

# The Making of Europe: From Middle Ages to Modernity



Syllabus 2026  
Utrecht Summer School  
Dr. Esther Baakman

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## Image Front Page

*Officer and laughing girl*, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1657.

## 1. Formal Information

### Materials

Lectures and seminars will be based on segments from books, as well as several articles. Additionally, the course will feature primary sources. All the reading material will be made available through the Microsoft Teams environment of the course.

### Course Duration

20 Jul. - 31 Jul. 2026

### Credits

You will obtain 4.0 ECTS and a Certificate of Attendance after completion of the course.

### Faculty

Dr. Esther Baakman

Course Coordinator

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### Contact Utrecht Summer School

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## 2. Course Description

### Introduction

When considering Europe, many will think about either its violent 20<sup>th</sup> century history, or about the peaceful period that followed the founding of the European Union. Yet to truly understand the complex history of this continent, we must go back a few centuries to the early-modern period during which many of its characteristic features were formed.

*The Making of Europe* will actively guide you past the most important developments of early modern Europe, taking the alluring city of Utrecht as a starting point. It invites you to directly step into history and will illuminate historical European developments from the end of the Middle Ages to the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This historical journey will help course participants understand the many political, socio-economic, religious and cultural factors that came to shape modern Europe.

You will receive lectures on and read sources from a variety of historical topics, including the the Reformation, European expansionism, the Enlightenment, and the political revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition, in this course, students will have the opportunity to visit several historical monuments and museums in Utrecht and Amsterdam.

After these two weeks in Utrecht, students will be able to analyze and discuss the role of the Netherlands in the making of Europe and have a firm understanding of the main political, religious and cultural developments that took place in Europe in this time period. During these two weeks, course participants will be able to “experience” history.

Finally, although the course will feature many examples from Dutch history, lectures will include stories from all over Europe, to highlight both similarities as well as national/regional differences.

### Course Objectives

At the end of this course, the students will be able to:

- Distinguish the most important historical developments that characterized (early) modern Europe.
- Analyze historical objects and monuments by historically contextualizing them.
- Recognize how Dutch history fits and contrasts with general European history in the (early) modern period.

### Disclaimer

Depending on factors such as the size of the travel group and opening times/availability of some offers, individual parts of the excursions might change. Please check the Summer School website and contact the course coordinator(s) for updates.

### 3. Academic Program

#### Week 1

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#### Monday: July 20, 2026

10:00-12:00: Seminar 1: Getting acquainted and introduction to the course.

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

13:00-15:00: Lecture 1: The Reformation and wars of religion

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

16:00-17:00: Climbing the Dom Tower in the center of Utrecht

#### Literature:

- Humfrey Butters, "Europe in 1500," in: *The European World 1500-1800*, 13-20.
- Joke Spaans, "Reform in the Low Countries" in: R. Hsia (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation World* (Oxford 2006) 118-134.

#### Tuesday: July 21, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 2: The Dutch Revolt and Dutch Republic

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Excursion 1: Catharijneconvent Museum, Utrecht

#### Literature:

- TBD

#### Wednesday: July 22, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 3: European Expansion and Colonialism

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 2: Transatlantic Slavery

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

#### Literature:

- Stefan B. Kirmse and Margarita Eva Rodríguez García (with Remco Raben), "Empire and Colonialism in Early Modern History (1500–1800)" in: *The European Experience*, 297-306.
- Eltis D, Richardson D., 'A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade', in: Eltis D, Richardson D., *Extending the Frontiers*. Yale University Press; 2008, 1-62.

- Jennings, William, 'Daily Life', Dibia's World: Life on an Early Sugar Plantation (Liverpool, 2023; online edn, Liverpool Scholarship Online, 18 Jan. 2024), 91-100.

### Thursday: July 23, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 4: The Scientific Revolution

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 3: The Enlightenment

Lecturer:

Location:

#### Literature:

- Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1996) 1-14.
- Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford 2013) 1-11.

### Friday: July 24, 2024

10:00-12:00: Lecture 5: Political Revolutions

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-17:00: Excursion 2: Utrecht city-tour

#### Literature:

- Janet Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders. The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven and London 2015) 1-16.

## Week 2

### Monday: July 27, 2026

10:00-13:00: Seminar 4: Student presentations

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

13:00-15:00: Lecture 6: Upcoming European Nationalisms

Lecturer:

Location:

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#### Literature:

- Robert Gildea, "The Generation of Nationalism" and "National Awakenings" in: *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford 1987) 52-56 and 70-75.

## **Tuesday: July 28, 2026**

Excursion 3: Full-day trip to Amsterdam.

Literature: Russel Shorto, “Desiging the World’s Most Liberal City”, in: Jan Nijman (ed.), *Amsterdam's Canal District : Origins, Evolution, and Future Prospects* (Toronto 2020) 43-56.

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## **Wednesday: July 29, 2026**

10:00-12:00: Lecture 7: The Industrial Revolution

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 5: self-study for Exam (coordinator available for advice)

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

Literature:

- Emma Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution* (London 2018) 1-14.

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## **Thursday: July 30, 2026**

10:00-12:00: Final Exam

Location:

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## **Friday: July 31, 2026**

15:00-16:00: Final Ceremony: Presentation of Certificate

Location:

16:00-17:00: Afscheidsborrel: Drinks!

## 4. Lecturers

**Dr. Esther Baakman (course coordinator)** is a lecturer in the Political History section of Utrecht University. Her research deals with colonialism and its portrayal in early-modern Europe, focusing on colonial news in the periodical press, colonial citizenship, and the development of various discourses of slavery in early modern Europe.

## 5. Excursions

During this course, we will make three excursions, on which you will witness the effects of 600 years of European history in the Dutch landscape. For the excursion to Amsterdam, transportation will be arranged by the Summer School. You are, however, required to arrange your own lunch.

### **Climbing the Dom Tower**

Monday: July 20, 2026 (16:00)

We will climb the 100-meter tall medieval bell tower of the Dom church, and admire the views!

### **Catharijneconvent Museum**

Wednesday: July 22, 2026 (Visit: 13:00)

The first excursion will bring us to the Catharijneconvent Museum in the city center of Utrecht. This museum, housed in an old monastery, exhibits many objects from both Medieval as well as Early Modern times with a focus on religious history in the Netherlands. Objects that can be found in the museum range from religious relics to historical paintings. Students will be able to explore the museum with a guide.

### **Utrecht City-Tour**

Friday: July 24, 2026 (Departure 13:00)

For the second excursion, we will walk around the city of Utrecht and see where history comes to live. Some students, with a topic related to Utrecht, will give their presentation on location during this tour.

### **Amsterdam**

Tuesday: July 28, 2026 (Departure: 9:00) Full day -TBA

## 6. Attendance, Assessment, Grading

### Attendance

You are required to attend all lectures, seminar sessions, and excursions. Students who are absent due to factors beyond their fault (illness, accident, etc.) should submit a medical attest of this to the course coordinator (Dr. Esther Baakman) as soon as possible. A compensatory assignment is expected for each absence and each uncompensated absence will result in a 10% subtraction of the final grade.

### Assessment

Your grade for this course will be based on two different assignments:

- Group presentation            40 %
- Exam                                60 %

### Group Presentation

To complete this course successfully, you will be required to give a 15-20-minute presentation in groups of three to four students on a historical object that you will encounter during one of the excursions. The assignment is not merely to describe the object, but also to explain to your fellow students its historical significance, and link it to wider themes discussed in the course. Groups will be made during the first seminar, and presentations will take place on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> (during the Utrecht city tour) or Monday 27<sup>th</sup> of July, the day before we go on excursion to Amsterdam. Students will be provided with complementary literature that will help you explore the object and its significance.

The objects available for presentations are:

1. Paushuis – Utrecht
  - Significance: pope Adrian IV and the Catholic Church at the start of the Reformation
2. Jacobikerk – Utrecht
  - Significance: Protestant iconoclasm and church (re-)design
3. Aula Academiegebouw – Utrecht (conditional)
  - Significance: The Unie van Utrecht as “Declaration of Independence” of the Dutch Republic
4. Oude Hortus Botanicus + Sonnenborgh – Utrecht (conditional)
  - Significance: the developing new sciences of biology and botany
5. Kameren Maria van Pallaes – Utrecht
  - Significance: poor houses and early-modern social welfare
6. Church of Maria Minor / Café Olivier – Amsterdam
  - Significance: clandestine churches and religious toleration
7. Canal Ring – Amsterdam
  - Significance: Amsterdam in the seventeenth century as the world’s trading port
8. Dutch genre painting (Rijksmuseum) – Amsterdam
  - Significance: Daily life in the Dutch Republic
9. Dutch militia portraits (Rijksmuseum) – Amsterdam

- Significance: Civic militias in early-modern Europe

Your assessment will be based on the following elements:

- Quality of research
  - Historical accuracy
  - Historiographical connection
  - Connection to the course
- Presentation skills

### Exam

The course ends with a final examination of all course material (lectures, seminars, and literature) on July 30<sup>st</sup> (10:00-12:00).

### **Grading**

Your grades will be numerical grades, following the Dutch grading system. Dutch grades range from 0 (very bad) to 10 (excellent). At Utrecht University, a 5.5 is considered the lowest passing grade. Please note that grade inflation has not affected the Dutch grading system as much as it has some American institutions. Grades of 9 and higher are rarely given, the most common grades awarded being between 6 and 8. The Utrecht University student registration system (Osiris) that will produce your transcript will round off all grades to whole numerals for 5 and lower, and half numbers for 5.5 and higher. Hence, ... 4 — 5 — 5.5 — 6 — 6.5 — 7 — 7.5, etc. On course work and examinations, however, it is customary to receive a grade that has not been rounded off. Pluses and minuses are sometimes used, and count for one-fourth of a point, for instance: 8- = 7,75. The meaning of the final numerical grades is as follows:

9.00-10.00	Excellent
8.00-8.99	Very good
7.50-7.99	Good
7.00-7.49	Very satisfactory
6.50-6.99	Satisfactory
6.00-6.49	Sufficient
5.50-5.99	Acceptable; minimum pass
5.00-5.49	Insufficient; fail
4.00-4.99	Unsatisfactory
3.00-3.99	Very unsatisfactory
2.00-2.99	Bad
0.00-1.99	Very bad

\* Note that the conversion of grades that you have received in the Netherlands to grades at your home institution is the responsibility of your home institution, not Utrecht University. This chart should be used as an indication; no rights can be drawn from it.

\* Any case of plagiarism, including the use of text-generating AI, will be reported to the home institution and result in a course failure, meaning 1.00 as the final grade for this course.

## 7. Summer School Information

### Utrecht University Facilities

During the course, you can use several of Utrecht University's computer and printing facilities. You have received your computer login code (SOLIS ID) from the Summer School administration.

You are recommended to use one of the main computer rooms of the Faculty of Humanities in Kromme Nieuwegracht 80 (KNG 80). The computer rooms are opened from Mondays through Fridays from 08:00 to 19:00. The computer rooms are closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Another option is to use the computers at the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27). The library is open from Monday through Fridays from 08:00 to 18:00. It is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Again, use your login code (SOLIS ID) to log in at any of the library computers.

### Social Program

Utrecht Summer School not only offers you a fine selection of interesting courses in all kinds of disciplines, it also aims at giving the participants an unforgettable stay. Therefore, we invite all students during the months July and August to an attractive social program, including excursions, sport activities and social gatherings. The activities will provide the perfect setting for you to get to know your classmates better and to meet international students from other Summer School courses!

Information on the Summer School Social Programme can be found on the website [https://utrechtsummerschool.nl/social\\_programme](https://utrechtsummerschool.nl/social_programme).