

Historical aspects of Thuringia

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Content

- 1. The landgraviate of Thuringia**
- 2. The Protestant Reformation**
- 3. Absolutism and small states**
- 4. Amid the restauration and the revolution**
- 5. Thuringia in the Weimar Republic**
- 6. Thuringia as a protection and defense district**
- 7. Concentration camps, weaponry and forced labor**
- 8. The division of Germany**
- 9. The Peaceful Revolution of 1989**
- 10. The reconstitution of Thuringia**
- 11. Classic Weimar**
- 12. The Bauhaus of Weimar (1919-1925)**



Werra bridge, near Kreuzburg. Built in 1223, it is the oldest natural stone bridge in Thuringia.

1. The landgraviate of Thuringia

The Ludovingian dynasty reached its peak in 1040. The Wartburg Castle (built in 1067) was the symbol of the Ludovingian power.

In 1131 Luis I. received the title of Landgrave (Earl). With this new political landgraviate groundwork, Thuringia became one of the most influential principalities. It was directly subordinated to the King and therefore had an analogous power to the traditional ducats of Bavaria, Saxony and Swabia. Moreover, the sons of the Landgraves were married to the aristocratic houses of the European elite (in 1221 the marriage between Luis I and Isabel of Hungary was consummated).

Landgrave Hermann I. was a beloved patron of art. Under his government (1200-1217) the court of Thuringia was transformed into one of the most important centers for cultural life in Europe.

In 1206 the most well-known poets of the time met for the “War of Singers”, a competition of troubadours in the Wartburg castle.

After the death of landgrave Henry Raspe IV. in 1247 and without descendants, the Ludovingian dynasty came to an end in Thuringia. After the war of succession, the landgrave was divided into two territories: Hesse and Thuringia.



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Monument dedicated to Martin Luther in Erfurt, the city in which he lived between 1501 and 1511.

2. The Protestant Reformation

The time that Martin Luther spent in Thuringia contributed to the spread of the Protestant Reformation in the region. In the cities, the priests preached the teachings of Luther and developed a wide range of reformist ideas.

The reformation centers were in Eisenach, Weimar and Orlamünde. Of particular cultural importance was Luther's stay in the Wartburg castle from 1521 to 1522. There Luther translated the Bible to German. The social and religious conflicts led to the war of the peasants. Still to this day Thomas Müntzer is known as a preacher that combined religious and social matters. On the 15th of May 1525, the peasant armies were defeated by the allied nobles in the battle of Frankenhausen.

Only after the war was the Lutheran Church founded in Thuringia, which brought about a reform in the church following the teachings of Martin Luther. The same occurred throughout the region of Thuringia, except for Eichsfeld.



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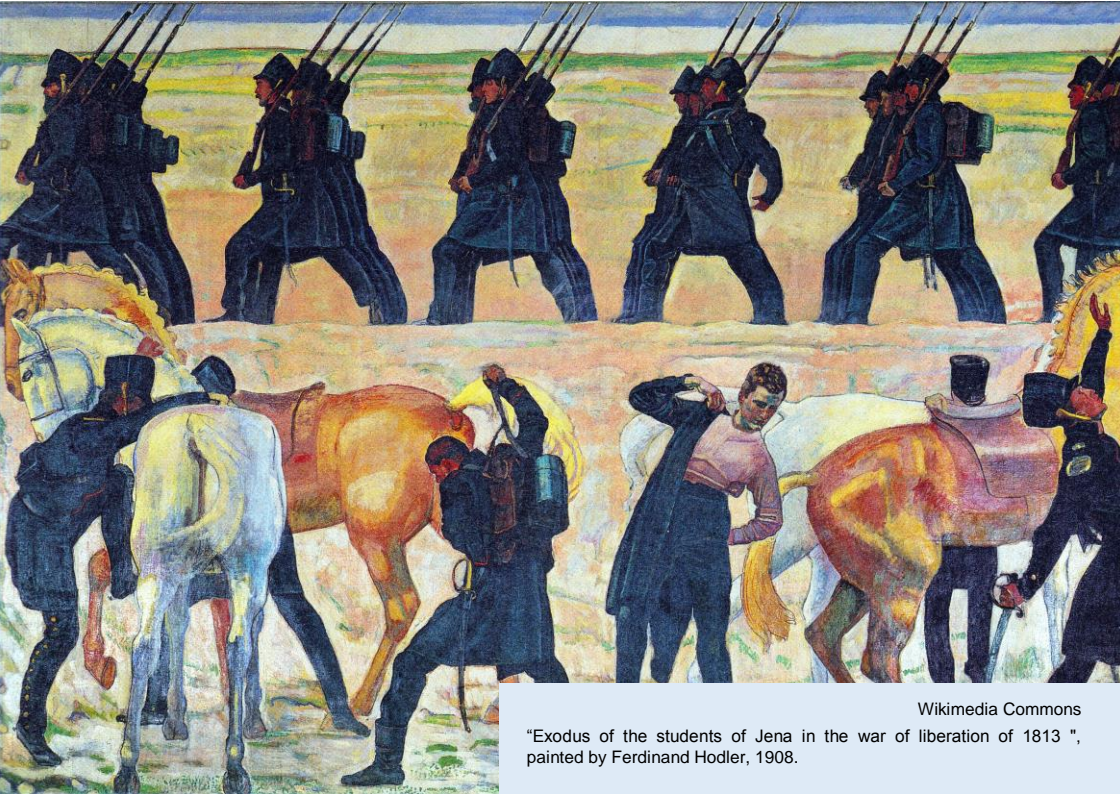
Friedenstein Castle in Gotha, an old baroque complex built between 1643 and 1654.

3. Absolutism and small states

In Thuringia during the XVII and XVIII centuries many rulers imitated the style of rule of the main European states. They built palaces (for example the castle of Friedenstein in Gotha), which was dedicated to hunting, built gardens and Parks and promoted the arts. By doing so, they exercised their absolute claims.

The Thuringia states of the time were very diverse. There were ten duchies, ten domains, four counties, an archbishop's possession and two imperial cities. The Wettin House was the most important. It governed the duchies of Weimar, Gotha and Eisenach. However, they also formed subdivisions that in some cases drove to the creation of miniature domains with power restrictions. The rulers tried to enhance state capability through effective political centralization, based in the construction of a bureaucracy.

Concerned about the education "of adults and the ignorant", Duke Ernest I of Saxony-Gotha (1601-1675) introduced in 1642 mandatory education for children from the age of five to twelve years old in his domains.



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"Exodus of the students of Jena in the war of liberation of 1813 ",
painted by Ferdinand Hodler, 1908.

4. Amid the restauration and the revolution

After the wars of liberation against Napoleon, the national liberal movement in Thuringia found itself in a favorable climate.

In 1815 the student's fraternity was founded in Jena after which similar fraternities were created in all of Germany. The Gran Duke of Saxony-Weimar received a constitution in 1816 and was transformed into one of the first constitutional monarchies of Germany.

Most notably is the Wartburg Festival of 1817, which drove an additional politicization of students. These movements demanded the suppression of local governments and they claimed the creation of the German empire below a constitutional monarchy. While liberal aspirations, national and democratic, had been withdrawn by the decrees of Karlsbad in 1819, the social grievances drove to revolutionary protests in 1848 in Thuringia.

With the collapse of the revolution in 1849, the revolutionary councils of Thuringia were also dissolved. In spite of the posterior restoration in Germany, the political climate in Thuringia remained relatively tolerant.



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Parliament Headquarters of the State of Thuringia during the republic of Weimar. Today it is home to the University of Music Franz Liszt.

5. Thuringia in the Weimar Republic

Because of the 1918 November revolution, all the monarchies were obliged to abdicate in Germany. In Thuringia, parliaments were formed which drove towards the union of Thuringia. Subsequently, after the elections in the entire German Empire, the National Assembly met in Weimar and adopted a Constitution. As a result, the democratic State, called the Republic of Weimar was born.

The chaotic conditions prevailed during the first years of the Republic. The coup d'état of Kapp-Lüttwitz (1920) transformed Thuringia into a region of strong disputes.

The establishment of the Free State of Thuringia was achieved on the 1st of May 1920, formed out of the seven small states of Weimar, Gotha, Altenburg, Meiningen, Rudolstadt, Sondershausen and Reuss. Weimar became the capital of the state. The city of Erfurt and other areas like Eichsfeld remained outside of Thuringia and continued being Prussian.

There was a distinguished rivalry in the Thuringia Parliament between the parties, one that favored the onset of radical political parties. Subsequently Thuringia became a political center for national socialism.



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The "Gauforum" in Weimar. Of the five complexes that were planned, only three were completed between 1937 and 1945.

6. Thuringia as a protection and defense district

In 1926 the Hitler Youth (HY) was founded in the Second national congress out of the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP) in Weimar. In Thuringia, the NSDAP reached the government in 1930/31, with Wilhelm Frick as the Minister of Internal Affairs and Education – the first in a region of the Republic of Weimar.

In 1932 the chief of the district of NSDAP Fritz Sauckel rose early to power when he was chosen to be Head of Government of Thuringia and Minister of Internal Affairs. Sauckel outlined Thuringia as a model state in the "Third Reich".

Weimar consolidated itself in the pompous national socialist style as administrative central power, and whereby the concentration camp of Buchenwald was set up there. As General Plenipotentiary for Manpower (1942) Sauckel counted on the unrestricted access to workers for forced labor from all of Europe. In 1944 he received governing power over the region of Erfurt. Because of the crimes against humanity that were committed, in 1946 Sauckel was sentenced to death as one of the 22 main war criminals in the Nuremberg trials.



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The main door of the Buchenwald concentration camp (1937-1945).

7. Concentration camps, weaponry and forced labor

Through the expropriation of the Simpson industries in Suhl, Sauckel was also capable of building an industrial empire (The Wilhelm Gustloff Foundation), which grew from the weaponry rearmament.

Buchenwald, built from 1937, was one of the three main concentration camps of the Reich. More than 50,000 people were killed by punishments and inhumane working conditions. This lasted until its liberation by the 3rd US Army. Besides the main concentration camp, there were sub concentration camps in multiple locations. One of special importance was Mittelbau-Dora, situated close to the city of Nordhausen. This last concentration camp was devoted to making missiles. It represented the largest underground arms factory of the Second World War.

During the war, Sauckel tried to relocate other armament industries to Thuringia. Through the “Sauckel Action” in 1942 2.7 million people were moved (primarily from Eastern Europe) to Germany. The workforce of the forced labor was exploited under horrific working and living conditions.

NATIONAL-THEATER, WEIMAR



ZWANZIG MARK

WER BANKNOTEN NACHMACHT ODER
VERFÄLSCHTE SICH VERSCHAFFT

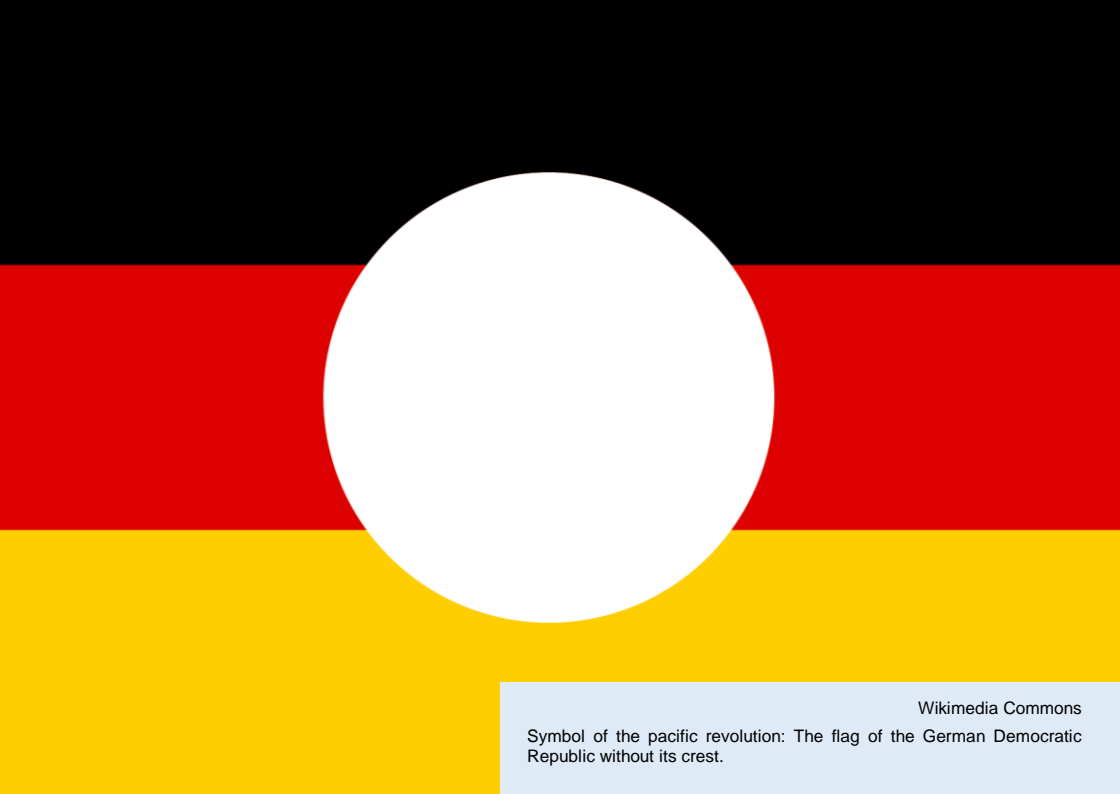
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20 marks from the Democratic Republic of Germany.

8. The division of Germany

After the Second World War, Thuringia fell under the Soviet occupation zone. Due to the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, in 1949 Germany was divided into the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the German Federal Republic (GFR). The internal German frontier extended 1393 kilometers across the country. Between 1945 and 1961, more than three million people fled from the GDR to the GFR.

Far from changing the policy that led people to flee, the Unified Socialist Party of Germany that governed the GDR bolstered the construction of the most impervious frontier of the world. This was the only way to stabilize the country. Through the progressive uplifting of obstacles, the right to free choice of residence was severed for the habitants of Thuringia. Thuringia counted on 763 kilometers of frontier including the federal states of Bavaria, Hesse and Lower Saxony of the GFR. Hundreds of people died while trying to flee the GDR. After the opening of the frontier on the 9th of November 1989, thousands of people began to travel from east to west.



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Symbol of the pacific revolution: The flag of the German Democratic Republic without its crest.

9. The Peaceful Revolution of 1989

Thuringia was not one of the centers of the Peaceful Revolution, but it still raised many voices in wake of the phony results of the local elections on the 7th of May. The citizen's movements under the protection of the church were the first pivotal players in the pacific revolution.

In some cases, certain specific regional conditions (autonomous politicians, environmental pollution, carelessness, decay of cities) channeled public anger. Numbers of people grew, who participated in weekly prayers for peace in numerous cities and townships of Thuringia. In addition to this, the autumn protest movements emerged. Some of the most important were Armstadt on the 7th of October, Jena on the 23rd of October, Nordhausen on the 27th of October and Erfurt on the 3rd of November. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Thuringia became a meeting place for the inhabitants of both German states.



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Hall of sessions of the Parliament of Thuringia in Erfurt (since 2003).

10. The reconstitution of Thuringia

The 3rd of October 1990 Thuringia was established as a state through the unification of the districts of Erfurt, Gera and Suhl. The districts of Schmöln, Altenburg y Artern also integrated in the new Free State.

In the same year, the first regional elections were held. The first Parliament of Thuringia was inaugurated in the National German Theatre of Weimar on the 25th of October 1990. In 1991, Erfurt was declared seat of the Thuringia Parliament and the state's capital. Alongside the traditional colors, the coat of arms equipped with the Ludovingian lion revived the landgraviate tradition in Thuringia.

Another historical reference is in the designation of the country as the "Free State of Thuringia", as it was called before, in the Republic of Weimar.

In 1993 the constitution of the Free State of Thuringia was adopted in the castle of Wartburg.



The Meiningen Theatre, built in 1909.

11. Classic Weimar

The cultural stage of Thuringia is still to this day, characterized by the "Classic Weimar" (1775-1832). The governments of the duchess Anna Amalia and her son Carl August (1775-1828) brought numerous writers and artists to Weimar.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe spent most of his life in Weimar and it is where he wrote many of his literary works. Also, Friedrich Schiller, Christoph Martin Wieland Johann Gottfried Herder along with other famous writers formed part of the Classic Weimar. Meanwhile, Jena was built as an idealist philosophy center (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) and the early romantic era (Schlegel, Tieck, Brentano, Novalis).

The composer Franz Liszt worked in many cities of Thuringia (including Eisenach, Sondershausen and Erfurt). In Weimar, the first orchestral school of Germany was founded in 1872.

The theatre of Duke George II (1866-1914) in the city of Meiningen attained certain relevancy on a European scale, thus through its theatrical productions and its role as founder of the modern theatre.



Diego Sebastián Crescentino

"Haus am Horn", built for the exposition of the Bauhaus in Weimar.

12. The Bauhaus of Weimar (1919-1925)

Following the downfall of the empire there was a necessary overhaul in the field of arts. The objective was to align art with the modern industrial society in which the focus was placed on the functionality of the object. In 1919 Walter Gropius took charge as leader of the Bauhaus Weimar, recently founded by the merging of two existing institutions. In Weimar, the esthetic and artisanal principles of the new era were conveyed, as stipulated in the Bauhaus Manifesto.

Gropius summoned the vanguard of European art to Weimar to display the Bauhaus. Amongst others, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Paul Klee (1879-1940) attended. Since its creation, the Bauhaus was exposed to critical pressure from the conservative circles.

In the political conflicts inside the Parliament, the Bauhaus became a game of competing interests. After a long dispute, it was relocated to Dessau in 1925.



University of Bauhaus, Weimar.

Diego Sebastián Crescentino

