THE KNIGHTS' AND PEASANTS' WARS

1: The Knights War, 1522-23

Teacher dictated notes:

• With CV out of the Empire dealing with external problems for the next 9 years, matters were left in the hands of Ferdinand.
• He remained suspicious of the Princes, and vice versa.
• However, when both were threatened they could act together.
• This occurred in 1522 when the Imperial Knights, led by Franz von *Sickingen* and Ulrich *von Hutten*, used Lutheranism as an excuse to attack the estates of the Archbishop of *Trier*.
• Ferdinand was in a difficult position.
On the one hand, the Knights were clearly undermining the stability of the HRE both politically and religiously; but
On the other hand (a) They were traditionally supporters of the Emperor, (b) To crush them with the *Swabian League* would mean setting two groups against each other on whom he usually relied and (c) The Archbishop was no friend of the Habsburgs.
• In the end he felt compelled to join forces with the Princes, who defeated the Imperial Knights at *Landstuhl* in 1523 with an army led by *the Landgrave of Hesse* and with forces of the Swabian League sent by the Emperor.
• Ferdinand regarded this as a hollow victory commenting that "We have lost the support of an important element on which we could have counted".

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2. The Peasants' War, 1524-25

a. Introductory narrative

• As Lotherington points out, the popularity of Luther with such disparate groups of people as the Princes and the Knights was that "Germans could make of his words what they wanted to hear".
• Another consequence of this was the Peasants' War of 1524-25.
• Teacher starts by putting up an OHT of Thomas Muntzer (a copy is available in this unit).
• Talk about what he was like – charismatic, forceful; became convinced that a second coming of Christ was at hand, split from Luther; felt he was invulnerable to attack by his enemies; found a threat by both Catholics and Protestants as he stood for the rejection of order and discipline. He was convinced that he would be able to catch their bullets in his sleeves. Eventually captured and exectuted.
• Teacher then dictates the following key events:

June 1524: Peaceful protest in Swabia (deep South of Germany)
August 1524: Rebels start to plough northwards, pillaging monasteries and nunneries.
Summer 1525: Rebels, under leadership of Thomas Muntzer, defeated at Frankenhausen by Imperial forces led by Landgrave Philip of Hesse. c.100,000 rebels killed after Muntzer encourages them to bear their breasts to the bullets which God would protect them from.

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b. Specific Analysis of Aims

Students should be given copies of the Twelve Articles and the Brigach Articles and asked to highlight socio-economic, political and religious aims which are highlighted. It makes sense to put students into groups for this, so that students are focusing on just one of these areas of analysis. They can then report back to the rest of the class with their findings.

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c. General Analysis

Students then have to complete their own copy of the blank table, using the double-sided article which follows it in this pack.

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d. Consolidation

Students then use the final worksheet in the pack to have a debate about the Peasants' War.

Homework question: How similar were the Knights' and Peasants' Wars?

Thomas Muntzer

THE TWELVE ARTICLES OF MEMMINGEN

These articles show that towns were also landlords and serfowners, and almost as reluctant as other lords to redress their peasants' grievances. The council's replies, where given, are indented following each of the articles.

1. It is our humble and most sincere request and plea that we may now elect a pastor for ourselves, who will proclaim the divine, almighty, and living Word and holy Gospel, which is a food for our souls, [and do so] purely and clearly, without any human addition, doctrine, or command. We will provide the same pastor with a suitable competency. If such a pastor behaves improperly, then we may dismiss him and take on another in his place, but always with the knowledge of the entire commune. For without proclamation of the divine Word we cannot be saved, as St Paul has shown us.

On the first article: where they are lacking, the council will provide and help to maintain Christian pastors in the parishes which belong to it as soon as it can obtain them, so that [the parishes] will be adequately provided for. But in the case of Woringen and other parishes where the council does not have the advowson, it will speak seriously to the pastors where they are deftient, and where a pastor will not amend himself, it will afterwards write to the collator about providing his subjects another pastor or allowing them to elect their own.

2. Since we have been forced to pay the tithe, we think that we should not be obliged to give it any more, for the holy New Testament does not oblige us to give it. We will also provide for the pastor's bodily needs.

On the second article, concerning the tithe, my lords think it good that the peasants and subjects suspend this article until the common peasantry everywhere have reached a settlement with the common Estates of the league. What the peasants then gain from other lords will be conceded to the council's subjects without delay.

3. It has hitherto been the usage that we have been held as your poor serfs, which is pitiable, given that Christ has purchased and redeemed us with his precious blood, the shepherd the same as the Emperor. It is not our intention to have no authority, for we will be obedient to all authority appointed by God in all fair and reasonable matters, and we do not doubt that as Christian lords you will release us from serfdom.

On the third article concerning serfdom: my lords purchased this for a considerable sum of money, and the serfdom of a Christian is no hindrance to the salvation of his soul; but so that the subjects may see and recognize the council's good will, it will release and absolve its subjects from such serfdom as far as it belongs to and is held by the council. In return they shall pay my lords a reasonable amount of protection money and accept no one else's protection since they are within the council's jurisdiction [Zwing und Bann]. The shall likewise allow no one to join [their community] who is not free; similarly, its subjects may marry no serf, whether man or woman, but only free persons, and otherwise be obedient to the council in all reasonable things... And once anyone has discharged his obligations, he may then move wherever he wishes, without hindrance from the council.

4. It has been the custom that a poor man did not have the right to catch or shoot game, likewise fish in running water, which is also not permitted us. We regard this as quite unjust and not in accordance with the Word of God, for when the Lord God created man he gave him power over the fish in the water, the birds in the air, and all the animals on the earth, etc. Our request does not apply where someone has [common] water that he has purchased unknowingly, for there one has exercise Christian concern out of brotherly love.

On the fourth, my lords will gladly concede that, as far as the council's forest and its authority extends and no further, its subjects shall and may catch and shoot any game and fowl on their holdings as they require, but they may not use the proper gins and traps, for that falls within the privilege of sovereign authority alone. And when the subjects pursue and want to catch or shoot game they should take care that they do harm to no one else's property

On free water, it is the council's will that no one may fish in running or still water that has been purchased. But whatever water was free and common shall be free again, and everyone shall be allowed to fish and catch with a hand net but with no other tool, and only whatever he can eat and use himself in his own household; and he may not give away or sell anything beyond that, in order that the streams and pools are not exhausted and dammed dry or the meadows and banks spoiled or undermined, so that no great harm

befalls the common man thereby.

5. It is our humble plea and request that since we have hitherto been long and greatly aggrieved by services, which have multiplied and increased from day to day, a gracious consideration might be given to how our forefathers supplied services, but only according to the Word of God.

On services: the council's subjects cannot complain, in that the majority of services were imposed upon them by other lords before the council purchased them... Nonetheless, where anything has been too hard for them and it is put to the council in detail, and the letters of obligation are also read, it will show good towards them.

6. We request that henceforth we be not burdened by entry-fines, but when a holding is leased for a suitable rent the tenant and his heirs may enjoy the holding without further impositions.

Sixth, on entry-fines: my lords will not use these any more, but in return will not lease any farm for more than a year. So when someone does not pay his rent or does not keep the farm in good order the council may evict him after a year, if it so chooses, and lease the farm to another. But whoever did not pay the old entry-fine may receive his farm anew each year, as this article provides.

7. Some villages are aggrieved about the fines for felonies, and request that we may remain by the old usage. On forest crimes, it is my lords' will that the fines and punishments relating to seigneurial and common woodland should remain the same and the punishment should be set at a florin for each offense. However, the council will at all times provide its subjects with adequate supplies of firewood, wood for fencing, and timber for building. on the other penalties, my lords think that those currently in force are fair, as they were in part imposed at the request of the subjects themselves, and they should so remain in order that there will be peace and change will be avoided.

8. It is our humble request and plea that since some villages are aggrieved about woods, fields, pastures, and other rights which at one time belonged to the communes, these should be returned to them.

Further, if the communes are aggrieved about wood, pastures, fields, and other things, the subjects should indicate to the council which in particular; it will appoint councillors to inspect and decide if certain rights have been taken away from a commune and whether something ought to be restored in their place; and whatever the council decides that it is obliged to do, it will keep to it.

9. It is our diligent plea that when we provide a rent for a feudal lord we should be able to work our holdings to our best advantage and sell its produce when and where we choose, without hindrance from the feudal lord. If Almighty God sends us a failed harvest or a hailstorm the feudal lord should then remit rent according to the circumstances.

On the ninth article, the council denies having forbidden its subjects to sell their produce once they have paid their rent, but when and where it may have occurred it should be clearly indicated and the council will act fairly. If there is a hailstorm, the council will try to effect a Christian remission of rent after inspecting the damage.

10. Since some of our holdings are so heavily burdened that we cannot retain them all, we ... request a reduction of the burdens.

11. The council will inspect whatever holdings are thought to be burdened and take account of what it finds.

12. In conclusion, it is our final opinion and wish that if we have presented one or more articles not in accordance with the Word of God, which we do not think we have, then that article will be void. Similarly, where any articles are conceded and subsequently found through the clear evidence of the Word of God to be unjust, then we will not have them. By contrast, if we later find one or more articles contrary to the Word of God, we desire at all times to reveal it to the worthy council, for such action benefits you as our gracious feudal lords as much as us ...

In all this the council reserves its sovereign authority, with the addendum that if it identifies something contrary to justice or the Word of God, it will reduce or abolish it, where it has the power to do so, to the extent requested by its subjects in their articles.

Articles of the Brigach Valley

These articles were discussed and approved by the Brigach valley peasants in the mill at Klengen. They were presented to the town council of Villingen on 18 November-for an account of the events, see doc. 23. They were further used as the basis for negotiations with the commander of the Swabian League, Georg Truchsess von Waldburg, acting in the name of archduke Ferdinand, on 31 January 1524.

1. They should not have to preserve and protect game, or hunt for their lords. All game, water, and fowl should be free.

2. They should not be obliged to hobble their dogs.

3. They should be free to carry crossbows, arquebus, and flintlocks.

4. They should not be punished by foresters and huntsmen.

5. They should not be obliged to carry manure for their lords.

6. Or obliged to mow, cut, or make hay, or to carry in wood or sheaves.

7. They should not be restricted in marketing or [the exercise of] trades.

8. No one who can provide bail should be put in prison or in the stocks.

9. They should not have to pay tax, assessment, or excise unless it is imposed by law.

10. They should not be obliged to give seed corn or to work [the lord's] fields.

11. No one should be punished for disobedience if he or she marries without [the lord's] permission.

12. If anyone hangs or kills himself, the lords should not take his goods.

13. The lords should not take an inheritance from any person who still has living relatives.

14. They should not be obliged to pay departure-fines [*Abzug*] or the recognition fee to the landlord [*Vogtrecht*].

15. Whoever has wine in his house should be able to retail it without fear of punishment.

16. If the bailiff summons someone because of an [alleged] offense, and cannot prove it on good evidence, the accused should not be obliged to pay.

THE PEASANT'S REVOLT	
1. LONG AND SHORT TERM CAUSES	**2. AIMS OF THE REBELS**
3. WHY DID THEY SEE LUTHERANISM AS A SOLUTION?	**4. SPREAD OF THE REVOLT – NARRATIVE**
5. RESPONSE OF THE PRINCES / LUTHER	**6. CONCLUSION - WHY DID IT FAIL AND WHAT IS IT'S SIGNIFICANCE?**

Fill this in using whatever sources you have available to you.

1. THE PEASANT'S REVOLT: Teacher copy

1. LONG AND SHORT TERM CAUSES

Situation of the German peasants in the early 16th Century

- German peasants resent pressures to make financial contributions and perform labor services exerted on them by the landlords
- Introduction of Roman law limits their rights to the commons, their personal freedom and their self-administration
- Secret Societies and unrest developed from the 15th century:
- 1476 Revolt of the Piper of Niklashausen (Franconia)
- 1493 Bundschuh-uprising (Upper Rhine)

Reformation Propaganda and Peasant Culture

- Luther and his supporter idealize Karsthans
- Reformation broadsheets allude to and reinterpret popular rituals and symbols
- Peasants appropriate certain Lutherian terms Christian Liberty, Freedom from the Law

Role of Charles V

Yes: He exacerbated social distress by levying heavy taxes to pay for wars against his enemies.

No: There was very little he could do about the Revolt. The causes were long term, rooted in the dissatisfaction of the Peasants (especially in the South) with being frozen out of the political system and the encroachment of Princely power onto their traditional rights (e.g. the forest). This had led to the so-called "Bundschuh" risings in the 15th Century. Abbots and Ecclesiastical Princes were particularly resented as they took tithes as well as rents. This was combined with a rapidly growing population.

2. AIMS OF THE REBELS

The Twelve Articles of Memmingen

• Grievances based on godly law versus Roman law

• Biblical authority used to legitimate social grievances (only two strictly religious demands)

• The aims of the Peasants varied from one area to another, although one manifesto which proved particularly popular were the *12 Articles of Memmingen* were particularly popular.

• Many of the demands within it were traditional – demanding the restoration of rights and a halt to the process of serfdom. But the demand for localities to elect their own ministers was a very Lutheran twist, encouraged by the spread of woodcuts.

3. WHY DID THEY SEE LUTHERANISM AS A SOLUTION?

Most dangerously, they suggested that anyone attempting to oppose their search for Christian justice were rebels of God. In this way they found themselves able to challenge not merely those parts of the social order which had gone against tradition, but the whole social order itself, which became "an open question" (Lotherington). This appealed to artisans and craftsmen as much as Peasants, so that Blickle thinks that it should be renamed "The Revolt of the Common Man".

4. SPREAD OF THE REVOLT – NARRATIVE

• 1524 Initial Revolts, Some Negotiations with Landlords

• 1525 (April) Luther writes Admonition to Peace, condemns injustice of the rulers, but warns peasants to abstain from revolt

• May 1525 Sudden spread of revolts and uprisings, Luther writes Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants (severe appeal to the princes to destroy the peasants so as to preserve divinely appointed authority, to which man owed obedience)

• Thomas Muntzer leads peasant army in the spring of 1525, utopian ideals of an eternal league of God, elimination of class differences and private property

• Peasant Revolts crushed by princes, brutal punishments administered

• Started with an uprising in *Schaufhausen* on the Swiss border. Spread quickly, reached peak in Spring of 1525, very disparate but very general.

5. RESPONSE OF THE PRINCES / LUTHER

• On the one hand, violence was used: The peasant bands were picked off one by one, with the most spectacular defeat being the forces of Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets at Frankenhausen in 1525 by Philip of Hesse and the Swabian League. Such violence against the peasants was encouraged by Luther in his pamphlet "*Against the Thieving, Murdering Hordes of Peasants*", as he never envisaged his ideas undermining the social order.

• On the other hand, some Princes such as *Frederick of Saxony* ("The poor people had cause for their revolt") were more far-sighted and gave the peasants more liberties, and it was this realistic combination that ensured the eventual success of the Princes.

6. CONCLUSION - WHY DID IT FAIL AND WHAT IS IT'S SIGNIFICANCE?

For Charles, it could be regarded as a success in that the rebellion was crushed; but on another level it was a failure, because it had been crushed not by him but by the Princes, who had stressed their power whilst the Emperor stood on the sidelines as if a spectator.

For Luther, the rebellion clearly showed what a genie he had let out of the bottle.

Background information: The Peasants'Revolt of 1525 and the Common Man

Serious in its immediate and long-range effects was the so-called Peasants' War of 1524-25. The causes of the uprisings were rooted deeply in the social and economic changes of the time. Part of the problem was a "revolt of rising expectations" as economic conditions gradually improved from the dismal depression and chaos of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The slowness of improvement, especially in rural areas, led to frustration as people grew restless and dissatisfied. Furthermore, the decline of feudalism in some areas had placed many of the peasants under serious handicaps, and they now clamored for a return to "the good old days." In other regions, especially southwestern Germany, the worst features of feudalism still prevailed as the powerful local lords and prelates ruled and abused the' peasants ruthlessly.

The oppressed farmers of the southwest reacted by demanding use of pasturelands and the common forests, and called for the restoration of ancient Germanic laws and customs. Some of their grievances were put into writing as in the Twelve Articles of the Swabian peasants. (In your reading) These demanded the right to choose their own pastors; protested the paying of so many tithes, taxes, dues, rents, and forced labor; denounced serfdom and demanded the right to fish, hunt, and cut wood in the common forests; protested the making of new laws; and censured the landowners' seizure of common lands.

More than rural peasants were involved in the massive upheavals of 1524-25. Written grievances from the Black Forest area described the leaders of the movement as "the poor common man (*gemeiner mann*) in town and countryside," while the margrave of Baden referred to them as a "union of the common man," meaning, of course, his restless subjects both urban and rural. In many contemporary accounts the uprising is called a "rebellion of the common man." Luther seems to have used the phrase to mean "simple," "ignorant," or often "misinformed." Regardless of how contemporaries described the participants, they saw the revolt as a more extensive social upheaval than is usually implied by the term peasant. So it was, for in some areas the towns were the first to raise the standard.of rebellion, and in many cases the urban poorer classes made common cause with their country cousins. For that reason some modern scholars prefer to call this the Revolution of the Common Man, not just the Peasants' War.

In the towns, according to the Swiss historian Peter Blickle, the term common man referred to those social groups that were ineligible to serve in the municipal assembly, that is, those underprivileged people without citizenship. He cites remonstrances of the imperial cities demanding more rights, or "rebellion and resistance would grow between magistrates and the common man in the towns." The term also included rural people of the lower classes other than peasant farmers. The key characteristic of this definition of the common man was the lack of political authority. He was "the peasant, the miner, resident of a territorial town; in the imperial cities he was the townsman iln eligible for public office." Thomas Brady notes that the term was used by the lords for those who should only be subjects. "The Common Man," he writes, was not necessarily poor or grievously oppressed-the concept excluded beggars, criminals, and gypsies and other marginal folk-but he had no possibility for political life except through common action with others of his kind." That is what happened in 1524-25.

Into this combustible mixture, the torch of religion was thrust. Luther's open defiance of church authorities gave the people courage and a precedent and, they thought, a leader. But the impassioned oratory and violent writings of Luther's former follower, Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525), was the direct spark that ignited the peasant protests in Thuringia and Saxony, and fanned them into a blaze of fanaticism and violence engulfing a large part of Germany. Believing that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand and that the wicked must be cut down to prepare the way of the Lord, Müntzer became the passionate leader of the social revolution, making it at the same time an apocalyptic religious conflict intent on wiping out all the enemies of God. Boldly defying the princes to their faces, Müntzer stirred the commoners to a frenzy with his fanatical speeches. "Strike while the iron is hot!" he ranted; "Don't let your swords cool off! Don't allow them to become feeble!" The peasants were easily excited and soon they were pillaging churches, defying laws, and repudiating authority.

War first broke out in the Black Forest area of southwestern Germany in June 1524, where the nobles' despotic rule was particularly galling, and from there it spread gradually northward and eastward into the rest of Swabia, the Rhineland, Franconia, Wfirtemberg, and Thuringia. As the uprisings spread, they became intensified with religious emotions. Lands were seized and many monasteries and churches were looted. In a few cases the people demanded common ownership of all property. Many of the towns cooperated, forcing some of the nobles to acknowledge the people's grievances and to promise them reforms.

Luther's reaction to this uniting of social revolution and religious revolt was consistent with his previous position. He himself had charged the princes with ungodliness, corruption, and cruelty, and had called on them to end their oppression of the peasants. But he never advocated nor condoned social revolution. The peasants misunderstood him completely if they thought he would lead, or even sympathize with, their more violent actions. He had repeatedly reaffirmed only his theological, not social or political, leadership. He was not ready for an all-out reform of both church and society at large, even if it was accomplished according to the word of God (as Muntzer avowed it would be).

The princes, however, needed no justification from Luther to put down the rebellion ruthlessly. Weakened by internal dissension and lack of leadership, the peasants were no match for the power of princes like the duke of Saxony, the landgrave of Hesse, the bishop of Wurzburg, and the nobles of the Swabian League. At Frankenhausen, near Luther's birthplace, the revolution came to a bloody end in May 1525. A chronicler described the scene in this way:
Then they advanced towards the peasants and began to fire. The poor people just stood there and sang, "Now we pray the Holy Spirit," as if they were insane. They neither resisted nor fled. Many comforted themselves in Thomas's [Muntzer's] great promise that God would send help from heaven, since Thomas had said he would catch all bullets in his coat sleeves.

The massacre was complete. Muntzer escaped from the carnage but was soon captured and executed. Reprisals and vengeance bathed the countryside in blood following the collapse of the revolution. Although Luther remained constant in his social views, always accepting the hierarchical order of society, including the rule of the nobility, the peasants believed he had betrayed them. Many denounced him as a traitor. Yet Luther's own charisma and the persuasiveness of his message continued to attract tens of thousands, particularly where no uprisings had occurred or where they had not been repulsed so severely. Nevertheless, after 1525 the evangelical movement came to depend more and more upon the support of the princes and the municipal magistrates, and it was they who carried the Reformation to its logical, political conclusion.

Who was responsible for the tragedy of the Peasants' War?: Debate and consolidation

For this discussion, we are travelling back in time to Germany in 1525. A team dedicated to conflict resolution hopped in a time machine, and directed that a council be called in an attempt to alter the timeline and bring the Peasants' Revolt to a peaceful conclusion. (We of course remember that the Peasants were really subject to wholesale slaughter in 1525).

You have been randomly assigned a role to play, one falling in one of the four general categories:

Group 1. A participant in the peasant's rebellion
Group 2. A Lutheran
Group 3. A Prince
Group 4. A follower of Muntzer

PREPARATION:
To prepare for the council, read whatever sources you have available. Then, write your opinion of the Peasant's Revolt, writing in your assigned role.

Group 1: If you are a peasant, why did you participate, and how did you justify your actions?
Group 2: If you are a Lutheran, would you support or condemn the peasant's actions, and the lord's treatments of the peasants?
Group 3: If you are a Prince, what would your opinion be of the peasants and of Lutherans?
Group 4: And finally, if you were a follower of Muntzer, what would you think of the Lutherans/Luther, of the Princes?

IN CLASS
When you get to class, you will break up into groups based on your role for 10-15 minutes or so Then each group will present their point-of-view about the Peasant Revolt for about five minutes, basing this presentation on the readings and your short discussion.

We will have general class discussion to:

- decide if there could have been any resolution of the peasants demands
- decide what larger implications the Revolt had for Lutheranism
- decide what larger implications the Revolt had for existing authority in Europe