

# The Later Middle Ages

## Unit 1: 1450-1640

# The Black Death (1347)

## Causes:

1. Bubonic plague was carried by fleas on Asian black rats and brought to Europe on ships returning from Asia
2. Overcrowding in cities and homes facilitated the spread of the disease
  - Many aristocratic families slept in one room and many prosperous peasant families slept in one bed for warmth; less prosperous peasants were even worse off
3. Poor sanitation in cities: garbage-filled streets, human excrement, and dead animals
4. Widespread malnutrition prior to the plague led to poor health (e.g. lower immune systems) that made people more susceptible to the disease
  - 25% harvests in early 14th century were poor as torrential rains destroyed wheat, oats, and hay crops; some instances of cannibalism occurred
5. Poor hygiene also played a significant role
  - Many people believed (correctly) that their water was contaminated and feared taking baths

Results: Loss of 1/3 of European population (mostly in cities)

1. In some cities, such as Florence, nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  the population died

2. Economy in towns suffered significantly (while the countryside was less affected by the plague)

- The plague accelerated an economic decline that had been in effect since the early 14th century

3. In some areas workers enjoyed higher wages as the supply of workers was depleted

4. Impact on the peasantry

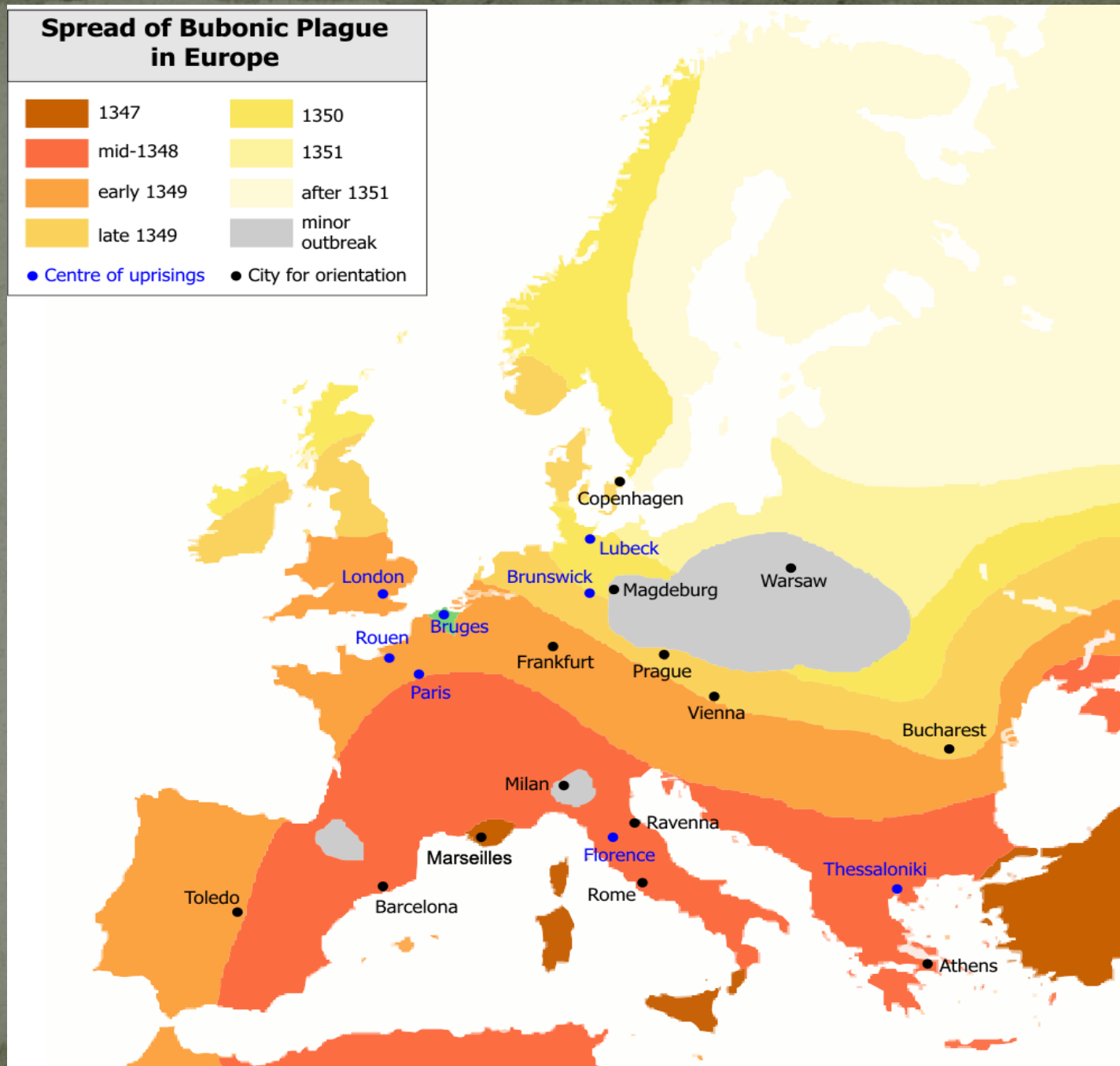
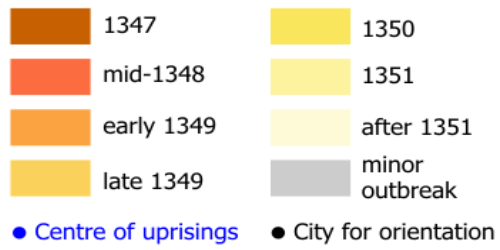
a. Serfdom ended in many areas in western Europe

b. Peasant revolts in England and France increased (had originally been in response to taxation during the Hundred Years' War)

5. First enclosure of fields in Britain occurred as landowners needed better agricultural production with fewer farm hands; largely done for sheep herding

- 6. Best of the clergy died (staying behind to help the sick)
- 7. Jews were often blamed for the plague and thus persecuted
- Continued the age-old phenomenon of anti-Semitism in Europe
  - 8. Literature and art reflected pessimism
- Dance of Death (Danse Macabre): dancing skeletons danced among the danced among the living, reminding viewers of the prevalence of death. (P.D)
- Northern Europe developed a morbid fascination with death that was later reflected in the art of the Northern Renaissance.
- 9. Population did not reach pre=plague level until the mid-16th century.

## Spread of Bubonic Plague in Europe



# Danse Macabre



# Hundred Years' War (1337-1453)

- Cause: English crown lay claim to the duchy of Aquitaine in France
- French king confiscated that territory from English control
- The War
  - Most of the war was fought intermittently in France and in the Low Countries
  - By 1415, the major battles had been won by England and Paris itself was now threatened
- Aside from loss of territory, France was threatened by the rise of a new state in its eastern territory, Burgundy, that allied with England

- **Joan of Arc**

- French peasant girl claimed she heard voices of saints and persuaded the king to allow her to be with the troops.
- In 1429 led the French army to victory at Orléans during a crucial stage of the war
- The French heir to the throne was crowned as a result, and the government was thus strengthened
- Joan was later captured by the English and burned at the stake in 1431







- Results:
  - France permanently removed England from France (except for tiny region of Calais)
  - The struggles of war began the modernization of state building in France and England (“New Monarchs”)
  - Peasant Revolts
    - Causes: taxation during Hundred Years’ War, desire for higher wages, hostility toward aristocracy, and higher expectations among the peasantry.
    - Revolts increased in frequency after the Black Death
    - **English Peasant Revolt (1381)**
    - Largest revolt, as many as 100,000 involved
    - Jacquerie in France (late 14th-early 15th c.)
    - Peasants not as successful as English peasants in gaining some changes
    - Revolted against increased taxes in spite of decimation by English armies
    - Thousands of peasants were massacred after their defeat
    - Results:
      - Revolts crushed
      - End of serfdom in England c. 1550

# Crisis in the Catholic Church

- Background
  - Western and central European society was dominated by the Catholic Church since the fall of the Roman Empire.
  - a. Religious authorities in many regions were more powerful than secular authorities
  - b. Popes, at times, were the most powerful political figures in all of Europe
- The Middle Ages were characterized by religious unity under the Catholic Church
  - Meanwhile, the Greek Orthodox Church (Eastern Orthodox Church) was dominant in the Byzantine Empire in the modern-day Balkans and parts of eastern Europe, including Russia.
  - There was little cooperation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches

# Early Critics of the church

Marsilius de Padua: *Defender of Peace*

- Claimed the church should be subordinate to the state
- Believed the church should be governed by a council of laity and priests superior to the pope.

John Wyclif (1320-1384)

- Believed the church should only follow Scripture
- - This view foreshadowed Martin Luther's reformation in the early 16th century
- Wrote an English translation of Bible
- His later followers were called **Lollards**

John Hus (1369-1415): ideas very similar to Wyclif

- Led a nationalist movement in Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic)  
Captured by authorities and burned at the stake for his heretical and political views
- **Hussites**: followers of Hus staged large rebellions in the 14th century.

John Wyclif



John Hus



# Babylonian Captivity (1309-1377)

1. 1305, a struggle between the pope and the French king led to the election of a French pope (Clement V) who set up his leadership in Avignon, France
2. 7 successive popes resided at Avignon, France
3. This situation damaged papal prestige (esp. in England & Germany) since popes were believed to be unduly influenced by French kings
4. Rome's economy, meanwhile, was damaged significantly

## Papal States (Avignon, France)





# Great Schism (c. 1377-1417)

- Further conflict occurred in 1377 with election of two popes—one in Rome, one in France—neither of whom recognized the other.
- Further hurt prestige of church

# Conciliar Movement (1409-1418): Ended the Great Schism

- **Conciliar Movement (1409-1418): Ended the Great Schism**
  - Sought to reform the Church by creating a council of cardinals that would be more powerful than the pope
  - Failed as a movement; the newly elected Pope Martin V ensured that papal power still remained supreme

# Nationalist literature of the Later Middle Ages

- Rise in the use of the **vernacular** (national languages)
- **Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321), *The Divine Comedy* (1321) (also considered an early Renaissance figure)
- **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1340-1400): *Canterbury Tales* – portrayed English life
- **Francois Villon** (1431-1463): *Grand Testament* (1461) – greatest poet of Medieval France
  - Portrayed ordinary French life with humor and emotion.
  - All three removed church influence and imprint from literature

Dante Alighieri



Geoffrey  
Chaucer



Francois Villon



# Life in Later Middle Ages

- A. Marriage: avg. age for men = mid-20s; women = 16-18
  - 1. Divorce was unheard of in Catholic countries
  - 2. Economic reasons were most important for marriage (love not paramount until the 18th-19th centuries)
  - 3. Prostitution existed in cities (customers were often young middle-class men who didn't marry until later)
- B. Work:
  - Agricultural cycles and church ritual closely linked
  - 2. Small % of men were artisans in towns; protected by guilds
  - 3. Serfdom reduced in many areas
- C. Recreation
  - 1. Aristocracy – jousting tournaments
  - 2. common people—archery, wrestling, bull-baiting, bear-baiting; alcoholism rampant
- D. Laity increasingly managed parish lands

# Scholasticism: Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

- Scholasticism became the cornerstone of late-medieval philosophy
- Aquinas attempted to reconcile faith and reason by using logic to support Christian doctrine
  - Sought to reconcile Aristotle's scientific ideas with Christianity
  - Summa Theologica
- Scholasticism dominated Catholic philosophy for centuries
- Challenged severely by Renaissance humanists in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries

