Cities Gain Ground

How local governments gained power within the Holy Roman Empire

AWH.C.10.3.B "partial disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of independent city-states in Italy and Germany"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons emperors had limited control, and circle two powers city governments exercised. Number the Italian cities' path to greater self-rule 1 and Lübeck's path 2.

Who Ruled the City?

1. Picture a trader carrying dyed cloth across northern Italy in the late 1100s. On paper, much of the region belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. In practice, an emperor could not easily govern every town from afar. Disputes with popes over the appointment of church leaders weakened imperial influence in Italy. Meanwhile, local merchants and landowners formed communes, city governments run by councils. Milan and other communes collected taxes, made local rules, and organized militias. These cities did not suddenly become modern independent countries. They gained room to rule themselves while emperors continued to claim authority.

2. When Emperor Frederick I tried to restore imperial control in northern Italy, several communes joined the Lombard League. Its forces defeated his army at Legnano in 1176. The Peace of Constance in 1183 recognized many league cities' right to choose their own officials and manage local affairs. In return, the cities acknowledged the emperor's overlordship and certain imperial rights. A trader in Milan might therefore deal with a city council about local business, not wait for an imperial officer to decide everything. This agreement shows partial disintegration: imperial claims remained, but imperial power over daily government was limited.

3. Far to the north, German cities also gained governing powers as imperial authority became divided among princes, bishops, and cities. In 1226, Lübeck received the status of a free imperial city, placing it directly under the emperor rather than a nearby prince. Its council handled many local matters, including trade rules, although Lübeck still belonged to the empire. Not every German town held this status, and princes controlled many other towns. Unlike the Lombard League cities, which won recognition through a peace settlement after fighting, Lübeck received its special status through an imperial grant. Both paths left city councils with real authority.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did disputes with popes and the rise of communes each limit an emperor's control in northern Italy?

2. What authority did the Peace of Constance recognize for league cities, and what authority did the emperor keep?

3. Why could Lübeck's council set trade rules even though the city remained in the empire?

4. How were the Italian league cities' and Lübeck's paths to greater self-rule different? What did the results have in common?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a trader who wants to open a cloth stall in Milan and Lübeck. In four sentences, explain whom you would approach in each city, why local officials could make decisions, and why you could not call either city wholly separate from the empire.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.10.3.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons emperors had limited control, and circle two powers city governments exercised. Number the Italian cities' path to greater self-rule 1 and Lübeck's path 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did disputes with popes and the rise of communes each limit an emperor's control in northern Italy?	**Disputes with popes weakened imperial influence, while communes took charge of local matters through their own councils.**
2	What authority did the Peace of Constance recognize for league cities, and what authority did the emperor keep?	**It recognized the cities' right to choose officials and manage local affairs. The emperor retained overlordship and certain imperial rights.**
3	Why could Lübeck's council set trade rules even though the city remained in the empire?	**As a free imperial city, Lübeck governed many local matters through its council while remaining directly under the emperor.**
4	How were the Italian league cities' and Lübeck's paths to greater self-rule different? What did the results have in common?	**The league cities gained recognition through a peace settlement after fighting; Lübeck received an imperial grant. Both gained councils with authority over local affairs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In Milan, I would ask the city council about opening my cloth stall because its commune managed local affairs. The Peace of Constance recognized that power after the Lombard League's struggle with the emperor. In Lübeck, I would ask the council because the city's imperial grant let it handle local matters, including trade rules. Neither city was wholly separate from the empire: Milan acknowledged the emperor's overlordship, and Lübeck remained directly under him.

Accept other passage-supported examples of local authority, such as collecting taxes or choosing officials. Students should distinguish practical self-government from complete separation from the empire.