

New monarchies

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New Monarchies, which were very powerful centralized governments with unified inhabitants, start emerging in the mid-15th century. Factors responsible for this advance were the vast demographic and economic growth. Before these New Monarchies were formed there were many changes the new monarchs had to make: including weakening powerful rivals, increasing revenue, unifying the country, and strengthening the power of the king and his bureaucracy. Three countries successful in strengthening themselves were France, England and Spain. To create and sustain a new monarchy kings have to introduce many changes.

At the early 15th century there was political fragmentation, where countries were not unified and had many separate rulers governing small areas. At that time the nobility and the church rose to be the thriving powers. Now the king had to effect changes to unify and strengthen his monarchy. He would have to weaken his rivals, the church and nobility, and transfer the authority to himself. He would also have to increase his funding by either increasing taxes, or selling government offices. Many kings did both. Many factors were responsible for the New Monarchies rise from the years 1450-1550.

Firstly, there was a giant demographic growth with an increase in population by fifty percent; this huge growth caused an increase in the amount of people paying the king's taxes. This demographic growth led to an economic growth because there was a greater demand, which stimulated the economy. The major economic growth was where people began taking bigger risks and forming partnerships, enabling large sums of money to be invested. People became wealthier causing a bigger consumption of goods and luxuries, making merchants and traders wealthy.

Merchants were then paying larger amounts in tariffs, increasing the king's revenue. The rulers of England, France, and Spain all had to weaken their rivals, the church and nobility, to constrict power to themselves. England did not have as hard a time in weakening the nobles because Henry VII comes to power after the War of Roses, which was between two noble families, his family, the House of Lancaster and his rivals, the House of York. Moreover, England had a very short supply of nobility, ranging from 50-60 families.

Henry VII hires the gentry, the class below nobility, to serve as Justices of Peace, who enforce the king's law and collect taxes; this weakened the power of nobility and made sure the king's laws were followed. Henry VII also increases the power of his royal court, the Star Chamber, via giving them cases that previously went to nobility: thus increasing his own power and decreasing the power of nobility. Henry VII concocted numerous schemes to increase his revenue. Since he needed the parliament's consent before he could increase taxes, he institutes a different application, he increases fines for criminals.

This has a dual effect, a decrease in crime and increase in his treasury. Furthermore, he sells monopolies, which fetched large sums because those in possession could sell their products at any price, without fear of competition. Unlike England's simple modification, France had a difficult time weakening its nobles, the aristocrats. Before the mid-1400s the aristocrats were very powerful, serving as independent rulers with their own laws and courts. Francis I sold offices in government, many of which come with a title. This increases the number of men in the class of nobles enabling France to dilute the aristocracy with men loyal to him.

France has a slightly different way of doing things; Frances I sells positions of government, and centralizes tax collection under one agency. France also institutes new taxes. Spain on the other was unified with the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon. They brought stability to the kingdoms that became the basis for the unification of Spain. After a struggle for Isabel to claim her right to the throne, she reorganized the governmental system, brought the crime rate to the lowest it had been in years, and pulled the kingdom out of the enormous debt her brother had left behind.

Her reforms and those she made with her husband had an influence that extended well beyond the borders of their united kingdoms. Isabella and Ferdinand are known for completing the Reconquista, ordering conversion or exile of their Muslim and Jewish subjects and in supporting and financing Christopher Columbus' 1492 voyage that led to the opening of the "New World". Together they utilized a prenuptial agreement to lay down their terms. During their reign they supported each other effectively in accordance to their joint motto of equality: " Tanto monta, Isabel como Fernando", (" They amount to the same, Isabel and Ferdinand").

Isabella and Ferdinand's achievements were remarkable: Spain was united, or at least more united than it ever was, the crown power was centralized, at least in name, the Reconquista was successfully concluded, the groundwork for the most dominant military machine of the next century and a half was laid, a legal framework was created, the church reformed. Even without the benefit of the American expansion, Spain would have been a major European power. Columbus' discovery set the country on the course for the first modern world power.

All three countries had very separate methods of dealing with the problem of the church and its power. Henry VIII, under the advice of Thomas Cromwell, decides to break off from the Catholic Church and start his own religion, the Anglican Church. Francis I, on the other hand, decides on a more simplistic approach and forces the pope to sign the Concordat Of Bologna in 1516, which gave the king power to appoint whomever he wants for bishops and other religious positions and lessened the power of the papacy.