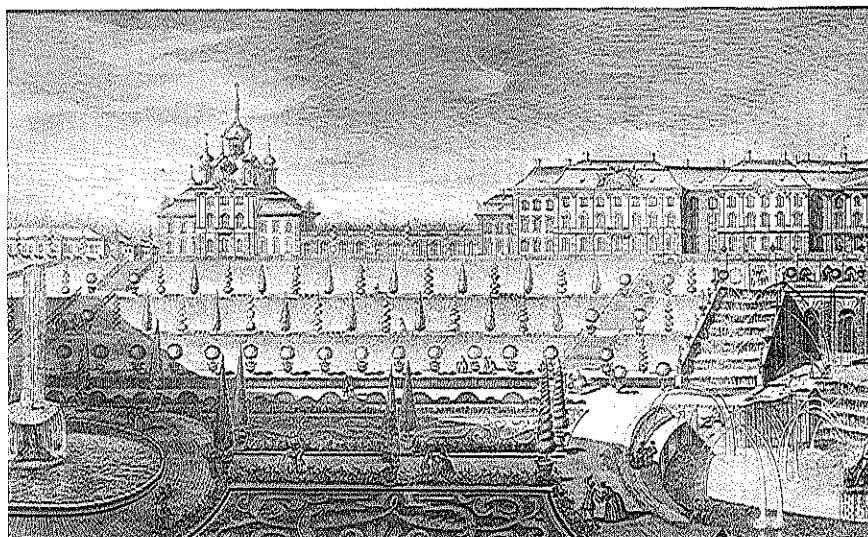


In the meantime, Peter the Great pushed back the neighbors who had blocked Muscovy's expansion: Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Turks. He added territory beyond the Ural Mountains, and along the Caspian Sea at the expense of the Turks (see Map 7.3). Peter dreamed of conquering the Turkish capital of Constantinople, which would give him control over its straits, the crucial passage between Europe and Asia leading to the Black Sea. Peter's new fleet sailed down the Don River in 1696, taking the Turkish port of Azov on the Sea of Azov, which gives access to the Black Sea. However, he was forced to surrender Azov back to the Turks after an unsuccessful war against them (1710–1711), thus remaining without access to the Black Sea.

Russia's role in European affairs, however, had remained minimal, despite its participation, with Habsburg Austria, Poland, and Venice, in the long series of wars against the Turks in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Russia joined Denmark and Saxony in attacking Sweden in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). The Russian ambassador in Vienna reported that once the news of Peter's victory arrived, "people begin to fear the tsar as formerly they feared Sweden." Peter's goal was to win a "window on the Baltic Sea" at Sweden's expense. The Swedes turned back the assault of a much larger Russian army at Narva (1700) in Estonia. But after Charles XII of Sweden passed up the opportunity to pursue the Russian army in order to invade Poland and Saxony, the Russian army conquered the mouth of the Neva River in 1703.

There Peter ordered the construction of a new capital city, where he forced nobles and wealthy merchants to build elegant townhouses. Saint

St. Petersburg, Peter the Great's new capital of the Russian Empire.



Petersburg offered a striking contrast to the chaos of tangled streets and shabby wooden buildings of Moscow, then by far the largest city in Russia. Built on coastal marshlands, Saint Petersburg reflected architectural ideas borrowed from the West, particularly Amsterdam. State offices, including army and military headquarters, occupied the centrally located islands. Symmetrical facades rose along the Neva River's south bank, near the shipyards, admiralty, and fortresses. Unlike Moscow, churches did not dominate the skyline of Saint Petersburg. Geometrically arranged boulevards, squares, gardens, and baroque palaces completed the tsar's capital, which itself became a reflection of absolute rule.

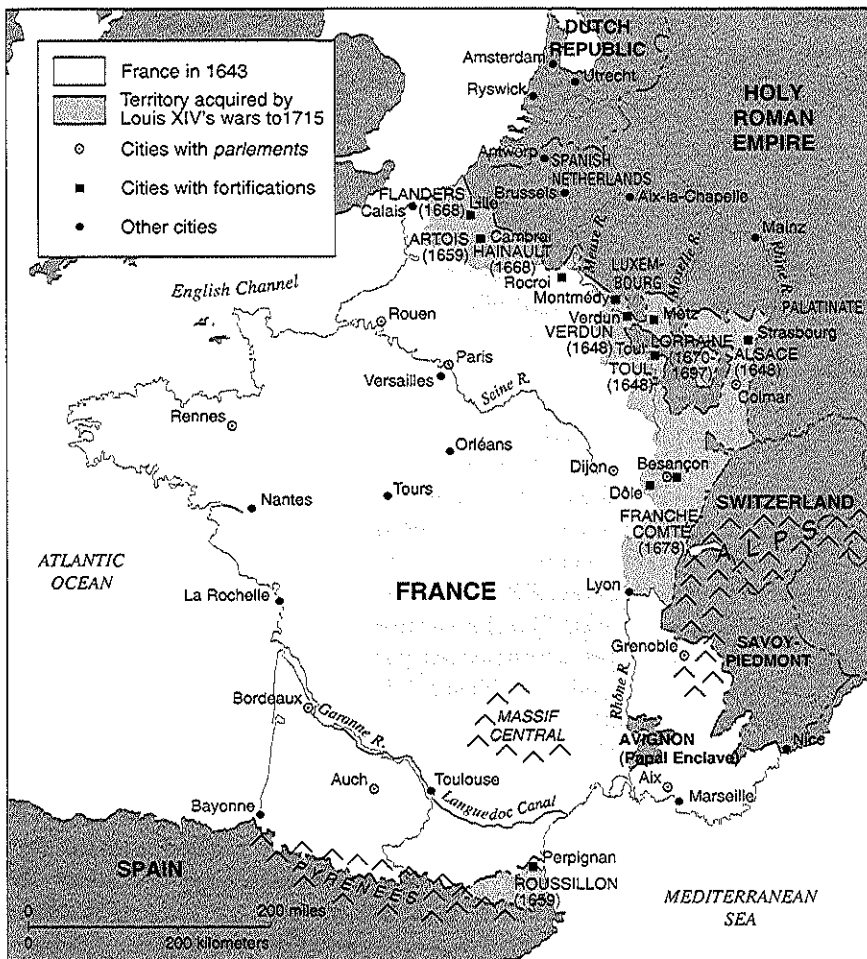
Russia supplanted Sweden as the Baltic region's dominant power. In 1709 at the Battle of Poltava, Peter's army turned back an invading Swedish army in Ukraine, a battle that marked the end of Sweden's status as a great power and its domination of northern Europe, allowing Peter to annex eastern Ukraine and bringing the Black Sea into sight. Five years later Russian troops raided Sweden for the first time. After losing its German and Polish territories, Sweden then entered a period of constitutional struggles, as the nobility tried to reassert economic and social prerogatives lost to the monarchy (see p. 271). This allowed Russia to solidify its expansion. The Treaty of Nystadt (1721) confirmed Russian primacy in the Baltic region, adding Estonia and Livonia (the southeastern part of modern Finland) to Peter's empire and bringing Russia ever closer to European affairs.

By the time of Peter's death in 1725, the territory controlled by absolutist Russia had increased sixfold since the time of Ivan the Terrible. The Russian Empire, thirty times bigger than France, had joined the European state system.

### *Louis XIV's Dynastic Wars*

As rulers of Russia, Sweden, Prussia, Austria, Turkey, and France sought to expand their territories, dynastic interests determined the choice of allies. Yet strong states were also likely to switch sides to gain the most beneficial terms from new allies. For example, in order to expand its influence in Central Europe, France needed an alliance with either Austria or Prussia. But inevitably such a coalition pushed the other German power into opposition, forcing it to look for allies against France. Usually this partner was England (Great Britain after the union of England and Scotland in 1707), France's rival in North America. Following the conclusion of hostilities that reworked borders, alliances frequently shifted, as rulers anticipated their next opportunity to conquer new lands.

Louis XIV was determined that territorial gain and prestige should be the measure of his greatness (see Map 7.4). France was the continent's richest, strongest, and most populous state. The king of France sought to expand his kingdom's borders to what he considered to be France's "natural" frontiers, that is, the Pyrenees Mountains to the south and the Rhine River to the east.



MAP 7.4 EXTENSION OF FRANCE'S FRONTIERS UNDER LOUIS XIV Louis XIV sought to expand his dynastic territories through wars fought between 1643 and 1715.

International conditions seemed conducive to such grandiose plans. England had been divided by civil war in the 1640s, and its restored monarch, Charles II, faced mounting political opposition at home (see Chapter 6). To the north, Sweden confronted a Danish threat to its control of the Baltic Sea. In Central Europe, the Austrian Habsburgs confronted other German princes, as well as threats from Poland-Lithuania and the Turks.

Louis XIV's "grand strategy" was to contain the two Habsburg powers, Spain and Austria, by initiating a series of wars. Each conflict followed the king's violation of a previous agreement or formal treaty, and was accompanied by the claim that French aggression was "just." Each war was to pay for itself: French armies would force local populations to offer "contribu-

tions." The Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659), ending essentially a quarter of a century of hostilities with Spain, established the lasting frontier between the two states and confirmed France's status as the preeminent European power.

France again went to war against Spain in 1667. Louis wanted to annex Spain's French-speaking Franche-Comté to the east and the Spanish Netherlands (Belgium) to the north. When French armies invaded the Spanish Netherlands, England, fearful that Flanders and its Channel ports would fall to France, joined the Dutch Republic, Sweden, and Spain to turn back Louis XIV's armies. By the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) in 1668, France annexed Lille and part of Flanders. Four years later, Louis XIV invaded the Dutch Republic after assuring English neutrality by making secret payments to King Charles II. The Dutch fended off the French by opening up the dikes to create a barrier of water (see Chapter 6). After several more years of indecisive fighting and negotiations, France absorbed Franche-Comté and tiny parcels of the Southern Netherlands. Still the king of France was not satisfied. He conquered Alsace and Lorraine beyond his eastern frontier. Despite the opposition of a wary alliance of Habsburg Austria, Spain, Sweden, and Saxony, Louis XIV ordered the invasion of the Palatinate, intending to secure the Rhine River. This initiated the War of the League of Augsburg (1688–1697). England and the Dutch Republic (an alliance solidified by the fact that William III of Orange now was king of England) and a number of other German states joined the coalition against France.

After hesitating, in 1692 Louis made a foolish attempt to invade England. Dutch and English ships drove the French fleet onto rocks off the coast of Normandy; the two sea powers then enforced an economic blockade of France. Louis XIV retaliated by turning French privateers loose on his enemies' ships. French defeats as well as rising opposition in the Dutch Republic and England to the cost of the war forced both sides to negotiate. The Treaty of Ryswick of 1697 confirmed French gains in Alsace, but also made clear that the other European powers would ally again if necessary to keep France from further territorial acquisitions in the Southern Netherlands and the German states in order to preserve the balance of power.

The question of the succession to the throne of Spain soon presented Louis XIV with the greatest temptation of all. The Habsburg King Charles II of Spain had no direct heir. Louis opposed the candidacy of the Habsburg archduke Charles of Austria (son of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I), hoping to end the virtual encirclement of France by Habsburg powers. Then Louis XIV, whose wife was the daughter of the late Philip IV of Spain, put forth his own claim to the throne.

When Charles II died in 1700, he left a will expressing his desire that his diminished empire remain intact, and that Louis XIV's grandson Philip of Anjou succeed him, but renounce any claim to the throne of France. However, on ascending the Spanish throne, Philip V (ruled 1700–1746) made

clear that he favored the interests of his imposing grandfather. The Austrian Habsburg ruler Leopold I refused to accept Charles II's will as valid and invaded the Italian territories of the Spanish Habsburgs.

Louis XIV refused to rule Philip V out of the line of succession to the French throne, so that if Philip's elder brother, the duke of Bourgogne, died without male issue, Philip would then inherit the throne of France, and the kingdoms of France and Spain would be joined. The matter became pressing in 1712, when smallpox struck the French royal family, leaving only Bourgogne's youngest son as heir to the French throne. If the future Louis XV had died then, Philip would have become heir to both kingdoms.

The French king's obvious interest in the possibility of the two thrones being brought together drew Great Britain into the war. The Dutch Republic again had reason to fear French occupation of the Spanish Netherlands. If the French opened up the Scheldt River to trade, Antwerp would reemerge as a commercial rival to Amsterdam. This vital link to the English Channel had been closed since the Dutch formally received independence from Spain in 1648, thus preventing ships from reaching Antwerp. The alliance against France also included Austria, Prussia, and Portugal. The War of the Spanish Succession reflected the fact that European wars were taking on a global dimension (see Chapter 6), as the powers fought for markets as well as prestige. As in the War of the League of Augsburg, British and French forces also battled in North America.

The Rock of Gibraltar being captured by the English fleet during the War of Spanish Succession.





France fought with Bavaria and Spain as allies. The English commander, the duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), raised an army of English, Dutch, and mercenary troops. In 1704, at Blenheim in southern Germany, the allied armies, aided by Habsburg Austrian troops, crushed a combined French and Bavarian force. Louis XIV's armies retreated behind the Rhine River. Winning victories in the Spanish Netherlands in 1708 and 1709, the allied armies also drove the French from the Spanish Netherlands and out of the Italian peninsula. The English fleet captured Gibraltar (1704), which guards the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. During the terrible winter of 1709–1710, France suffered military defeat and famine. The great kingdom of Louis XIV seemed on the verge of collapse.

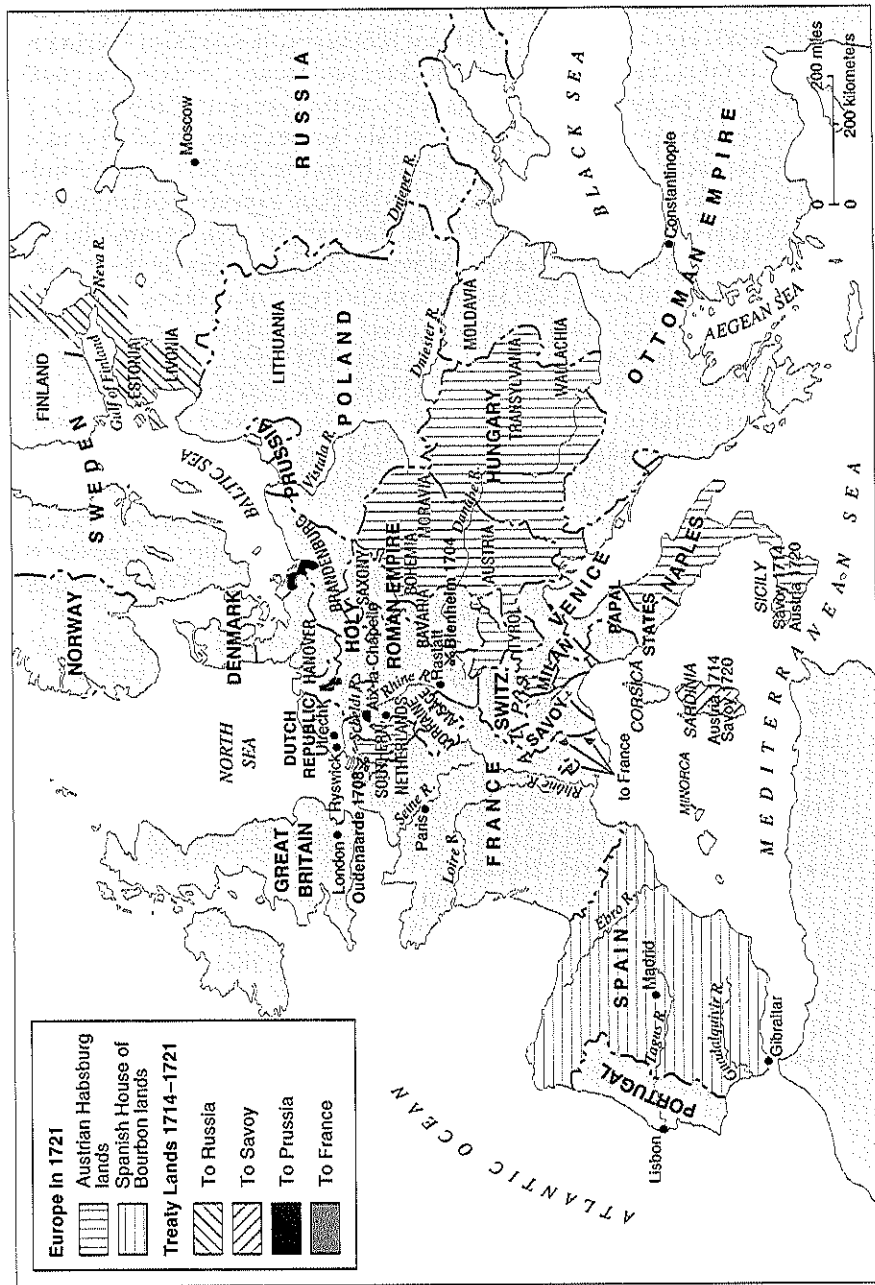
But the French and Spanish armies revived their fortunes. Dynastic changes, too, helped Louis XIV's cause. In 1711, Archduke Charles of Austria became Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI (ruled 1711–1740). Should France and Philip V of Spain be defeated, the British and Dutch now confronted the possibility that Charles might one day become king of Spain, reviving the dynastic union that had made the Habsburg dynasty Europe's strongest power during the first half of the seventeenth century. It was now in the interests of Great Britain and the Dutch Republic to bring the war to an honorable conclusion. Louis XIV, weakened by age and illness and suffering the financial burdens of the war, agreed to negotiate.

Under the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht (confirmed by the Treaty of Rastatt in 1714, when Emperor Charles VI accepted peace), Habsburg Austria received the Southern Netherlands as security against future French ambitions and annexed Lombardy and Naples, replacing Spain as the paramount power on the Italian peninsula (see Map 7.5). The decline of Spain, which had now lost all of its European possessions beyond the Pyrenees Mountains, continued unabated. In North America, France ceded Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Hudson Bay to Great Britain.

Louis XIV had reigned so long that on his death in 1715 the throne passed to his great-grandson, young Louis XV (ruled 1715–1774), with affairs of state in the hands of a regent. Philip V kept the throne of Spain, but the monarchies of Spain and France would remain separate. Louis XIV was defeated by more than powerful alliances mounted against him. Britain had proved better able to sustain long wars; its more developed commerce and manufactures provided greater tax revenues. The non-absolutist British state collected taxes more efficiently than the absolute monarchy of France, where tax farmers kept part of the take. Britain's interests remained overseas, dominated by lucrative commercial concerns that were protected by the Royal Navy. France's foreign policy had led to costly wars on the continent.

France had been the preeminent power in Europe at the time of the accession of Louis XIV; this was no longer true at his death. The king's reputation had fallen victim to unrestrained ambition. Perhaps a lingering sense of failure explains why Louis XIV tried to burn his memoirs shortly before his

MAP 7.5 EUROPE IN 1721 Territorial realignments in Europe after the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Treaty of Rastatt (1714), and the Treaty of Nystadt (1721).



death (although they were rescued from the fire). On his deathbed, Louis confessed with uncharacteristic insight that perhaps he had "loved glory too much."

## THE MODERN STATE

As they established absolute rule, the sovereigns of continental Europe constructed the modern state. While extending authority over their subjects and expanding their dynastic territories, they developed state bureaucracies and established large standing armies. They broke noble resistance to absolute rule, confirming their privileges in exchange for loyalty to the throne. This relationship between rulers and nobles thus remained essential to the functioning of most European states in the eighteenth century.

Following a period of relative stability, the structure of Western European society then began to change as the European economy entered a remarkable period of dynamic growth, particularly during the second half of the eighteenth century. This was the case above all in Britain, where the expansion of capital-intensive agricultural techniques, population growth, and a boom in manufacturing combined to begin the Industrial Revolution. The changing structure of society, in turn, would affect states by encouraging demands for political reform that began in the 1760s and 1770s and challenged the monopoly on political power by oligarchies and absolute rule itself. Traditional assumptions about science also came under attack. The methodology, discoveries, and culture of the Scientific Revolution helped create modern science.

