

Topic 1.5: The New Monarchies

OVERVIEW

Between 1450 and 1600, the **New Monarchs** began to construct **centralized states** and began to take on some of the powers that had been traditionally held by the nobility, such as tax collection and maintaining armies. New Monarchs also exercised **control over religion**, claiming the authority to determine the religion of all of their subjects.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The New Monarchies represent an important transition between decentralized feudal institutions of Medieval Europe and the absolutist nation states that would become prevalent in Europe in the seventeenth century. The **centralization** of authority helped facilitate European colonial ventures during the Age of Exploration and contributed to the later development of **national identity**.

KEY TERMS

Conversos

Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity in order to escape persecution were known as *conversos*. Muslims who converted were called *moriscos*.

Spanish Inquisition

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain established the Spanish Inquisition in order to identify and punish **heretics** (Christians who held beliefs contrary to Catholic teaching), as well as *conversos* and *moriscos* who had made insincere conversions.

Star Chamber

Henry VII of England set up an independent court of justice where high-profile defendants could be tried in a setting where they could not use their influence to escape justice. It became known as the Star Chamber because of the stars painted on the ceiling. Though initially popular, it later became associated with secrecy and corruption.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

*The New Monarchs of Spain and England were **similar** because...*

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain asserted control over the religious life of their subjects, as did Henry VIII and Elizabeth I of England, who also insisted on religious uniformity.

*The New Monarchs of Spain and England were **different** because...*

In Spain, the monarchs used their power to defend and strengthen the Catholic religion, while the English monarchs cut ties with the Catholic Church in order to assert a more independent religious authority..

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SPAIN: THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS

When **Ferdinand of Aragon** married **Isabella of Castile**, they united the two largest Christian kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula, laying the foundation for modern Spain. In 1492, they completed the **Reconquista** when they conquered Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain.



Wedding Portrait of Ferdinand and Isabella

The Catholic Monarchs, as they were known, mandated that all of their subjects profess and practice the Catholic faith. They expelled Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Christianity and established the **Spanish Inquisition** to keep an eye on recent converts to make sure that they did not continue to practice their former faiths in secret.

Ferdinand and Isabella financed Christopher Columbus' voyages, which led to the establishment of the **Spanish Empire** in the Americas. Spanish conquests in the Americas generated a new source of wealth, elevating Spain to the status of a major power in Europe during the sixteenth century.

ENGLAND: THE TUDOR DYNASTY

In 1485, Henry Tudor found himself victorious at the Battle of Bosworth Field, ending the **Wars of the Roses**, a disastrous series of civil wars between the rival noble houses of York and Lancaster. Henry Tudor was crowned as **Henry VII**, the first English monarch of the Tudor Dynasty. As a New Monarch, he made reforms that strengthened the English monarchy.

Henry VII prohibited noble families from retaining private armies, reducing the chances of another civil war, and set up an efficient system of centralized tax collection, which built up his royal treasury. To centralize the administration of justice, he established the **Star Chamber**, a court of justice where nobles could not use their influence to manipulate justice. He also began building a navy, which would later be useful to his granddaughter.

Henry VIII continued to build a New Monarchy in England when he left the Catholic Church and, with the support of Parliament, proclaimed himself the Supreme Head of the **Church of England** (also known as the Anglican Church). He sold the Church's lands to bring new wealth to the monarchy.



Portrait of Elizabeth I commemorating the defeat of the Spanish Armada

Although Henry's eldest daughter, **Mary I**, briefly restored England to Catholicism, his second daughter, **Elizabeth I**, firmly established England as a Protestant nation. The **Elizabethan Religious Settlement** required all subjects take communion in the Church of England, which would retain some Catholic features. In 1588, Elizabeth's navy defeated the **Spanish Armada**, establishing England as a naval power.

THE RISE OF THE COMMERCIAL ELITE

The increase in global trade created wealth not only for monarchs, but also for merchants, who formed an emerging **commercial elite** during the early modern period. The growing wealth and political influence of the professional class would further undermine the power of the traditional nobility. In regions without centralized monarchies, such as Italy and the Netherlands, commercial elites were directly involved in governing.