EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Please answer one question from Part I and one question from Part II. You are allowed a total of four hours to complete this exam (two hours per question). You are on your honor not to consult any materials, including notes or papers or anything stored in your computer. You are also on your honor not to discuss the exam or its content with any faculty or student until the exam period is over.

PART I

1. What is secularization and how did it work in western Europe from the late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century? You must provide specific examples and a broad grasp of the development of European culture from the late fifteenth century to the eve of the Enlightenment.

2. Both the Renaissance in Italy and the Scientific Revolution that swept parts of western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had their counterpart in the elite’s embracing of astrology, alchemy, hermeticism, magic, and in the widespread popular belief in witches. The result of the latter was the witch craze. How do you make sense of the seemingly contradictory nature of early modern European society? It had, on the one hand, a deep concern for a new science and new forms of knowledge; on the other hand, it witnessed the strong grip and attraction of the witch hunt. Provide examples and references to your reading.

3. What was unique about Machiavelli’s The Prince in the context of late medieval and early modern political life? What arguments was he advancing in this book? Why was he doing so, and to what extent did his work reflect new political and cultural developments in the West? How does this work contrast with Thomas More’s Utopia?

4. Since Norbert Elias’ influential work on court society historians have seen courts as shaping social and political structures during the early modern period. How valuable are Elias’ view on the role of the early modern court and the emergence of the state? Discuss with examples.

5. Discuss European overseas expansion from the early sixteenth to 1650 and compare two different models for expansion and colonization. How did the discovery of the New World and the opening of direct trade with the East affect the Old World?

6. “Popular and elite culture” are terms often used to describe aspects of early modern European culture. How has our understanding of these concepts changed over the last three decades? What was the nature of the interplay between popular and elite cultures in western Europe between 1520 and 1715? Select some specific examples.
Part II

1. Many historians see the Thirty Years War as a significant factor in determining Europe’s later development. Discuss the importance of the war and its legacy as it pertained to military organization, political theory and state-building.

2. Generally, traditional accounts of Europe have portrayed the Holy Roman Empire as Europe’s “sick man.” Yet the Empire showed an enormous resiliency during most of the early modern period. To what extent can one still use this characterization of the Empire, and if so, how can one account for the Empire’s durability?

3. During the early modern period a number of European nations became colonial empires (e.g. Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands), while others did not (e.g. most Italian states, the member states of the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland). To what extent can one interpret early modern European history through the lens of colonialism or its absence? Choose two politics, one colonial and the other non-colonial to illustrate your answer.

4. If you were asked to plan a graduate course on women in early modern European history, how would you structure it? What points would you emphasize and what sources would you use as reading assignments?

5. Can one construct an alternative vision of Europe’s early modern history, if one concentrated on small states, corporative entities, or areas such as Italy or post Renaissance Spain that seem to have been in decline? If so, how would that history look and how would it change our idea of early modern European history?

6. By 1648, the Dutch Republic had become a major European power in European affairs and probably the richest nation in Europe. By 1748, it had lost both its economic predominance and its political uniqueness. Can you explain both its rise and decline?