

CHAPTER
16
SECTION 4

Section Summary

RISE OF AUSTRIA AND PRUSSIA

By the seventeenth century, the Holy Roman Empire had become a mix of several hundred small, separate states. Theoretically, the Holy Roman emperor, who was chosen by seven leading German princes called **electors**, ruled these states. Yet, the emperor had little power over the numerous princes. This power vacuum led to a series of brutal wars that are together called the Thirty Years' War. It began when **Ferdinand**, the Catholic Hapsburg king of Bohemia, wanted to suppress Protestants and declare royal power over nobles. This led to several revolts and then a widespread European war.

The war devastated the German states. **Mercenaries**, or soldiers for hire, burned villages, destroyed crops, and murdered and tortured villagers. This led to famine and disease, which caused severe **depopulation**, or reduction in population.

It was not until 1648 that a series of treaties known as the **Peace of Westphalia** were established. These treaties aspired to bring peace to Europe and also settle other international problems.

While Austria was becoming a strong Catholic state, a region within the German states called **Prussia** emerged as a new Protestant power. The Prussian ruler **Frederick William I** came to power in 1713. He created a new bureaucracy and placed great emphasis on military values.

In Austria, **Maria Theresa** became empress after her father's death in 1740. That same year, **Frederick II** of Prussia seized the Hapsburg province of Silesia. This action sparked the eight-year **War of the Austrian Succession**. Despite tireless efforts, Maria Theresa did not succeed in forcing Frederick out of Silesia. However, she did preserve her empire and won the support of most of her people. She also strengthened Hapsburg power by reorganizing the bureaucracy and improving tax collection.

At his father's insistence, Frederick II endured harsh military training at a early age. After becoming king, he used his military education brilliantly, making Prussia a leading power. By 1750, the great European powers included Austria, Prussia, France, Britain, and Russia. These nations formed various alliances to maintain the balance of power. Often, Austria and Prussia were rivals.

Review Questions

1. What started the Thirty Years' War?

2. What caused the depopulation in the German states?

READING CHECK

What was the Peace of Westphalia supposed to accomplish?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *aspired* mean in the underlined sentence? The word *strived* is a synonym for *aspired*. Apply what you already know about *strived* to help you understand the meaning of *aspired*.

READING SKILL

Identify Supporting Details List details to support the statement: The Thirty Years' War had a terrible effect on German states.
