The Later Middle Ages

By 1300, the High Middle Ages was coming to an end. For 200 years, Europeans experienced much change and progress. Agricultural expansion made food more abundant and allowed for more trade, both within Europe and the Orient. Warm weather patterns frequently insured good harvests of grains and vegetables.

The population expanded, and new towns and cities dotted the landscape from England to Poland. Great Gothic cathedrals were constructed, as well as universities and schools of higher learning. Wars were kept to a minimum. It was a time of peace, security, and an expanding economy.

Even the peasants experienced the best of times. With the expanding economy of the High Middle Ages, many peasants were able to buy their freedom from their lords, and become landowners themselves. In France, King Louis X freed all the serfs (after they paid him for the right first).

But a storm was gathering over Europe with the coming of the new century. The 14th century would soon usher in 150 years of problems and peril, plagues and peace-breaking. Until about 1450, Europe—especially western Europe—suffered from increasing economic depression.

This downturn was aggravated by widespread financial chaos, wars of rivalry, revolution, peasant riots, international rivalries with the Church, famines, and, perhaps worst of all, a series of disastrous plagues. Often called the Black Death, these plagues brought about the deaths of one-fourth to one-third of the population of medieval Europe.

What caused this 180 degree turnaround in Europe? Why did the prosperity and security of one age suddenly give way to an age of destruction, dismay, disease, and death? There are many reasons.

To begin, Europe's population had increased rapidly and dramatically. With more people, available farmland was divided between the knights and the peasants into inevitably smaller and smaller holdings. This left many landowners without enough land to support themselves and depleted crop surpluses for trade.

This trade restriction was made worse later in the 1300s when, in the Far East, the Chinese experienced an imperial collapse, bringing new leaders into power under the Ming Dynasty. These powerful rulers did not trust foreigners, and they closed many trade doors to the Europeans. Any future trade with the Orient was controlled by Moslem middlemen in Egypt and the Near East, who charged the Europeans extremely high prices for Eastern goods.

To make things worse, the European climate began to turn colder around 1300. Glaciers in the mountains and in the north advanced across farm land. Thousands of northern European villages were abandoned, unable to sustain themselves.

Such bad weather patterns brought on repeated droughts, resulting in serious crop failures. Between 1302 and 1348, poor harvests occurred during 20 seasons. This, in turn, caused famines. In the famine of 1315–1317, tens of thousands died. France faced destructive famines in 1351, 1359, and 1418. (According to legend, 100,000 people died during the 1418 famine in Paris alone.) Desperate for food, people ate cats, dogs, even rats.

All these natural and international disasters wrecked life for many in Europe. Wars of competition over natural resources developed. The peasants—caught in the economic squeeze and starving to death—brought about revolts, demanding higher wages and greater security from roaming bands of soldiers, knights, and drifters who looted, burned, and raped their way across the sorrowful landscape.

Despite all these problems, the great scourge of the period was the Black Death.

Review and Write

1. Identify some of the positive aspects of life during the High Middle Ages.

2. Describe some of the negative aspects of life during the Later Middle Ages.

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The Black Death, Part I

In October 1347, the people of Messina, a port on the northeastern shores of the Mediterranean island of Sicily, experienced an unforgettable sight.

A convoy of a dozen Italian trading ships sailed into the harbor with dead and dying men at the oars. Those still barely alive had a hideous look about them. Black, egg-sized lumps, oozing blood and pus, formed in the armpits and groins of afflicted men. Boils and blackened spots dotted their bodies. Everything about them smelled foul: their wounds, their blood, their sweat, even their breath.

An eyewitness to these wretched men wrote the following:

> In their bones they bore so virulent [strong] a disease that anyone who only spoke to them was seized by a mortal illness and in no manner could evade [avoid] death.

City officials, fearful of the spread of the disease, tried to keep these death ships out of Messina, but it was too late. Frightened Messinans fled their city to escape the disease. However, they only managed to spread the illness further and faster. By early 1348, it had found its way to mainland Italy and France.

The great plague, soon to be called the Black Death, arrived on the shores of Europe and soon spread to nearly every corner of the Continent.

What was this dreadful disease and how was it spread? Often called *the bubonic plague*, it was caused by bacteria which developed in the blood of a certain type of flea. The bacillus caused the flea's stomach to block, making it unable to take in food properly.

Such fleas were frequently found on black rats. The fleas bit the rats by inserting a pricker into the host's skin to feed on its blood. With an infected flea's stomach blocked, it would regurgitate the rat's blood along with the plague bacteria. A bite from an infected rat or flea could then pass the infection to a human.

Once contracted, the disease was almost always fatal. The bacteria could infect the bloodstream and settle in the lymph glands, causing large lumps, called *buboes*, on the skin.

Lymph infections caused blood hemorrhages, turning the skin black, including the tongue (hence the name *Black Death*). Some forms of the disease infected the throat and lungs. Such victims coughed up blackened blood and gave off a foul smell. Pain was intense and death came swiftly, typically within three days or less.

Even before the arrival of the Genoese ships in Messina, Europeans had heard of a great plague in the East. Beginning probably in China, it spread to central Asia, then to India and Persia. By 1346 it made its way to Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Trading ships unknowingly helped spread the disease, as did land trade caravans. Others, too, spread the plague. Central Asian warrior nomads, called *tatars*, invaded Europe in 1346, bringing the disease with them.

One such band of warriors, while laying siege to the city gates of the port of Caffa on the Russian Crimean Sea, fell victim to the Black Death. Rather than retreat, they loaded their catapults with the putrid corpses of dead comrades, and flung them into the city, spreading the disease among their enemies.

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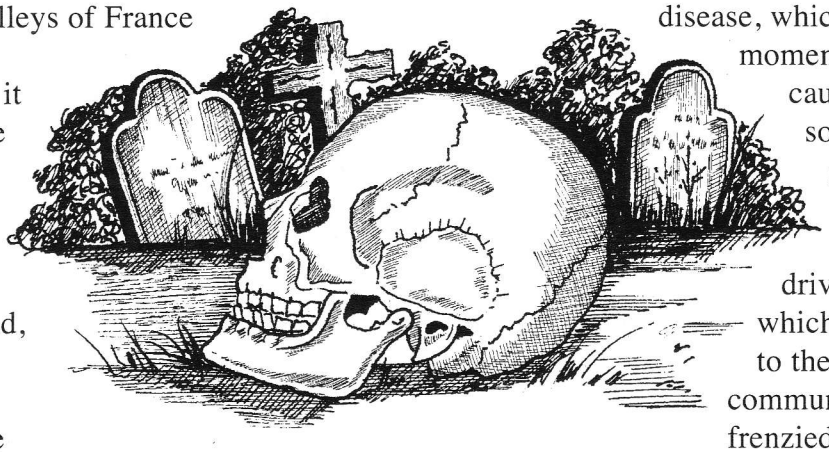
The Black Death, Part II

Once the bubonic plague landed on the island of Sicily in October of 1347, it spread quickly throughout the European continent. With no understanding of disease, germs, or bacteria, medieval people did not know how to begin fighting the disease.

The Black Death was, by its nature, a disease which spread rapidly. By January of 1348, it had spread to France, landing first in the Mediterranean port city of Marseilles. Within the next six months, it made its deadly way into eastern Spain, all of Italy, the southern reaches of Eastern Europe, and across the hills and valleys of France as far as Paris.



Before year's end, it had traveled across the English Channel to the British Isles. The next year—1349—brought the infection to nearly all of England, Ireland, Scotland, modern Belgium, the German states, and the Scandinavian countries. The great cities of Europe—London, Paris, Rome, Florence, Pisa, Frankfurt, Cologne, Ghent—were all centers of the Black Death. In 1349, Paris reported 800 deaths daily, Vienna 600, and Pisa 500. In some cities, as much as 80% of the population died.

As the plague advanced, frightened people tried to flee ahead of it, often carrying the disease with them to the next town, port, or village.

People stayed to themselves, refusing to come in contact with outsiders, even their own servants. Family members abandoned one another, leaving the dying miserable and alone.

Remote farms were not necessarily safe; sheep and hogs contracted the disease, just as rats did, spreading it to their masters.

Life everywhere changed dramatically in the face of this powerful killer. It was the speed of the disease which caused its potency. The plague consumed its victims so quickly that a person might go to bed feeling well and die in his or her sleep. Doctors called to tend to the sick sometimes caught the plague and died ahead of their patients. Present at the bedside of the suffering to provide last rites, priests died in great numbers

In the southern French city of Avignon, specific death numbers were recorded. In one three-day period, 1500 people died in the city. Many Roman Catholic clergymen were counted among the dead, including five cardinals, 100 bishops, and 358 Dominican friars. A single Avignon graveyard received 11,000 corpses.

The threat of the Black Death nearly drove some people to the brink of insanity. This dreaded disease, which could strike at any moment without warning, caused some panicky souls to gather in church graveyards where they sang and danced wildly, hoping to drive away the evil spirits which had brought the death to their village or community. Also, such frenzied activity would hopefully keep the dead from rising from their burial places, so that they would not infect anyone else with the plague. People often gathered in long processions of dancing and singing. Sometimes such paranoid people danced until they fell exhausted or died of self-induced fear.

Today, historians do not have a clear estimate of the number of people who died at the hands of the Black Death. Tens of thousands of villages and rural settlements disappeared, their inhabitants killed. The populations of monasteries, abbeys, and universities were wiped out. Across Europe, villas, castles, and homes were abandoned.

Modern estimates place the death toll from recurring outbreaks of the plague at 20 million, or perhaps one out of every three persons.

Review and Write

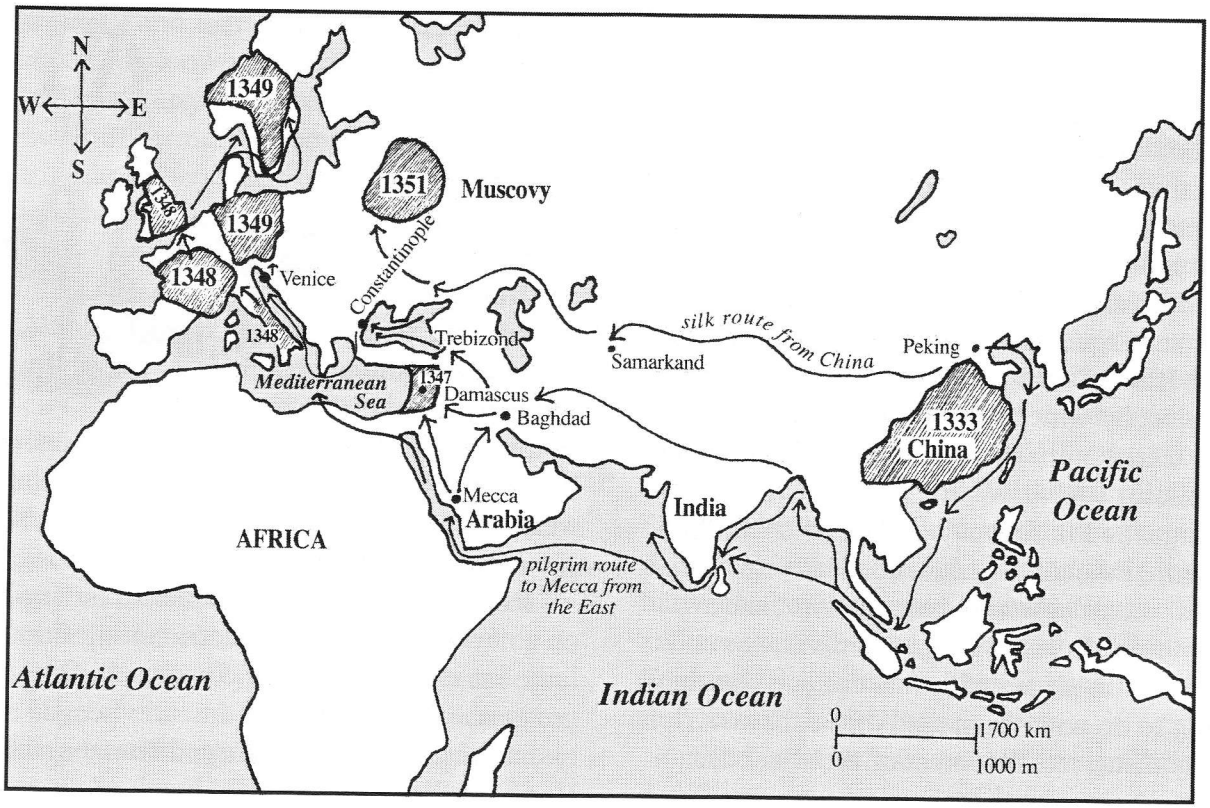
What were some of the reasons why the Black Death killed so many people in Europe?

Map of the Black Death

The Black Death spread rapidly from Asia to Europe. The result was widespread destruction and death spanning the continents.

The map below shows the spread of the disease. Dates are included to indicate the time frame for transferring the plague from Asia.

Using the map and information given on pages 2 and 3, use the space below to write a short history describing where the plague began and when and how it spread from Asia to Europe. Use your interpretative skills to determine the sequence of events.



A History of the Spread of the Black Death, 1333 to 1351

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The Impact of the Black Death

At first, the direct impact of the Black Death was fear, dislocation, and death. The population of Europe dropped from 60 million people to 40 or 35 million. A wandering traveler could enter a village or town and find it abandoned or, worse, littered with rotting corpses. Death was commonplace.

This pattern recurred over and over again. After its initial run from 1348 to 1351, the plague returned in later decades. It appeared four different times in Spain and nine times in Italy between 1381 and 1444. England witnessed five separate outbreaks between 1361 and 1391. The Black Death struck in France six times between the years 1361 and 1436.

Since men and women of the Middle Ages didn't understand how diseases spread, they manufactured explanations to satisfy themselves. Although Jews died from the plague like everyone else, Christians blamed the Black Death on the Jews. They created elaborate plots by which Jewish Europeans were destroying Christianity by poisoning wells and other water supplies.

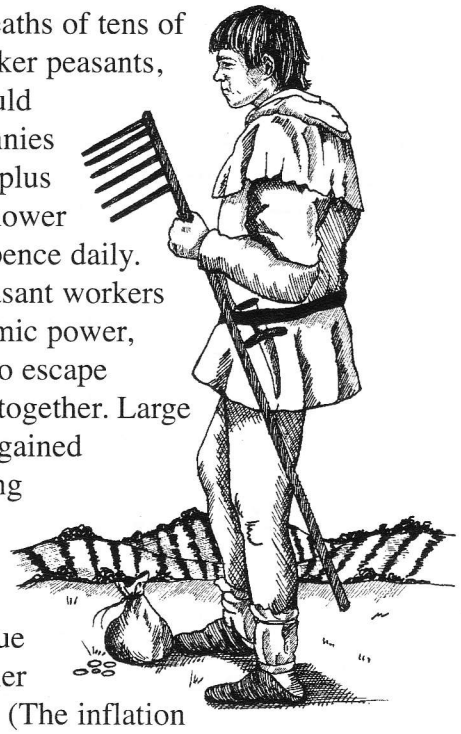
Campaigns to kill Jews took place in southern France, Spain, Poland, Austria, and Germany. Jewish populations were massacred, burned alive, and attacked by dogs. In more enlightened villages and towns, city fathers protected local Jews, certain they had nothing to do with the spread of the disease.

In many instances, the threat of the Black Death brought out the worst in people. However, despite the destructive and deadly impact of the plague across Europe, there were some changes which resulted in positive differences across the Continent.

With the threat of the plague, people farmed less, produced fewer goods, and became generally less enterprising. This caused the economies of whole regions to plunge into chaos. Many basic items, including food, grew scarce and their values rose, causing inflation.

While this made life more difficult for most, such scarcities were not all bad. With the deaths of so many people, a scarcity of labor developed across Europe. This shortage of workers caused the labors of those still alive to be worth more.

For example, prior to the initial outbreak of the Black Death in the mid-14th century, the normal wage for a field worker was a penny a day. After the plague and the deaths of tens of thousands of worker peasants, a grain reaper could demand eight pennies (or pence) a day, plus a noon meal. A mower could expect 12 pence daily.



Suddenly, peasant workers had a new economic power, many managing to escape feudal services altogether. Large numbers of serfs gained freedom, becoming landowners in their own right.

Those who survived the plague were now wealthier and bought more. (The inflation caused by the Black Death was only temporary.) Business flourished once again, great trading centers were reestablished in the towns and cities, and significant profits became the rule.

Renewed emphasis on trade and buying brought on a new banking industry, accounting firms, and large international trading companies. One such group was known as the Hanseatic League. Led by two northern cities, Lubeck and Bremen, the Hanseatic League controlled much of the trade between the North Seas and the Baltic, from Scandinavia to the Germanies. By 1450, a smaller population in Europe was enjoying a better standard of living than the population of 1300.

Review and Write

1. How were Jewish Europeans victimized by the Black Death?

2. How did the Black Death bring about an increase in the wages of the average European worker?

New Trials for the Church

During the 1200s A.D., the power of the Roman Catholic Church piqued. The papacy was recognized as the spiritual head of all European Christians. (Christians living in the old Byzantine Empire in Eastern Europe did not tend to recognize the pope and his authority, however.)

But, beginning in the 1300s, with the strengthening of the monarchy in places like France, England, and the Germanies, challenges to the Church and the power of the papacy came frequently. The Church faced several defeats over a long century of turmoil and division.

The struggle between the Catholic papacy and secular kings began during the years of Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303). He and the king of France, Philip IV (known as Philip the Fair), came to blows. When Philip attempted to tax the clergy in France, Boniface resounded, announcing that clergy in any state were not to pay taxes to a secular ruler without permission from the Church.

When Philip ignored and challenged the Pope's authority by banning exports of money and valuable goods from France to Italy, Boniface came down hard, excommunicating Philip from the sacraments in an attempt to keep him in line and extend papal authority over all secular rulers.

Philip IV responded by dispatching soldiers to Rome, taking Boniface prisoner and bringing him back to France to stand trial. Since Boniface was an old man, the shock of imprisonment and challenge took its toll, causing his death in 1303.

With the death of the pope, King Philip moved swiftly to replace him. By 1305, he forced the college of cardinals (Catholic clergymen who select new popes) to elect a Frenchman to the papacy named Clement V (1305–1314). Once Clement was installed as pope, he ordered the removal of the papacy from Rome to French soil, settling himself and his papal office in the city of Avignon. This new papal city was not located in France directly, but rather in the Holy Roman Empire along the east bank of the Rhone River. Although not in France, Avignon was just across the river from the territory ruled by King Philip, and easily controlled by him.

For roughly the next 75 years, the papacy was centered in French-controlled Avignon, not in Rome. Historians refer to this era as the Babylonian Captivity, the period when the papacy existed outside of its traditional home in Rome. During the reign of most of the popes of this period, the papacy supported French interests.

With the papacy centered outside of Rome, many critics questioned the popes who ruled from Avignon. Their first loyalty appeared to be to France and its monarchy. By 1377, Pope Gregory XI, aware of the decline of the papacy's reputation, returned to Rome, where he died the next year.

When the college of cardinals met to select a new pope (most of the cardinals were French) the citizens of Rome forced them to elect an Italian pope named Urban VI (1378–1389). Five months later, a group of French cardinals refused to recognize Urban and elected another pope, a Frenchman named Clement VII, who returned the papacy back to Avignon. With two ruling popes, a Great Schism—or division—developed.

Christians in Europe divided their loyalty between the two popes. France, Spain, Scotland, and southern Italy gave support to Clement. England, Scandinavia, the Germanies, and most of Italy recognized Urban.

The Great Schism caused many Christians to doubt papal authority and led to great confusion. It was not until 1417 that a church council, the Council of Constance, rejected the split papacy and elected Pope Martin V as the only legitimate pope. By this time, however, the prestige of the Church had been greatly compromised, never again to regain the power it wielded during the High Middle Ages.

Review and Write

1. What was the basis for the struggle between Pope Boniface VIII and the French king, Philip IV?

2. What damage to the Church was caused by the Great Schism?

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The Hundred Years' War

While many peasants gained their freedom and became landowners during the years of the Black Death, the nobility, who traditionally owned the land and its wealth, suffered. The economic crises caused by inflation and a lack of manpower caused the incomes of the landlords to dwindle.

Strapped for money and trained in the arts of war, the nobles and their knights turned the 1300s into a century of almost constant warfare, with knights raiding and looting towns and terrorizing the peasants, tradesmen, and merchants.

Much of the looting, raiding, and warfare was embodied in the long series of military and political struggles between England and France known as the Hundred Years' War, which actually lasted longer than a century, beginning in 1337 and drawing to an end in 1453.

The Hundred Years' War was fought for territorial control. In 1337, the French, led by King Philip VI (1328–1350), invaded the English province of Guienne in southwestern France. (The French kingdom of 1337 did not yet include all the lands which comprise modern-day France.) The English king, Edward III (1327–1377), responded by claiming to be the rightful king of France since his mother was the daughter of Philip IV (the Fair), who had ruled France earlier in the century.

The actions of both kings led to a lengthy war. After ensuring his alliance with the town of Flanders (in modern-day northern France), King Edward III invaded French territory with approximately 15,000 men, mostly highly mobile infantry and archers armed with longbows.

When the war began, France was the strongest country in Europe, its population outnumbering the English three to one. France's strength in numbers, wealth, and allies won out over the long run of the Hundred Years' War. But the English won several decisive battles early in the war, primarily because of their effective use of the longbow.

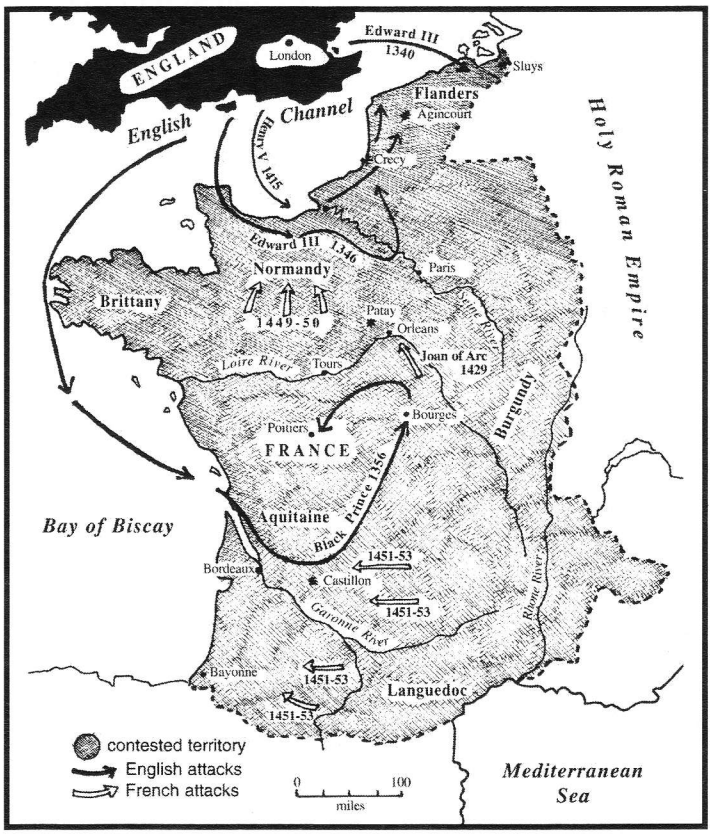
The longbow, compared to the more traditional crossbow of the period, was a superior weapon. Five to six feet in length, it was carried by a common archer. The bow string was pulled back to the ear (the crossbow was aimed like a gun) and, when let loose, had an effective range of 250 yards. Such an arrow could penetrate two sets of chain-mail armor or a well-seasoned, thick oak board. It could also be shot five times faster than the crossbow.

For the first 80 years of the Hundred Years' War, the English armies won most of the significant battles. Using superior military tactics and well-disciplined archers, the English were able to defeat the mounted, heavily-armored French knights.

In three great battles—Crecy [kray SEE] 1346, Poitiers [pwah TYAY] 1356, and Agincourt [AJ in kohrt] 1415—the English, although outnumbered by the French army, crushed their enemy.

The Crecy battle was typical. An English army of 8000 lodged themselves at the top of a hill. Their king, Edward III, was present, to rally his men. They faced a larger army of French cavalry, infantry, and Italian mercenaries armed with crossbows. The French made 15 charges up the hill. Each time, they were cut down by the arrows of the English longbows. The French lost 4000 men (including 1500 knights) that day, while the English suffered few casualties.

While the Crecy engagement proved the longbow effective, it also introduced another new weapon to the European battlefield: cannons and gunpowder.



The Hundred Years' War Continues

Following the English victory at Crecy, where archers cut down the French and Italians with their deadly longbows, King Edward III laid siege to the French port city of Calais. The city fell and Calais remained in English hands for the next 200 years.

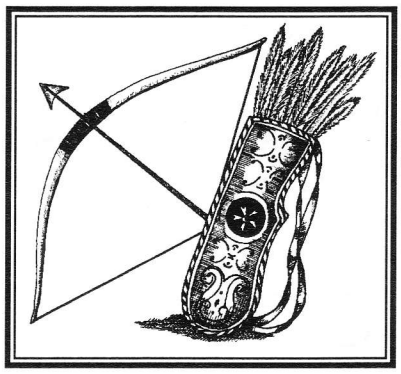
The war was interrupted by the advance of the Black Death. The English withdrew temporarily from French soil (except for Calais), only to return in 1355. Two English armies were soon moving about on French soil, one marching from Brittany to the south, while the other made its way north from Bordeaux in territory controlled by the English.

The next significant English victory came a decade later with the fight at Poitiers in 1356. Here, Edward's son, known as the Black Prince, engaged a larger French army once again. Although the French knights fought on foot rather than be cut down on horseback as at Crecy, English longbowmen brought victory. The English took 2000 prisoners, including the new king of France, John II. King John's ransom was set at 500,000 pounds, a huge sum of money for that time.

In 1359–60, the English invaded France again and marched all the way to Paris. This campaign brought an end to the first phase of the Hundred Years' War. The Treaty of Bretigny, signed in 1360, guaranteed English control over French soil including the regions of Calais, Aquitaine, and Ponthieu. In exchange, Edward III agreed to give up his claim to the French throne.

In time, France recovered from its losses and with the coming of a new king to the throne, Charles V (1364–1380), fought to regain its lost territory. By 1380, the year King Edward died, the English held little French territory. For the rest of the 14th century, England's monarchs were either insane, unpopular, or busy fighting rebels in Scotland and Wales. Some warfare with the French continued, but both sides were tired and financially drained by the war. In 1396, both powers agreed to sign a 20-year truce, ending the second phase of the Hundred Years' War.

In 1413, a new king, Henry V (1413–1422), the great-grandson of Edward III, led the English into war with the French once again. The most significant battle of this phase of the war was at Agincourt, located between Crecy and Calais.



English longbow

Here the English, outnumbered five to one, won a brilliant victory. A small army, its ranks filled with archers, once again battled French knights in full armor. The night before the battle, heavy rains turned the next day's battlefield into a muddy meadow.

The French knights, dismounting their horses, were soon caught between slipping in mud and lying helplessly on their backs under the weight of heavy armor and the arrows of the English archers. The day's battle resulted in the loss of 5000 Frenchmen, plus 1000 prisoners. English losses amounted to a mere 100 men. Following his success at Agincourt, Henry V conquered Normandy (1417–19). By 1420 he was recognized as the heir to the French throne.

More English victories came in the 1420s, as well as the rise of a mysterious young girl, Joan of Arc, a peasant mystic who rallied French forces in the 1428–29 siege of the city of Orleans. Inspired by her presence, the French broke the English siege. This victory proved to be a turning point in the war. The English suffered disastrous defeats, owing to an increased use of French cannons. By the 1440s, the French had regained much of their territory. When the English failed to reconquer the region of Gascony, the Hundred Years' War ended. The result was a stronger France which controlled more territory.

Research and Write

Joan of Arc is a fascinating figure. This young, illiterate peasant girl made an important contribution to the French efforts in the war. Research her story and write about it in 100 words.

Challenges to England's Kings

Despite great military success on the part of the British throughout most of the Hundred Years' War, the French ultimately regained their lost territory. By the war's end, the French were stronger than ever.

In England, events took a dark turn. Nobles warred with one another, military leaders were accused of treason, and some were even executed.

The English monarch, Henry VI (1421–1471), was unable to stop the fighting which soon spiraled out of control. Henry suffered from bouts of insanity and was otherwise controlled by his French wife, whom most of the English aristocracy hated. After decades of fighting the French, the English nobility had become accustomed to violence. And within ten years of the end of the Hundred Years' War, the English were at war again, this time with one another.

Henry VIII

These conflicts were known as the Wars of the Roses, and were fought between 1455 and 1485. The cause of the wars was basically a challenge to the ineffective reign of Henry VI.

The name for the wars came from the emblems used by both sides. The symbol for Henry VI's family name, Lancaster, was a red rose, while the rival house of York bore the emblem of a white rose. (Both lines had descended from the line of Edward III, so both claimed they represented the legitimate heirs to the throne.)

In 1461, Edward IV of York (1461–1483) managed to seize the throne from the weak Henry VI. Edward and his supporters did manage to restore some order to England, but he was occasionally cruel. When he died, his brother Richard III (1483–1485) became king, despite a legitimate heir in Edward V, one of two young sons of Edward IV.

To ensure his reign, Richard III had his two nephews locked away in the Tower of London. "The little princes" were eventually murdered, presumably under orders from their uncle, Richard. Richard's rule proved to be a short one, however; he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485.

With the death of Richard III during battle, the English throne passed to Henry VII (1485–1509), the first English king of the Tudor family line. (He was born into the house of Lancaster.) To consolidate his claim to the throne, Henry VII married into the house of York. He also convinced Parliament to recognize him as the rightful heir to the throne.

Henry VII proved one of the most capable kings seen in England in 200 years. He selected capable ministers who served him well, balanced the kingdom's budget, and even accumulated a treasury surplus. Trade increased during his reign. He avoided war as often as possible, knowing that wars are expensive, win or lose. He married his children to the royal families of Scotland and the Germanies. He forced his nobles to treat their serfs and the lower classes with justice.

Although the people of England did not feel warmly toward their king (Henry kept himself removed from direct contact with his subjects), he managed to bring to England a new order of stability and security. He left his kingdom solidly intact and is considered one of England's greatest kings.

When his son, Henry VIII (1509–1547), inherited the throne, England was one of the four strongest powers in all of Europe, second only to France, Spain, and Austria.

Review and Write

1. Identify the basic cause of the English Wars of the Roses.

2. From the information found on this page, describe the reign of Henry VII. What kind of king was he? (Be specific.)

France in the Later Middle Ages

Early in the 1300s, the French monarchy—in particular, Philip the Fair— caused the Roman Catholic Church many problems. Yet in the 14th and 15th centuries, the monarchy faced serious troubles of its own.

When the sons of Philip the Fair died, leaving Philip without a male heir, it was left for his daughters to inherit their father's power. Yet, the French lords created a rule barring any woman from ascending to the throne.

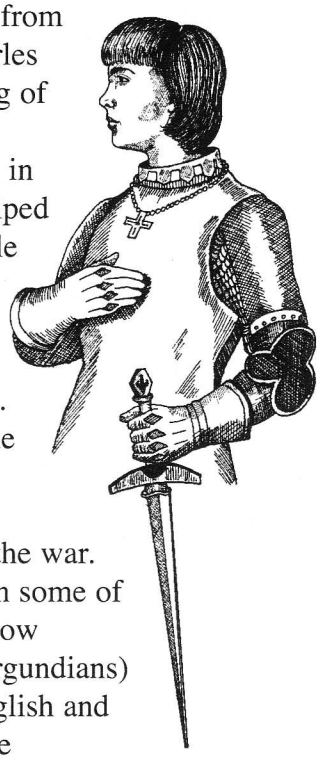
By 1328, the barons selected a nephew of Philip the Fair, Philip of Valois, for the position of king. Since this Philip was placed on the throne rather than having inherited it directly, he spent much of his reign granting favors to his supporters and watching his back against nobles opposed to him. Aristocratic feuds and squabbles nearly caused civil war and accounted for the early French defeats in the Hundred Years' War.

Philip's son, John (1350–1364), faced his own rocky reign. Captured by the English during the Battle of Poitiers, he lost huge portions of French territory (which cut out his tax revenues from those regions) and made the French people in general very dissatisfied with him. The year 1358 proved most difficult for John who faced a bloody peasant revolt and an attempt by the Parisian middle class to bring down his government, which ultimately failed.

The next king, John's son, Charles V (1364 - 1380), was moderately successful in his war with the English and managed to regain much of the territory lost earlier in the Hundred Years' War. His son, Charles VI (1380–1422), however, proved to be a highly ineffective ruler. He suffered bouts of insanity, and died in 1422 in his early 50s.

His son, Charles VII (1422–1461) was a victim of events that were often greater than he was. Few took him seriously, for he had been disinherited by his father. The Hundred Years' War was on in earnest and the English, along with their allies, held much French territory. His armies seemed incapable of defeating the English. Charles was known as a weak ruler.

Then, events turned in Charles VII's favor. First, the mysterious and pious peasant girl, Joan of Arc, stirred her people and rallied around Charles. Joan was certain she heard voices from God which told her that Charles VII was the only rightful king of France. Many people, from nobility to peasants, believed in her and in her words. She helped to restore to the French people their Christianity and faith in the French monarchy. Charles could not have had a better ally than Joan of Arc.



Joan of Arc

With a new confidence, he decreed a massive campaign against the English which ultimately turned the tide of the war. He gained an advantage when some of England's allies (actually fellow Frenchmen known as the Burgundians) had a falling out with the English and returned to fight alongside the French instead. With such allies, Charles's armies were able to wrest northern France from the English.

With the support of the French people, and the success of his armies against the English, Charles VII began to systematically expand his power base as king. He instituted taxes on the people without consulting with anyone, including the Estates General, a political body representing the three classes of French people—the clergy, nobility, and commoners.

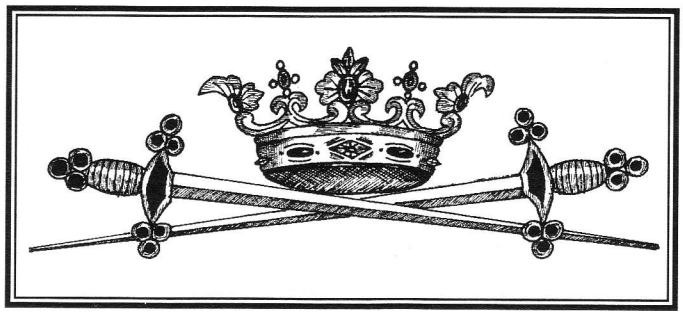
He overcame all opposition, including the nobles, from seriously challenging him. The result was a king who expanded the power base of the French monarchy. Charles VII became a king who was strong, and who ran France as a powerful, bureaucratic state. This pattern of political structure was soon to become the European model for centuries to come.

Review and Write

What positive impact did Joan of Arc have on her native France?

Ferdinand and Isabella Unite Spain

During the High Middle Ages, from 1085 to 1212, the land known today as Spain was ruled by small feudal Christian kingdoms. Those decades were spent battling the Moslems for control of the Iberian Peninsula, which today includes the nations of Spain and Portugal. These wars to remove the followers of Islam from the peninsula were known as the Reconquista, the *reconquest*. This campaign concluded with the 1212 victory of a combined Aragonese and Castilian army over a Moslem force at Las Navas de Tolosa.



By the 1400s, the various kingdoms had formed three, often feuding, monarchies: Portugal, which hugged the western coast of the Iberian Peninsula; Aragon on the Mediterranean Sea coast; and Castile near the center of the peninsula. (The Moslems, called the Moors, still retained a small state called the Kingdom of Granada in the south, where they hung on by a thread by paying tribute to the Christian kingdoms to the north.)

Two of these kingdoms united later in the 15th century. In 1469, King Ferdinand of Aragon (1479–1516) and Isabella of Castile (1474–1504) married and formed a single state. (They became the sponsors for the voyages of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s.) In time, this newly formed Spain became the chief French rival in Europe.

Once united, Ferdinand and Isabella faced many problems. Both France and Portugal opposed the marriage, and Portugal went to war with Castile in 1476 to overthrow Isabella. Noblemen in both Castile and Aragon frequently launched plots against the union of the kingdoms. Yet Ferdinand and Isabella ultimately overcame all serious opposition.

Together, they managed to extend and strengthen their royal power over the nobility, the towns, and all legislative bodies. They ordered the Council of Castile, once controlled by the noblemen, into an agency answerable to the monarchy. Ferdinand took control of the three military orders of knights which had previously been controlled by the nobility. In the years to follow, the Spanish army became one of the best-equipped and best-trained forces in Europe.

Ferdinand and Isabella dominated the Church in Spain as well. In 1482, the pope granted them power to appoint Catholic bishops, archbishops, and cardinals. They collected Spanish Church revenues. Although the king and queen appeared loyal to the pope in Rome, they changed the Catholic Church in Spain into a national body, independent of the papacy. Church officials often served the monarchy in administrative positions.

Religion played an important role in late 15th-century Spain. Isabella, much more religious than her husband, ordered the reintroduction of the Inquisition, which had been created in the 1200s by the Church as a means of fighting heresy and Church opposition. The Inquisition was carried out by a zealous Spanish government to harass rebellious noblemen and other opponents. Isabella's Inquisitor General, Torquemada, used torture and execution (by burning at the stake) to punish his victims.

As an extension of Christian zeal, the Spanish government ordered the removal of all Moslems and Jews from Spain in 1492, the year of Columbus' first voyage to the New World. Approximately 200,000 Jews were forced out of their homes. Once the Spanish army defeated the Moslems in Granada, their Christian state was complete.

Isabella died in 1504 and Ferdinand in 1516. Upon his death, their grandson, Charles V (1516–1556), became the king of Spain. As the ruler of the Spanish Netherlands, Austria, Milan, Naples, and the new Spanish empire in the Americas, his kingdom was a secure one during Spain's golden age of the 1500s.

Review and Write

Once they united their kingdoms into one, what successes did Ferdinand and Isabella have as rulers of Spain?

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15th-Century Eastern Europe

The 1400s, despite destructive wars and recurring bouts of the Black Death, brought about the rise of powerful monarchies in the Western nations of England, France, and Spain. However, while kings and queens were expanding their power in the West, in the East and in central Europe, the states were noted not for power but for weakness.

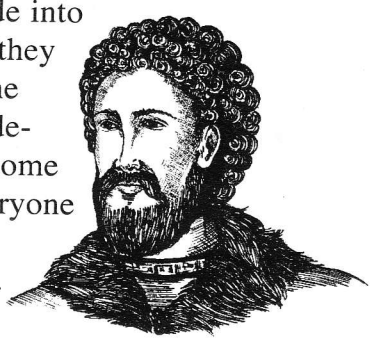
There were some short-lived exceptions. In Hungary, King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) briefly united the kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia to the west into a single monarchy. Matthias defeated his neighbors, the Habsburgs of Austria, and one of his armies even occupied the Austrian capital of Vienna in 1485. However, his kingdom collapsed after his death in 1490, when the Hungarian nobility refused to recognize Matthias's son as king.

In Poland to the north, the ruling family of the Jagiellonians stepped in. Casimir IV, king of Poland, managed to get his son, Wladyslaw, elected as king of both Bohemia (in 1471) and Hungary (in 1490). However, when Casimir died in 1492, the kingship of Wladyslaw died with it as the union of Bohemia and Hungary fell apart.

To the south of Hungary, the ancient empire of Byzantium faced a grim future. The direct heir of the eastern half of the long dissolved Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire managed to thrive for nearly 1,000 years until the 15th century. In 1453, the Moslem leader of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed II, proclaimed a holy war against the Byzantines. He soon laid siege to the ancient city of Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium.

Mehmed's army was gigantic, one of the largest amassed during the Late Middle Ages. With his army ranging between 200 and 400,000 soldiers, he faced little opposition from the 6000 men defending the crumbling, 1000-year-old walls of Constantinople. Mehmed's men used a huge siege cannon, which knocked down the city's walls with granite cannon balls weighing a ton each. After 53 days of siege, the old city of Constantinople finally fell to the Moslem Turks on a Tuesday, the 29th of May, 1453.

When the Turks rode into the city on horseback (they were able to because the walls of the city were destroyed completely in some places), they killed everyone who resisted them and enslaved 60,000 others. Almost immediately, the 1000-year-old church of the Hagia Sophia was invaded by the Turks. Here, the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine IX, was killed. Now, the Greek city of Constantinople became Turkish Istanbul, as it is known today.



Ivan III of Muscovy

Despite the power vacuums scattered around eastern Europe in the 1400s, one state saw dramatic expansion and development. During the second half of the 15th century, the Muscovite princes of northern Russia overthrew their Asian oppressors, the Mongols.

One prince, Ivan III (1462–1505), rose to power and declared himself tsar, from the Roman name *Caesar,* over all Russian lands, then known as Rus. In 1471, Ivan defeated his opponents in the city-state of Novgorod, which controlled much of northern Russia. He soon consolidated his power, establishing his capital at another Russian city, Moscow.

Research and Write

1. Another weak state of central and eastern Europe in the 1400s was the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanies. Find out about the Germanies of this period and explain why the HRE was so ineffective.

2. Describe the collapse of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of the Turks on May 29, 1453.

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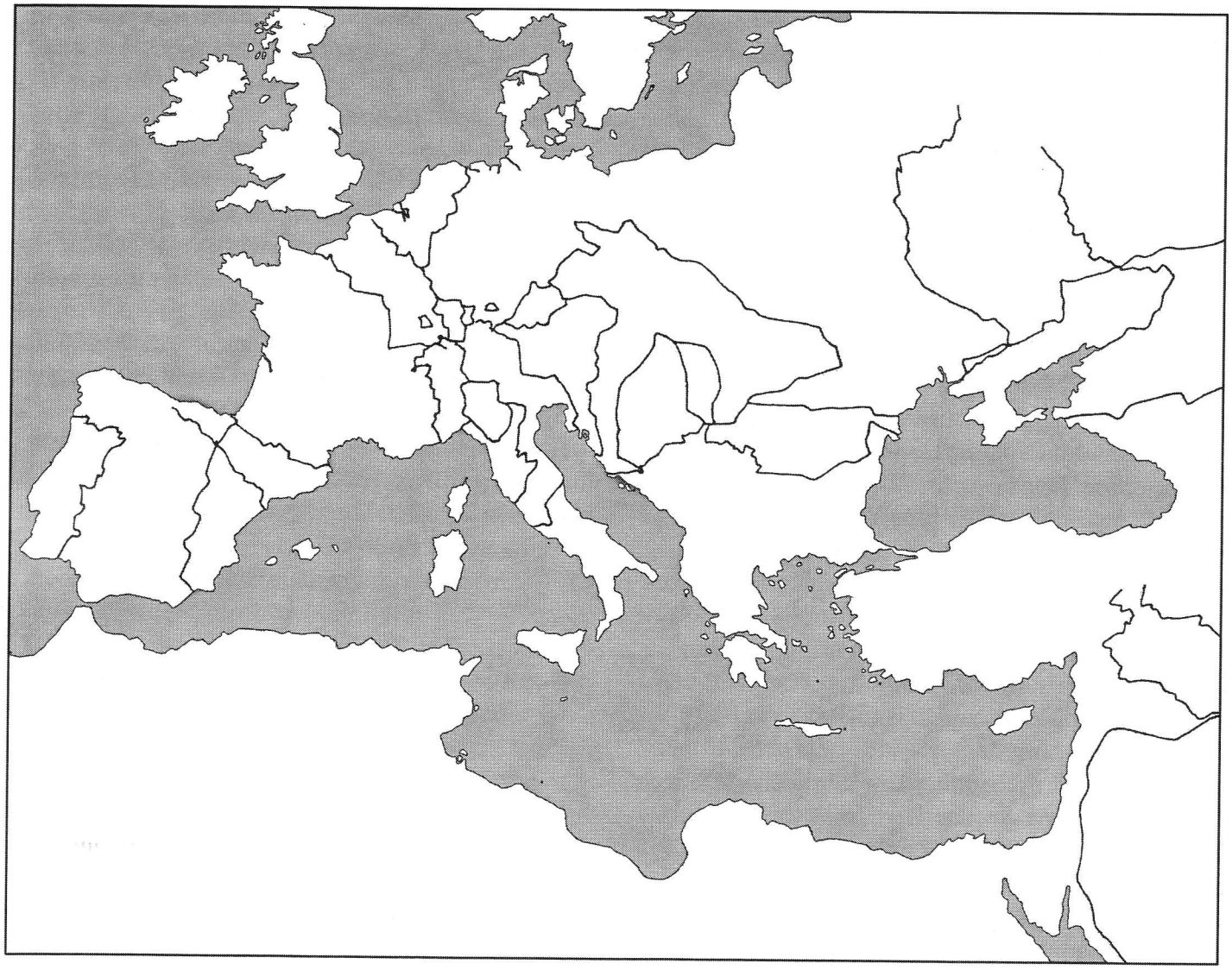
Map of 15th-Century Europe

During the Later Middle Ages, Europe was the scene of both new and old states. It was a time of rising political power for the monarchies in France, England, and Spain. Other states continued to exist only as less significant places where royalty failed to gain an upper hand. Others were surrounded by more powerful neighbors or were too small in size to gain any real strength during the 1400s.

Using the map below, locate the following kingdoms, states, and countries: Aragon, Austria, Bavaria, Bohemia, Brandenburg, Castile, France, Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, Netherlands, Ottoman Empire, Papal States, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Saxony, Switzerland, Tuscany. Write the name of each site directly on the map.

Using a modern map of Europe, what European countries today were basically already in place during during the 15th century?



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Test I

Part I. Multiple Choice (Worksheets 1-6)
Match the answers to the right with the statement on the left.

_____ 1. The period of medieval history from 1300-1500	A. Babylonian Captivity
_____ 2. This Sicilian port saw some of the first European Black Death victims	B. buboes
_____ 3. The large lumps found in the armpits and groins of Black Death victims	C. Great Schism
_____ 4. Religious and ethnic group blamed for the spread of the Black Death	D. Hanseatic League
_____ 5. Economic impact brought on by the Black Death	E. Jews
_____ 6. Organization which controlled much of the trade in northwestern Europe	F. Later Middle Ages
_____ 7. Pope who was taken captive by the forces of the French king in 1303	G. Boniface VIII
_____ 8. French king who challenged the power of the papacy during the 1300s	H. Martin V
_____ 9. Name given the period when the papacy was located at Avignon	I. Clement VII
_____ 10. Period of a divided papacy: a pope in Rome and one in Avignon	J. inflation
_____ 11. French pope who returned the papacy back to Avignon in 1378	K. Philip IV (the Fair)
_____ 12. Pope selected by Council of Constance in 1417, restoring one pope to Rome	L. Messina

Part II. Multiple Choice (Worksheets 8-13)

_____ 1. English king whose armies performed well during early years of the Hundred Years' War	A. Joan of Arc
_____ 2 Most effective English weapon used during the major battles of the Hundred Years' War	B. Reconquista
_____ 3. English victory of 1456	C. longbow
_____ 4. French king captured by the English monarch, the Black Prince, in 1356	D. Inquisition
_____ 5. English king victorious at the Hundred Years' War battle at Agincourt	E. John II
_____ 6. French peasant girl who rallied troops at the siege of Orleans	F. Richard III
_____ 7. English king killed at 1485 Battle of Bosworth Field	G. Henry V
_____ 8. Spanish campaign of the 1200s to remove the Moslems from Iberia	H. Isabella
_____ 9. Government-Church campaign to fight heresy and Church opposition	I. Poitiers
_____ 10. King of Aragon who united his kingdom with Castile in 1469	J. Edward III
_____ 11. Queen of Castile who united her kingdom with Aragon in 1469	K. Ivan III
_____ 12. Muscovite prince who united Russians in the 1400s	L. Ferdinand

Part III. Respond and Write
During the Later Dark Ages, life was dramatically changed in Europe by the repeated plagues known as the Black Death. Explain why these plagues were so devastating to much of Europe. What impact did the Black Death have in the long run on Europe?