

## Chapter Eleven

# BREAKDOWN AND RENEWAL IN AN AGE OF PLAGUE

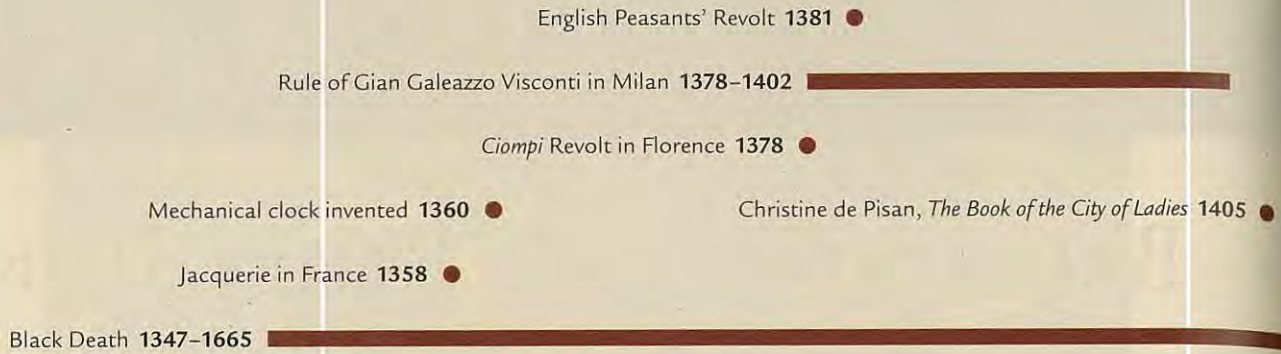
POPULATION CATASTROPHES • ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY •  
POPULAR UNREST • CHALLENGES TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF EUROPE •  
THE FALL OF BYZANTIUM AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

*I*n the fourteenth century, plague, famine, and recurrent wars decimated populations and snuffed out former prosperity. At the same time, feudal governments as well as the papacy struggled against mounting institutional chaos. But despite all the signs of crisis, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were not merely an age of breakdown. The failures of the medieval economy and its governments drove the Western peoples to repair their institutions. By the late fifteenth century the outlines of a new equilibrium were emerging. In 1500 Europeans were fewer in number than they had been in 1300, but they had developed a more productive economy and a more powerful technology than they had possessed two hundred years before. These achievements were to equip them

for their great expansion throughout the world in the early modern period.

Some historians refer to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the “autumn of the Middle Ages,” emphasizing the decline and death of a formerly great civilization. People living at the time tended to think in terms of the Biblical passage in Revelation referring to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—famine, disease, war, and the white horse of salvation. Constantinople, the last remnant of the Byzantine Empire, fell to the Ottoman Turks, providing a powerful symbol of decay. But the study of any past epoch requires an effort to balance the work of death and renewal. In few periods of history do death and renewal confront each other so dramatically as in the years between 1300 and 1500.





## POPULATION CATASTROPHES

The famines and plagues that struck European society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries profoundly affected economic life. While the disasters disrupted the economy, Europeans recovered and reorganized to greatly changed demographic conditions. They significantly increased the efficiency of economic production.

### *Demographic Decline*

A few censuses and other statistical records give us an insight into the size and structure of the European population in the 1300s. While incomplete, the figures show how population was changing.

**Population Losses** Almost every region of Europe shows an appalling decline of population between approximately 1300 and 1450. In Provence in southern France, the population seems to have shrunk after 1310 from between 350,000 and 400,000 to roughly one-third, or at most one-half, of its earlier size; only after 1470 did it again begin to increase. In Italy the decline of population was more severe.

For the larger kingdoms of Europe, the figures are less reliable, but they show a similar pattern. England had a population of about 3.7 million in 1347 and 2.2 million by 1377. France by 1328 may have reached 15 million; it was not again to attain this size for two hundred years. It can safely be estimated that all of Europe in 1450 had no more than one-half, and probably only one-third, of the population it had had around 1300. Population did not begin to recover until the end of the fifteenth century.

**Famine and Hunger** The first demographic catastrophe in late medieval Europe was **famine** and general food scarcities. In 1315, 1316, and 1317 a severe famine swept the north of Europe. Chroniclers described the incessant rainfall that rotted crops in the fields and prevented harvests; they spoke of people dying in the city streets and country lanes; cannibalism is another theme. In 1339 and 1340 a famine struck southern Europe. During famines, the starving people ate not only their reserves of grain but also most of the seed they had set aside for planting. Medieval Europe lacked a welfare system that could handle such massive crop failures.

Why was hunger so widespread in the early fourteenth century? Some historians see the root of trouble in the sheer number of people the lands had to support by 1300. The medieval population had been growing rapidly since about 1000, and by 1300 Europe, so this analysis suggests, was becoming the victim of its own success. Parts of the continent were crowded, even glutted, with people. Some areas of Normandy, for example, had a population in the early fourteenth century not much below what they supported six hundred years later. Thousands, millions even, had to be fed without chemical fertilizers, power tools, and fast transport. Masses of people had come to depend for their livelihood on infertile soils, and even in good years they were surviving on the margins of existence.

Although hunger did not always result in starvation, malnutrition raised the death rate from respiratory infections and intestinal ailments. While some parts of Europe returned to prosperity and good diets before the next disaster—plague—the experience of others demonstrated the dual impact of famine and



- 1434 Medici family dominates Florentine politics

- 1454 Peace of Lodi

- 1455 Gutenberg Bible printed

1451–1481  
Rule of Mehmet II,  
Ottoman Empire

1455–1489  
War of the Roses  
in England

1337–1453 Hundred Years' War

plague. Barceleona and its province of Catalonia experienced famine in 1333; plague in 1347–1351; famine in 1358–1359; and plague in 1362–1363, 1371, and 1397.

## Plague

The great plague of the fourteenth century, known as the **Black Death**, provides a dramatic, but not a complete, explanation for the huge human losses. Plague is endemic (always present) in several parts of the world, including the southwestern United States, and occasionally spreads to become a pandemic. In the mid-fourteenth century it spread along caravan routes of central Asia and arrived at the Black Sea ports. Europe's active trade in luxury items from the East gave plague a route to Europe. In 1347 a merchant ship sailing from Caffa in the Crimea to Messina in Sicily seems to have carried rats infected with the plague. A plague broke out at Messina, and from there it spread rapidly throughout Europe (see map 11.1).

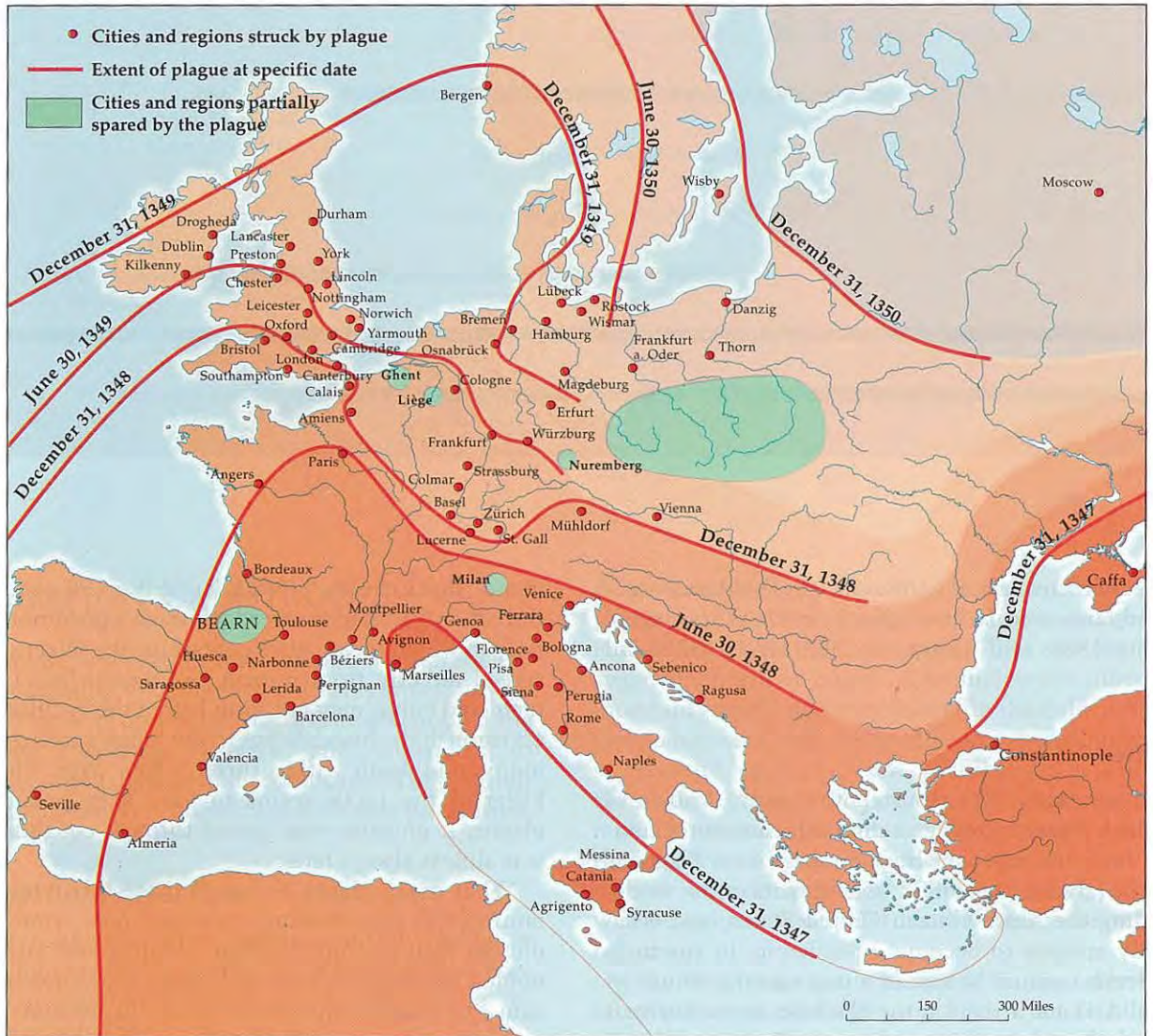
**Nature of the Disease** The plague took several forms in Europe. The most identifiable one—the one that contemporary sources describe (see “Boccaccio on the Black Death,” p. 309)—is the bubonic form. The pathogenic agent (not discovered until the late nineteenth century) is *Bacillus pestis*. While normally a disease of rodents, particularly house rats, it can spread to humans by fleas that carry the infection from rodents to humans through a flea bite. Bubonic plague has an incubation period of about two to ten days; its symptoms are chills, high fever, headache, and vomiting. The next symptoms are swellings (bubos) in lymph nodes of the groin and clotting blood under the skin, hence the

name “Black Death.” Death is likely in 90 percent of the cases. Plague also spreads through a pneumonic variety in which the droplets containing the infection can spread directly from human to human. Infection is rapid and bubos may not form before the bacillus travels through the bloodstream to the lungs, causing pneumonia and death within three or four days. The real killer in the 1300s seems to have been pneumonic plague; it probably was spread through coughing and was almost always fatal.

What made plague so much more terrifying than famine was that it struck rich and poor, young and old, women and men, urban dwellers and villagers, nobles, peasants, monks, and clergy. Not knowing the cause of plague, physicians could do no more than lance the bubos to bring comfort, and many refused to treat plague patients at all. Those members of the clergy who went among the dying usually became infected themselves. Not knowing the true cause of the disease, people blamed the Jews for poisoning the wells; others (the Flagelants) thought it was the wrath of God and walked in procession beating themselves. Eventually, cities formed a contagion theory of the disease and refused admittance within their walls of anyone who came from a city in which the plague was prevalent.

**Pandemic** The Black Death was not so much an epidemic as a pandemic (universal disease), striking an entire continent. The plague was the same one that had visited the Mediterranean and Western Europe in 542, during the reign of Justinian (see chapter 7). It struck not just once but repeatedly, until the last great outbreak in 1665, the Great Plague in London. Plague revisited every generation, and other diseases came into





MAP 11.1 THE BLACK DEATH

The plague, as this map shows, took three years to move from Sicily to Sweden. Europe's poor travel conditions contributed to the gradual spread of plague. Where did plague appear first in Europe? Which cities and regions of Europe were partially spared by the plague?

◆ For an online version, go to [www.mhhe.com/chambers9](http://www.mhhe.com/chambers9) > chapter 11 > book maps

Europe. Population did not begin to recover until the late fifteenth century.

Some of the horror of the plague can be glimpsed in this account by an anonymous cleric who visited the French city of Avignon in 1348: "To put the matter shortly, one-half, or more than a half, of the people at Avignon are already dead. Within the walls of the city there are now more than 7,000 houses shut up; in these no one is living, and all who have inhabited them are departed. . . . On account of this great mortality there is such a fear of death that people do not dare even to speak with anyone whose relative has died, because it

is frequently remarked that in a family where one dies nearly all the relations follow him."<sup>1</sup>

## ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY

A continent does not lose a third to a half of its population without feeling the effects immediately. After

<sup>1</sup> *Breve Chronicon clerici anonymi*, quoted in Francis Aidan Gasquet, *The Black Death of 1348 and 1349*, 1908, p. 46.





## BOCCACCIO ON THE BLACK DEATH

*The following eyewitness description of the ravages of the Black Death in Florence was written by one of its most famous citizens, the writer Giovanni Boccaccio. This passage comes from his masterpiece, The Decameron, written during the three years following the plague.*

"In the year of our Lord 1348, there happened at Florence a most terrible plague, which had broken out some years before in the Levant, and after making incredible havoc all the way, had now reached the west. There, in spite of all the means that art and human foresight could suggest, such as keeping the city clear from filth and the publication of copious instructions for preservation of health, it began to show itself in the spring. Unlike what had been seen in the east, where bleeding from the nose is the fatal prognostic, here there appeared certain tumors in the groin or under the arm-pits, some as big as a small apple, others as an egg, and afterwards purple spots in most parts of the body—messengers of death. To the cure of this malady neither medical knowledge nor the power of drugs was of any effect; whether because the disease was in its own nature mortal, or that the physicians (the number of whom, tak-

ing quacks and women pretenders into account, was grown very great) could form no just idea of the cause. Whichever was the reason, few escaped; but nearly all died the third day from the first appearance of the symptoms, some sooner, some later, without any fever or other symptoms. What gave the more virulence to this plague was that it spread daily, like fire when it comes in contact with combustibles. Nor was it caught only by coming near the sick, but even by touching their clothes. One instance of this kind I took particular notice of: the rags of a poor man just dead had been thrown into the street. Two hogs came up, and after rooting amongst the rags, in less than an hour they both turned around and died on the spot."

From C. Warren Hollister et al., *Medieval Europe: A Short Sourcebook*, McGraw-Hill Companies, 1992, pp. 248–249.

burying the dead, often in mass graves outside city walls, the survivors took stock of their economic position. According to contemporaries, survivors of the plague often gave up toiling in the fields or looking after their shops; presumably, they saw no point in working for the future when it was so uncertain. But in the long run Europeans adapted to the new conditions and prospered.

### **Agricultural Specialization**

Perhaps the best indication of the changes in the European economy comes from the history of prices. The cost of most agricultural products—cereals, wine, beer, oil, and meat—shot up immediately after the Black Death and stayed high until approximately 1375 in the north and 1395 in Italy. High food prices in a time of declining population suggests that production was falling even more rapidly than the number of consumers. But high food prices mask the shift in agricultural production that led to greater specialization and, ultimately, improved diets.

**Impact on the Peasantry** Some historians have called the period following the depletion of population a golden age for peasantry. Conditions did change for the peasants, but these changes were not uni-

formly for the better across Europe. The peasantry quickly realized that with labor in short supply they could demand higher wages for their labor, and that they could even break the bonds of their serfdom and move around the countryside to follow higher wages. The nobles and landlords were swift in their reaction to such gains.

In England, as elsewhere in Europe, the peasants had enjoyed a period of relative freedom from the labor demands of serfdom, but in the late thirteenth century landlords reimposed serfdom to take advantage of the money they could make from their crops in the period of high population and high demand for grain. With the sudden drop in population and demand for higher wages, Parliament passed the Statute of Laborers in 1351, which fixed prices and wages at what they were in 1347, the year before the plague. Like any law against supply and demand, the statute was hard to enforce, and during the course of the fifteenth century serfdom gradually disappeared in England, as the population moved away from the old manors or simply refused to pay any dues other than their rent.

**Agricultural Specialization** One branch of agriculture that enjoyed a remarkable period of growth in the fifteenth century was sheep raising. Since the prices

**TRIUMPH OF DEATH**

The great social disaster of the Black Death left few traces in the visual arts; perhaps people did not wish to be reminded of its horrors. One exception was the *Triumph of Death*, a mural painted shortly after 1348 in the Camposanto (cemetery) of Pisa in Italy. In this detail of the mural, an elegant party of hunters happens upon corpses prepared for burial. Note the rider who holds a handkerchief—scented, undoubtedly—to his nose, to ward off the foul odors.

Art Resource, NY



for wool, skins, mutton, and cheese remained high, English landlords sought to take advantage of the market by fencing large fields and converting them from plowland into sheep pastures and expelling the peasants or small herders who had formerly lived there. This process, called enclosure, continued for centuries and played an important role in English economic and social history. Other countries as well began to have agricultural specialization. The Netherlands did cheese and dairy while Spain developed Merino wool.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, agricultural prices stabilized, suggesting that production had become more dependable. Farms enjoyed the advantages of larger size, better location on more profitable soil, and increased capital investments in tools and animals. Agriculture was now more diversified, which benefited the soil, lowered the risk of famine from the failure of a single staple crop, and provided more nourishment for the people.

**Gentry** The specialized agriculture brought prosperity to the land-owning nobility, but also to a new rural middle class. The middle-class urban dwellers, lawyers, bureaucrats, and wealthy peasants began to invest in land in the countryside. With capital to invest in either the purchase or lease of land, these people made considerable profits. New fortunes gave rise to a country middle class called the **gentry**.

**Protectionism**

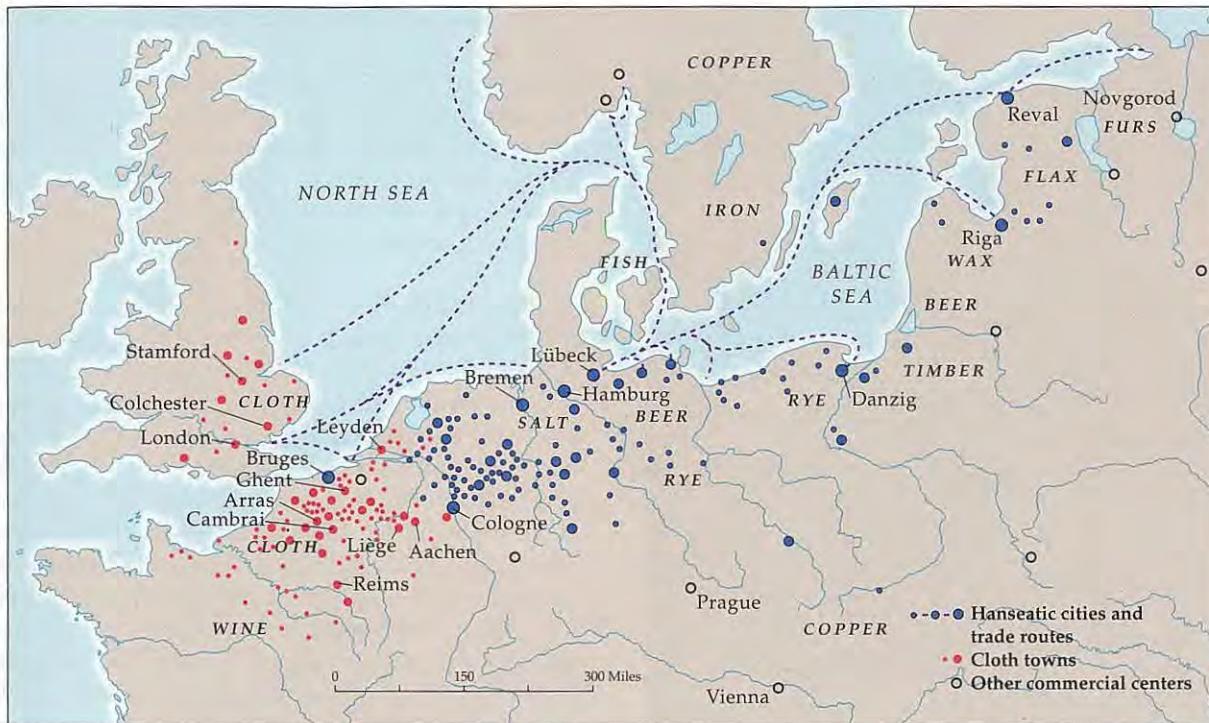
The population decline caused wages to rise. The price of goods also increased, but not fast enough to offset

wages. Between 1349 and 1351, England, France, Aragon, Castile, and other governments tried to fix prices and wages at levels favorable to employers. Such early experiments in a controlled economy failed.

**Guilds on the Defensive** A related problem for businesses was that competition grew as population fell and markets contracted. Traders tried to protect themselves by creating restricted markets and establishing monopolies. Guilds limited their membership, and some admitted only the sons of established masters. To keep prices high, some guilds prohibited their members from hiring any women as workers, because their wages were low. Only wives and daughters of the household could work in the shops.

**The Hanseatic League** Probably the best example of the monopolizing trend is the association of northern European trading cities, the **Hanseatic League**. Formed in the late thirteenth century as a defensive association, by the early fourteenth century it imposed a monopoly on cities trading in the Baltic and North seas. It excluded foreigners from the Baltic trade and could expel member cities who broke trade agreements. At its height, the Hanseatic League included seventy or eighty cities, stretching from Bruges to Novgorod and led by Bremen, Cologne, Hamburg, and especially Lübeck (see map 11.2). Maintaining its own treasury and fleet, the league supervised commercial exchange, policed the waters of the Baltic Sea, and negotiated with foreign princes. By the late fifteenth century, however, it began to decline and was unable to meet growing competition from the Dutch in northern commerce. Never formally





**MAP 11.2 THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE AND THE GOODS IT TRADED IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY**

Northern Europe developed a vigorous trade, mostly centered in cities around the Baltic Sea and along the rivers of Europe. The cities involved in the trade formed an association called the Hanseatic League, with its own regulations and requirements for membership. What would be the benefit of joining such a trade association? What types of goods did the Hanseatic League trade? Of these, which commodities seem to have been most in demand? Which cities predominated in the trade?

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abolished, the Hanseatic League continued to meet—at lengthening intervals—until 1669.

### **Technological Advances**

Attempts to raise the efficiency of workers proved to be far more effective than wage and price regulation in laying the basis for economic recovery. Employers were able to counteract high wages by adopting more rational methods of production and substituting capital for labor—that is, providing workers with better tools. Although hard times and labor shortages inspired most technical advances of the 1300s and 1400s, increased efficiency helped to make Europe a richer community.

**Metallurgy** Mining and metallurgy benefited from a series of inventions after 1460 that lowered the cost of metals and extended their use. Better techniques of digging, shoring, ventilating, and draining allowed mine shafts to be sunk several hundred feet into the earth, permitting the large-scale exploitation of the deep, rich mineral de-

posits of central Europe. During this period, miners in Saxony discovered a method for extracting pure silver from the lead alloy in which it was often found—an invention that was of major importance for the later massive development of silver mines in America.

By the late fifteenth century, European mines were providing an abundance of silver bullion for coinage. Money became more plentiful, which stimulated the economy. Exploitation also began in the rich coal deposits of northern Europe. Expanding iron production meant more and stronger pumps, gears and machine parts, tools, and iron wares.

**Firearms and Weapons** Europeans were constantly trying to improve the arts of war in the Middle Ages. The crossbow was cranked up and shot with a trigger; it was so powerful that it could penetrate conventional armor. The long bow came into widespread use during the Welsh wars of Edward I. It was light, accurate, and could be shot rapidly. In response to these two weapons, armor became more elaborate,





MONTIS foditur querente in  
 argentum es electum. Alii  
 gemmas et pietu digitoru

#### MINING, 1389

One does not normally associate miners with elegant decoration, but in this fourteenth-century manuscript, a miner provides the subject for the ornamentation of the capital *M* that starts the word *metalla* (metals). That the artist even considered such a subject is an indication of the growing importance of the industry in this period.

© Giancarlo Costa/Index

with exaggerated convex surfaces designed to deflect arrows from the chest, arms, and knees.

Siege weapons that hurled projectiles with great force and accuracy were also important. Adapting a Chinese invention for fireworks—consisting of an explosive mixture of carbon, sulfur, and saltpeter—the Europeans developed gunpowder and cannons to hurl boulders at an enemy. Firearms are first mentioned in 1328, and cannons were used in the early battles of the Hundred Years' War. With firearms, fewer soldiers could fight more effectively; capital, in the form of an efficient though expensive tool, was being substituted for labor.

Medieval architects and artists had long been interested in military engineering as well as building. Konrad Kyeser wrote and illustrated a book of weapons of war between 1395 and 1405. His work included cannons, siphons and wheels for raising water, pontoon bridges, hot-air balloons, and a device to pull horses across streams. He also made drawings of multiple guns arranged like a revolver.

**Mechanical Clocks** Telling time in the Middle Ages was imprecise, based as it was on the position of the sun and the canonical hours for prayer at about three-hour intervals during the day. Times of meetings, for instance, were set within vague parameters of “at vesper,” “at sunrise,” or even within a few days. But in 1360 Henry De Vick designed the first mechanical clock with an hour hand for King Charles V of France, which was placed in the royal palace in Paris. Large astronomical clocks that showed the signs of the zodiac were the precursors of clocks that kept time and tolled the hours. Milan had a clock that struck a bell at every hour of the day. The regular ringing of the hours brought a new regularity to life, work, and markets and gave time itself a new value. Pocket watches, although cumbersome, had appeared by 1550 with the invention of the spring for running clocks.

**Printing** The extension of literacy among laypeople and the greater reliance of governments and businesses on records created a demand for a cheap method of reproducing the written word. The introduction of paper from the East was a major step in reducing costs, for paper is far cheaper than parchment to produce. A substitute for the time-consuming labor of writing by hand was also necessary: Scribes and copiers were skilled artisans who commanded high salaries. To cut costs, printers first tried to press woodcuts—inked blocks with letters or designs carved on them—onto paper or parchment.

By the middle of the fifteenth century several masters were on the verge of perfecting the technique of printing with movable metal type. The first to prove this practicable was Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, a former jeweler and stonemason. Gutenberg devised an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony that would melt at a low temperature, cast well in the die, and be durable in the press; this alloy is still the basis of the printer's art. His Bible, printed in 1455, is the first major work reproduced through printing. The technique spread rapidly. By 1500 some 250 European cities had presses.

**The Information Revolution** The immediate effect of the printing press was to multiply the output and cut





**ENGLISH SIEGE OF ORLÉANS (1428–1429)**

This piece shows the English soldiers behind a siege wall (left) firing cannons across the Loire River. The cannons at this stage were more frightening for their noise than for their destructive power because of design problems. The siege of Orléans was brought to an end by a French relief force led by Joan of Arc.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

the costs of books (see map 11.3). It made information available to a much broader segment of the population, and libraries could store more information at lower cost. Printing helped disseminate and preserve knowledge in standardized form—a major contribution to the advance of technology and scholarship. Printing produced a revolution in what we would call information technology, and indeed it resembles in many ways the profound changes that computers are making in our own lives. Finally, printing could spread new ideas with unprecedented speed.

### ***The Standard of Living***

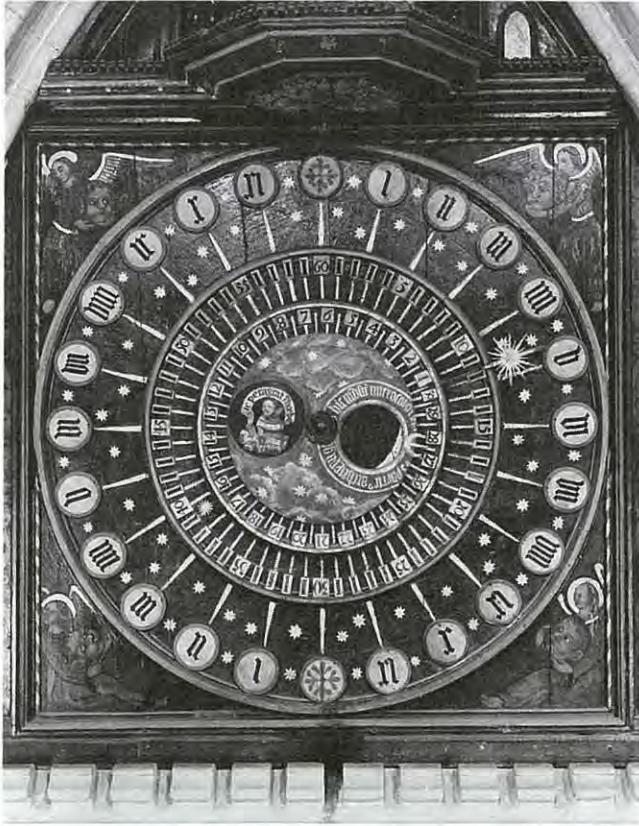
For those who survived the famine, plagues, and wars, the standard of living became better as the economy began to grow again in the late fifteenth century; but the pall of death and disease hung over the survivors.

***Reduced Life Expectancy*** The average life expectancy in the fifteenth century was thirty years of age. The principal victims of plague, other diseases, and famine were the very young. In many periods, between a half and a third of the babies born never reached age fifteen. Society swarmed with little children, but their deaths were common occurrences in almost every family.

The plague took a greater toll among young adults than among the aged. In effect, a person who survived one or more major epidemics had a good chance of living through the next onslaught. A mild attack of plague brought immunity rather than death as the population built up resistance to the disease; a favored few thus did reach extreme old age. The death toll of people in their child-bearing years slowed the demographic recovery.

***Female Survival*** Women seemed to be more robust than men in resisting or recovering from plague and the other diseases, and they became a disproportionately





The mechanical clock, a medieval invention, was installed in major buildings. The Wells Cathedral clock was built in England. The face was decorated with the four winds and angels. The clock told the hours twenty-four hours a day and told the days in the lunar month. Bells tolled the hours.

(Top) Derek Bayes/Aspect Picture Library Ltd.

(Bottom) The Science Museum, London

larger part of the population. Historians have interpreted this fact in a number of ways. Some have argued that women took a greater role in urban and rural life and that this was a golden age for women. As historians

find more evidence about women during this period, however, it appears that while more women found employment in urban centers, their roles were limited to household servants and unskilled labor. Women did not move into positions of power in government or guilds. Indeed, female guilds that had women as guild officers were forced to elect men.

#### *Misogyny and the Debate over Women's Nature*

Witchcraft charges against women were rare in the Middle Ages, but some historians have argued that the greater preponderance of women in the population contributed to the witch hunts of the sixteenth centuries. By the Late Middle Ages the intellectual debate about women's nature had become more pointed (see chapter 16). Both the ancient and the medieval world had relegated women to inferior positions, and some of the ancient and Christian authors had added strong negative invectives against women. The Church offered two images of women—Eve, the sinner who led Adam astray in the Garden of Eden, and the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. Neither image fit ordinary women's lives very well. As we saw in the last chapter, some very pious women commanded the respect of the Church through their asceticism.

Women were not without champions, however. Christine de Pisan, a widow with young children, turned to writing and translating to make a living. Among her books was *The Book of the City of Ladies*. She pointed to all the heroic women in history as examples of women's superior qualities, describing virtue in the most trying circumstances, heroism, self-sacrifice, wisdom, and leadership (see "The Status of Women in the Middle Ages," p. 317).

**Knowledge of the Human Body** During the Late Middle Ages, some modest advances were made in medicine. Eyeglasses, invented in the thirteenth century, were perfected in the fourteenth century. For the most part they were designed for reading rather than distance vision.

Until the later part of the Middle Ages, religious prohibitions against dissecting the human cadaver meant that medicine had not advanced much beyond the Hellenistic and Arabic contributions. By the end of the thirteenth century, a teacher of medicine at the University of Bologna wrote a textbook on dissections with illustrations of human anatomy. With a superior knowledge of the human body, physicians' ability to diagnose illnesses advanced, but their knowledge of cures did not. Surgery remained the practice of barber-surgeons, guildsmen whose sharp knives could shave beards and perform surgery and whose supply of leeches could draw blood.



## MORI

et temptauerunt me iam p̄ decem uices  
nec obedierunt uoci mee. nō uidebūt  
terram pro qua iuravi patribus eorū:  
nec quilibet eꝝ illis qui detrahit michi  
intuebitur eam. Secūm meū thaleb q̄  
pleuus alio sp̄ritu secūm est me indu-  
cam in terram hanc quā dixerunt. et  
semen eius possidebit eam: quoniam  
amalechites ⁊ chananeus habitāt in  
uallibus. Ecce mouere castra: ⁊ reuer-  
simini in solitudine p̄ uiam maris ru-  
bri. Vocatusq; ē dñs ad moysen ⁊ aa-  
ron dicens. Uiquequo multitudo hec  
pellima murrurat contra me? Que-  
relas filiorū israhel audiui. Dic ego  
eis. Quid ego ait dominus: sicut lo-  
cuti estis audiente me. sic faciā uobis.  
In solitudine hac iacebunt cadauera  
uestra. Omnes qui numerati estis a  
uiginti annis ⁊ supra. ⁊ murrurastis  
contra me. non intrabitis terram sup  
quā leuauī manū meam ut habitare  
uos facerem: preter thaleb filiū iepha-  
ne. ⁊ iohue filiū nūi. Paruos autē  
uestros de quibus dixistis quod prede  
hostibus forent introducam: ut uide-  
ant terram que uobis displicuit: uꝛa  
cadauera iacebūt in solitudine. Filij  
uestri reunt uagi in deserto annis qua-  
draginta: ⁊ portabunt fornicationē  
uestram. donec consumēt cadauera  
patrū in deserto: iuxta numerū q̄dra-  
ginta dieꝝ quibus considerastis terrā.  
Annus pro die imputabitur. Et qua-  
draginta annis recipietis iniquitates  
uestras: ⁊ scietis ultionem meā. Quo-  
niam sicut locutus sum. ita faciā omni  
multitudinē huic pessime. que consur-  
regit aduersum me: in solitudine hac  
debilet ⁊ morietur. Agitur omnes uiri  
quos miserat moyses ad cōtemplan-  
dam terram: ⁊ qui reuersi murrurare

fecerant contra eū omnē multitudinē.  
Detrahentes terre quā esset mala: moti  
sunt atq; percussiq; in conspectu do-  
mini. Iohue autē filius nūi ⁊ thaleb  
filius iephone uixerunt eꝝ omnibus  
qui preperant ad considerandā terrā.  
Locutusq; est moyses uniuersa uerba  
hec ad omnes filios israhel: et luxit  
populus nimis. Et ecce mane primo  
surgentes. ascenderūt uerticem montis  
atq; dixerunt. Parati sum⁹ ascendere  
ad locum de quo dominus locutus  
est: quia peccauimus. Quibus moy-  
ses. Cur inquit transgredimini uerbum  
dñi. quod uobis non redet in profu-  
rum? Nolite ascendere. non enim est  
dñs uobiscum: ne contumacis corā ini-  
mijs uestris. Amalechites ⁊ chanane-  
us ante uos sunt quorū gladio corru-  
etis: eo q̄ nolueritis acquiescere dño:  
nec erit dominus uobiscū. At illi con-  
turbati. ascenderūt in uerticem mon-  
tis. Archa autem testamenti domini  
et moyses non recesserūt de castris. De-  
scenditq; amalechites ⁊ chananeus q̄  
habitabāt ī monte: et percussit eos atq;  
cōtūcō. p̄secut⁹ ē eos usq; hama. XV  
Locutus est domin⁹ ad moysen  
dicens. Loquere ad filios isrl. ⁊  
dices ad eos. Cum ingressi fueritis ter-  
ram habitationis uestre quā ego dabo  
uobis. ⁊ feceritis oblationē dominū  
in olocaustum. aut uictimam pacifi-  
cam uota solutes. uel sponte offeret  
numera. aut in solemnitatib; uꝛis a-  
doleutes odorem suauitatis dño: de  
hubus siue de quib; offeret quicumq;  
immolauerit uictimam. sacrificiū sūt  
decimam partem ephi cōspectam oleo.  
quod mensurā habebit quartā partē  
hinc et uinum ad liba fundenda. eius-  
dem mensurē dabit in olocaustū siue

## GUTENBERG'S BIBLE

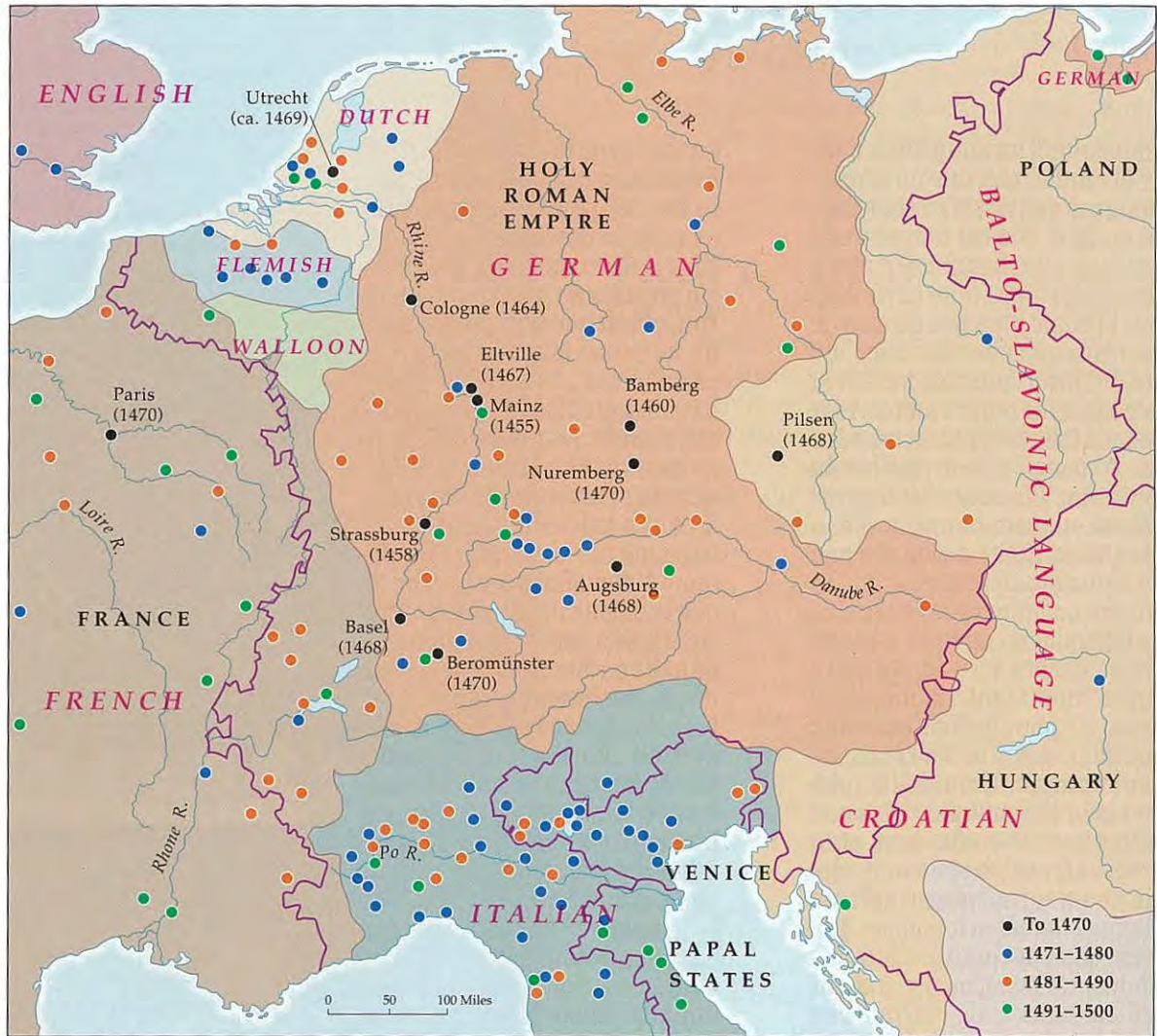
A page from Johannes  
Gutenberg's Bible marks one of  
the most significant technical  
and cultural advances of the  
fifteenth century: printing with  
movable type, a process that  
made possible a wider  
dissemination of literature  
and thought.

**Housing and Diets** The revitalized economy brought improvements in housing, dress, and diet and increased spending on art and decorative objects. Housing was generally improving for most people in the Late Middle Ages. The increasing use of brick and tile meant that buildings were more substantial and more spacious. The nobility, gentry, and wealthy urban dwellers built large town houses and country houses with gardens

and large windows rather than defensive walls. The fireplace on the wall replaced the hearth in the center of the room even in peasant houses.

The European diet had been largely based on cereal products, and when population was dense, all land had to be devoted to raising grain, even if the land was not particularly well suited for it. Reduced population meant that land could be devoted to other crops or to





MAP 11.3 THE SPREAD OF PRINTING BEFORE 1500

After the invention of printing in the Rhineland, printing presses sprang up along the rivers of Europe. How quickly did the printing technology spread? In which countries were the printing presses concentrated?

◆ For an online version, go to [www.mhhe.com/chambers9](http://www.mhhe.com/chambers9) > chapter 11 > book maps



CHRISTINE DE PISAN PRESENTS POEMS TO ISABEAU OF BAVARIA

Christine de Pisan (1364–1439) was the author of several important historical and literary works including a biography of King Charles V of France and *The Book of the Three Virtues*, a manual for the education of women. She is here depicted presenting a volume of her poems to the queen of France, who is surrounded by ladies-in-waiting and the symbol of the French royal family, the fleur-de-lis. It is significant that there were such scenes of elegance and intellectual life even amidst the chaos and destruction of the Hundred Years' War.

The British Library, London; Harly Ms. 4431, fol. 3





## HISTORICAL ISSUES: THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

*The study of medieval women has become a major area of historical research in the past thirty-five years. Scholars have raised a number of unresolved questions about women's lives and their experiences. The questions discussed here suggest ongoing areas of research.*

1. Does the periodization of political history apply to women's history or to the history of ordinary people? Historians have used watersheds in political history such as the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 to define the end of medieval England and the beginning of early modern England. But did women or peasants wake up after the battle and declare that a new era had begun and life was going to change for them? Intellectual movements, since they largely involved men, may have had little influence on women's lives, as Joan Kelly asked in her famous essay, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"\*
2. To what extent did the Church's misogyny influence the way women lived? In Church writings, women were either saintly like the Virgin Mary or sinners like Eve. The Church blessed women's roles only as virgins or as wives and mothers. The general misogyny was also prevalent in medieval lay society and appeared in jokes, in literary pieces such as the Romance of the Rose, and in various regulations regarding women. But did women consciously take these strictures to heart when they lived their everyday lives? Some women did move into positions of power as regents and queens; powerful female saints and mystics became a part of late medieval religious life; women joined the tertiaries and the Beguinages. Individual peasant and urban women farmed their plots or ran their own businesses. Many other women moved into business and administrative capacities when their husbands were away or when they became widows. But women who took these initiatives generally worked within a framework of acceptable female behavior. Joan of Arc, on the other

hand, offended the Church perhaps more because she adopted male dress and role than because of the heresy and witchcraft charges the Inquisitors brought.

3. Understanding the role of patriarchy is important for understanding women's freedom in marriage and widowhood. Customs varied greatly depending on the availability of women for marriage, on local laws covering dower and dowry, and on economic necessity. Some marriage arrangements, particularly among the peasantry, assumed that the household was the unit of economic production and that the sex roles were equally important for the survival of the family. In urban Florence the age differences between spouses seemed to preclude a strong voice for a young bride. Other studies will, no doubt, show other patterns.
4. Women's participation in intellectual and political life continues to be researched. Women could not attend universities, be ordained as priests, or participate in legal and magisterial roles. On the other hand, nunneries, courts, and individual experiences did permit them to write, engage in intellectual debate, and contribute to the cultural enrichment of the Middle Ages. Much women's writing and artistic work has been lost, but enough survives to indicate the ways women participated in the cultural life of the Middle Ages. Christine de Pisan is an example of a writer who was so well-known that Richard II of England offered to be her patron.

\*From "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" by Joan Kelly from Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, *Becoming Visible: Woman in European History*, 2nd ed. Copyright © 1987 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Adapted with permission.

animal rearing. Diet generally improved, with more meat, cheese, oil, butter, fruit, wine, and beer.

**Courtesy and Dress** Refinements in living brought a new emphasis on polite behavior, particularly at the table. Guild ordinances began to include instructions about manners at the annual feast, and books of advice for young people moving up in social station proliferated in every language. Silver forks replaced fingers as a tool for polite dining among the upper class.

Dress for the upper classes became very grand, with the tall pointed caps and the long pointed shoes that we associate with medieval Europe. That the fine dress was not limited to the upper classes is obvious from

the sumptuary legislation that cities and kingdoms passed, which tried to regulate who was allowed to wear fine cloth with furs and who was prohibited from doing so.

## POPULAR UNREST

The demographic collapse and economic troubles of the fourteenth century deeply disturbed the social peace of Europe. European society had been remarkably stable and mostly peaceful from the Early Middle Ages until around 1300, and there is little evidence of uprisings or social warfare. The fourteenth and fifteenth





Dress became very elaborate, with tall headdresses for women and pointed shoes and tights for men. The most elaborate court was that of the Duke of Burgundy, which is pictured here with courtiers dancing.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

centuries, however, witnessed numerous revolts of peasants and artisans against what they believed to be the oppression of the propertied classes.

### **Rural Revolts**

One of the most spectacular fourteenth-century rural uprisings was the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This revolt originated in popular resentment against both the policies of the royal government and the practices of the great landlords. Although the Statute of Laborers (1351), which tried to fix prices and wages at the preplague level, had little practical success, the mere effort to implement it aggravated social tensions, especially in the countryside, where it would have reimposed serfdom on the peasants. Concurrent attempts to collect poll taxes (a flat tax on each member of the population), which by their nature burdened the prosperous less than the humble, crystallized resentment against the government.

Under leaders of uncertain background—Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, and a priest named John Ball—peasant bands, enraged by the latest poll tax, marched on London in 1381. They called for the abolition of serfdom, labor services, and tithes and demanded an end to the poll taxes. The workers of London, St. Albans, York, and other cities who had similar grievances rose in support of the peasants. After mobs killed the king's advisers

and burned the houses of prominent lawyers and royal officials, King Richard II, then age fifteen, bravely met with the peasants in person at Mile End, outside the walls of London. One of his followers killed Wat Tyler as he negotiated with the king. Thinking quickly, Richard told the peasants that he was their leader and promised to give them charters of freedom. But as the peasants dispersed, the great landlords reorganized their forces and violently suppressed the last vestiges of unrest in the countryside; the young king also reneged on his promises and declared the charters invalid.

The peasant uprising in England was only one of many rural disturbances between 1350 and 1450, including revolts near Paris, called the **Jacquerie**, and in Languedoc, Catalonia, and Sweden. Germany also experienced such disturbances in the fifteenth century and a major peasant revolt in 1524, which was to feed into the tensions of the early days of the Protestant Reformation.

### **Urban Revolts**

The causes of social unrest within the cities were similar to those in the countryside—wages and taxes. In the 1300s and early 1400s Strasbourg, Metz, Ghent, Liège, and Paris were all scenes of riots. Though not entirely typical, one of the most interesting of these urban revolts was the Ciompi uprising at Florence in 1378.

Florence was one of the wool manufacturing centers of Europe; the industry employed probably one-third of the working population of the city, which shortly before the Black Death may have risen to 120,000 people. The wool industry, like most, entered bad times immediately after the plague. To protect themselves, employers cut production, thereby spreading unemployment.

The poorest workers—mainly the wool carders, known as *Ciompi*—rose in revolt. They demanded, and for a short time got, several reforms: The employers would produce at least enough cloth to ensure work, they would refrain from monetary manipulations considered harmful to the workers, and they would allow the workers their own guild and representation in communal government. Because the Ciompi did not have the leaders to maintain a steady influence on government policy, the great families regained full authority in the city by 1382 and quickly ended the democratic concessions. Although the Ciompi revolt was short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful, the incident is one of the first signs of the urban class tensions that would be a regular disturbance in future centuries.

### **The Seeds of Discontent**

While local and unique circumstances shaped each of the social disturbances of the 1300s and 1400s, the so-





Jehan Froissart  
*PEASANTS' REVOLT*,  
CA. 1460–1480

One of the leaders of the peasant revolt was a preacher, John Ball, who is shown on the horse. One of his messages was a simple egalitarian rhyme: "When Adam delved and Eve span, where then were all the gentlemen?" Wat Tyler, another leader, is in the foreground holding a banner with the English coat of arms. Rather than a rabble with pitchforks, many peasants had trained in the militia that defended the English coast against French raids. Loyal to the king, the peasants did not want to kill him, but rather to get rid of his bad advisers.

British Library, London/Bridgeman Art Library

cial movements had common elements. With the standard of living generally rising after the Black Death, misery was not the main cause of unrest. Rather, the peasants and workers, now reduced in number, were better able to bargain for lower rents, higher wages, and a fairer distribution of social benefits.

With the possible exception of the Ciompi, the people who revolted were rarely the desperately poor. In England, for example, the centers of the peasant uprising of 1381 were in the lower Thames valley—a region with more fertility, more prosperity, less oppression, and less serfdom than other parts of the kingdom had. Also, the immediate provocation for the revolt was the imposition of a poll tax, and poll taxes (or any taxes) do not alarm the truly destitute who cannot be forced to pay what they do not have, but they do anger people who have recently made financial gains and are anxious to hold on to them.

The principal goad to revolt in both town and country, therefore, seems to have been the effort of the propertied classes to retain their old advantages and deny the workers their new ones. Peasants and workers felt that their improving social and economic status was being threatened.

The impulse to revolt also drew strength from the psychological tensions of this age of devastating plagues, famines, and wars. The nervous temper of the times predisposed people to take action against real or imagined enemies. When needed, justifications for re-

volt could be found in Christian belief, for the Christian fathers had taught that neither the concept of private property nor social inequality had been intended by God. In John Ball's words: "When Adam delved and Eve span, where then were all the gentlemen?" The emotional climate of the period turned many of these uprisings into efforts to attain the millennium, to reach that age of justice and equality that Christian belief saw in the past, expected in the future, and put off for the present.

## CHALLENGES TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF EUROPE

War, the third horseman of the Apocalypse, joined famine and disease. War was frequent throughout the Middle Ages but was never so widespread or long lasting as in the conflicts of the 1300s and 1400s. The Hundred Years' War between England and France is the most famous of these struggles, but there was fighting in every corner of Europe. The inbred violence of the age indicated a partial breakdown in governmental systems, which failed to maintain stability at home and peace with foreign powers.

The governmental systems of Europe were founded on multiple partnerships: feudal ties with vassals, relations with the Church, representative institutions, and



subjects in general. Out of the crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many of the new governments that came to dominate the European political scene in the late 1400s conceded far more power to a king, prince, despot, or oligarchy.

### **Roots of Political Unrest**

**Dynastic Instability** In a period of demographic instability, dynasties suffered, as did the population as a whole. The Hundred Years' War, or at least the excuse for it, arose from the failure of the Capetian kings of France, for the first time since the tenth century, to produce a male heir. The English War of the Roses resulted from the uncertain succession to the crown of England and the claims of the two rival houses of Lancaster and York. In Portugal, Castile, France, England, Naples, Hungary, Poland, and the Scandinavian countries, the reigning monarchs of 1450 were not the direct, male, legitimate descendants of those reigning in 1300. Most of the founders of new lines had to fight for their positions.

**Changes in Warfare** War grew more expensive as well as more frequent. Better-trained armies were needed to fight for longer periods of time and with more complex weaponry. Above all, the increasing use of firearms added to the costs of war. To replace the traditional, undisciplined, unpaid, and poorly equipped feudal armies, governments came to rely on mercenaries, who were better trained and better armed. Many mercenaries were organized into associations known as companies of adventure, whose leaders were both good commanders and good businessmen.

**Seeking Revenue** While war went up in price, the traditional revenues on which governments depended sank. Until the fourteenth century, the king or prince met most of the expenses of government from ordinary revenues, chiefly rents from his properties; but his rents, like everyone else's, were falling in the late Middle Ages. Individuals, movable property, salt, prostitutes, and a variety of products were taxed to raise revenue. Surviving fiscal records indicate that governments managed to increase their incomes hugely through taxes. For example, the English monarchy never collected or spent more than £30,000 per year before 1336; thereafter, the budget rarely sank below £100,000 and at times reached £250,000 in the late fourteenth century.

**The Nobility and Factional Politics** The nobility that had developed nearly everywhere in Europe also entered a period of instability in the Late Middle Ages. Birth was the main means of access to this class, and membership offered legal and social privileges such as exemption from most taxes, immunity from certain ju-

ridical procedures (such as torture), and hunting privileges. The nobles saw themselves as the chief counselors of the king and his principal partners in the conduct of government.

By the 1300s, however, the nobles began to experience economic instability. Their wealth was chiefly in land, and they, like all landlords, faced the problem of declining rents. Unlike the gentry, they often lacked the funds needed for the new agricultural investments, and they continued to have the problem of finding income and careers for their younger sons.

As the social uncertainties intensified, the nobles tended to coalesce into factions that disputed with one another over the control of government and the distribution of its favors. From England to Italy, factional warfare constantly disturbed the peace. A divided and grasping nobility added to the tensions of the age and to its violence. Characteristically, a faction was led by a great noble house and included people of varying social station—great nobles in alliance with the leading royal house, poor knights, retainers, servants, sometimes even artisans and peasants.

A good example of liveried retainers of these great nobles are the Pastons of England. The family originated from wealthy peasant stock who prospered in the agricultural opportunities of the fifteenth century. The founder of the family fortune, William, managed to marry up socially, taking a knight's daughter as wife. He educated his sons in law because land could be gained by legal maneuverings as well as through advantageous marriages. He was also careful about the local patronage system and placed his eldest son, John, in the Duke of Norfolk's household. John was part of the duke's retinue on ceremonial occasions. Sir John Fastolf, a soldier who made a fortune in the Hundred Years' War and was the model for Shakespeare's Falstaff, relied on John for legal advice and eventually made him his heir. The Pastons continually defended their lands either in court or in actual sieges. At one point John's wife, Margaret, organized the defense of one of their manors from armed attack. The people trying to obtain their property had the support of other great lords in the district, particularly the Duke of Suffolk. The family managed to survive the War of the Roses to emerge in the sixteenth century as nobility.

### **England, France, and the Hundred Years' War**

All the factors that upset the equilibrium of feudal governments—dynastic instability, fiscal pressures, and factional rivalries—helped to provoke the greatest struggle of the epoch, the **Hundred Years' War**. The war had distinctive characteristics. It was not fought continually for one hundred years, but in different phases. The great battles were of less significance for determin-





Ambrogio Lorenzetti

*ALLEGORY OF GOOD GOVERNMENT, 1338–1339*

The effects of good government, seen in this idealized representation of a peaceful city by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, include flourishing commerce, dancing maidens, and lavish residences, as opposed to the protective towers of feudal warfare. This fresco in the city hall of Siena was a constant reminder to the citizens of the advantages of living in their city.

Scala/Art Resource, NY

ing the outcome than was the war of attrition against the population. Economic embargo and interruption of trade became weapons of states in winning wars.

**Causes** The issue that is alleged to have started the Hundred Years' War was a dispute over the French royal succession. While most noble families had direct father-to-son succession for only three generations, the Capetians had produced male heirs for three hundred years. The last three Capetian kings (the sons of Philip IV, the Fair) all died without male heirs. In 1328, when the last Capetian died, the nearest surviving male relative was King Edward III of England, son of Philip's daughter Isabella. The Parlement of Paris—the supreme court of France—discovered that the laws of the Salian Franks precluded women from inheriting or transmitting a claim to the crown. Philip of Valois, a first cousin of the previous kings, became king. Edward did not at first dispute this decision, and, as holder of the French fiefs of Aquitaine and Ponthieu, he did homage to Philip VI.

More important than the dynastic issue was the clash of French and English interests in Flanders, an area whose cloth-making industry relied on England for wool. In 1302 the Flemings had rebelled against their count, a vassal of the French king, and had remained virtually independent until 1328, when Philip VI defeated their troops and restored the count. At Philip's insistence, the count ordered the arrest of all English merchants in Flanders; Edward retaliated by

cutting off the export of wool, which spread unemployment in the Flemish towns. The Flemings revolted once more and drove out the count. To give legal sanction to their revolt, they persuaded Edward to assert his claim to the French crown, which held suzerainty over Flanders.

The most serious point of friction, however, was the status of Aquitaine and Ponthieu. Philip began harassing the frontiers of Aquitaine and declared Edward's fiefs forfeit in 1337. The attack on Aquitaine pushed Edward into supporting the Flemish revolt and was thus the main provocation for the Hundred Years' War.

Economic maneuvers by both sides aggravated tensions. The French king encouraged French pirates and shippers to interfere with the wine trade from English Gascony. Edward began to tax wool leaving England and encouraged the Flemish weavers to come to England under his special protection to set up workshops with their superior craftsmanship. Incidentally, this move was the beginning of the woolen cloth weaving tradition in England.

### *The Tides of Battle*

The confused struggle of the Hundred Years' War may be divided into three periods: initial English victories from 1338 to 1360; French resurgence, then stalemate, from 1369 to 1415; and a wild denouement with tides rapidly shifting from 1415 to 1453 (see map 11.4).





MAP 11.4 THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

In reading this map, one must keep in mind that control of these territories shifted for centuries (see map 9.3, p 264). In the tenth century, French royal domain was concentrated in the areas around Paris. While the French kings extended their territory through marriage alliances and conquest, so, too, did England increase its holdings in France. For example, Henry II of England acquired the extensive lands of the duchy of Aquitaine through his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152. England later lost much of its territory in France and by 1339 had only a small fraction of its earlier holdings. English monarchs tried continually to repossess the lands that they lost and the French monarchs tried to push the English entirely out of French territory. What areas did England and France control outright in 1339 and what areas were contested? After its victory at Agincourt, which areas did England attempt to control?

◆ For an online version, go to [www.mhhe.com/chambers9](http://www.mhhe.com/chambers9) > chapter 11 > book maps



## CHRONOLOGY

*The Hundred Years' War*

1328	Charles IV, last Capetian king in direct line, dies; Philip of Valois is elected king of France as Philip VI; Philip defeats Flemings at Cassel; unrest continues in Flemish towns.	1381	Peasants' Revolt in England.
1329	Edward III of England does simple homage to Philip for continental possessions but refuses liege homage.	1392	Charles VI of France suffers first attack of insanity; Burgundians and Armagnacs contend for power over king; fighting wanes as both sides are exhausted.
1336	Edward embargoes wool exports to Flanders.	1399	Henry IV of Lancaster takes English throne, deposing Richard II.
1338	Philip's troops harass English Guienne; Edward, urged on by the Flemings, claims French crown; war begins.	1415	Henry V wins major victory at Agincourt.
1346	Major English victory at Crécy.	1420	Treaty of Troyes; Charles VI recognizes Henry V as legitimate heir to French crown; high-water mark of English fortunes.
1347-1351	Black Death ravages Europe.	1429	Joan of Arc relieves Orléans from English siege; Dauphin is crowned king at Reims as Charles VII.
1356	Black Prince defeats French at Poitiers.	1431	Joan is burned at the stake at Rouen.
1358	Peasants' uprising near Paris.	1435	Peace of Arras; Burgundy abandons English side.
1360	Peace of Brétigny; English gain major territorial concessions but abandon claim to French crown.	1436	Charles retakes Paris.
1369	Fighting renewed in France.	1453	Bordeaux falls to French; English retain only Calais on continent; effective end of war, though no treaty is signed.
1370	Bertrand du Guesclin, constable of France, leads French resurgence.		

**First Period** An English naval victory at Sluys in 1340 ensured English communications across the channel and determined that France would be the scene of the fighting. Six years later Edward landed in France on what was more a marauding expedition than a campaign of conquest. Philip pursued the English and finally overtook them at Crécy in 1346. The English were on a hill, and Edward positioned his troops so that the longbowmen could shoot into the advancing French line. The French knights had arrived after a long journey but decided to attack without waiting for their crossbowmen, who were coming on foot. Charging up the hill, the French knights met a rain of arrows that cut their horses from under them. The English knights came down to finish the fight. The victory ensured the English possession of Calais, which they took in 1347.

The plague interrupted the war until 1356. At Poitiers, John II, who had succeeded Philip, attacked an English army led by Edward's son, the Black Prince, and suffered an even more crushing defeat. John was captured and died, unransomed by his son and vassals. English victories, the Black Death, and mutual exhaustion led to the Peace of Brétigny in 1360. The English were

granted Calais and an enlarged Aquitaine, and Edward, in turn, renounced his claim to the French crown.

**Second Period** The French were not willing to allow so large a part of their kingdom to remain in English hands. In 1369, under John's successor, Charles V, the French opened a second phase of the war. Their strategy was to avoid full-scale battles and instead wear down the English forces, and they succeeded. By 1380 they had pushed the English nearly into the sea, confining them to Calais and a narrow strip of the Atlantic coast from Bordeaux to Bayonne. Fighting was sporadic from 1380 until 1415, with both sides content with a stalemate. During this war of attrition, mercenaries on both sides devastated the countryside, plundering villages, ruining crops and vineyards, and driving the population to seek refuge. It was a type of warfare that reappeared in the Thirty Years' War and in World War II.

**Third Period** The last period of the war, from 1415 to 1453, was one of high drama and rapidly shifting fortunes. Henry V of England invaded France and shattered the French army at Agincourt in 1415. The battle was a replay of Crécy and Poitiers. The English





#### JOAN OF ARC, 1484

Surrounded by the clerics who had condemned her, Joan of Arc is bound to the stake in this scene from a manuscript that was prepared half a century after she was executed in 1431. Despite Joan's own preference for short hair and manly costume, she is shown here as a conventionally idealized female figure.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

longbowmen shot at the French knights in full armor as they charged downhill into a marshy area. Henry's success was confirmed by the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, an almost total French capitulation. King Charles VI of France declared his son the Dauphin (the future Charles VII) illegitimate, named Henry his successor and regent of France, and gave him direct rule over all French lands as far south as the Loire River (see map 11.4). Charles also gave Henry his daughter Catherine in marriage, with the agreement that their son would become the next king of France.

The Dauphin could not accept this forced abdication, and from his capital at Bourges he led an expedition across the Loire River. The English drove his forces back and systematically took the towns and fortresses north of the river that were loyal to him. In 1428 they finally laid siege to Orléans, a city whose fall would have given them a commanding position in the Loire valley and would have made the Dauphin's cause desperate.

**Joan of Arc** The intervention of a young peasant girl, Joan of Arc, saved the Valois Dynasty. Convinced that heavenly voices were ordering her to rescue France, Joan persuaded several royal officials, and finally the Dauphin himself, of the authenticity of her mission and was given command of an army. In 1429 she marched to Orléans and forced the English to raise the siege. She then escorted the Dauphin to Reims, the historic coronation city of France, where his coronation confirmed his legitimacy and won him broad support

as the embodiment of French royalist sentiment. The tide had turned.

Joan passed from history as quickly and as dramatically as she had arrived. The Burgundians, allies of the English, captured her in 1430 and sold her to the English. They turned her over to a church court which put her on trial for witchcraft and heresy (see "The Trial of Joan of Arc," p. 325). She was burned at the stake at Rouen in 1431. Yet Joan's commitment was one sign of an increasingly powerful feeling among the people. They had grown impatient with continuing destruction and had come to identify their own security with the expulsion of the English and the establishment of a strong Valois monarchy. This growing loyalty to the king finally saved France from its long agony. A series of French successes followed Joan's death, and by 1453 only Calais was left in English hands. No formal treaty ended the war, but both sides accepted the outcome: England was no longer a continental power.

### *The Effects of the Hundred Years' War*

Like all the disasters of the era, the Hundred Years' War accelerated change. It stimulated the development of firearms and the technologies needed to manufacture them, and it helped establish the infantry—armed with longbow, crossbow, pike, or gun—as superior in battle to mounted knights. It also introduced wars of attrition in which the countryside was devastated in an effort to bring the enemy to submission. The war had a major effect on government institutions in England and France.

**English Government** The expense of fighting forced the English king to request more revenue through taxation. In England the king willingly gave Parliament a larger political role in return for grants of new taxes. The tradition became firmly established that Parliament had the right to grant or refuse new taxes, to agree to legislation, to channel appeals to the king, and to offer advice on important decisions such as peace and war. The House of Commons gained the right to introduce all tax legislation, since the Commons, unlike the Lords, were representatives of shires and boroughs. Parliament also named a committee to audit tax records and supervise payments. Equally important, the Commons could impeach high royal officials, a crucial step in establishing the principle that a king's ministers were responsible to Parliament as well as to their royal master. By the end of the Hundred Years' War, Parliament had been notably strengthened at the expense of royal power.

**French Government** The need for new taxes had a rather different outcome in France, where it enhanced





## THE TRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC

*The records of the trial of Joan of Arc in Rouen in 1431 give us a rare opportunity to hear her directly, or at least the words a secretary heard. Whether recorded accurately or not, her testimony does give us a glimpse of her extraordinary spirit and determination.*

"When she had taken the oath the said Jeanne was questioned by us about her name and her surname. To which she replied that in her own country she was called Jeanette. She was questioned about the district from which she came.

"She said she was born in the village of Domrémy. Asked if in her youth she had learned any craft, she says yes, to sew and spin; and in sewing and spinning she feared no woman in Rouen.

"Afterwards she declared that at the age of 13 she had a voice from God to help her and guide her. And the first time she was much afraid. And this voice came towards noon, in summer, in her father's garden. Asked what instruction this voice gave her for the salvation of her soul, she said it taught her to be good and to go to church often; and the voice told her that she should raise the siege of the city of Orléans.

"Asked whether, when she saw the voice coming to her, there was a light, she answered that there was a great

deal of light on all sides. She added to the examiner that not all the light came to him alone!

"Asked whether she thought she had committed a sin when she left her father and mother, she answered that since God commanded, it was right to do so. She added that since God commanded, if she had had a hundred parents, she would have gone nevertheless.

"Jeanne was admonished to speak the truth. Many of the points were read and explained to her, and she was told that if she did not confess them truthfully she would be put to the torture, the instruments of which were shown to her.

"To which Jeanne answered in this manner: 'Truly if you were to tear me limb from limb and separate my soul from my body, I would not tell you anything more; and if I did say anything, I should afterwards declare that you had compelled me to say it by force.'"

From G. G. Coulton and Eileen Power (eds.), *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*, W. P. Barrett (trans.), Routledge, 1931.

the power of the monarchs while weakening the Estates General, the national representative assembly. In 1343 Philip VI established a monopoly over the sale of salt, fixing in many areas of France its cost and the amount each family could have to consume. The tax on salt, called the *gabelle*, was to be essential to French royal finance until 1789. In gaining support for this and other taxes, Philip and his successors sought the agreement of regional assemblies of estates as well as the national Estates General. The kings' reliance on the local estates hindered the rise of a centralized assembly that could speak for the entire kingdom. By the reign of Charles VII, during the last stages of the war, the monarchy obtained the right to impose national taxes (notably the *taille*, a direct tax from which nobles and clerics were exempt) without the consent of the Estates General. By then, too, the royal government was served by a standing professional army—the first in any European country since the fall of the Roman Empire.

**The War of the Roses** Both England and France experienced internal dissension during the Hundred Years' War. Both countries suffered from a brutalization of life, with groups of former fighters and thugs pillaging the countryside. After the death of Edward III in 1377, England faced more than a century of tur-

moil, with nobles striving to maintain their economic fortunes through factional conflicts. The powerful magnates and their liveried followers used law and brute force to gain lands of competitors, as we have seen in the case of the Pastons. The son of Henry V and Catherine of France, Henry VI, went through periods of insanity, which led to a civil war for succession to the throne. Two factions, the Lancastrians and the Yorkists, laid claim to the throne, and the English nobles aligned themselves on one side or the other. The civil war that followed is known to historians as the War of the Roses (the Lancastrians' emblem was a red rose; the Yorkists', a white rose).

The civil war lasted some thirty-five years. While not bloody for the population as a whole, the war did decimate the ranks of the nobility. It also gave rise to the allegations that Richard III, a Yorkist, killed his two young nephews in the Tower of London because they had a clearer title to the kingship than he had. Finally, the Lancastrian Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at Bosworth Field in 1485. Henry VII Tudor married Elizabeth of York to heal the breach between the factions. By the end of the fifteenth century, prosperity had relieved the pressures on the English nobles, and the people in general, weary of war, welcomed the strong and orderly regime that Henry established.



**Burgundy** In France, too, the power of the monarchy was threatened by rival factions of nobles, the Armagnacs and the Burgundians. The Armagnacs wanted the war with England vigorously pursued, while the Burgundians favored accommodation. The territorial ambitions of the Burgundians also posed a threat to the French monarchy. King John II of France had granted the huge Duchy of Burgundy to his younger son, Philip the Bold, in 1363. Philip and his successors greatly enlarged their possessions in eastern France, the Rhone and Rhine valleys, and the Low Countries (see map 11.3). They were generous patrons of literature and the arts, and they made their court at Dijon the most brilliant in Europe.

The dukes seem to have sought to establish a Burgundian "middle kingdom" between France and the Holy Roman Empire; such a state would have affected the political geography of Europe permanently and undermined the position of the French monarch. But the threat vanished in 1477 when the last duke, Charles the Bold, was killed in battle with the Swiss at Nancy. His daughter and heir, Mary of Burgundy, could not hold her scattered inheritance together, and a large part of it came under French control.

**The English and French States** With the loss of most of its continental possessions, England emerged from the war geographically more consolidated. It was also homogeneous in its language (English gradually replaced French and Latin as the language of the law courts and administration) and more conscious of its cultural distinctiveness and national identity. Although the French had made some incursions in coastal areas, England had not been invaded, and the woolen industry began to be very profitable. Freed from its continental entanglements, England was ready for its expansion beyond the seas and for a surge in national pride and self-consciousness.

France did not immediately achieve quite the territorial consolidation of England, but the expulsion of the English from French lands and the disintegration of the Duchy of Burgundy left the French king without a major rival among his feudal princes. The monarchy emerged from the war with a permanent army, a rich tax system, and no clear constitutional restrictions on its exercise of power. Most significantly, the war gave the French king high prestige and confirmed him as the chief protector and patron of the people. Although ravaged by warfare, the land was so rich that, when the peasants returned and began cultivating, the French economy quickly recovered.

In both France and England, government at the end of the Middle Ages was still decentralized and "feudal," meaning here that certain privileged persons and

institutions (nobles, the Church, towns, and the like) continued to hold and to exercise some form of private jurisdiction. They retained, for example, their own courts. But the king had unmistakably emerged as the dominant partner in the feudal relationship. Moreover, he was prepared to press his advantages in the sixteenth century.

### **The States of Italy**

Free cities, or communes, dominated the political life of central and northern Italy in the early fourteenth century. The Holy Roman Empire claimed a loose sovereignty over much of the peninsula north of Rome, and the papacy governed the area around Rome, but most of the principal cities, and many small ones too, had gained the status of self-governing city-states.

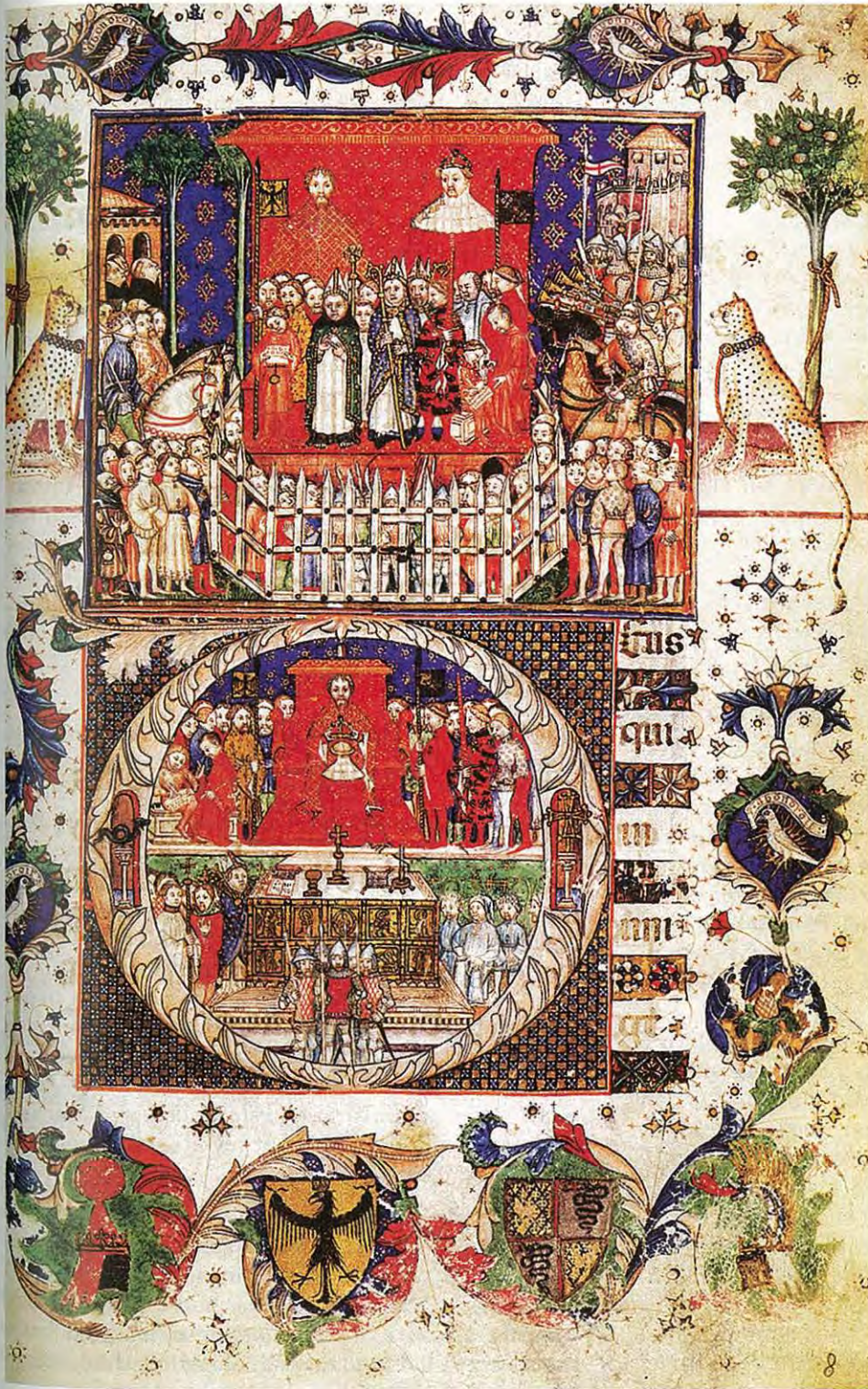
The new economic and social conditions of the 1300s, however, worked against the survival of the smaller communes. Regional states, dominated politically and economically by a single metropolis, replaced the numerous, free, and highly competitive communes.

**Milan** Perhaps the most effective Italian despot was the ruler of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti (r. 1378–1402), who set about enlarging the Visconti inheritance of twenty-one cities in the Po valley. Through shrewd negotiations and opportune attacks, he secured the submission of cities to his east, which gave him an outlet to the Adriatic Sea. He then seized Bologna, purchased Pisa, and through a variety of methods was accepted as ruler of Siena, Perugia, Spoleto, Nocera, and Assisi. In the course of this advance deep into central Italy, Gian Galeazzo kept his chief enemies, the Florentines and the Venetians, divided, and he seemed ready to create a united Italian kingdom.

To establish a legal basis for his power, Gian Galeazzo secured from the emperor an appointment as imperial vicar in 1380 and then as hereditary duke in 1395. This move made him the only duke in all Italy, which seemed a step closer to a royal title. He revised the laws of Milan, but the chief administrative foundation of his success was his ability to wring enormous tax revenues from his subjects. Gian Galeazzo was also a generous patron of the new learning of his day; with his conquests, wealth, and brilliance, he seemed to be awaiting only the submission of the Florentines before adopting the title of king. But he died unexpectedly in 1402, leaving two minor sons who were incapable of defending their inheritance.

**Florence** Florence by the mid-1300s was the principal banking center in Europe and one of the most impor-





**INVESTITURE OF GIAN GALEAZZO VISCONTI, CA. 1395**

This contemporary depiction of the investiture of Gian Galeazzo Visconti as duke of Milan is from a manuscript he commissioned to commemorate the occasion. The picture on top shows Visconti in a white cape seated next to the emperor's representative, who in the picture below places the diadem on the kneeling Visconti's head. The spectators, coming from all walks of life, include bishops and soldiers carrying cannons, but the ceremony itself takes place in front of an altar. The margins contain such Visconti family symbols as the eagle, the cheetah, and various fruit trees, and the entire manuscript leaf is a rich and colorful glorification of a central event in Visconti's life.

© Giancarlo Costa/Index

tant producers of luxury goods. Its silks, textiles, fine leather, and silver and gold objects were much prized. The florin, the city's gold coin, had international standing as one of the most reliable currencies of the time.

By the 1300s Florence had been a self-governing commune for two centuries, but it had rarely enjoyed political stability. It was ruled by a series of councils, whose members were drawn from the leading families.



The rich Medici banking family gained control of the city's government in 1434 and made sure that only people they favored were defined as eligible for government positions. While retaining a facade of republican government, Cosimo de Medici established a form of boss rule over the city. His tax policies favored the lower and middle classes, and he also gained the support of the middle classes by appointments to office and other forms of political patronage. He secured peace for Florence and started his family's brilliant tradition of patronage of learning and the arts.

This tradition was enhanced by Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (r. 1469–1492), who beat back the plots of other powerful Florentine families and strengthened centralized control over the city. Lorenzo's Florence came to set the style for Italy, and eventually for Europe, in the splendor of its festivals, the elegance of its social life, the beauty of its buildings, and the lavish support it extended to scholars and artists.

**Venice** Already independent for more than five hundred years, the city of Venice by 1400 controlled a far-flung empire in northern Italy and the eastern Mediterranean and kept a large army and navy. Venice's wealth came from its dominance of the import of goods from Asia, notably spices like black pepper and cloves, which were probably the most expensive commodities, per ounce, sold in Europe. Its wealthiest citizens also controlled its government. Unlike Florence, Venice was ruled by a cohesive, rather than faction-ridden, oligarchy of some 150 families who inherited this dominance from generation to generation. From among their number they elected the *doge*, the head of the government, who held that position for life. (To increase turnover, older men were usually elected.)

Venice enjoyed remarkable political stability. There were occasional outbursts of discontent, but usually the patricians—who stayed united, relied on informers, made decisions in secret, and were ready to punish troublemakers severely—were able to maintain an image of orderliness and justice in government. They were also careful to show a concern for public welfare. The chief support of the navy, for instance—an essential asset for a city that, though containing more than 100,000 people, was built on a collection of islands in a lagoon—was a unique ship-building and arms manufacturing facility, the Arsenal. This gigantic complex, which employed more than 5 percent of the city's adult population, was not only the largest industrial enterprise in Europe but also a crucial source of employment. The Arsenal could build a fully equipped warship, starting from scratch, in just one day, and the skills it required helped maintain Venice's reputation as a haven for the

finest artisans of the day. Not only men but entire families came to work there; one visitor described a "hall where about fifty women were making sails for ships" and another where one hundred women were "spinning and making ropes and doing other work related to ropes."

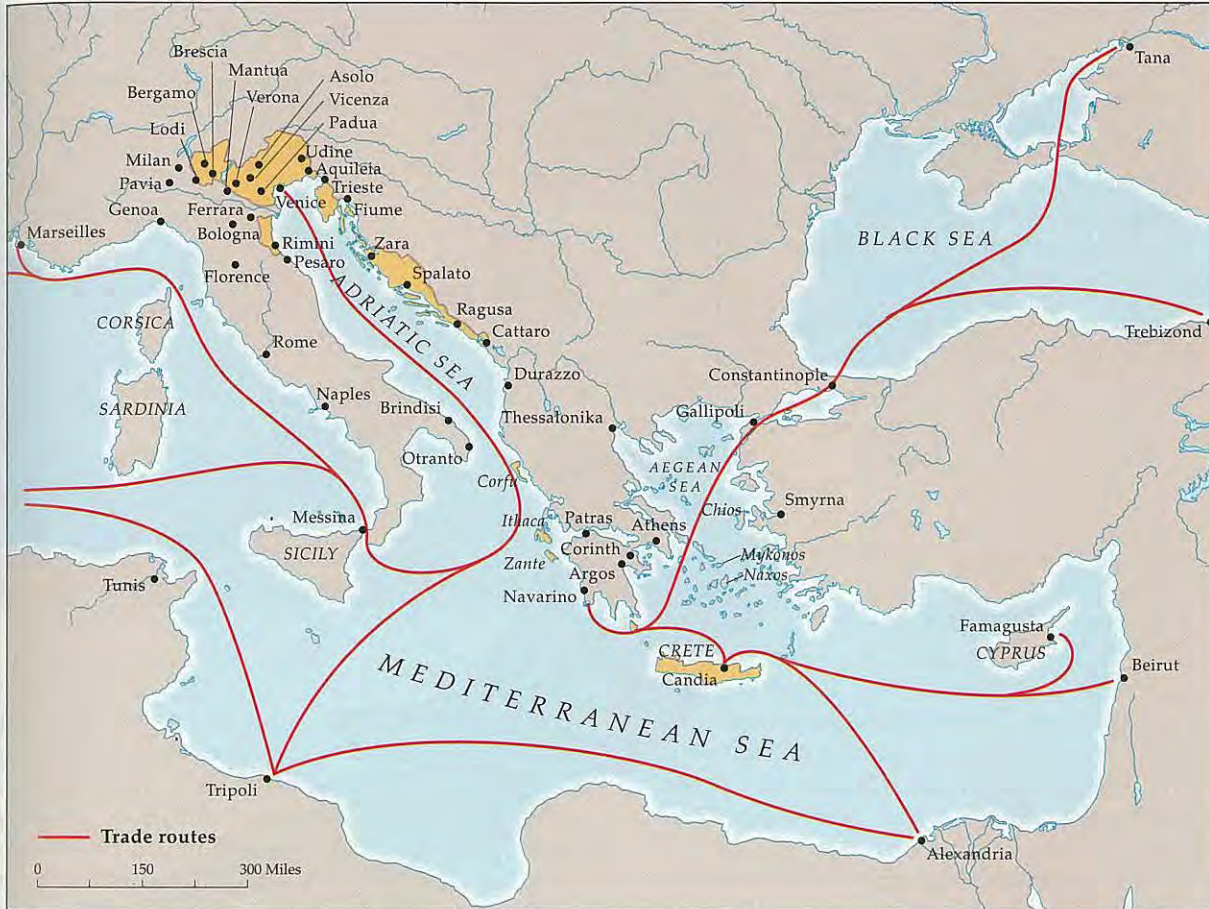
Because of its location and its easy openness to all who wished to trade, Venice was a meeting ground for Slavs, Turks, Germans, Jews, Muslims, Greeks, and other Italians. It was a favorite tourist spot for travelers and for pilgrims on the way to the Holy Land, a major center for the new international art of printing, and famous for its shops and entertainments. By the mid-1400s, its coin, the ducat, was replacing the florin as a standard for all Europe; and its patrons, often interested in more earthy themes than the Florentines, were promoting a flowering of literature, learning, and the arts that made Venice a focus of Renaissance culture.

From the early fifteenth century onward, Venice initiated a policy of territorial expansion on the mainland. By 1405, Padua, Verona, and Vicenza had become Venetian dependencies (see map 11.5).

**Papal States** The popes, like the leaders of the city-states, worked to consolidate their rule over their possessions in central Italy, but they faced formidable obstacles because the papacy was now located in Avignon in southern France. The difficult terrain of the Italian Papal States—dotted with castles and fortified towns—enabled communes, petty lords, and brigands to defy papal authority. Continuing disorders discouraged the popes from returning to Rome, and their efforts to pacify their tumultuous lands were a major drain on papal finances. Even after its return to Rome in 1378, the papacy had difficulty maintaining authority. Not until the pontificate of Martin V (r. 1417–1431) was a stable administration established, and Martin's successors still faced frequent revolts throughout the fifteenth century.

**Kingdom of Naples and Sicily** The political situation was equally confused in the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily with competing factions. In 1435 the king of Aragon, Alfonso V, the Magnanimous, reunited Sicily and southern Italy and made the kingdom the center of an Aragonese Empire in the Mediterranean. Alfonso sought to suppress the factions of lawless nobles and to reform taxes and strengthen administration. His efforts were not completely successful, for southern Italy and Sicily were rugged, poor lands and difficult to subdue; but he was at least able to overcome the chaos that had prevailed earlier. Alfonso thus extended to the Mediter-





**MAP 11.5 THE VENETIAN EMPIRE IN THE 1400S**  
 The Venetian trade routes, as this map shows, moved Venice to a position of major power. How far did Venice's rule extend? Which cities did it control? Who were its trading partners in the eastern Mediterranean?  
 ♦ For an online version, go to [www.mhhe.com/chambers9](http://www.mhhe.com/chambers9) > chapter 11 > book maps

reanean the strengthening of central governments that took place elsewhere in Europe in the 1400s. The court he created at Naples was one of the most brilliant centers of art and literature of the age.

**Balance of Power** Relations between the city-states on the Italian peninsula were tense as they clashed over trade and the acquisition of surrounding territory. The Peace of Lodi in 1454 ended a war among Milan, Florence, and Venice. Cosimo de Medici sought to make the peace a lasting one by creating an alliance system between Milan, Naples, and Florence on one side and Venice and the Papal States on the other (see map 11.6). During the next forty years, until the French invaded the peninsula in 1494, the balance was occasionally rocked but never overturned. This system represents one of the earliest appearances in European history of a diplomatic **balance of power** for maintaining peace.

## THE FALL OF BYZANTIUM AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Although the Byzantine Empire revived under Michael VIII Palaeologus, by the mid-fifteenth century the empire's control was effective only in Greece, the Aegean, and the area around Constantinople. The Ottoman Turks eventually fell heir to Byzantium's former power and influence, and by the early sixteenth century they were the unquestioned masters of southeast Europe and the Middle East.

### *The Fall of Constantinople*

**The Rising Threat** Turkish peoples had been assuming a large military and political role in the Middle East since the late tenth century. The Seljuk Turks dominated western Asia Minor since the late 1000s.





**MAP 11.6 THE ITALIAN STATES IN 1454**

As this map shows, after the Peace of Lodi in 1454, five major states dominated Italy. For forty years they maintained a balance of power among themselves. What were the five major states of Italy? What forms of government did these states represent?

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Antonio Natale

#### VENICE ARSENAL

This eighteenth-century depiction of the huge complex that made up the Arsenal in Venice indicates some of the specialized buildings that formed the production line around the pools in which the ships were built. At the back, hulls are being laid, and in the foreground, a ship is being scuttled. At the very front are the two towers that flanked the entrance gate to the Arsenal.

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Although Turks survived the attacks of Western crusaders, they were defeated by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. The Ottoman Turks, who had converted to Islam, followed the Mongol invasions and took over Asia Minor. They took their name from Osman, or Othman (r. 1290–1326), who founded a dynasty of sultans that survived for six centuries.

Establishing themselves at Gallipoli on the European side of the Straits in 1354, the Ottomans completely surrounded the Byzantine territory. The Byzantine emperors, fearing the worst for their small and isolated realm, tried desperately but unsuccessfully to persuade the West to send military help. At the council of Florence in 1439, Emperor John VII even accepted reunion with Rome, largely on Roman terms, in return for aid, but he had no power to impose the reunion of the churches on his people; in fact, many Eastern Christians preferred Turkish rule to submission to the hated Westerners.

**The Capture of the City** The Ottomans were unable to mount a major campaign against Constantinople until 1453, when Sultan Mehmet II, the Conqueror, finally attacked by land and water. The city fell after a heroic resistance, and Emperor Constantine XI Palaeologus, whose imperial lineage stretched back more than 1,400 years to Augustus Caesar, died in this final agony of the Byzantine Empire.

The fall of Constantinople had little military or economic effect on Europe and the Middle East. The Byzantine Empire had not been an effective barrier to Ottoman expansion for years, and Constantinople had

dwindled commercially as well as politically. The shift to Turkish dominion did not, as historians once believed, substantially affect the flow of trade between the East and West. Nor did the Turkish conquest of the city provoke an exodus of Byzantine scholars and manuscripts to Italy. Scholars from the East, recognizing the decline and seemingly inevitable fall of the Byzantine Empire, had been emigrating to Italy since the late fourteenth century; the revival of Greek letters was well under way in the West by 1453.

**The End of an Era** The impact of the fall was largely psychological, although hardly unexpected, it shocked the Christian world. The end of the Byzantine Empire and the rise of the **Ottoman Empire** had great symbolic importance for contemporaries and, perhaps even more, for later historians. In selecting Byzantium as his capital in 324, Constantine had founded a Christian Roman empire that could be considered the first authentically medieval state. For more than 1,000 years this Christian Roman empire played a major political and cultural role in the history of both Eastern and Western peoples. In some respects, the years of its existence mark the span of the Middle Ages, and its passing symbolizes the end of an era.

#### **The Ottoman Empire**

Under Mehmet II (r. 1451–1481), who from the start of his reign committed his government to a policy of conquest, the Ottomans began a century of expansion (see





## THE SULTAN MEHMET II

*One of the first histories of the Ottomans by a Westerner was written by an English schoolmaster named Richard Knolles and published in 1603. It is obvious that a great deal of research went into his work, which is marked by vivid portraits such as this one of the Sultan Mehmet II, known as the Conqueror because of his capture of Constantinople, who had lived a century before Knolles wrote.*

"He was of stature but low, square set, and strongly limbed; his complexion sallow and melancholy; his look and countenance stern, with his eyes piercing, and his nose so high and crooked that it almost touched his upper lip. He was of a very sharp and apprehending wit, learned especially in astronomy, and could speak the Greek, Latin, Arabic, Chaldee, and Persian tongues. He delighted much in reading of histories, and the lives of worthy men, especially the lives of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, whom he proposed to himself as examples to follow. He was of an exceeding courage, and a severe punisher of injustice. Men that excelled in any quality, he greatly favored and honorably entertained, as he did Gentile Bellini, a painter of Venice, whom he purposely caused to come from thence to Constantinople, to draw the lively counterfeit of himself for which he most

bountifully rewarded him. He so severely punished theft, as that in his time all the ways were safe. He was altogether irreligious, and most perfidious, ambitious above measure, and in nothing more delighted than in blood: insomuch that he was responsible for the death of 800,000 men; craft, covetousness and dissimulation were in him accounted tolerable, in comparison of his greater vices. In his love was no assurance, and his least displeasure was death; so that he lived feared of all men, and died lamented of none."

From Richard Knolles, in John J. Saunders (ed.), *The Muslim World on the Eve of Europe's Expansion*, Prentice Hall, 1966, adapted by T. K. Rabb.



Gentile Bellini  
MEHMET II

Mehmet II, here shown in a painting attributed to the Venetian artist Gentile Bellini, was the conqueror of Constantinople in 1453.

The Granger Collection, New York

"The Sultan Mehmet II," above). After the fall of Constantinople, which became his capital under the name of Istanbul (though the name was not officially adopted until 1930), Mehmet subjugated Morea, Serbia, Bosnia, and parts of Herzegovina. He drove the Genoese from their Black Sea colonies, forced the khan of the Crimea to become his vassal, and fought a lengthy naval war with the Venetians. At his death the Ottomans were a power on land and sea, and the Black Sea had become a Turkish lake (see map 11.7).

Early in the following century, under the leadership of Suleiman II, the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), the Ottoman Empire came to the height of its power. Turkish domination was extended over the heart of the Arab lands through the conquest of Syria, Egypt, and the western coast of the Arabian peninsula. (The Arabs did not again enjoy autonomy until the twentieth century.) With the conquest of the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina, the sultan assumed the title of caliph, "successor of the Prophet," claiming to be Islam's supreme religious head as well as its mightiest sword. Suleiman II also extended Turkish conquests into the Balkan peninsula and Hungary. His attempts to conquer Austria failed when Vienna withstood the onslaught of the Ottomans in 1529. (For more on Suleiman II and the Ottomans see chapter 14.)





MAP 11.7 THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1300–1566

This map shows the gradual expansion of the Ottoman Empire from 1300 to 1566. What areas of Europe did the Ottoman Empire include? What was the decisive battle that stopped further advances into Europe?

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## Summary

While the fall of Constantinople had a strong psychological effect on Europe, the threat of the Ottoman invasion initially meant little except to the Austrians, Hungarians, Balkan states, and the Knights Hospitalers. The West was preoccupied with the reality of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Early fourteenth-century famines, recurrent plague, and wars, including the Hundred Years' War, diverted their attention. By the end of the fifteenth century, peace was generally restored. England emerged as a government that would come to be described as a constitutional monarchy, the French king was on his way to a control over his subjects that would be called absolutism, and Italy had established a balance-of-power politics. The economy was strengthened by new inventions, such as the printing press, that would change the way people spread and received information to the present day. Europe was on the verge of new expansions. The explorations of the late fifteenth century introduced new concepts of power and wealth to the competing countries; the problems of the Church intensified with major splits; and the economy, although plagued with problems of overpopulation once again, was expanding in new directions and with new products from the conquests in America.