



A COURSE GUIDE *for the*  
HARVARD HUMANIST

*Presented by the  
Abigail Adams Institute*

FOURTH EDITION

# THE ABIGAIL ADAMS INSTITUTE

The Abigail Adams Institute (AAI) is an independent scholarly enterprise dedicated to promoting humanistic inquiry in the Harvard intellectual community. Throughout the year, we provide a range of humanities programming, including reading and discussion groups, workshops, lectures, conversations with faculty, intellectual retreats, and mentoring. The name of the Institute honors the Massachusetts native Abigail Adams, whose capacious learning, judicious insight, and wise counsel shaped the founding and early development of the American nation.



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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*A Course Guide for the Harvard Humanist* is meant to be useful to any Harvard student who wants to make the best use of the College's academic resources in the humanities. It highlights some of Harvard's truly outstanding courses and teachers.

This guide also provides a framework for thinking about what a humanistic education can look like in the twenty-first century, and it offers practical advice on how to get such an education at a large modern research university like Harvard. We have divided the subject material by areas and forms of inquiry in a way that, we hope, will prompt you to think in big and broad terms about your education. The ordering you will find in these pages reflects the Abigail Adams Institute's approach to humanistic study. It is our best effort to put together something like the beginning of an integrated core curriculum.

The courses included in this guide have gained their spots based on the recommendations of upperclassmen and young alumni who believe that becoming an educated person requires a right inclination and a lot of diligent work on the part of the student. The contributors are all deeply grateful for the tradition of learning that they encountered and assimilated at Harvard. This is one small contribution that they are making toward a good beginning of your humanistic education.

Acquiring a good education takes time, thought, effort, and a proper orientation to knowledge. It is in college that even a lifelong student has the opportunity to develop a taste for genuine understanding. Your college years can be a time of grounded and well-ordered intellectual growth. We hope our guide can be of use to you in this endeavor.

*A Course Guide for the Harvard Humanist: Fourth Edition* was compiled in 2023 by the Staff of the Abigail Adams Institute.

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## CLASSICS

*Gain proficiency in ancient Greek and Latin, and read the classic texts that shaped the ancient and modern worlds.*

### **GREEK 1: Introductory Ancient Greek 1**

*Professor Ivy Livingston*

Greek 1 is a starting point for those interested in learning to read ancient Greek. Participants will begin to gain direct access to the literature and culture of Greece through its writings.

### **CLS-STDY 97A: Introduction to the Ancient Greek World**

*Professor Paul Kosmin*

This course will cover the history of ancient Greece from the Bronze Age Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations to the Roman conquest of the East Mediterranean. Attention will be paid to the major political, social, economic, and cultural transformations.

Bryce McDonald '21

Classical Studies 97A is an example of the best kind of survey class, masterfully tracing threads in the Greek and neighboring cultures over the course of a thousand years, without seeming cursory or scattered. Though the instructor varies year-to-year, there is consistent instruction in developing the skills of a historian, enabling the gleaning of rich context from ancient artifacts and inscriptions. This class is a perfect chance to follow the fount of Western Civilization back to its source.



## CLASSICS

### **CLS-STDY 97B: Introduction to the Ancient Roman World**

*Professor Kathleen Coleman*

This course provides a chronological survey of Roman history, thematic explorations of key features of culture and daily Roman life, and an introduction to the tools and methods available for research on the Roman world.

### **CLS-STDY 118: Ancient Greek Warfare**

*Professor Natasha Bershadsky*

Introduces students to the history, myths, and social context of ancient Greek warfare stretching across approximately one thousand years.

*Sophia Downs '25*

Classics 97B offers a sweeping look at the vast history of Rome, a necessity for understanding our civilization today.

### **CLASPHIL 239: Intertextuality and Reception from Alexandria to Rome and Beyond**

*Professor Richard Thomas*

Exploration of the pragmatics of the intertextual relationship of Hellenistic poetry to the prior Greek tradition, and of republican, Augustan, and imperial Roman poets' further building on this practice.



## THE OCCIDENT

*Understand and appreciate the effort to translate and transform the classical tradition into Western civilization.*

### **HDS 2094: The History of Christianity through Biography and Autobiography, ca. 150-1100**

*Professor Kevin Madigan*

An introduction to the history of ancient and early medieval Christianity. Organizes narratives and themes around hagiographical and autobiographical accounts of figures like Perpetua, Origen, Constantine, Benedict, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede, and Charlemagne.

### **HIST 1301: Western Intellectual History: The Prehistory of Modern Thought**

*Professor James Hankins*

A survey of major themes in medieval and early modern intellectual history. Includes readings from Anselm, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Thomas More, Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes.

### **ENGLISH 131P: Milton's Paradise Lost**

*Professor Gordon Teskey*

This course focuses on Milton's most famous work, *Paradise Lost*, the greatest long poem in English and the only successful classical epic in the modern world.

**Shani Agarwal**  
HDS '23

Professor Madigan's course utilized a rich selection of primary sources to provide a survey of the History of Early Christianity. Discussions were engaging, and the exams and final paper had clear and helpful guidelines.



## THE OCCIDENT

### **MEDVLSTD 119: Constitutional and Legal History of Medieval Continental Europe**

*Professor Charles Donahue*

An overview of continental European constitutional and legal history from the fall of the Roman Empire to the "Rise of absolutism" at the beginning of the 17th century.

**Carter Stewart '25**

Professor Donahue is a leading expert in the field, able to refer to documents and cases with more authority than anyone else, because in many cases he found and translated them himself.

### **HIST 1921: The History of Law in Europe**

*Professor Tamar Herzog*

A discussion class on the history of law in Europe and its legal reach around the world from the fall of the Roman Empire (5th century) to the establishment of the European Community (20th century).







# HISTORY

*Develop an empathetic understanding of eras other than one's own. Read and evaluate the stories people tell about themselves.*

## **HIST 97B: "What is Intellectual History?"**

*Professor Ann Blair*

Intellectual historians study almost every period, place, and theme in human history: from classical times to the present, from Asia to the Americas, by examining philosophy and religion, social and political thought, literature and art, and other diverse expressions of human agency and intention.

## **HIST 1029: Early Modern Britain, 1485-1714**

*Professor Flynn Cratty*

This course focuses on the formation of the ideas and institutions that the British would eventually export across the world, with special attention to the ways people sought to imagine new worlds in times of instability.

Paige Proctor '23

Professor Blair is exceptionally accomplished in the field of intellectual history and is an engaging teacher committed to helping her students succeed in her courses and well into their futures.

## **HIST 83A: Markets and States: The History of Economic Thought Since 1750**

*Professor Emma Rothschild*

Examines the history of various kinds of economic thought, including 18th century laissez-faire political economy, 19th century theories of the state, and 20th century ideas of nature and the environment.





# HISTORY

## **HIST 1520: Colonial Latin America**

*Professor Tamar Herzog*

This course is an introductory survey of colonial Latin American history, spanning the 16th to the early 19th centuries.

## **CHNSHIS 228: Introduction to Neo-Confucianism**

*Professor Peter K. Bol*

Explores programs for moral practice and their underlying theories advanced by Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist writers from the 8th century to the 14th.

## **HIST 1323: German Social Thought, Nietzsche to Habermas**

*Professor Peter Gordon*

A philosophical and historical survey of major debates in modern German social theory over the span of a century, from Nietzsche's critique of morality and truth to Habermas's attempt to rebuild a theory for ethical and discursive reason after the collapse of metaphysics.

David Vega '24

Professor Gordon is genuinely committed to the revival of the study of German thought. He lectures captivantly, and any Harvard student would be remiss to skip out.



## RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

*Reflect on the deepest sources  
of our beliefs about God and  
the world.*

### **PHIL 7: Introduction to Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy**

*Professor Mariana Noe*

An introduction to some of the most influential theories in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy. This course does not presuppose any prior knowledge of philosophy, but requires eagerness to learn three philosophical skills: thoughtful speaking, precise writing, and careful reading.

### **RELIGION 1232: Ancient Jewish Wisdom Literature**

*Professor Jon Levenson*

A close critical reading and interpretation of works thought to derive from the Wisdom tradition of ancient Israel, principally in the Second Temple period.

### **PHIL 31: Saints, Heretics, and Atheists: A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion**

*Professor Jeffrey McDonough*

This course will explore foundational questions in the philosophy of western religion through the study of classic works by figures such as Plato, Augustine, Anselm, Ibn Sina, Aquinas, Pascal, Spinoza, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche and James, as well as discussions by contemporary authors.

Gabrielle Landry '22

I have been very impressed by the quality of instructors in the Philosophy Department. Some of my favorite classes have been taught by Professor McDonough. He gives extremely effective lectures, helpful handouts, and plenty of office hours.



## RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

### **ISLAMCIV 145: Introduction to Islamic Philosophy and Theology: The Classical and Medieval period**

*Professor Khaled El-Rouayheb*

An introduction to some of the key problems and figures in medieval Islamic theology and philosophy, including the rise of theological controversies in early Islam, an Arabic tradition of Aristotelianism, the confrontation between theological and philosophical traditions, and the later influences of Platonist philosophy and mystical monism.

Mary Broker '20

I highly recommend Religion 40 for those of any religious background. The readings are diverse and fascinating; the course serves as an excellent introduction to important Christian texts. The professor is extremely knowledgeable and delivers engaging lectures while facilitating discussion.

### **RELIGION 40: Incarnation and Desire**

*Professor Courtney Lamberth*

An introduction to Christian thought, considering major texts, figures and ideas from the 1st century to the present in their changing cultural contexts.

### **PHIL 121: Life and Death: A History**

*Professor Alison Simmons*

What, exactly, is the difference between a living thing and a dead (or inanimate) thing? Explore the ways in which the metaphysics of life and death has changed over the past 2000 years in the Western tradition.



## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

*Articulate the idea of the political and the nature of our obligation to others.*

### **GOV 1060: Ancient and Medieval Political Philosophy**

*Professor Eric Nelson*

A study of the greatest works of classical political philosophy in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Thomas Aquinas, with a focus on justice.

### **GOV 1540: The American Presidency**

*Professor Roger Porter*

This course analyzes the development and practice of presidential leadership in the United States by examining the evolution of the modern presidency, the process of presidential selection, and the structure of the presidency as an institution.

Alex Hughes '25

Even for those who don't envision their own eventual White House run, GOV 1540 is valuable for anyone looking to understand the nature of effective leadership -- and Professor Porter's stories are an excellent cherry on top.

### **GOV 941A: Sino-US Relations in an Era of Rising Chinese Power**

*Professor Alastair Johnston*

Focuses on the theoretically informed explanations for changing levels of conflict and cooperation in US-China relations.





## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Jim McGlone '15

Professor Hankins brings a love of Western culture and tradition to all his lectures.

### **HIST 2130: Renaissance Political Thought**

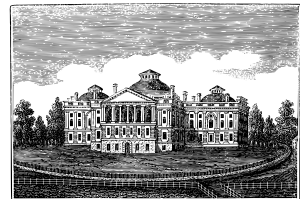
*Professors James Hankins and Eric Nelson*

An exploration of political thought in the Renaissance (1350–1600), which saw a shift away from medieval efforts to apply Christian doctrine to the ordering of public power towards an interest in how to secure good government by educating political leaders in virtue and through the prudent application of ancient history.

### **GOV 1521: Bureaucratic Politics: Government, Economic, Social and Military Organizations**

*Professor Daniel Carpenter*

A theoretical and historical analysis of bureaucratic organizations in different domains of modern society.







## LITERATURE AND ART

*Acquire an appreciation of the beauty and power of language and image. Learn to write clearly and logically.*

### **GENED 1010: Satire**

*Professor Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja*

A course on satire and its power and limitations, from Classical Rome through medieval Italy, Elizabethan theater, and 19th-20th century American cartoonists.

### **GENED 1090: What Is a Book? From the Clay Tablet to the Kindle**

*Professor David Stern*

Students study the different material forms in which texts in Western culture have been inscribed—from tablets to e-books—and the technologies that have enabled their creation.

### **MUSIC 20: Opera**

*Professor Carolyn Abbate*

This lecture course will explore opera, a theatrical genre with a 400-year history, as a multimedia performance to invoke the passions, focusing on evolution over time, famous works, and attending live performances.

Portia Berry-Kilby '20

Music 20 covers technical matters, and expects students to train their ear in order to identify key traits in musical pieces. People often dismiss opera as being too old-fashioned or elite, but this course proves otherwise.



## LITERATURE AND ART

### SLAVIC 147: Russian Fiction in the Soviet Era

*Professor Justin Weir*

Read several of the most acclaimed works of Russian fiction in the Soviet era, including Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, and narratives by Osip Mandelstam, Yuri Olesha, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Evgeny Zamyatin.

### ENGLISH 178X: The American Novel: Dreiser to the Present

*Professor Philip Fisher*

A survey of the 20th-century novel, its forms, patterns of ideas, techniques, cultural context, rivalry with film and radio, short story, and fact. Includes works by Wharton, Hemingway, Faulkner, Ellison, Nabokov, Fitzgerald, Salinger, and more.

Paul Chin '24

Professor Weir's philosophical, historical, and literary insights illuminate the texts in ways that would be hard to come by if you read these great texts alone.



Loren Brown '23

Professor Fisher does a fantastic job explicating the themes of classic novels and showing how they helped develop their particular literary tradition.



# ECONOMY

*Learn the underpinnings of the modern system of production, consumption, and exchange.*

## **ECON 10A Principles of Economics (Microeconomics)**

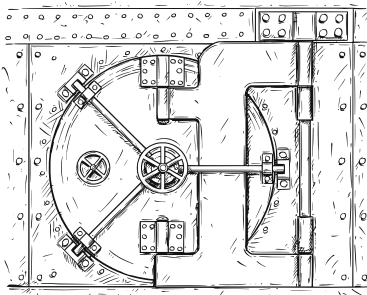
*Professors Jason Furman and David Laibson*

Studies individual decision-making and markets, and ranges from classical approaches like supply and demand to more recent approaches that consider informational limitations and behavioral mistakes.

## **ECON 10B: Principles of Economics (Macroeconomics)**

*Professors Jason Furman and David Laibson*

Continues the curriculum presented in ECON 10A, moving to the study of macroeconomics including the growth of the overall economy, business cycles, and economic crises.



Danilo Petranovich '00

Over the years, many renowned economists have taught the ECON 10 course sequence, but the real learning experience is in the day-to-day contact with your TA.



## ECONOMY

### **GOV 1780: International Political Economy**

*Professor Jeffry Frieden*

Analyzes the interaction of politics and economics in the international arena. Focuses on international trade, investment, monetary, and financial relations.

### **ECON 2010A: Economic Theory**

*Professors Edward Glaeser and Eric Maskin*

Covers the theory of individual and group behavior. Topics include consumer theory, producer theory, behavior under uncertainty, externalities, monopolistic distortions, game theory, oligopolistic behavior, and asymmetric information.

### **GENED 1159: American Capitalism**

*Professor Sven Beckert*

In this course, students will gain an in-depth understanding of how North America turned from a minor outpost of the Atlantic economy into the powerhouse of the world economy, how Americans built a capitalist economy, and how that capitalism, in turn, changed every aspect of their lives.





# LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Harvard students lead rich extracurricular lives. They form lifelong friendships in student-run groups, sports teams, and other societies on and around campus. Plenty of active learning also takes place over a meal with old and new friends from the College and beyond. But there is much to learn outside the "Harvard Bubble." We heartily encourage you to occasionally leave the confines of campus, especially in order to visit some of the storied New England landmarks around the area. Here are a few recommendations to start you off:

## **Fenway Park**

Make sure to spend an afternoon viewing America's game at the storied Fenway, or simply stopping by for a tour.

## **Bunker Hill & the Freedom Trail**

In the oldest part of Boston, a train ride from campus, runs the Freedom Trail. Walking tours use the two-and-a-half mile trail to explain the role of Bostonian patriots in beginning the American Revolution and shaping a new nation.

## **Lexington & Concord**

Visit the Old North Bridge and learn about Yankee military strategy.

## **Granary Burial Ground**

Up the street from Boston Common one can find the Granary Burying Ground. Sam Adams, John Hancock, the Boston Massacre Victims, and many other significant colonial figures lay at rest here.

## **Massachusetts Historical Society**

You can find the nation's first historical society across the Charles River on Boylston Street. The Adams Family Papers and the Thomas Jefferson Papers are a must-see for students of the American Founding.

## **Mount Auburn Cemetery**

Just up the street from campus sits Mount Auburn Cemetery, a significant burial ground for many local families, and its beautiful chapel and grounds.



# LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



## **USS Constitution Museum**

Located in the Charlestown Navy Yard, the USS Constitution Museum “preserves, displays, and interprets artifacts and archival material” from ‘Old Ironsides’ herself, “an active-duty U.S. Navy vessel, the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world.”

## **Museum of Fine Arts**

Boston’s MFA is located on the Green Line of the T, about 35 minutes from campus. It is one of the most comprehensive art museums in the world; the collection encompasses nearly 450,000 works of art from across the globe.

## **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum**

Originally the home of Isabella Stewart Gardner, the museum houses her personal collection of paintings, tapestries, and other mediums of artwork. It often hosts cultural events, such as musical performances.

## **Handel & Haydn Society**

Having performed early music in Boston for two centuries now, the Handel & Haydn Society has a reputation for fine artistry and its use of period instruments. H&H offers discounts to young professionals on all its shows, and it performs Handel’s *Messiah* every year in the Advent season.

## **Symphony Hall**

The historic Symphony Hall hosts some of Boston’s biggest classical music concerts. The Boston Symphony Orchestra offers unparalleled discounts for college students.

## **Museum of Science**

Located in Science Park, a plot of land spanning the Charles River, Boston’s MoS features over 700 interactive exhibits, a number of live presentations throughout the building every day, and shows at the Charles Hayden Planetarium and the Mugar Omni Theater, the only domed IMAX screen in New England. The museum is also an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and is home to over 100 animals, many of which have been rescued and rehabilitated.

# POSTSCRIPT: ON THE LIBERAL ARTS



**By FRED LARSEN '24, AAI AROUTIUNIAN FELLOW**

Liberal arts—a term well-known, yet rarely questioned. Our College sets the national standard for a liberal arts education, so we are compelled to investigate the true meaning of this odd term.

The term, on its face, means an education in the free arts — not limited to fine arts, but rather in the sense of the Greek *techné*: a craft aimed ultimately at an end, and ultimately at the good. It is common to take the qualifier "free" to mean that our education is open to unstructured exploration and complete student choice in following specific educational dreams. But educational freedom has not always been understood as such, and its contemporary meaning is rather radical compared to its original end.

An education in freedom is the crafting of a free person. This freedom is the end, not the means of the educational project. Freedom to do what? To follow one's whim, to explore untethered, to chase fleeting desires? This is not freedom properly speaking, but an operational freedom in service of lower aims. One should see "liberal" in "liberal education" as oriented toward the end of a free person, free from the tyranny of desire and free to explore and find the truth. This is an end to which we orient ourselves in hopes of reaching it in the long term, as an ultimate goal. This freedom is not a prescription for how we ought to carry our education in the short term. Liberal education is the highest duty of the good society, not merely a method of a student's educational choice.

Harvard describes its approach to liberal arts as such: "commitment to liberal arts & sciences is at the core of Harvard College's mission: before students can help change the world, they need to understand it."\* The focus here is knowledge for the sake of change, knowing the world so that one can transform it. Human knowledge becomes human power. But transform it into what? Change the world in what way? Understanding how it functions is not enough to prescribe an end of change. One needs a set of values, hidden in the function between understanding and change, which directs the goal of change. A proper liberal arts education should create virtuous, wise, and free people, toward the aim of the good, not effective changers to no apparent specific end. An education of world-changers is, as Max Weber described, an education which produces "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart."\*\*

Don't view your four years here as training to change the world. Don't understand them as free and aimless exploration. Immerse yourself in timeless ideas, pressing questions, and exploration of the truth. And never let your education disconnect itself from virtue, beauty, and friendship.

**"Liberal education supplies us with experience in things beautiful."**

—Leo Strauss\*\*\*

# CITATIONS

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Vermeer, Johannes. *The Geographer*, 1669. Oil on canvas. 53 x 46.6 cm (20.8 x 18.3 in). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 17, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El\\_ge%C3%B3grafo.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_ge%C3%B3grafo.jpg)

## General Introduction

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## Classics

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## The Occident

Canal, Giovanni Antonio (Canaletto). *Piazza San Marco, Venice*, late 1720s. Oil on canvas. 68.6 x 112.4 cm (27 x 44 1/4 in). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435839](https://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435839)

Neefs, Pieter the Elder and Francken, Franz the Younger. *A Nocturnal Interior of a Gothic Cathedral with a Candlelit Procession*, c. 1609-1642. Oil on canvas. 33.7 x 48.3 cm (13.2 x 19 in). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 16, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter\\_Neefs\\_the\\_Elder\\_%E2%80%93\\_A\\_Nocturnal\\_Interior\\_of\\_a\\_Gothic\\_Cathedral\\_with\\_a\\_Candlelit\\_Procession.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Neefs_the_Elder_%E2%80%93_A_Nocturnal_Interior_of_a_Gothic_Cathedral_with_a_Candlelit_Procession.jpg)

## History

Berthon, René Théodore. *Capitulation at Ulm*, c. 1805-1815. Oil on canvas. 176.5 x 279 cm (69.4x 109.8 in). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 16, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulm\\_capitulation\\_\(3\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulm_capitulation_(3).jpg)

Moore, Claude Thomas Stanfield. *The training ship 'Fisgard' (?) off the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, in 1877*, 1877. Oil on canvas. 30.5 x 45.5 cm (12 x 17.9 in). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 16, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulm\\_capitulation\\_\(3\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulm_capitulation_(3).jpg)

## Religion & Philosophy

Raphael. *School of Athens*, c. 1509-11. Fresco. 500 x 700 cm (6.4 x 22.9 ft). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 16, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael\\_058\\_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael_058_(cropped).jpg)

Bellini, Giovanni. *Madonna and Child with Four Saints and Donator*, 1507. Oil on canvas. 90 x 145cm (34.5 x 57 in). [Public Domain], via Wikipedia Commons. (Accessed Aug 16, 2023). [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael\\_058\\_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael_058_(cropped).jpg)

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## Literature & Art

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## Economy

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