

**HISTORY 351:  
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY EUROPE  
PROFESSOR SOMMERVILLE**

**FALL 2004**

This course is about Europe in the seventeenth century - probably the most important century in the making of the modern world. It was during the 1600s that Galileo and Newton founded modern science; that Descartes began modern philosophy; that Hugo Grotius initiated international law; and that Thomas Hobbes and John Locke started modern political theory. In the same century strong centralized European states entered into worldwide international competition for wealth and power, accelerating the pace of colonization in America and Asia. The Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and others, all struggled to maintain and extend colonies and trading-posts in distant corners of the globe, with profound and permanent consequences for the whole world. They also fought one another in Europe, where warfare grew increasingly complex and expensive. To gain an edge against other powers in war, European governments invested in research in military technology, and the seventeenth century was consequently an age of military revolution, enabling Europeans from then on to defeat most non-European peoples relatively easily in battle.

The course will examine the main social, economic, intellectual, religious, cultural and political developments that occurred in the seventeenth century. It will begin by exploring European religious divisions at the opening of the seventeenth century - divisions that led to assassinations and to widespread warfare, especially in the Thirty Years War of 1618-48. This war devastated much of Germany, and for a while made Sweden a great power. It also profoundly affected France, Spain and the Netherlands. In France, Cardinal Richelieu and Jules Mazarin strengthened and centralized state power, though at times their policies came perilously close to disaster. In Spain, disaster struck, and the Spaniards lost their long war with the Dutch, who formed a prosperous independent republic. Spain also lost control of Portugal, and for a while it seemed that Catalonia too would break free from Spanish control.

In the seventeenth century, Spain declined but France rose to become the greatest power in Europe. In the second half of the century Louis XIV increased royal power at home and French power abroad, but at a very high cost in lives and cash. The France of Louis XIV threatened to dominate Europe, and to oppose him other powers laid aside their religious differences (which were becoming less important in the increasingly secularized and scientific atmosphere of the late 1600s) and joined forces against France. By the end of the century two powers in particular were rivaling France, namely Holland and England. Both benefited from the shift of Europe's economic center of gravity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. In both, agricultural and commercial changes were taking place which would soon pave the way for the Industrial Revolution.

Course Requirement details

## Schedule of Topics

### **SEPTEMBER**

#### Introduction:

An age of revolution

Geography, climate and economy

The balance of power

Government religion and ideas

#### The Thirty Years' War:

Onset

The Bohemian phase

The Danish interval

Swedish invasion

The final French phase

#### Europe and the aftermath of the Thirty Years War

#### Spain in the seventeenth century:

A nation in decline

Olivares and crisis

### **OCTOBER**

#### Early seventeenth-century France

Henry, Louis, and Richelieu

#### The Netherlands in the early seventeenth century

Dutch Religious and intellectual history

The Netherlands, 1600-1650

#### EXAM OCTOBER 15 (in class)

#### Early Stuart England

##### Russia:

The Time of Troubles

The first Romanovs

##### Poland:

Society and Government

The Deluge

#### Peasant Revolts,

the Fronde

and the English Civil War

## **NOVEMBER**

The “General Crisis” of the seventeenth century  
France under Mazarin and Louis XIV

Louis and the French Church

NOVEMBER 5: TERM PAPER DUE IN CLASS.

France against Europe: the wars of Louis XIV  
- to 1678  
- to 1697  
- to 1713

Europe in the later-seventeenth century:  
Austria,  
the rise of Prussia, Russia,  
Sweden, Britain & the Netherlands

EXAM NOVEMBER 19 (in class).

The Military Revolution:  
Arms & tactics,  
Ships & navies,  
Soldiers & government

The Intellectual Revolution:  
Intellectual trends,  
Absolutism and the divine right of kings,  
Contractarians, republicans & skeptics.

THANKSGIVING RECESS, NOVEMBER 24-28.

## **DECEMBER**

The Scientific revolution:  
Copernicus to Kepler,  
Galileo,  
Newton and other advances.

Scientific & philosophical method  
Mechanical philosophy

Beliefs and culture:

Doubts & Deism  
Witchcraft

FINAL EXAM: 10:05-12:05 A.M., MONDAY, 12/20; PLACE TO BE ANNOUNCED.