



**Beyond Elizabeth and  
Shakespeare**

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe

1566—1610



FORGOTTEN SEA

Excudebat Hugo Harlonii  
anno societatis LI



If You have Questions or Want a PDF of these Notes,

PLEASE CONTACT

**Zonkheer Hugo van Harlo**

*HugovanHarlo.com*

*Email: HvHarlo@WillPhillips.org*    *Facebook: Hugo van Harlo*



SECOND PRINTING

*Prepared for WINTERKINGDOM, The XXVIII Day of January, 2017*

*In The BARONY OF NORTHKEEP, the Kingdom of Ansteorra*

1.

## Defining the "Late 16th" Century in Europe

¶ Periodization of history is a difficult task, especially across large geographic areas. This is undoubtedly the case for finding tidy beginning and ending points for a discussion of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century across the whole of Europe.

¶ These notes adhere to a timeline from 1566 to 1610, as these provide some convenient historical events to reference at the beginning and the ending of the survey.

¶ Within the "pre-seventeenth century" research and reenactment context of the SCA, concluding this survey a decade into that century may be a point of contention. However, history rarely provides clean, neat cutoffs at the ends of centuries to segment research by. So it is with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and 1610-1611 makes for an interesting ending point for the reasons that follow.

### 1.1 STARTING IN 1565-1666

- ☛ First signs of Dutch Revolt which would eventually drag in mercenaries from all over the Continent
- ☛ Death of Suleman the Magnificent,
- ☛ New Pope: Pius V, who would have a significant influence and legacy via the Counter Reformation
- ☛ Aftermath of the Great Siege of Malta, in which the Turks were defeated and prevented from using the island to launch further attacks into the belly of Europe.
- ☛ Birth year of the future kings James VI & I and Sigmund III Vasa of Sweden and the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth

### 1.2 ENDING IN 1610-1611

- ☛ Elizabeth of England, Phillip II of Spain, Henri IV of France, and Charles IX of Sweden all dead
- ☛ Twelve Year's Truce between the United Provinces and Spain and the de facto recognition of Dutch independence
- ☛ Pause in the ongoing Swedish-Polish wars
- ☛ Beginning of the Wars of Julich Succession, which set the stage for the Thirty Years War
- ☛ Printing of the "King James" Bible

## 2.

## Key Social Changes and Movements

¶ While the following developments are called out individually, note how dependent and interconnected many are with the others. For example, it is likely the Protestant Reformation could not have occurred without the spread of the printing press.

### 2.1 THE RISE OF THE PRINTING PRESS

¶ The spread of the printing press and movable type fundamentally changed the course Europe – and fundamentally of all human history. Information was now disseminated faster and to a larger audience than ever before. Protestants of varying creeds used print to capture the minds of the public more broadly than travelling preachers ever could. Early scientists like Tycho Brahe could disseminate their learnings and discoveries to like minds – and learn from the same. And lastly, the rise of popular literature in the form of the novel, the printed play, and collections of poetry and songs fascinated both noble and common.

- Immense scale: over 200 million books by 1600
- Mass communication through pamphlets and placards
- First news periodicals in pamphlet form originate in Germany in the early 17th, while the first “broadsheet” newspaper would come from the Netherlands in 1618

### 2.2 FALLOUT FROM THE REFORMATION

¶ Luther died in 1546, but the frenzied movement he unleashed continued to mature across Europe, though by the late 16<sup>th</sup>, clear factions had emerged within Protestantism: Lutherans and Calvinists. Aided by the Jesuits, the Roman Catholic Church set about a successful Counter-Reformation. This division within Christendom set the stage for decades of war across Europe, often times serving as a pretext for underlying issues.

- Continuing translations of the Bible, catechisms, and hymns into local, vernacular languages
- Mob persecution, judicial punishments, and executions of religious dissenters

- ☛ Religious tolerance rarely the goal: the definition of right, correct religion was (i.e. everyone still hates the Anabaptists), but the Warsaw Confederation (1573) was a significant event for religious toleration

### 2.3 EARLY MODERN SOCIETAL CHANGES

¶ Evolutions in how society, justice, and economics reverberated across society. The development of professional jurists and bureaucrats by way of the centralization of governments challenged the traditional role of nobility on one front. While on another, global trade and mercantilism contributed to the rising wealth – and influence - of the merchant class who looked to emulate the nobility.

- ☛ First modern stock exchange in 1602 in Amsterdam
- ☛ Trade across Europe, Asia, and the New World
- ☛ Silver from the New World lead to massive inflation

### 2.4 CHIVALRY AND WARFARE EVOLVING

¶ The maturation of gunpowder weapons (both large canon and shoulder-fired firearms like the arquebus and musket) combined with the growing ability to field larger armies were influencing factors in the warfare's transition into the era of "pike and shot." The nature of warfare saw the role of nobility change from heavily armed feudal gendarmes to entrepreneurial officers paid by the state or princely court coffers.

- ☛ Heavily armed lancers existed alongside pistol and carbine armed cavalry clad in a mixture of plate armor – even such seemingly-anachronistic troops as mounted crossbowmen persevered in small numbers
- ☛ The "shot" was the principle offensive weapon of the infantry, defended by pikemen with a vanguard of two-handed swordsmen, halbeirers, or sword-and-shield men
- ☛ Continuum from mercenaries (e.g. landsknechts) through greater state control to standing professional armies via the "military revolution"
- ☛ Tournaments continued and become ornate and theatrical
- ☛ Growth in formal schools of swordsmanship

### 2.5 THE AGE OF EXPLORATION AND THE EVE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

¶ The European discovery of the Americas and the 1498 discovery of a maritime route to India opened up the world for exploration, and the popular spread of Humanist teachings increased the interest to learn about the world and how it works. Though the scientific breakthroughs of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and the

*Notes*

Enlightenment were still some time away, the early scientists, their breakthroughs, creations, and books of this time set the stage for what was to come.

- ☛ Remarkable early scientists: Galileo Galilei, Tycho, and Bernardino Telesio & Francis Bacon
- ☛ Inventions: telescope, microscope, and thermometer
- ☛ Furthering explorations of the Americas
- ☛ Establishment of a cross-Pacific route from Mexico to the Philippines – and later, Japan – making long sea voyages more common and reliable.

## 3.

## ☛ Survey of Europe

¶ Europe of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century was incredibly interconnected. People, to ideas, to trade goods crisscrossed the continent from the Mediterranean to the Baltic and from the Atlantic to the Ottoman-steppe frontier.

¶ This lecture will focus on the core of Europe and leave discussions of the periphery - the Ottoman Turks, Muscovy, the steppe, North Africa, and European endeavors in the New World - to others.

### 3.1 THE BRITISH ISLES

¶ The Elizabethan Era has long been known as a golden age for England where English literature (via Shakespeare and Marlowe) flourished, the Reformation took root, and English was relatively stable and peaceful. It contended with the native Irish and Spain vis-à-vis the Low Countries and privateers. To the north, Scotland underwent a Calvinist Reformation and cultural flowering of its own under James VI, who later became James I of England in the “Union of the Crowns” in 1603.

- ☛ Ireland: complicated power politics exacerbated by Tudor English military intervention lead to Tyrone’s Rebellion
- ☛ Union of the Crowns in 1603 under James VI and I leads to the term “Great Britain” which we’re all familiar with
- ☛ Tense socio-religious atmosphere – lead to numerous assassination plots against both Elizabeth and James

### 3.2 THE LOW COUNTRIES AND THE DUTCH REVOLT

¶ The Low Countries is a term to broadly describe the collection of seventeen counties, duchies, and other fiefs that had been united into a cohesive, personal union under Charles V. Yet, they still viewed themselves as fiercely independent domains governed under particular regional laws complete with independent rights and freedoms that were recognized by their sovereign.

¶ The region chaffed at the Habsburg efforts at government centralization even under the native Flemish Emperor Charles V. When Charles' son, Phillip II, came to power and continued his father's policies of centralization and introduced strict anti-heresy laws, it was only a matter of time until the Seventeen Provinces erupted into an open revolt. This Dutch Revolt would turn into the Eighty Years War and see the northern seven provinces ultimately succeed from Habsburg Spain to form the Dutch Republic.

- Low Countries: densest population in Europe, wealthy, home of artists and many printing presses
- Evolving, conflicting sense of national Netherlandish identity versus many smaller, provincial identities
- International nature of the conflict: mercenaries from France, German states, Italian states, Hungary, England, Scotland, and Ireland all fought in the Low Countries
- Prince William of Orange and the office of stadtholder
- 1576 Pacification of Ghent, 1579 Union of Arras and Union of Utrecht, 1581 Act of Abjuration
- Terminology: "Holland" vs "Netherlands" vs "Dutch"

### 3.3 FRANCE AND ITS WARS OF RELIGION

¶ The persecution of Protestantism which had continued for decades erupted into open war as a result of the 1562 Massacre of Vassy. Over thirty years of brutal warfare between the Calvinist Huguenots and the Catholics (and between various noble factions vying for the crown) would follow, costing the lives of untold thousands and seeing the assassination of two kings: Henri III and Henri IV.

- French Wars of Religion were incredibly bloody. See St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 as an example.
- Catherine de' Medici as power behind the throne through the influence she wielded through her sons, the kings Charles IX (d. 1574) and Henry III (d. 1589) – both of whom died without direct heirs.
- 1589 Conversion of Henri of Navarre from Protestantism to Catholicism and the 1598 Edict of Nantes aided peace.

### 3.4 THE IBERIAN PENINSULA AND THE NEW WORLD

¶ Phillip II - the Habsburg but thoroughly Spanish king - ruled over the growing Spanish empire until late in the 16th Century. Under his leadership, Spain waged war against the rebellious Low Countries, France, and England, but not without having to declare bankruptcy multiple times.

- ☛ Expansion across the New World
- ☛ 1580 unification with Portuguese crown
- ☛ The Armada: complicated
- ☛ Also complicated: Catholicism within the Spanish state
- ☛ Spanish literary tradition

### 3.5 ITALIAN AND GERMAN STATES

¶ With the great Italian wars between France and the Habsburgs drawn to a close in 1559, the Italian peninsula entered a long period of Spanish-dominated internal peace. North of the Alps, the panoply of German states continued to wrestle with the changes to religion and government initiated by the Reformation that would culminate in the disastrous and devastating Thirty Years War in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

- ☛ The Peace of Augsburg as social/religious buffer
- ☛ The Ottomans as an existential threat
- ☛ Rudolf II's court in Prague was a center of art, science, and learning. However, his disinterest in politics and religion and poor leadership impacted the whole of Europe.
- ☛ Seeds of the Thirty Years War sewn

### 3.6 POST-KALMAR UNION SCANDANAVIA

¶ The late 16th century in Scandinavia can be framed as a region seeking a new equilibrium. The Kalmar Union came to an end in the 1520s through Swedish rebellion and the election of Gustav I Vasa as king, whose sons would rule through the end of the century. Denmark-Norway continued to clamor for its old power across the Baltic and plunged the region into the Northern Seven Year's War until 1570.

- ☛ The Swedish House of Vasa after Gustav I: Erik XIV (d. 1577), John III (d. 1592), Sigismund III (deposed 1599), Charles IX (d. 1611)
- ☛ Sigismund III vs. Duke Charles: civil war due to Polish relations, absenteeism royalty, and the king's Catholic faith
- ☛ Northern Seven Year's War of 1563-1570: Frederick II of Denmark waged war on Sweden, Poland, and Lubeck
- ☛ Cudgel War: Finnish rebellion lead by Jaakko Ilkka

### 3.7 POLAND - LITHUANIA AND THE OTTOMAN FRONTIER

¶ The 1569 Union of Lublin created the first constitutional state in Western history: the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth. It would quickly become one of the most powerful kingdoms in Europe and a counterbalance to the expansion of the Ottomans in the East. To the south a semi-independent Transylvania and divided Hungary languished amid Habsburg meddling, Ottoman invasions, and the internal politics of their nobility.

- Successful reigns of Stephen Báthory (d. 1586) and Sigismund III (d. 1632)
- 1570 Treaty of Speyer and the incorporation of eastern Hungarian lands into the new *Principality* of Transylvania
- Complex internal politics and the aims of Emperor Maximilian II for the thrones of Eastern Europe
- Crimean Tartar slave raids
- *Vlad Dracula is the middle 15th, not late 16th!*



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

¶ Due to the very broad scope of this topic, a fully exhaustive bibliography is difficult to supply. However, the following books and articles will be able to point interested scholars in the right direction for further reading and research.

Christianson, J. R. *On Tycho's Island: Tycho Brahe and His Assistants, 1570–1601*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Crowley, Roger. *Empires Of The Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008.

Deen, Femke, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders. *Pamphlets And Politics In The Dutch Republic*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Early Modern Print Culture in Europe - *European Review*. Volume 23, Issue 03. July 2015.

Fodor, Pál and Géza Dávid. *Ottomans, Hungarians, And Habsburgs In Central Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Frost, Robert I. *The Northern Wars*. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000.

Notes

## Notes

- Greengrass, Mark. *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517-1648*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015
- Hale, J. R and Geoffrey Best. 1998. *War And Society In Renaissance Europe, 1450-1620*. Stroud: Sutton.
- Heath, Ian. *The Armies Of England, Scotland, Ireland, The United Provinces, And The Spanish Netherlands ; 1487 – 1609*. St. Peter Port, Guernsey: Foundry Books, 1997.
- "Jaakko Ilkka". *Jaakkoilikka.Fi*, 2016. <http://www.jaakkoilikka.fi/Jaakko%20Ilkka%20-%20Rebellion%20.htm>.
- Keul, István, *Early modern religious communities in East-Central Europe: ethnic diversity, denominational plurality, and corporative politics in the principality of Transylvania (1526–1691)*, London: BRILL, 2009.
- Lockhart, Paul Douglas. *Denmark, 1513-1660*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Love, Ronald S. *Maritime Exploration In The Age Of Discovery, 1415-1800*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Malcolm, Noel. *Agents Of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015
- Marvin, Carolyn and Elizabeth Eisenstein. "The Printing Press As An Agent Of Change: Communications And Cultural Transformations In Early-Modern Europe". *Technology And Culture* 20, no. 4 (1979): 793. doi:10.2307/3103643.
- Pálffy, Géza. "The Habsburg Defense System in Hungary against the Ottomans in the Sixteenth Century: A Catalyst of Military Development in Central Europe." In *Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1500-1800*. History of Warfare series. Edited by Brian L. Davies. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012.
- Parker, Geoffrey. *The Army Of Flanders And The Spanish Road, 1567-1659*. Cambridge [England]: University Press, 1972.
- Parker, Geoffrey. *The Dutch Revolt*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Parker, Geoffrey. *Imprudent King: A New Life of Phillip II*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Serjeantson, Richard. "Francis Bacon and the 'Interpretation of Nature' in the Late Renaissance," *Isis* (Dec 2014) 105#4 pp: 681-705.
- Wiesner, Merry E. *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789* (Cambridge History of Europe) (2006).