The Hundred Years' War

The Hundred Years' War was a struggle between the monarchs and nobles of France and England that lasted from 1338 to 1453. Today it is hard for us to imagine how a war could last so long. Warfare in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was not like modern warfare with its terrible weapons of mass destruction. There were frequent long truces, and nobody fought during the winter months, when the roads were impassable. Even during an active military campaign, the armies spent much of their time manoeuvring for position, burning homes, trampling crops, and raiding farmers' food stores.

The war began, like the Norman invasion of England, as a war about who should be king. The French supported a French cousin of the dead ruler. The English king, Edward III, as a nephew of the old French king, believed he had a stronger claim, so he invaded France. Over the course of the war, the English, at various times, controlled vast areas of France but by the end of the war held only the port city of Calais. King Henry V's victory at Agincourt, as told at the beginning of this chapter, was to be one of the last important English successes of the war.

Technology and Tactics

The English had one powerful weapon that the French did not have: archers. These archers were ordinary villagers skilled in the use of the longbow. They shot clothyard (metre-long) arrows from bows almost 2 metres in height. It was reported that an arrow from a longbow could penetrate a knight's plate armour and kill him. The thrust from such a bow was so powerful that it could send an arrow through the armoured leg of a mounted knight, the body of his horse, and the knight's leg on the other side.

Although the French knights could fight as well as the English,

hierarchy: the order of ranks in a system

DID YOU KNOW?

Japan, another military society, also had castles. Compare the castle on the opposite page with the one on page 196.

they were defeated many times during the Hundred Years' War. Many of the French refused to fight with anyone of "low birth," so they would not attack the archers. In three important battles, French knights tried to ride past the low-born archers to get at their social equals, the English knights. In each case, the volleys of arrows from the archers were so deadly that the battles turned into disasters for the French, who had to pay large sums to ransom the surviving knights. The lowly English archer made the knight and his armour **obsolete**.

obsolete: useless because it is out of date

siege: the act of surrounding a fortified place in order to capture it

Figure 5–6 At the age of twenty-eight, Henry V of England invaded France. You read about his great victory at Agincourt at the beginning of this chapter. Judging by this peace-time painting, what do you think Henry's character was like?

The Burghers of Calais

Early in the Hundred Years' War, in 1346, Edward III of England besieged the French port city of Calais.

Under the rules of war at the time, the inhabitants of a town or castle under **seige** would be treated mercifully if they surrendered. The rules of chivalry, which were tied to the rules of war, demanded it. The citizens could all be slaughtered, however, if they had not surrendered before the final assault. With this in mind, hold a class debate to decide who was the most chivalrous in the true story at right: the burghers, who volunteered to die to save their fellow-citizens; the Queen of England, who pleaded for the lives of her husband's enemies; or King Edward III, who granted his wife's request.

The story begins when the French king refuses to come to the city's aid, and the citizens finally ask Edward for terms of surrender. Upon which the king replied: "You will inform the governor of Calais that the only grace he can expect from me is that six of the principal citizens of Calais march out of the town with bare heads and feet, with ropes round their necks, and the keys of the town and castle in their hands. These six persons shall be at my absolute disposal, and the remainder of the inhabitants pardoned."

When Sir Walter Manly had presented these six citizens to the king . . . the king eyed them with angry looks . . . and ordered that their heads be stricken off.

The queen of England, who at that time was big with child, fell on her knees, and with tears said, "Ah, gentle sir, since I have crossed the sea with great danger to see you, I have never asked you for one favour: now, I most humbly ask for a gift, for the sake of the Son of the blessed Mary, and for your love to me, that you will be merciful to these six men."

The king looked at her for some time in silence, and then said: "Ah, lady, I wish you had been anywhere else but here: you have entreated in such a manner that I cannot refuse you; I therefore give them to you, to do as you please with them." The queen had the six citizens conducted to her apartments, and had the halters taken from round their necks, after which she new clothed them, and served them a plentiful dinner; she then presented each with six nobles, and had them escorted out of the camp in safety.

JOAN OF ARC RALLIES THE FRENCH

dauphin: eldest son of the French king

hither: here

In 1429, seven years after the death of Henry V, a seventeen-year-old peasant girl named Joan of Arc appeared at the French court claiming that angelic voices had commanded her to drive the English out of France. The dauphin was skeptical at first. In the end, however, he gave Joan a plain steel suit of armour, a white banner, and enough troops to battle the English.

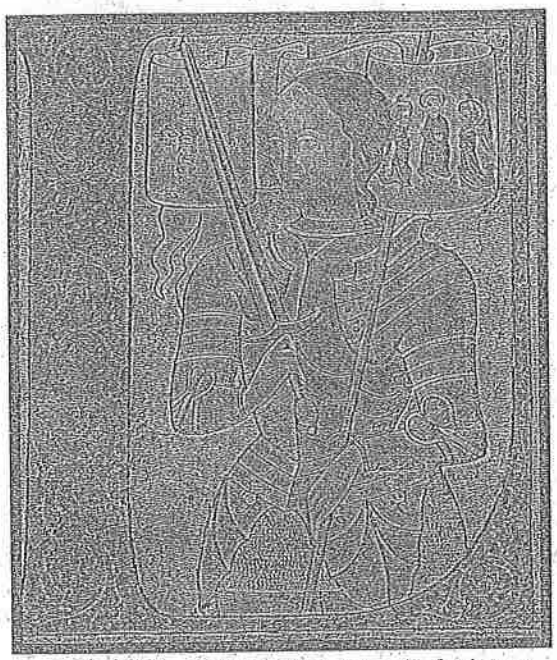

Figure 5–9 Although burned at the stake for heresy and witchcraft, Joan of Arc was eventually made a saint. What view of Joan does this portrait present? Explain.

Young Joan, brimming with confidence and flying her white banner, was an inspirational leader. After driving the English from Orleans, she escorted the dauphin to the cathedral at Reims where she stood at his side as he was crowned Charles VII, King of France.

Joan of Arc enjoyed other triumphs, but two years after her victory at Orleans, she was captured. King Charles refused to pay her ransom, so she was put on trial for heresy and witchcraft. One piece of evidence considered important at her trial was that she dressed in armour, which was men's clothing. People of the high Middle Ages would have been highly suspicious of a woman who dressed as a man. On May 30, 1531, Joan was burned at the stake. She was just nineteen years old.

Joan's death proved to be as inspirational to the French as her life had been. By helping them rally together behind the French king against the English, she had forced them to start thinking of themselves as one nation rather than as a collection of fiefdoms always at war with each other. In her death, Joan became a heroine of all France. By strengthening the king at the expense of the nobles, she also contributed to the end of feudalism in Europe.

Joan of Arc Writes to the English Invaders

Joan of Arc could not read or write herself but dictated this letter to be delivered to the English at the beginning of her campaign to drive them from France. After reading this letter, decide what qualities made Joan an inspiration to her troops.

Jesus Maria —

King of England, and you Duke of Bedford, calling yourself regent of France, you William Pole, Count of Suffolk John Talbot, and you Thomas Lord Scales, calling yourselves lieutenants of the said Duke of Bedford, do right in the King of Heaven's sight. Surrender to The Maid sent hither by God the King of Heaven the keys of all the good towns you have taken and laid waste in France. She comes in God's name to establish the Blood Royal, ready to make peace if you agree to abandon France and repay what you have taken. And you, archers, comrades in arms, gentles and others, who are before the town of Orleans, retire in God's name to your own country.

If you do not, expect to hear tidings from The Maid who will shortly come upon you to your very great hurt.

Trade and Town

Trade Begins

During the Crusades, western Europeans' eyes were opened to the possibilities of trade with distant lands. Tempted by goods such as silk, spices, tapestries, and sugar, a few brave individuals with the money to pay for the expenses of a trip went into the trading business. Over time, western Europeans began sending ships on trading expeditions to distant lands in search of the goods they desired.

At first, traders sold their goods in regular local markets, or fairs, held in towns and villages and sponsored by the feudal lords. The fairs were fabulous events where people gathered to socialize and browze, not just to buy. Through exposure to the

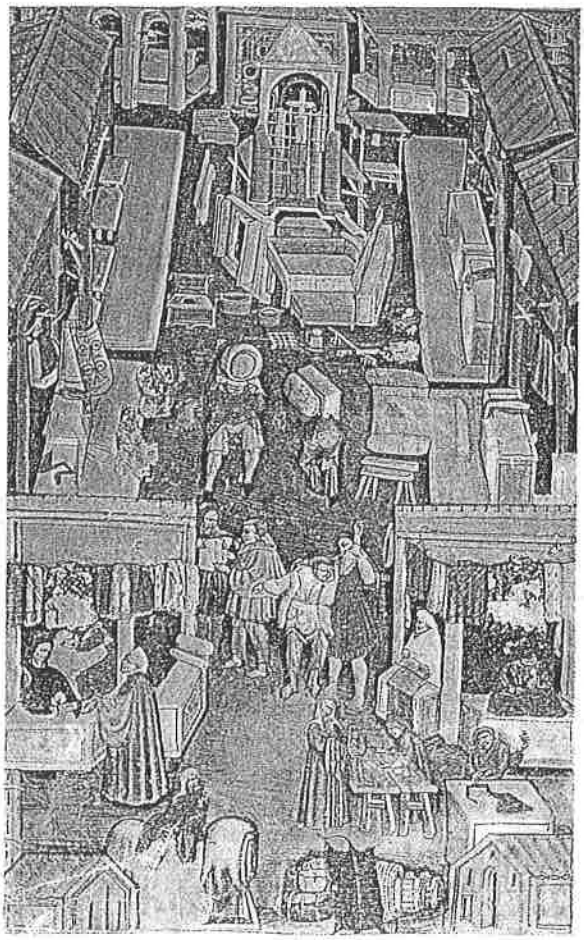

Figure 5–10 Medieval towns were busy places with all kinds of goods for sale. Identify four activities in this street scene.

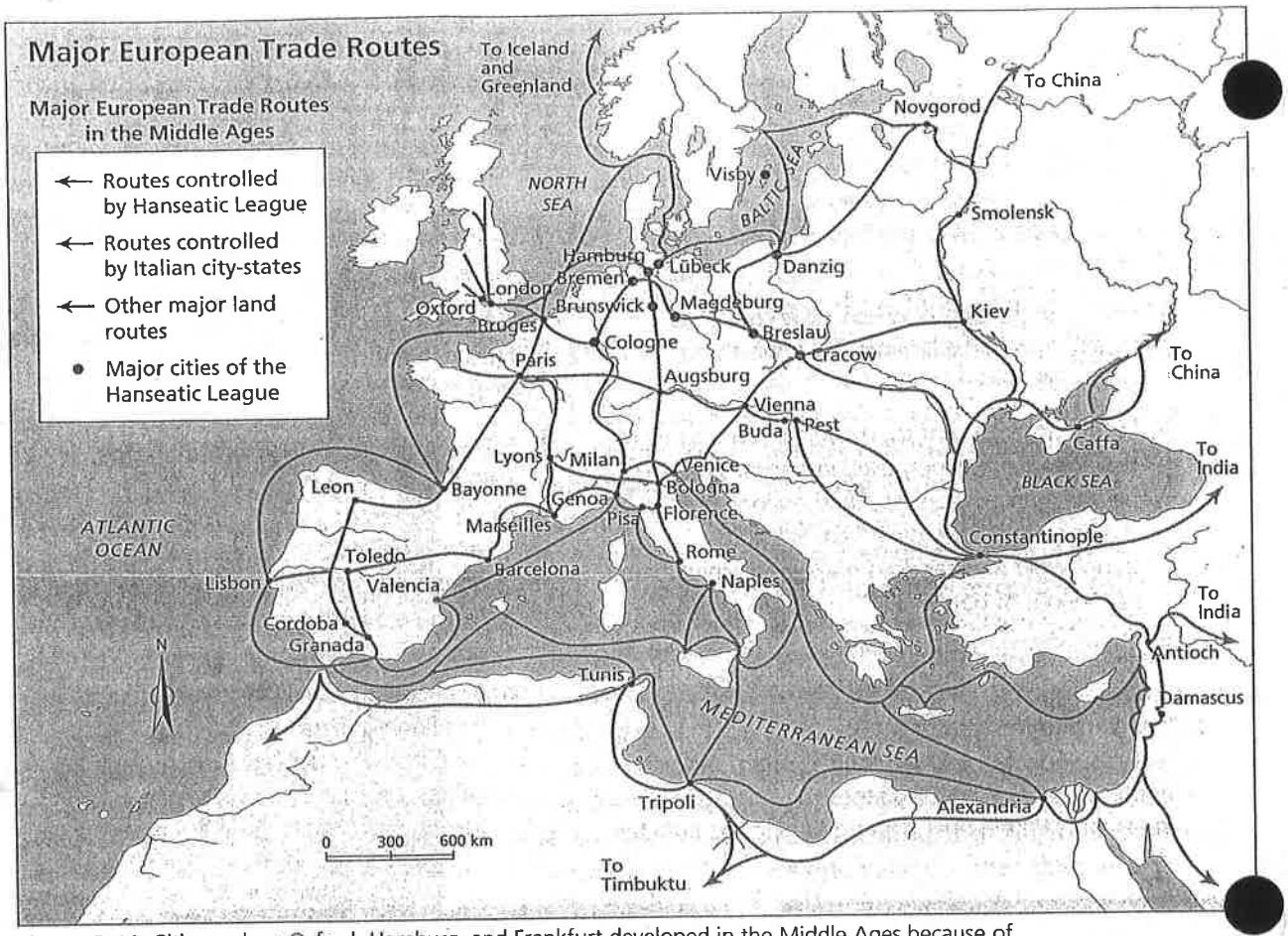

Figure 5–11 Cities such as Oxford, Hamburg, and Frankfurt developed in the Middle Ages because of their location on trade routes. What trade did the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa control? What trade did the Hanseatic League control?

many goods brought from faraway lands, ordinary people realized that they could make things and sell them in exchange for money. Here was their escape from serfdom. All over Europe, people began learning and perfecting the skills needed to produce the goods that were coming from distant lands. Fairs were soon filled with finely crafted goods—such as copper pots, gloves, and cutlery—made in western Europe as well as in far-off lands.

TRADE LEADS TO TOWNS

After some time, the fair could not satisfy all the needs of traders and consumers. First, they were seasonal, so no one could buy or sell in winter. Second, people would sometimes have to travel great distances to reach the fairs. Travel was dangerous, so many just didn't go. Out of this emerged the need for the stability that could be provided by a town, where permanent shops could be set up and protected by a wall surrounding the town.

pageant: an elaborate entertainment displaying scenes from history

bear baiting: a public spectacle in which dogs torment a chained bear

LIFE IN THE TOWN

Although medieval towns had many attractions, they were also crowded and smelly and rather small compared with modern cities. London, England, today has a population of more than eight million people, but in the year 1300 only 50 000 people lived there, only one-thirtieth the number living in modern Greater Vancouver.

DID YOU KNOW?

A stone wall encircles the oldest part of Quebec City, just as walls encircle the centres of many European towns.

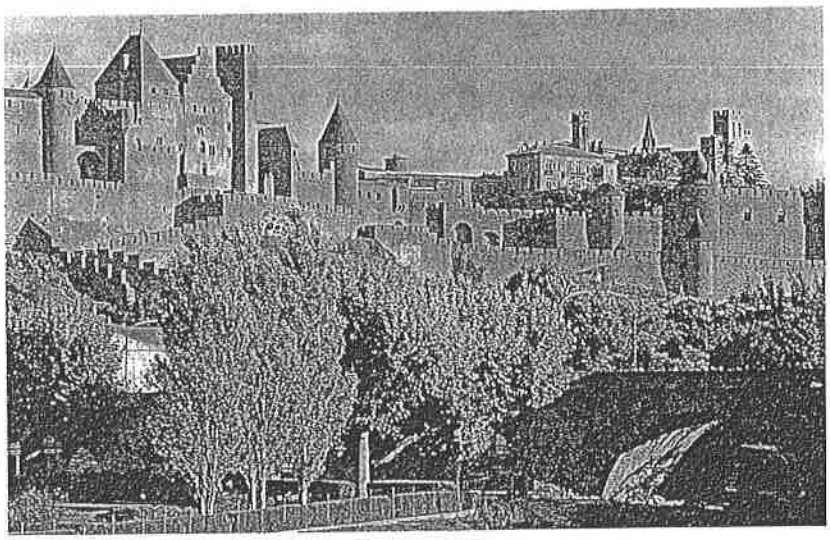

Figure 5–14 The city of Carcassone, France, is still surrounded by the wall built in the Middle Ages. What effect would such a wall have on the architecture of the houses in the town?

Most towns and cities were the centres for farm communities. They were surrounded by the farms of large manors or they grew around some sort of defensive structure, such as a castle, palace, or large monastery. Citizens usually built an encircling wall of stone to protect against raids from rival cities or feudal lords. The citizens also built gates, which they shut at night. As a village developed into a town and then into a city, ever larger rings of walls were built.

Because of the walls that surrounded medieval towns, space was limited, and houses for the poor and middle-class people were all crowded together. Town houses were often several stories high, with their upper floors overhanging the street. Unlike cities today, medieval towns did not have straight, planned streets. Instead, streets were narrow and winding, and they usually had open sewers. As there was no plumbing, people routinely emptied chamber pots into the street and dumped their garbage there as well. In some places, swineherds drove pigs through the town at night to eat up the waste.

For all their faults, medieval towns also had their attractions. Compared with small manor villages, there was much more entertainment for people. Guilds and the local church organized many **pageants** and plays, and people could also see **bear baiting** and other blood sports. Life in town was exciting.

SOCIAL CHANGES THAT CAME WITH TRADE

Money had not been very important in the old feudal system, where a person's wealth and power were measured by the amount of land he or she held. With trade, all that changed. Now many people could become independent and even powerful because they could make money. The town was the home of the medieval middle class, most of whom were merchants and skilled tradespeople. These townspeople were called burgesses in England, burgers in Germany, and bourgeois in France. Some merchants grew wealthier than the feudal landowners in the country.

The feudal lords had a hard time adjusting to a system where money, and not position, was most important. Members of the nobility thought trade was beneath them, but they still wanted the finer things available only in the towns. Unknown to the feudal lords, the middle class, with its power, money, and desire for freedom, would spell the end of feudalism.

New Freedoms

The towns drew people longing for freedom. Although the town was walled and cramped, people had the freedom to do as they wished, marry whom they pleased, and make money as they could. According to the law, runaway serfs could gain their freedom by staying in town for a year and a day without being discovered. Because the towns were so small, this was actually quite difficult to do. Nonetheless, some were able to manage it.

Feudal lords could not control the people who lived in towns, nor could manor courts. Most medieval towns were chartered; that is, they paid for or were given the right to exist by the monarch or the local lord. The **charters** of many modern European towns can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages. A charter gave a town certain privileges, one of which was that the town could govern itself. Wealthy citizens and the guilds usually controlled the town government.

New Powers

The most powerful citizens were those belonging to the merchant guilds. These guilds were for the people who bought and sold goods on a large scale, and who financed ships and overland caravans to trade in distant lands.

Sometimes merchant guilds became very powerful and well organized. By putting together their wealth, for example, the port cities belonging to the Hanseatic League (a merchant guild) were able to support their own army and build a navy. The league became so wealthy and powerful that by threatening to cut off all trade with a country it could force that country's ruler to do what it wanted. In Italy, the port cities of Genoa, Venice, and Naples grew into powerful city-states thanks to their merchant-traders.

DID YOU KNOW?

In modern times, people who run major businesses still have enormous influence over nations large and small. Their power, however, lies in their ability to bring business to a country, not in military might.

charter: a written order authorizing the right to operate as a town