

The Rise of European Monarchies in the Late Middle Ages
Najm

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The Source of All Power

- We have learned since the beginning of the last unit, discussing feudalism and monarchies, that land is the source of all power in this governance structure. The land is at the center of the relationships between the monarch, the owner of all lands in his demesne, and the nobility that claims parcels of that land based on a relationship of mutual obligations of military, administrative, and legal support.
- This relationship devolves into micro-arrangements between the king's chiefs, the dukes, earls, and barons, and their tenants. All these relationships mirror each other at the macro and micro levels.

The Source

- Today, we will explore an idea by looking at the underpinnings of the monarchies, i.e., the power structures that dominated the sociopolitical landscape of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, which we are studying in this unit.
- Broadly speaking, if the monarchies must function, survive, and flourish, the prime mover of their power, limited ownership of the land, and the relationships it generates, shall remain in place. If this foundational equation changes, the socioeconomic ecosystem will acquire new dimensions.

The Source

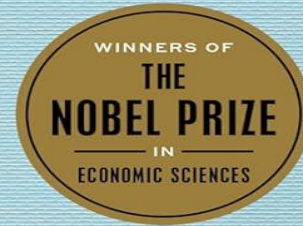
- I will digress here for a moment to briefly introduce a framework that would help us make sense of the situations we are trying to understand.
- In 2024, three American scholars won the Nobel Prize for economics. They were Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson. Acemoglu and Johnson taught at MIT, Robinson at Harvard.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

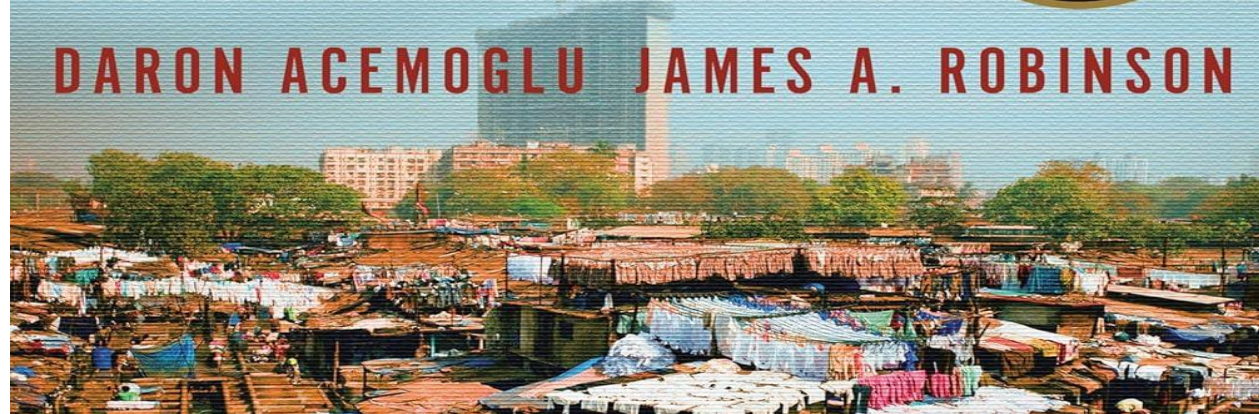
“Truly awesome . . . brilliant in its simplicity and power.”—Steven Levitt, coauthor of *Freakonomics*

**THE ORIGINS OF
POWER, PROSPERITY, AND POVERTY**

**WHY
NATIONS
FAIL**



DARON ACEMOGLU JAMES A. ROBINSON



Why Nations Fail

- The Nobel Committee announcement defined their joint contribution as demonstrating “the importance of societal institutions for a country’s prosperity. Societies with a poor rule of law and institutions that exploit the population do not generate growth or change for the better. The laureates’ research helps us understand why.”
- Acemoglu and Robinson joined minds to explain all this in easy terms in the book that you saw in the slide above, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 2012.

Why Nations Fail?

- Acemoglu and Robinson argue, “... while economic institutions are critical for determining whether a country is poor or prosperous, it is politics and political institutions that determine what economic institutions a country has.” (P 43). One imperative condition for economic growth, they maintain, is political centralization, a component that the post-Roman Empire Europe lacked.
- How must nations not fail, then? Acemoglu and Robinson tell us that they must establish a central authority and then secure institutions that are least extractive, combined with inclusiveness in political representation and economic policy.

The Land

- Following Acemoglu and Robinson, we will see that England and France, with similar feudal backgrounds, developed their institutions differently.
- For England, our first example, I will cite from Andro Linklater's *Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership* (Bloomsbury, New York, 2023), abbreviating the author as AL before the page number.
- After France, we will look at the Venetian Republic, which had a different background, pattern of growth, and orientation toward the future.

The Church

- For both England and France, we learned that the monarchs preferred asserting their authority over different power centers.
- Defying the church was one example of this growing trend. The French were ahead of their English counterparts in terms of asserting royal authority. Philip the Fair (IV) 1285-1314, had defied the Papal Bulls to tax ecclesiastical lands and made church officials subject to the King's law and justice.
- Henry VIII will challenge the Church differently in 1531.

The Land

- While discussing the Black Death, we learned that one of the economic impacts of the Great Plague was that the way landowners used the land changed. They preferred enclosing their land for cattle and dairy farming. Besides the usage, the range of landowners began to change.
- Linklater finds, “In 1450, about sixty percent of the twelve million acres of farmland had been held by the crown, by the church, and by some thirty dukes, earls, and barons. By 1700, the nobility, church, and crown together owned less than 30 percent of what had grown to be fourteen million acres of the cultivated land” (36).

The Land

- By 1700, Linklater adds, almost three-quarters of what had grown to be fourteen million acres of farmland now belonged to the heads of more than two hundred thousand families of gentry, yeoman, and tenant farmers with land worth more than forty shillings a year in rent. And, perhaps 150,000 more families rented less valuable properties.
- Out of a population that had increased to five million in 1700, about two million had an interest in landed property.”
- Linklater established that given the social issues that landless tenants generated, the royal courts fined or imprisoned those who broke the law against enclosing the land, including no fewer than 264 peers, bishops, and knights (AL 18).

Expanding the Ownerships

- By the 1530s, the monasteries held two million acres of farmland (William the Conqueror had granted fifteen percent of his land to them), almost twenty percent of the total cultivated land.
- In 1531, Henry VIII became the head of the Church of England (the Church became fully protestant by 1547).
- In 1535, he ordered the monasteries to surrender their lands and buildings.
- By 1540, the monastic estates worth £150,000 in annual rent fell into the king's hands.

Expanding the Ownerships

- Within seven years, by 1547, Henry VIII had sold half of his newly acquired assets, raising some £1,400,000.
- Initially, the courtiers bought the land, but with a difference. These acquisitions were not feudal fiefs, holding them in a relationship of mutual obligations.
- The owners reacted to a new economic reality of the 1540s. After a century of uninterrupted rise, the wool prices fell. The courtiers decided to sell their newly acquired land for possible profit.

Expanding the Ownerships

- This is how Linklater describes the consequences of this confiscation, purchase, and second sale of the surplus lands: “... within two generations, a high proportion of England’s most productive land was bought and sold twice over, and its eventual destination was not the ancient nobility, but people with cash, i.e., London merchants, careful farmers, government officials, even tenants on fixed rents” (20).

Expanding the Ownerships

- Here are two examples of the land market enriching the buyers and sellers at different rates:
- Between 1537 and 39, Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor bought twenty properties in Southeast England worth £38,000. He made £ 4,000 in profit when he sold them.
- Compared with him, in 1540, a London cloth merchant bought three manors of the abbey of Tewkesbury for £1255. In 1604, he sold one of them for 1000 percent profit at £4600.

Efficient Usage of the Land

- By the 1580s, the efficient usage of enclosed lands competed strongly with the collective farming of the feudal manors. Cash crops and the selling of the surplus replaced subsistence farming.
- The dairy and cattle farmers advanced from a commodity-based process of wool production to basic manufacturing. They also added to their product range by raising horses and meatier rabbits.
- At the macroeconomic level, the population of England almost doubled to four million by the beginning of the sixteenth century. This major demographic event did not cause any food shortages or price rise.

The Source

- Between 1450 and 1500, wool prices rose across Europe almost without interruption. Antwerp became the cloth capital of fifteenth-century Europe.
- Silver flowing from Spanish America enriched the owners of large English pastures. Tenant farmers, as well, made more than ever and could pay advance rents for multiple years.
- The idea grew that cultivating one enclosed acre will earn more profit than one's share of many acres in common with others" (AL 15).
- This was a solid move away from feudalism and its culture of mutual obligations.

The Source

- The landowners sought to reduce their manorial manpower. Linklater says, “Driven by the prospect of wool profits, landowners and some tenants competed to take exclusive control of grounds, clearing away, if need be, those without secure title to their strip of earth” (16).
- Henry VII became King in 1485. In four years, he promulgated an act “Agaynst the Pulling Doun of Touns.”

The Source

- Despite royal indignation, the enclosures kept growing. By 1500, 61 villages were wiped out in the Warwick county. In 1567, one feudal lord evicted 340 people.
- By 1530, five percent of the cultivated land was already under enclosures.
- In 1531, the Church of England instituted a special prayer seeking landowners' indulgence, that their hearts may have mercy on the evicted persons.

The Source

- Henry VIII passed nine statutes and many royal proclamations and appointed three government commissioners to prevent ploughland from being turned into pasture.
- Henry VIII, ironically, also became the biggest source of support for the landowners as he sought to dispose of half of the land he had appropriated from the monasteries.
- In the House of Commons, property-owning members increasingly dominated the proceedings simply because they outnumbered the courtiers.

The Land

- One achievement of the property owners was to preserve the tax-avoidance trusts. This legal arrangement permitted the transfer of land to the next generation without any dues being paid.
- Facing a substantial loss of revenue on this account, Henry VIII sought to retain essential taxation through the court system.
- The House of Commons created a new statute that overturned the law court's decision. The landowners scored a victory as the king compromised in 1533 (AL 19).

Central Authority and Inclusiveness

- When the central authority weakened, other participants in the power structure were ready to seek enhancement of their role at the expense of the king. We learned earlier about one example of it in the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215.
- At a broader level, Magna Carta moved away from the “mutual obligations” framework of the feudal era and created absolute rights invested in the owners of the freehold lands.

Central Authority and Inclusiveness

- While discussing Feudalism and Monarchy in the last unit, we learned that the first layer of dissent in the power structure emerged because of changes and expansion in the corps of Earls, the top echelon of the nobility, and the only ones enjoying hereditary rights for the lands the king allocated to them.
- In 1275, Edward I initiated a process of inclusion that became the basis of the House of Commons. He called his first Parliament, but with a great difference. He summoned nobles and churchmen but also issued orders (known as writs) for the election of two representatives from each county (the knights of the shire) and two from each city or town (the burgesses) to attend.
- As the circle of landowners expanded, the House of Commons became more assertive in defending their rights.

Central Authority and Inclusiveness

- Henry VIII had to negotiate with the House of Commons to obtain their consent to fund his insatiable taste for military spending.
- In the 1540s, the Commons adopted new laws affecting property, wills, mortgages, inheritance, and conveyancing. Linklater adds, “The guiding principle of the new laws was to make it simpler for two individuals to negotiate the exchange of property, by purchase or inheritance, without interference by lord or monarch” (35).

The Land

- Linklater adds, “Not only did the adult males of some two hundred thousand landowning families vote for the members of Parliament, they provided the magistrates who enforced Parliament’s laws, and the officers of the cavalry that ensured compliance with the magistrates’ orders...” (36-37).
- Statutes now protected the property owners against the king’s exactions, kept trespassers out of the property, and, defying the anti-enclosure legislation, the hedges had become sacrosanct, boundaries that no poacher or paperless claimant, nor even a royal writ, could cross without the owner’s permission (37).

The Land

- Between 1642 and 1651, a ruinous civil war wracked England, Scotland, and Ireland. The war took the lives of one million of the eight million of their inhabitants. Also, more than one million English acres and most of Ireland's farmland changed hands.
- Conflict erupted in 1640 when the Parliament called by Charles I refused to grant him his wishes and subsidies to suppress a rebellion in Scotland. The Irish rebelled the following year, and by 1642, strained relations between Charles and Parliament led to civil war in England.

The Land

- Before the civil war, in 1628, the property owners had moved a Petition of Rights that stated as a principle that there should be no taxation without representation and no imprisonment except by process of law. Although the king reluctantly accepted the petition, the distrust about the implementation persisted
- Controversies over issues like this created tensions between a growing landowning class and the monarch in the House of Commons.

The Land

- Next year, 1629, Charles I dismissed the Parliament and did not summon it until 1640.
- During the “personal rule,” as the Parliament was not there to approve the taxation, Charles I “raised money by various methods, including imposing a massive total of £ 50,000 in fines for illegal enclosures (42).
- Unable to run the Kingdom without taxation, Charles I summoned a resentful Parliament back to session in 1640. Frustrated by a hostile Parliament, when royal troops tried to force them to vote, violence ensued (42).

The Land

- The civil war was a confrontation between two dominant camps, the royalists and the property owners. Both sides aggressively defended themselves.
- This was no country of the commoners and farmers yet. The expanded circle of property owners finally won, arrested the king, and put him on trial. In 1649, the High Court of Justice executed King Charles I. England became a republic.
- Linklater comments that Cromwell, “...an instinctively property-supporting dictator,” replaced Charles I (46).

The Land

- We are in the first half of the seventeenth century. Between 1066 and 1649, the composition of the affluent and influential class in England radically changed and expanded. England was then a few decades apart from the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689, the beginning of the constitutional monarchy.
- The struggle for individual rights had begun. England would, however, not fully enfranchise its voting age population before the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, and only with the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, the annulment of the 1542 law of "coverture" commenced. Inclusion advanced only in small steps.

The Kings

- Coercion in response to an assertive House of Commons had a cost. By 1649, like the Magna Carta of 1215, the monarchy in England had known its limits. In 1215, the result was defining and delimiting the royal power. In 1649, unthinkably, a king lost his life.
- Last week, Bachelet ended the Hundred Years' War by declaring that the French people idealized themselves in a commoner like them, Jean d'Arc. France had found, he said, its moment of discovering the motherland.
- We know, nonetheless, that feudalism endured in France until 1789. In our last unit, we read the decree that finally ended feudalism in France in 1789.

The Kings

- The French were, as such, behind England in terms of diversification of landownership, limited degrees of inclusiveness, and breaking the grip of the land-feudalism-church relationship as the source of all power.
- We learn from Sydney Herbert in *The Fall of Feudalism in France*, 1921, that the French monarchy by the era of Louis IX, 1226-1270, had reconstituted a powerful center. We learned from historian Bachelet last week that, particularly with the victory of Charles VII in the Hundred Years War, the monarchy had triumphed also over those reluctant members of the nobility who had sided with England.

The Central Authority

- The monarchy strived to break the feudal power, Herbert says, with “every weapon in its armory, i.e., diplomacy, money, and the sword. But broken down, it was at last” (xvi). The methods that the central authority used included deploying “the royal armies to overthrow the feudal fortresses; the royal law courts filched jurisdiction from the feudal judges; the royal tax gatherers thrust themselves between the noble and his vassals” (xvi). By the end of Louis IX, the tide had turned, although irritants remained.
- The economic power of the seigneurs, however, remained intact, along with vestiges of tax collection and some judicial powers. Only the revolution, Herbert emphasizes, “trod both crown and nobility into the dust” (xvii). We are far away at this moment from the guillotine Louis XVI faced in January 1793.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- The central authority also continued to extend great privileges to the nobility. The nobles and their dependents were exempt from the most burdensome of the direct taxes, which weighed so heavily upon the Third Estate (the French idea of social stratification: the First Estate (clergy), the Second Estate (nobility), the Third Estate (commoners)).
- The Second Estate monopolized the well-paid offices of the administration. A royal decree, which was issued as late as 1781, reserved the commissioned ranks in the army to those who could show a certain number of quarterings of nobility. In the same way, the higher offices of the church had become the closed preserve of men of rank.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- After 1783, not one holder of the 135 French bishoprics and Archbishops was of plebeian origin.
- The monarchy purchased nobility's political power by handing over to them financial privileges and a monopoly of the higher offices of church and state (xvii).
- Herbert highlights how the central and feudal taxes weighed heavily on the third estate. While the central authority had been able to impose direct taxes on the provinces, the farmers and commoners had to pay multiple forms of taxation.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- On page 87, for example, Herbert cites the amounts for the direct taxes and the feudal dues for 6 counties around 1789, which vary but remain substantial.
- In French livres (French pounds of the era, equal today to \$ 0.0031), for each subset of two numbers, the 1st number stands for direct taxes, and the second denotes the feudal dues: 1786 and 1600; 6694 and 3650; 9010 and 4500; 6266 and 2400; 3436 and 3000; 9820 and 5925.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- The decree of 1789 abolishing feudalism shows that those privileges survived several religious and political upheavals. The fundamental equation between the central authority and agrarian feudalism continued to revolve around the land.
- France witnessed Louis XIII (1624 to 1642) and his chief advisor, Cardinal Richelieu, seriously undermining the feudal lords. Richelieu had resolved to eliminate the vestiges of any level of political medieval feudalism on the way to establishing a centralized state. France also viewed the absolutism of Louis XIV from 1643 to 1715, one of the longest ruling eras in history.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- France was affected by the Protestant reformations' attempt to break the unity of Roman Catholic Europe.
- The French Fronde was a series of civil wars from 1648 to 1653 against the royal authority of Louis XIV. Cardinal Mazarin met with severe opposition from the feudal Lords.
- Louis XIV was finally able to subdue the rebellion.

Rising Coercion, No Inclusiveness

- These religious and political upheavals affected the monarchy-nobility relationship, but the nobility retained their privileges.
- There was no parallel movement in the expansion of land ownership, whose impact we noticed in the British House of Commons.
- In both France and England, nonetheless, violence marred the process of social change.



Marrying the Adriatic (Page 37)

- Land was the source of the Feudal monarchical system and power. For the change to come, the source of power and feudal institutions must be substituted.
- Cities and towns, and particularly the maritime Republics of the Mediterranean, began to lead the way out of the meandering stranglehold of Feudalism. Venice was one example.
- In this picture, we see doge, the ruler, dropping a ring into the sea in an annual ceremony, saying, “We thus espouse thee, O Sea, as our bride and Queen.”
- The Venetians had a radically different source of power.

The Venetians

- We met them for the Fourth Crusade. Today, we will hear from Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 2012.
- Venice led the world in several ways. Our authors looked at them through the prism of centralization, inclusion, and exclusion.
- This trading Republic looked not at the land but at the sea and innovated the trading contracts.
- We will discuss in our discussion about The Age of Exploration how futuristic they were.

The Venetians

- Commenda partners agreed on how to share profits between a sedentary and a travelling trader based on the capital provided.
- This trading instrument became a dynamic driver of social mobility. In the archives for AD 960, 971, and 982, “the number of new names comprise 69 percent, 81 percent, and 65 percent of those recorded” (153).
- The Republic thrived on a well-defined and delimited central authority. They called their ruler, doge.
- Between 1032 and 1082, Venice experienced massive growth in maritime trade while the election of the doge and the Ducal Council became more inclusive.

The Venetians

- Following the murder of a doge in 1171, the power structure expanded to become more inclusive and built further checks and balances.
- The emergence of a new affluent class, however, became the eyesore of the old money and influence. The grandees began to close the doors to the emerging traders. Besides, gradually changing the rules for the representative institutions, they nationalized the trade beginning in 1314, imposing heavy taxes on private entrepreneurs from 1324.
- The Venetian economy declined as centralized authority became exclusive and coercive. Between 1650 and 1800, when the population of Europe expanded, that of Venice contracted (156).

Conclusion

- We began our last unit by defining land as the source of power in feudal monarchies and governance structures. We just noticed how the Venetians built their economy and power structure on a radically different source.
- In England, although the source of power and affluence remained intact, its usage and range of ownership enormously changed and challenged the monarchical system by 1649, when England switched to Republicanism for a moment in its history.

Conclusion

- France gradually developed an absolute and coercive central authority, and as its adjunct, a compliant yet extractive nobility.
- The Third Estate had to wait till 1789 before it could forcibly eliminate these bastions of feudalism.
- We will discuss the Rise of the Ottoman Empire next week.