

AP European History **Summer Reading and Assignments**

Mr. Lomeo

The Middle Ages

1. Florence: Out of Darkness. This podcast gives an excellent introduction to the transition out of the Middle Ages.

<https://rockyruggiero.com/episode-10-florence-out-of-darkness/>

2. "The Road of Death and Destruction," in Peter Frankopan, The Silk Roads.: This excerpt discusses the Bubonic Plague and its impact on Europe.

3. "Lutherans Long Before Luther," in Thomas Cahill, Heretics and Heroes. Thomas Cahill. Let the highlighting guide you as to what is important to know from this excerpt.

The Renaissance and Reformation

Each of these articles does an excellent job of setting the scene for the time period. We will read more about Machiavelli and Luther in our first units, and these introductions are very helpful.

4. "How Jacques Coeur Made His Fortune"

5. "Machiavelli: Would You Buy a Used Car from This Man?"

6. "Where Columbus was Coming From"

7. "Luther: Giant of His Time and Ours"

Mapping

Familiarize yourself with European geography. Europe's borders, as we will discuss, are not and have never been static. Print quizzes and bring them with you to class. (this is not a graded quiz)

8. European countries quiz: <https://www.sporcle.com/games/g/europe>

9. European capitals quiz: <https://www.sporcle.com/games/g/europecapitals>;

vation in financial credit in China that had been introduced before Genghis Khan's time, including the introduction of bills of exchange and the use of paper money.³⁸ Adopted and improved by the Mongols, the effect was the liberation of enormous amounts of silver into the monetary system as new forms of credit caught on. The availability of the precious metal suddenly soared—causing a major correction in its value against gold. In parts of Europe, the value of silver plunged, losing more than half its value between 1250 and 1338.³⁹ In London alone, the surge in silver supply allowed the rental mint to more than quadruple output between 1278 and 1279 alone. Production rose sharply across Asia too. In the steppes as well, coin production took off as rulers of the Golden Horde began to strike coins in large quantities.⁴⁰ New regions were stimulated too. Japan, which had relied heavily on barter for payments in products such as rice as an exchange mechanism, shifted to a monetary economy and became increasingly active in long-distance trade.⁴¹

Start here

The most important effect that the Mongol conquests had on the transformation of Europe, however, did not come from trade or warfare, culture or currency. It was not just ferocious warriors, goods, precious metals, ideas and fashions that flowed through the arteries connecting the world. In fact something else entirely that entered the bloodstream had an even more radical impact: disease. An outbreak of plague surged through Asia, Europe and Africa threatening to annihilate millions. The Mongols had not destroyed the world, but it seemed quite possible that the Black Death would.

As well as being home to livestock and nomads for thousands of years, the Eurasian steppe also forms one of the world's great plague basins, with a string of linked foci stretching from the Black Sea as far as Manchuria. The ecological conditions of arid and semi-arid landscape lend themselves perfectly to the spread of the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* that is transmitted from one host to another principally by fleas through blood feeding. Plague was spread most effectively and quickly by rodent hosts such as rats, although camels could also become infected and play an important role in its transmission—as research closely linked to the Soviet Union's biological-warfare programme during the Cold War period showed.⁴² Although plague can be spread by consuming or handling host tissues or by inhaling infected materials, transmission to humans is most commonly effected by fleas vomiting bacilli into the bloodstream before feeding, or by

bacilli in their faeces contaminating abrasions in the skin. Bacilli are then carried to the lymph nodes, such as in the armpit or the groin, multiplying rapidly to cause swellings or buboes that Boccaccio, who lived through the plague, described as growing as large as an apple, or the size of an egg "more or less."⁴³ Other organs are then infected in turn; haemorrhaging causes internal bleeding and the distinctive black bags of pus and blood that make the disease as visually terrifying as it is lethal.

Modern investigation into *Yersinia pestis* and plague has made clear the crucial role played by environmental factors to the enzootic cycle, where seemingly insignificant changes can transform the disease from being localized and containable to spreadable on a large scale. Small differentials in temperature and precipitation, for example, can dramatically change the reproductive cycles of fleas crucial to the development cycle of the bacterium itself, as well as the behaviour of their rodent hosts.⁴⁴ A recent study that assumed an increase of just one degree in temperature suggested that this could lead to a 50 per cent increase in plague prevalence in the great gerbil, the primary host rodent of the steppe environment.⁴⁵

Although it is not clear precisely where the ultimate origin of the disease of the mid-fourteenth century lay, plague spread rapidly in the 1340s as the outbreak moved out of the steppes through Europe, Iran, the Middle East, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula.⁴⁶ It really took hold in 1346 when what an Italian contemporary described as "a mysterious illness that brought sudden death" began to sweep through the Golden Horde by the Black Sea. A Mongol army laying siege to the Genoese trading post of Caffa following a dispute about trade terms was annihilated by illness that killed "thousands and thousands every day," according to one commentator. Before withdrawing, however, "they ordered corpses to be placed in catapults and lobbed into the city in the hope that the intolerable stench would kill everyone inside." Rather than being overwhelmed by the smell, it was the highly contagious disease that caught hold. Unknowingly, the Mongols had turned to biological warfare to defeat their enemy.⁴⁷

The trading routes that connected Europe to the rest of the world now became lethal highways for the transmission of the Black Death. In 1347, the disease reached Constantinople and then Genoa, Venice and the Mediterranean, brought by traders and merchants fleeing home. By the time the population of Messina in Sicily realised there was something wrong with the Genoese who had put in, arriving covered with boils, vomiting incessantly and coughing up blood before dying, it was already too late: although

the Genoese galleys were expelled, the disease took hold and devastated the population.⁵⁰

It spread rapidly northwards, reaching the cities of northern France and Bavaria by the middle of 1348. By that time, ships putting in to ports in Britain had already brought "the first pestilence . . . carried by merchants and sailors."⁵¹ So many began to die across towns and villages in England that the Pope in "his clemency granted a plenary indulgence for confessed sins." According to one contemporary estimate, scarcely a tenth of the population survived; several sources report that so many perished that there were not enough people to bury the dead.⁵²

Instead of bringing goods and valuables, ships criss-crossing the Mediterranean brought death and devastation. Infection was not only spread by contact with plague victims or by the rats which were always a feature of maritime travel; even the goods in the hold turned into lethal cargoes as fleas infested furs and food destined for mainland Europe as well as for ports in Egypt, the Levant and Cyprus, where the first victims tended to be infants and the young. Soon the disease had been transmitted along the caravan route to reach Mecca, killing scores of pilgrims and scholars and provoking serious soul searching. The Prophet Muhammad had supposedly promised that the plague which ravaged Mesopotamia in the seventh century would never enter the holy cities of Islam.⁵³

In Damascus, wrote Ibn al-Wardi, the plague "sat like a king on a throne and sweated with power, killing daily one thousand or more and decimating the population."⁵⁴ The roads between Cairo and Palestine were littered with the bodies of victims, while dogs tore at the corpses piled up against the walls of mosques in Bilbais. In the Asyut region of Upper Egypt meanwhile, the number of taxpayers fell from 6,000 before the Black Death to just 110—a fall of 98 per cent.⁵⁵

Although such population contractions may also reflect people fleeing their homes, there can be little doubt that the death toll was enormous. "All the wisdom and ingenuity of man" was powerless to prevent the spread of disease, wrote Borcaccio, the Italian humanist scholar, in his introduction to the *Decameron*; in the space of three months, he noted, more than 100,000 lost their lives in Florence alone.⁵⁶ Venice was all but depopulated; accounts agreed that no less than three-quarters of its citizens died during the outbreak.⁵⁷

To many, it seemed to signal the end of the world. In Ireland, one Franciscan monk concluded his account of the ravages caused by plague by leav-

ing blank space "for continuing [my] work, in case anyone should still be alive in the future."⁵⁸ There was a sense of impending apocalypse; in France chroniclers reported that it "rained frogs, snakes, lizards, scorpions and many other sinister poisonous animals." There were signs from the sky that made God's displeasure clear: enormous hailstones struck the earth, killing people by the dozen, while towns and villages burnt down after being set ablaze by thunderbolts that produced "stinking smoke."⁵⁹

Some, like the King of England, Edward III, turned to fasting and prayer, with Edward ordering his bishops to follow suit. Arabic handbooks written around 1350 provided guides for the Muslim faithful to do much the same, advising that saying a specific prayer eleven times would help, and that chanting verses relating to the life of Muhammad would provide protection from boils. In Rome, solemn processions were held where the penitent and fearful marched barefoot in hair-shirts, flagellating themselves to show contrition for their sins.⁶⁰

These were among the least creative efforts to appease God's wrath. Avoid sex and "every fleshly lust with women," urged one priest in Sweden, and for that matter also do not bathe, and avoid the south wind—at least until lunch time. If this was a case of hoping for the best, then a counterpart in England was at least rather more direct: women should wear different clothes, urged one English priest, for their own sake, as well as that of everyone else. The outlandish and revealing outfits they had got used to sporting were simply asking for divine punishment. The trouble had started when "they began to wear useless little hoods, laced and buttoned so tightly at the throat that they only covered the shoulders." That was not all, for "in addition, they wore *pallois*, extremely short garments . . . which failed to conceal their arses or their private parts." Apart from anything else, "these misshapen and tight clothes did not allow them to kneel to God or to the other saints."⁶¹

Wild rumours circulated in Germany that the disease was not natural, but the result of Jews poisoning wells and rivers. Vicious pogroms were carried out, with one account reporting how "all the Jews between Cologne and Austria" were rounded up and burnt alive. So bad were the outbreaks of anti-Semitism that the Pope intervened, issuing proclamations forbidding any violent action against the Jewish populations in any Christian country, and demanding that their goods and assets be left unmolested.⁶² Whether this was effective or not was another matter. It was not the first time, after all, that fear of disaster, hardship and excessive religious out-

Pourings resulted in the widespread slaughter of the Jewish minority in Germany: there had been terrible suffering in the Rhineland at the time of the First Crusade when circumstances were not dissimilar. It was dangerous to have different beliefs at times of crisis.

Europe lost at least one-third of its population to the plague, and perhaps much more, with conservative estimates of the number of dead placed somewhere around the 25 million mark in an assumed total population of 75 million.⁵⁶ Work on more recent epidemics of plague has also demonstrated that during large outbreaks small villages and rural areas report much higher levels of death than cities. It seems that the key determinant of spreading plague is not the density of the human population (as had usually been thought) but that of rat colonies. The disease does not spread anywhere quickly in a packed urban environment where there are more households per infected rodent colony than in the countryside. Escaping from cities and towns for the countryside did not in fact increase one's chances of cheating death.⁵⁷ From field to farm and city to village, the Black Death created hell on earth: pattern, rotting bodies, oozing with pus set against a background of fear, anxiety and disbelief at the scale of suffering.

The effects were crushing. "Our hopes for the future have been huried alongside our friends," wrote the Italian poet Petrarca. Plans and ambitions for further discovery of the east and for fortunes to be made were overshadowed by darker thoughts. The only consolation, Petrarca went on, was the knowledge "that we shall follow those who went before. I do not know how long we will have to wait, but I know it cannot be very long." All the riches of the Indian Ocean, the Caspian or the Black Sea, he wrote, could not make up for what had been swept away.⁵⁸

And yet, despite the horror it caused, the plague turned out to be the catalyst for social and economic change that was so profound that far from marking the death of Europe, it served as its making. The transformation provided an important pillar in the rise—and the triumph—of the west. It did so in several phases. First was the top-to-bottom reconfiguration of how social structures functioned. Chronic depopulation in the wake of the Black Death had the effect of sharply increasing wages because of the accentuated value of labour. So many died before the plague finally began to peter out in the early 1350s that one source noted a "shortage of servants, craftsmen, and workmen, and agricultural workers and labourers." This gave considerable

negotiating powers to those who had previously been at the lower end of the social and economic spectrum. Some simply "turned their noses up at employment, and could scarcely be persuaded to serve the eminent unless for triple wages."⁵⁹ This was hardly an exaggeration: empirical data shows that urban wages rose dramatically in the decades after the Black Death.⁶⁰

The empowerment of the peasantry, of labourers and of women was matched by a weakening of the propertied classes, as landlords were forced into accepting lower rents for their holdings—deciding it was better to receive some revenue than nothing at all. Lower rents, fewer obligations and longer leases all had the effect of tilting power and benefits towards the peasantry and urban tenants. This was further enhanced by a fall in interest rates, which declined noticeably across Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶¹

The results were remarkable. With wealth now more evenly distributed through society, demand for luxury goods—imported or otherwise—soured as a result of more consumers being able to purchase items that had previously been unaffordable.⁶² Spending patterns were affected by other demographic changes that the plague had produced, notably the shift in favour of the working young, who were best placed to take advantage of new opportunities opening up before them. Already less disposed to saving because of their close shave with death, the new up-and-coming generation, better paid than their parents and with better prospects for the future, set about spending their wealth on things they were interested in—not least of which was fashion.⁶³ This in turn stimulated investment in and the rapid development of a European textile industry that began to turn out fabrics in such volume that they had a major impact on the trade in Alexandria as imports fell sharply. Europe even began to export in the opposite direction too, flooding the market in the Middle East and causing a painful contraction that stood in direct contrast to the invigorated economy to the west.⁶⁴

As recent research based on skeletal remains in graveyards in London demonstrates, the rise in wealth led to better diets and to better general health. Indeed, statistical modelling based on these results even suggests that one of the effects of the plague was a substantial improvement in life expectancy. London's post-plague population was considerably healthier than it had been before the Black Death struck—raising life expectancy sharply.⁶⁵

Economic and social development did not occur evenly across Europe. Change took place most rapidly in the north and the north-west of the con-

tinent, partly because this region was starting from a lower economic point than the more developed south. This meant that the interests of landlord and tenant were more closely aligned and therefore more likely to end in collaboration and in solutions that suited both parties.⁷² It was also significant, however, that the cities in the north did not carry the same ideological and political baggage as many of those in the Mediterranean. Centuries of regional and long-term commerce had created institutions such as guilds that controlled competition and were designed to hand monopolistic positions to defined groups of individuals. Northern Europe, by contrast, began to boom precisely because competition was not restricted—causing urbanisation and economic growth to happen at a markedly faster rate than in the south.⁷⁴

Different behavioural profiles also emerged across different parts of Europe. In Italy, for example, women were either less tempted or were less able to enter the labour markets, and continued to marry at the same age and to have as many children as before the outbreak of plague. This contrasted sharply with the situation in the northern countries, where the demographic contraction gave women the chance to become wage-earners. One effect of this was to raise the age at which women tended to get married—which in turn had longer-term implications for family sizes. "Don't hurry into marriage for soon," advised Anna Bijns in a poem written in the Low Countries, for "one who carries her board and clothes shouldn't hurry to suffer a man's rod. . . . Though wedlock I do not decry; anybody is best! Happy the woman without a man!"⁷⁵

The transformations triggered by the Black Death laid foundations that were to prove crucial for the long-term rise of north-western Europe. Although the effects of the divergence between parts of Europe would take time to evolve, the systemic flexibility, the openness to competition and, perhaps most importantly of all, the sense of awareness in the north that geography counted against them and that a strong work ethic was required in order to turn a profit, all laid the basis for the later transformation of the European economies in the early modern period. As modern research is increasingly making clear, the roots of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century lay in the industrious revolution of the post-plague world: as productivity rose, aspirations were cast upwards and levels of disposable wealth increased along with opportunities to spend it.⁷⁶

As the bodies were finally buried and the Black Death faded to become a horrific memory (periodically brought to life by cyclical secondary out-

breaks), southern Europe underwent change too. In the 1370s, the Genoese tried to take advantage of the terrible effect that plague had had on Venice, where suffering had been particularly acute, and attempted to wrest control of the Adriatic. The gamble backfired spectacularly: unable to deliver a decisive blow, Genoa found itself suddenly overstretched and vulnerable. One by one, the appendages that the city-state had added over generations linking the city to the Middle East, the Black Sea and North Africa were picked off by rivals. Genoa's loss was Venice's gain.

Freed from the attentions of its long-term competitor, Venice now soared as life returned to normal, exerting a vise-like grip over the spice trade. Pepper, ginger, nutmeg and cloves were imported in increasing quantities, above all via Alexandria. On average, Venetian ships were bringing back over 400 tons of pepper per year from Egypt, as well as shipping considerable volumes from the Levant. By the late fifteenth century, nearly 5 million pounds of spices were passing through Venice each year to be sold on at handsome profits elsewhere, where they were used in food, medicine and cosmetics.⁷⁷

It also seems to have been the main point of entry for pigments used in paintings. Often referred to collectively as "oluremare de venecia" (Venetian goods from overseas), these included verdigris (literally, green from Greece), vermilion, fennugreek, lead-tin yellow, bone black and a gold substitute known as purpurinus or mosaic gold. The most famous and distinctive, however, was the rich blue that came from lapis lazuli, mined in Central Asia. The golden age of European art—of Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca in the fifteenth century, and then of artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Titian—owed much to their ability to use colours drawn from pigments that were part of the extension of contacts with Asia on the one hand and rising levels of disposable wealth to pay for them on the other.⁷⁸

Trade missions to the east were so lucrative that the republic auctioned them off in advance, guaranteeing payments while devolving market, transport and political risks to the successful bidder. As one Venetian put it proudly, galleys set off from the city in all directions—to the coast of Africa, to Beirut and Alexandria, to the Greek lands, to the south of France and to Flanders. Such wealth flowed into the city that *palazzi* shot up in value, especially in the best locations near the Rialto and St. Mark's cathedral. With land rare and expensive, new techniques were used in the construction of buildings, such as replacing spectacular but indulgent double court-

yard staircases with smaller stairwells that required less space. Nevertheless, said one proud Venetian, even normal merchants' houses were lavishly appointed with gilded ceilings, marble staircases, balconies and windows fitted with the finest glass from nearby Murano. Venice was the distribution point for European, African and Asian trade par excellence—and had the tracings to show it.⁷⁹

It was not just Venice that flourished. So too did the towns dotted along the Dalmatian coast which served as stopping points on the outbound and inbound journeys. Ragusa, modern Dubrovnik, saw extraordinary levels of prosperity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Disposable wealth quadrupled between 1300 and 1450, spiralling up so quickly that a cap on dowries was enforced to stop payments that were rising rapidly; the city was so awash with cash that steps were taken partially to abolish slavery; in times of such plenty, it seemed wrong to hold fellow humans in bondage and not to pay them for their work.⁸⁰ Like Venice, Ragusa was busy building its own trading network, developing extensive contacts with Spain, Italy, Bulgaria and even India, where a colony was established in Goa, centred on the church of St. Blaise, Ragusa's patron saint.⁸¹

Many parts of Asia saw a similar surge in growth and ambition. Business boomed in southern India as trade with China built up alongside that from the Persian Gulf and further afield. Guilds sprang up to ensure security and quality controls, but also to create a monopoly that obstructed the rise of local competition. These guilds concentrated money and influence in the hands of a self-selecting group who maintained a dominant position on the Malabar coast and in Sri Lanka.⁸² Under this system, commercial relations were formalised to ensure transactions were done efficiently and fairly. According to an account written by the Chinese traveller Ma Huan in the early fifteenth century, prices between buyer and seller were set by a broker; all taxes and duties were calculated and had to be paid in advance before goods were released and shipped. This made for good long-term trading prospects: "the people there are very honest and trustworthy," Ma Huan added.⁸³

That was the theory, at any rate. In fact, the towns on the southern coast of India did not operate in a vacuum, and competed with each other fiercely. Cochin emerged as a rival to Calicut in the fifteenth century after an aggressively competitive tax regime succeeded in attracting considerable

trade. This began Chinese. A series of Muslim empires and gain access to the Persian Gulf with the ruler of

These mis- taken by the middle of the fourteenth century, ing an infrastructure were devoted to competing with the south began to arrive luxury items in 1387, for export and sandal- pepper, sandal- widening the

expedition in- and nearly 30,000 pay, equipment as tools of di- in the produc- which led to a after 1390.⁸⁵ It also produced stimulated with a command eco-

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as a bellwether of late medieval disencumbrment and prestiges, future disjunctions within a Europe that will grow more regionally diverse from this time forward.

The long cultural lassitude that affected Western Europe after the fall of Rome in the late fifth century AD snatched through the so-called Dark Ages and was alleviated only toward the end of the eleventh century by a rising merchant class, greater wealth, the growth of cities, a new confidence, more leisure, and an expanding interest in education and the arts. This blossoming—often referred to as the *twelfth-century renaissance*—propelled Europe forward for two and a half centuries, fostering continuing cultural (and even scientific) experimentation and excitement that looks unsurpassable.⁴ In important ways, however, this great medievalism was halted in its tracks in the mid-fourteenth century by the advent of an infection that appeared to be of cosmic proportions.

Thomas
Cobhill

1381 1451: LUTHERANS LONG BEFORE LUTHER

Perhaps someday someone will write a history of rhyme and its impact.

In ancient times, rhyme was generally eschewed as childish babble, silly stuff lacking the dignity that was so precious to the ancients. For this reason none of the classical writers and orators of the Western tradition (or of any other tradition, so far as I can judge) made use of rhyme. The sole exception was the Greek mathematician Pythagoras, who was something of a wing nut anyway and who told his wide-eyed followers that word combinations that rhymed contained hidden spiritual meanings. In the early fifth century of the Christian era, Augustine of Hippo did occasionally play with rhyme, especially in his sermons, for the sake of giving his African congregation an easily remembered phrase, such as *bona dona* (good gifts). One might almost wonder if his method is the prototype for the rhyming of African American preachers like Jesse Jackson. In the late sixth century, we find

⁴ This cultural movement is the subject of Volume V of the *History of History: Myriads of the Middle Ages*.

a few examples of what may be intentional slant rhyme in the slick hymns of that urbane Italo-Gallo-Germanic courtier Venantius Fortunatus.

In the eleventh century, we find the Old French poets, the authors of *The Song of Roland* and other stirring *chansons de geste*, who employ rhyme as a matter of course, as do the jingly Latin writers of Germany in such twelfth-century collections as the *Carmine Burana*. In the thirteenth century, in the jolly, singsong Latin hymns of such writers as Thomas Aquinas (who was no doubt taking a day off from weightier pursuits), rhyming took a definite place in church ceremony. Thence it traveled easily to all the emerging European vernaculars, useful in giving shape to both song and spoken poetry. Medieval playfulness had won a permanent victory over classical dignity.

But we should never minimize the importance of rhyme as a mnemonic device, especially useful to both street monger and preacher (or, in more modern times, to politicians) who want their spoken message to stick permanently in the minds of their listeners. And it was in this guise that a single rhyme brought about a late-fourteenth-century rebellion that would reverberate through all of subsequent European history.

*When Adam delf and Eve spun,
Who was thair a gentillman?*

This was the question John Ball put to his many audiences. Ball was an English priest, and his question was posed perfectly in the English of his day. "Delf" is the original past tense of the verb "delve" (or dig); "spin" is the original past tense of the verb "spin." So, when Adam and Eve, expelled from the Garden of Eden, were the only humans on earth, toiling away at their various tasks, who stood on the sidelines at leisure? Why, no one. In the original order of the fallen world, decreed by God himself, there were only laborers, who toiled at all the necessary obligations imposed on human beings. There was then no leisured class, no gendefolk whose privilege it was to observe the laborers and idly profit from their ditch digging and cloth spinning and all the rest of the work that was their lot in life.

The only conclusion to be drawn was that the nobility, those who lived off the honest sweat of others, were not only unnecessary but a thwarting of the will of the Almighty, an undoing of God's

own plan. To an English peasant of 1381, this struck home, an amazing, unforgettable, unassailable idea. If it weren't for the back-drop of Judeo-Christian theological belief, the reasoning might have come straight out of Karl Marx: the members of the leisured class were no better than leeches, sucking the blood of decent working men and women!

Contemporary chronicles, written by clerics, who were employed by nobles and bishops, are all against Ball, so much so that it is impossible to separate fact from fiction in their accounts. Ball, they say, was a "hedge priest," a self-ordained preacher without parish or other normal clerical post. He wandered from town to town, barefoot and stirring up trouble. He preached not in churches but in the open on village greens. He had been excommunicated for his opinions, and the English had all been forbidden to hear him preach—forbidden by competent ecclesiastical authority. But still the ignorant and unlettered came to learn what they might from "the mad priest of Kent," as the French chronicler Froissart contemptuously called him.

However despicable and unwelcome Ball may have appeared to his betters, to the peasant farmers—the so-called villains or serfs in bondage to their local lord, who had the right to exact unpaid service—he was a truth teller, and the few sentences of Ball's that have survived only confirm his powerful—and long-echoing—eloquence: "From the beginning all men were created equal [emphasis mine] by nature, and . . . servitude had been introduced by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God, who, if it had pleased him to create serfs, surely in the beginning of the world would have appointed who should be a serf and who a lord."

As the national economies of Europe had experienced considerable growth, the gulf between the world of peasants and servants and the world of lords and bishops grew immense. In many places, peasants toiled incessantly, sowed in lean times, died young, and saw many of their children die, as they had always done. They had few pleasures, fewer recreations. The lords and ladies, however, and their clerical equals had managed to make for themselves a new world of pleasure. When Boccaccio's ten privileged storytellers reach their destination in the countryside, they find the grounds "abundant in different kinds of shrubs and trees, rich in green fa-

flinge. On the summit of a hill was a great country house, built around a fine and large inner courtyard and containing loggias, halls, and bedrooms, all of them perfectly proportioned and marvelously decorated with depictions of gay scenes. Surrounding the house were glorious meadows and gardens and wells of fresh water and cellars stocked with precious wines, more suited to wine-bibbers than to well-behaved, respectable young ladies. And the party discovered, to no little delight, that the place had been cleaned from top to bottom, all the beds made, fresh and seasonal flowers everywhere, and the floors strewn with rushes." Though hardworking serfs and servants are scarcely alluded to in such airy descriptions, their solid, loyal, essential presence undergirds everything.

Whether or not, as the chroniclers report, John Ball encouraged the peasants—at a great assembly at Blackheath, near Greenwich—to assassinate all the chief lords and kill all their lawyers,⁴ vast throngs of rebels entered the city of London, including an army from Kent led by Wat Tyler (whose name is permanently affixed to this insurrection, known as Wat Tyler's Rebellion) and an army from Essex led by the priest Jack Straw. They commanded the Tower and beleghed Simon of Sudbury, the antipathetic archbishop of Canterbury, whose name was associated with an unjust poll tax leveled against the peasants. They beleghed several other Canterbury clerics and even executed Richard of Wallingford, uncle to King Richard II, who was then a boy of fourteen and easily led by his elders.

When the rebels insisted on meeting with Richard, he agreed and met with them at Mile End, where he promised to address their grievances. This was a ruse, however. The very next day, Wat Tyler would be knifed to death by the Lord Mayor of London, with assistance from one of the king's knights, in Richard's presence. Once the armies, charmed by the boy king, had disbanded, Richard went back on his word. Jack Straw was beheaded, and John Ball was hanged and, while still alive, drawn (that is, cut down, castrated and disemboweled, his organs burned while he watched) decapitated.

⁴ This exhortation sounds false to me, part of the general disdainful mischaracterizations of the peasantry by the educated classes. It is all one with the congenerational exhortation of *Dick the Butcher* in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 2*—"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers!"—also used to denigrate the supposed villainy of the villains. First, Shakespeare was hardly a fan of peasant uprisings.

and quartered, his quarters and severed head sent for display to five strongholds of rebellion as reminders of the fate that awaited rebels. When a respectful deputation of peasants later begged the king to fulfill his promises, Richard would dismiss them with the words: "Villains ye are still and villeins ye shall remain."

Behind this rebellion and others like it in continental Europe, especially in France, lay a great economic shift that had occurred as a result of the Black Death. Because there were far fewer people, there was no longer any reason for serfdom. Without artificial legal constraints, anyone could make a good living, because there were so many jobs to be done and so few to do them. So the lords of the English manors had got Richard's grandfather and predecessor, Edward III, to proclaim the Statute of Laborers, according to which landowners could summon as many laborers as they needed and pay them no better wages than what they'd received before the plague. Despite my earlier reference to Karl Marx, a better way to understand the peasant unrest of this period may be to think of it in terms of our so-called free-market economy. What the peasants wanted was a market in which they could get whatever price a customer was willing to pay, so long as each provider of labor could be free and unconstrained in seeking his bargain. Though the peasants lost this battle, there could no longer be any doubt that they would eventually win the war.

We know the punishment given John Ball was one reserved for high treason, not heresy. Convicted heretics were not hanged, drawn, and quartered but burned to death. The rebellion initiated by the preaching of Ball would, nonetheless, result eventually in not a few convictions for heresy and subsequent incinerations. These especially should be considered.

Behind Ball stands what many of his well-placed contemporaries took to be a larger conspiracy, that of the Lollards, who probably got their name from their supposedly sloppy, undisciplined speech. (They were thought to mutter or mumble "loll-loll" or "toll-loll," as if their tongues were slow.) For slow-witted, slow-speaking dullards, however, their ideas were many and keen. Churchmen, they thought, should be poor like Christ and prohibited from accruing personal wealth. Wealthy church properties should be taxed. The endless hubbub about the nature of Christ's presence in the ele-

ments of the Eucharist was excessive: no one really knew whether it was symbolic or real, and, if real, in what way. Far too much was made of images and relics in churches, which hardly deserved the reverence accorded them. Let's stop paying clergy for prayers for the dead, which benefit only the rich. All the dead, as well as all the living, should be prayed for equally. Church ceremony should be simplified and the focus put on reading the Scriptures, which need to be translated into local languages, so that everyone may understand them. There is nothing special about ordained priests; every Christian is a priest. Priests have no special power to forgive sins and should not be expected to be celibate. Nonetheless, official churchmen should not concern themselves with secular matters, which are none of their business. War is wrong, as is capital punishment and the taking of oaths.

There were probably additional tenets held by various groups of Lollards. Soon enough, they had to meet in secret, and it becomes harder to track their beliefs. That John Ball was a Lollard seems indisputable; so was Sir John Oldcastle, boon companion of Prince Hal (one day to reign as King Henry V) and model for Shakespeare's Falstaff. At times, Chaucer has been labeled a Lollard and certainly seems, in *The Canterbury Tales*, to express Lollard-like sympathies. To combat Lollardy, Henry IV, Henry V's father and Richard II's successor, had, as early as 1401, issued *De Heretico Comburendo* (On the Burning of Heretics), which prohibited both the translating of the Bible into English and the owning of such a Bible and made provision for the burning of heretics in England.

The probable founder of Lollardy was John Wyclif, Oxford don and by traditional acclamation "the Morning Star of the Reformation"—nearly a century and a half before Luther. Besides the convictions of Lollardy outlined above, Wyclif attacked the claims of the papacy as unfounded, reestablished the Scriptures as Christianity's authoritative norm, translated much of the New Testament into splendid vernacular English (a translation that continued to be imitated by others even as late as the King James Version of 1611), and taught—if in a simple, more primitive form—what would become Luther's central doctrine of justification by faith, rather than by works. Though he died in his bed in 1384, he was convicted of heresy by a church council in 1428. His remains were

ding up at the command of Pope Martin V. burned, and cast into the River Swift. Despite this posthumous animosity, Wyclif was much loved in his lifetime and known by his many friends and admirers as "the wisest and most blessed of all men." Like Luther, Wyclif was very much an Augustinian Platonist, so much so that he was dubbed "John of Augustine" by his students. In advance of his time in so many ways, he also despised Aristotle.

Wyclif's most famous disciple was Jan Hus, the Czech priest and reformer who to this day is held in special reverence by the Czech nation. He advocated theological and structural reforms similar to those of Wyclif—though it would be difficult to find anything he had to say that would be unacceptable today to a moderate Roman Catholic—and was burned at the stake for his honesty and candor. His martyrdom took place not in his native Bohemia but in 1415 in the Alps at the ecumenical Council of Constance, whither Hus had journeyed to debate his proposals at the invitation of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, who had assured him of safe passage. He was condemned by a consensus of the bishops in attendance. He said he would die "with gladness" "in the truth of the Gospel." As the flames licked higher, poor Hus, naked except for a high paper hat inscribed with the single word *haereticus* (heresiarch), is reported to have called out that "in a hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed." One hundred and two years later, Martin Luther will—or so it is recounted—until his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg church on October 31, now remembered as Reformation Sunday.

The most notorious heresy conviction in this period was that of Joan of Arc, an illiterate French peasant who was burned at the stake in 1431, at the probable age of nineteen, for having dared to attempt the military task of reuniting France and expelling its English occupiers. The church court that condemned her as a witch was an irregular one, convened by the sniveling bishop of Beauvais, an English partisan, who had not the ecclesiastical jurisdiction to try her case. Joan, a genuine mystic and visionary, would never have fallen into English hands if her sovereign, Charles VII, had had the courage to pursue the daring military strategies she urged on him. Everything in the extensive contemporary records under-

scores both her genius and her unadulterated honesty. The record of her trial reads at times like the gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. She was, perhaps somewhat too enthusiastically, awarded the title "the first Protestant" by George Bernard Shaw. However challenging she may have appeared to the official church in her insistence on the truth of her personal inspiration over any supposed norms of Catholic orthodoxy, she was later than both Wyclif and Hus.⁴

"These ecclesiastical inquiries into heresy—or inquisitions, as they were called—could clearly end in dire consequences for the accused. Nonetheless, we should bear in mind that, bloody-minded and misguided as they were and, like so many public trials even to our own day, easily influenced by emotional and political pressures, they were fairly infrequent in the Middle Ages. The gruesome errors of the rack and other forms of torture belong more properly to the period of the Renaissance and Reformation than to the medieval period to which they are so often referred. More than this, we should recall that in times past even the most reasonable and pacific of men imagined that heresy—that is, diversity of religious opinion—could not be tolerated if a society was to remain whole. As late as the enlightened eighteenth century, we find Samuel Johnson, that most considered of Englishmen, rendering this shocking judgment:

"They set out for Harwich in the stage-coach . . . as planned," writes Christopher Hibbert in his biography. "Johnson, in high good humor, fell in conversation with a fat, talkative, elderly gentleman. . . . In the afternoon, the old lady began to talk violently against the Roman Catholics and of the horrors of the Inquisition. To the utter astonishment of everyone present, except Boswell who knew by now that he would talk on any side of a question, Johnson defended the Inquisition warmly, maintaining that a false doctrine should be checked on its first appearance, that the civil power should unite with the church in punishing those who dared to attack the established religion, that none but such as these had ever been punished by the Inquisition."

⁴ More than four and a half centuries after her martyrdom at the hands of churchmen, Joan was canonized by the pope and named a patron of France.

How Jacques Coeur Made His Fortune

He made it none too scrupulously, and lost it at the whim of a much willier scoundrel than himself

Marshall B. Davidson

One should visit Bourges to see the curious house that Jacques Coeur built, wrote Jules Michelet a century or so ago in his gigantic history of France. It was, he added, "a house full of mysteries, as was Coeur's life." Then, in one of the picturesque asides that make his history such a treasury of unexpected discoveries, he went on to describe that house and the man who built it—the self-made man who played banker to King Charles VII of France, and who bailed out that monarch when his kingdom was at stake; the intrepid man of the world who traded privileges with Moslem sultans, Christian popes, and European princes; the implausibly rich parvenu who, within less than twenty years, parlayed a few counterfeit coins into the largest private fortune in France.

By 1443, when construction of his house started, Coeur was quite possibly the wealthiest man in the world. His new dwelling was to be a monument to his worldly success, and according to one contemporary it was "so richly ornamented, so spacious, and yet, withal, so magnificent, that neither princes of the blood, nor the king himself, had any residence comparable to it." That last point was not lost on Charles VII, as, in the end, Coeur had bitter cause to know.

The house still stands in the cathedral town of Bourges, a short drive south of Paris. It is a unique survival, a memorial as much to a time in history as to the man who built it, for Coeur's life spanned a critical period in the destiny of France. In the last decade of his life the agonizing internecine strife and the bloody slaughter that accompanied the Hundred Years'

War were, with his substantial aid, finally brought to an end. The English were thrown back across the Channel, and the land was united as it had not been in living memory.

In the course of those protracted disorders the scrambled authority of feudalism gave way to the more orderly rule of national monarchy, the spirit of chivalry faded before the practical aims of an aspiring bourgeoisie, and the stultifying controls of medieval economy were turning into the growing pains of modern capitalism. To most contemporary eyes such vital changes appeared as a blurred image, like a dissolve in a movie. But Coeur's role in those transitions was so decisive, and he was so perfectly cast for the part he played, that he might well have written the script himself.

It could be said that in Coeur's time double-entry bookkeeping was proving mightier than the sword, for without that instrument of precision and convenience (apparently a fourteenth-century invention), he could hardly have managed his complex affairs. To him, and other businessmen, time and—timekeeping—took on new importance. For time was money made or lost. The easy rhythm of the canonical hours was being replaced by the stern measure of mechanical clocks that counted out the cost of fleeting opportunities, pointed the way to quicker profits, and ticked off interest on loans. And Coeur pressed every advantage. He even used carrier pigeons to bring him advance notice of approaching cargoes so that he could improve his position in the local markets.

From the very beginning Coeur's enterprise was, for better and for worse, closely associated with the interests of

his sovereign. Ironically, he first came to public notice in 1429, when, as an associate of the master of the Bourges mint, he was accused of striking coins of inferior alloy. Like so many other functions now considered the exclusive prerogative of government, minting money was then a private concession, albeit by privilege from the king, who took a substantial share of the milling toll as seigniorage, at rates fixed by law. Since no practical system of taxation was yet in force, this was one of the few ways the king could raise money. To meet the demands of the moment, debasing the coinage was approved practice, and the royal "take" could be enhanced by secretly altering the rate of seigniorage—that is, by still further debasing the coinage without advising the public. If the counterfeit was detected, the royal accomplice could disavow the scheme and leave his concessionaires to face the music. And this is what happened to Coeur and his associates in 1429.

Desperate necessities drove Charles VII to practice such duplicity. When he inherited the throne in 1422, the Hundred Years' War was in its eighth grim decade and the fortunes of France were at their lowest ebb. This ill-omened, youthful heir, the tenth child of a madman who disinherited him and of a mother of loose morals who disowned him (it was widely reported that he was a bastard, no matter of shame at the time, but a shadow on his claim to the throne), was holed up in Bourges. An English king reigned in Paris, and English forces occupied all the land from the Channel to the Loire. Philip the Good, the powerful and autonomous duke of Burgundy, tolerated the foreign invader and was allied with him.

And Brittany, ever mindful of its own independent traditions, wavered between allegiances.

The years that followed Charles's succession revolved in a murderous cycle of war and brigandage, pestilence and famine. The king could not afford a standing army, and his military leaders were independent contractors who, between battles with the enemy, roamed the land with their mercenaries, raping, stealing, burning, and killing. Under the circumstances, trade and commerce came to a standstill. Merchants took to the road only if they were armed to the teeth. The great international fairs of Champagne, once vital points of exchange for Europe's traffic, were abandoned as the north-south trade shifted to the sea routes between Flanders and the Mediterranean. France came close to ruin.

The winter of 1428-1429 brought a turning point, or at least a promise of deliverance. The English had laid siege to Orléans, the principal city remaining in Charles's rump of a kingdom. Had Orléans fallen there would have been pitifully little left of that kingdom. The city became a symbol of resistance, while the timid young monarch vacillated in his provincial retreat barely sixty miles away. His mocking enemies dubbed him the "king of Bourges" and anticipated the fall of his petty realm. His treasury was empty; it is said he even borrowed money from his laundress. Only by a miracle could he keep his tottering crown.

The miracle materialized when, as if in direct response to the widely whispered prophecy that an armed virgin would appear and drive the English from the land, Joan of Arc was brought before the king at the château of Chinon where he was then holding court. After grilling the maid for three weeks, the king's counselors decided that she was, as she claimed, divinely appointed by "voices" she had heard to save her king and her country. Somehow, Charles found money to provide her with troops, and the siege of Orléans was lifted. Joan then persuaded her wavering monarch to be crowned at Reims, where Clovis had been baptized. By that ritual the stain of bastardy was automatically removed, and Charles was indisputably the true king of France. It took him eight more years to win Paris from the English, but when he did ride triumphantly into that city, after its sixteen years of foreign

occupation, he came as the rightful Christian king.

It was hardly a coincidence that Coeur and his associates were charged with counterfeiting almost immediately after the "miracle" at Orléans, or that Coeur was pardoned of the crime. Charles had most likely met the payroll for Joan's troops with funds provided by the mint's illegal operations, and as party to the crime he saw that Coeur got off easily. At least there is no better explanation.

In any case, soon after his pardon Coeur set out to make his fortune. He formed a new partnership with his old associates at the mint, this time to deal in "every class of merchandise, including that required by the King, Monseigneur the Dauphin, and other nobles, as well as other lines in which they [the partners] can make their profit."

For precedents in this new venture he looked abroad. The basis of Renaissance prosperity, already so conspicuous in Italy, was the carrying trade between East and West. For centuries Venice had fattened on this commerce, to the point where its successful and friendly business relations with Mongols and Moslems alike had encouraged those infidels to close in on the Christian world. Then, as European knighthood took the Cross to the Holy Land, Venetians supplied and equipped their fellow Christians and ferried them to the battle sites at exorbitant rates.

Venice also continued its flourishing trade in arms, armor, and diverse other goods with the Saracens of Egypt and Palestine. When Pope Benedict XII forbade unauthorized trade with the infidel, the merchants of Venice bought up papal authorizations wherever they could and used them as ordinary bills of exchange. With the Fourth Crusade, the "businessman's crusade," the merchants of Venice made a double killing. They dissuaded the debt-burdened knights from their proclaimed purpose of attacking Alexandria, one of Venice's richest markets, and persuaded them to sack the flourishing Christian capital of Constantinople.

Meanwhile, across the Apennines in Tuscany, enterprising merchants were swarming out of Florence into western Europe, collecting contributions to the Crusades as bankers to the Holy See, advancing money to land-poor feudal lords at fantastic interest rates, and with their ready cash buying up the privileges of the towns. During the Hundred Years'

War the powerful Bardi and Peruzzi families equipped both French and English armies for the battlefields, prolonging the conflict and taking over the functions of state when it was necessary to secure their accounts. In return for helping Henry III of England with his running expenses, the Florentines asked for 120 per cent interest on advances and, when repayment was not prompt, added 60 per cent more. In such a company of greedy Christians, Shylock would have seemed hopelessly ingenuous.

During the most agonizing period of the Hundred Years' War, however, the Florentines had gradually abandoned their commercial colonies in France. Now that his time had come, Coeur moved to fill that vacuum with his own business and, with equal speed, to stake a claim among the markets of the East, so profitably exploited by Venice. His first try at emulating the Venetian merchants was a disaster. In 1432 he journeyed to Damascus, an awkward if not perilous place for Christians to be at the time, buying up spices and other exotic commodities for resale in the home markets of France. When his ship foundered off Corsica he lost literally everything but his shirt. He and his shipmates were stripped clean by the islanders.

He seems to have recovered promptly. He had centered his operations at Montpellier on the Mediterranean coast, the only French port authorized by the pope to deal with the infidel East. He threw himself with bounding determination into the development of the city's facilities, pressing the local authorities to improve its docks, dredge essential canals, construct adequate warehouses, and generally improve the advantages for commerce and navigation even spending his own money when he had to. As he later wrote the king, he had plans for developing a vast maritime empire under the lily banner of France.

Almost from the moment Charles returned to Paris, Coeur's affairs started to move in a steady counterpoint to the affairs of state. Within a year or two he was installed as *argentier*, receiver of the revenues used to maintain the royal establishment. Since in his capacity as merchant he was also the principal purveyor to that establishment, his position was doubly advantageous and ambiguous. And since for the most part the court could be accommodated only by long-term credit, both the advantage and the ambiguity were compounded. It must

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have been quite easy for Coeur to convince himself that what was good for Jacques Coeur was good for France.

A reciprocal rhythm of commissions and benefits, responsibilities and opportunities, honors and profits, increased in tempo for more than a decade. The king may already have been in debt to Coeur even before the royal entry into Paris, and this relationship became more or less chronic thereafter. The Paris campaign had again exhausted the royal treasury. In an effort to tighten the leaking economy of the state, Charles, possibly advised by his *argentier*, forbade the export of money from his realm except by a special license, which he then granted, apparently exclusively, to Coeur.

In 1440 Charles further recognized Coeur's services by according him patents of nobility. The following year he appointed him *conseiller du roi*, in effect minister of finance and, as such, adviser in the revision of the nation's tax structure. Charged with assessing and collecting regional taxes, Coeur sometimes received not only his due commissions but gratuities from local representatives who both respected his influence at court and feared his power as a merchant banker. The "states" of Languedoc, for example, of which Montpellier was the principal port, paid him handsomely for his good offices in the interest of their maritime prosperity—canceling his share of their taxes as a matter of course.

The king, meanwhile, with an unprecedented income from the revenues he received, reorganized his military forces into a paid standing army. He was no longer a mere feudal lord but a monarch able to make policy and enforce it, if need be, with cannon—cannon, cast at the foundries of bourgeois manufacturers, that could reduce the proudest knight's castle to rubble. In 1444 Charles arranged a temporary peace with the English, who still held Normandy and Guyenne. It was at the gay spring *pourparlers* on the banks of the Loire by which the peace was negotiated that Charles first spied the indescribably beautiful Agnes Sorel, "the fairest of the fair," whom he shortly afterward made his mistress. As the king's bedmate, Agnes began to use her influence in matters of state, inaugurating a tradition in French history. As it later turned out, this was a fateful development in the life of Jacques Coeur. The immediate consequence of the truce arrangements, however, was that he could now move into

the English-held markets in Rouen and Bordeaux as well as across the Channel.

Coeur's influence was already recognized far beyond the shores of France. In 1446 he served as negotiator between the Knights of Rhodes and the sultan of Egypt. Two years later, through the intercession of Coeur's agents, the sultan was persuaded to restore trading privileges to the Venetians, who had for a time been banned from the Arab world. At the same time, Coeur consolidated his own position in the Mediterranean and put a cap on his immense commercial structure. Pope Eugenius IV issued a bull authorizing Coeur to trade for five years in his own right, beyond the privileges enjoyed by the port of Montpellier, with the non-Christian world. With this special authority in his pocket, Coeur shifted the base of his maritime enterprise to Marseilles.

One important matter still needed mending. For all Coeur's good offices and his wide reputation, official relations between France and the Arab world were less cordial than suited his interests. In 1447 he persuaded Charles to agree to a formal pact with Abu-Saïd-Djamac-el Daher, sultan of Egypt. The French ambassadors, traveling in Coeur's ships and at his expense, arrived in Egypt "in great state" bearing lavish gifts provided by Coeur in the name of the king. The sultan, in turn, arranged an extravagant reception. Coeur's diplomacy triumphed. Peace between the two lands was agreed upon, and French traders received "most favored nation" privileges in Arab ports.

Aided by the gratitude of the Venetians and the Knights of Rhodes, the friendship of the sultan, the favor of the pope, and the indulgence of his king, Coeur secured unassailable advantages at every important point in the world of his day. "All the Levant he visited with his ships," wrote the duke of Burgundy's chronicler some years later, "and there was not in the waters of the Orient a mast which was not decorated with the *fleur-de-lis*." The maritime empire he created remained for several centuries one of the principal bulwarks of French commerce. To carry on his far-flung, highly diversified operations—they had developed into a virtual monopoly of France's exclusive markets—Coeur employed some three hundred agents and maintained branch offices in Barcelona, Damascus, Beirut, Alexandria, and other strategic centers.

The inventories of his warehouses read like an exaggerated description of Ali Baba's caves. "All the perfumes of Arabia" were carried in stock, and spices and confections from the farthest shores; dyes and colors, cochineal and cinnabar, indigo and saffron—and henna to illuminate the king's manuscripts; materials of fabulous richness and variety, and gems supposedly from the navels of sacred Persian and Indian monkeys, which were mounted in precious metals and considered a universal antidote to human ills. He could provide for the court's most extraordinary or exquisite whim: a coat of mail covered with azure velvet for a Scottish archer of the king's bodyguard; a silver shoulder piece and Turkish buckler for Charles of Orléans; silks and sables for Margaret of Scotland; diamonds to set off the incomparable beauty of Agnes Sorel—they were all to be had, including cold cash for the queen of France herself, who offered up her "great pearl" for security.

In order to put his surplus money to work and to spread his risk, Coeur joined associations that profited from the licensing of fairs (reborn since the temporary truce with England), from speculation in salt, and from the exploitation of copper and silver mines of the Lyonnais and Beaujolais. He had interests in paper and silk factories in Florence. He even invested in three-quarters of two English prisoners of war, each worth a handsome ransom.

The list of his varied enterprises is almost endless. Cash was still in short supply among the nobility, the long war had brought ruin to many lordly tenants, and Charles's fiscal reforms were reducing their income from traditional feudal dues. So Coeur accommodated some of the greatest families of the realm by buying up their manor houses and properties until he held more than thirty estates, some including whole villages and parishes within their grounds. All told, the complex structure of his myriad affairs, his control of the production, transport, and distribution of goods, his private banking resources, and his secure grasp on essential markets all suggest something like the first vertical trust in history.

So far, nothing belied the motto Coeur was then having chiseled into the stones of his great town house at Bourges—*A vaillans cueurs riens impossible*, nothing is impossible to the valiant. Coeur's star rose even higher in 1448 when he was



Coeur's mansion is adorned both inside and out with whimsical vignettes of daily life.

BOTH: ARCHIVES PHOTOGRAPHIQUES



The trompe l'oeil couple may represent servants watching for their master's return.

sent to Rome by Charles with a select group of ambassadors to help end the "pestilential and horrible" papal schism that for long years had been a great trial to the Church. The French ambassadors entered Rome in a procession of splendor—their cortege included three hundred richly caparisoned and harnessed Arabian horses—and Pope Nicholas V wrote Charles that not even the oldest inhabitants could remember anything so magnificent.

Coeur promptly took center stage. Through his efforts, the rival pope, Amadeo VIII, duke of Savoy, was finally persuaded to renounce his claim to the papal throne and accept a position in the church hierarchy second only to that of Pope Nicholas V. As a reward, Coeur's privilege of dealing with the non-Christian world was extended indefinitely. He was also given a franchise to carry Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land.

There were some who complained of the outrageous cost of that papal mission from which Coeur gained such honor and profit. Coeur had no doubt paid the bills, but whether from his own purse or from the king's treasury would have been difficult to determine. Coeur's wealth was by now beyond imagining. It was reported that his horses were shod with silver. His table service was of gold and silver. Each year, it was said, his income was greater than that of all the other merchants of France combined. "The king does what he can; Jacques Coeur does what he pleases" was a repeated observation. He might even be in league with the devil, they began to say.

Jacques Coeur had indeed reached a singular, and perilous, eminence.

How rich Coeur really was and what resources he could command came out in the years immediately following. The time had come, Charles decided, to break the truce with the English and to push them out of France altogether. To launch and maintain the campaign, however, Charles needed more money than he could find in the royal coffers, and he turned to Coeur for help. Coeur responded by dredging every sou he could manage from the resources available to him and by stretching his almost inexhaustible credit to the limit. By one means or another, he turned over to the king, at the very minimum, two hundred thousand ecus, a sum equal to more than one-fifth of the kingdom's annual tax revenues.

He also took to the field at the king's side. In the victorious procession that entered Rouen on November 10, 1449, Coeur rode in the company of Charles; mounted on a white charger, he was clothed in velvet and ermine and wore a sword embellished with gold and precious stones.

Coeur was now about fifty-five years old. For some twenty years he had enjoyed increasing wealth and prestige. Then, suddenly, the wheel of fortune changed direction. Three months after the ceremonies at Rouen, Agnes Sorel died in childbirth, after having been delivered of the king's fourth child. Rumors spread that she had been poisoned. Almost automatically, a cabal of debtors formed to point a finger at the king's *argentier*, "the money man" of almost

magical faculties, who was known to be one of the executors of Agnes's will. To convict Coeur of murder would serve to disembarass the king and every important member of the court from the claims of their common creditor.

Charles was quick to play his part. One week in July, 1451, he expressed his gratitude to Coeur for his many services; the next week he issued an order for his arrest. Supported by his most recent favorites, the king confronted Coeur with a long list of indictments, starting with the poisoning charge and going back over the years to the counterfeiting charge of 1429, set aside so long ago by the pleasure and the convenience of Charles VII.

No sooner were the dungeon doors closed behind Coeur than "the vultures of the court" started picking away at the estate he could no longer protect. The nobility of France swarmed about the tottering house of Jacques Coeur to redeem their own fortunes from his disgrace. The trial that followed was a mockery. With his enemies as both prosecutors and judges he never had a chance. Even though his accusers confessed that the charge of poisoning Agnes Sorel was false, and the pope pleaded for clemency and justice in the case, Coeur was shunted for several years from prison to prison.

Finally, in May, 1453, at Poitiers, when he was threatened with torture, he issued a statement that led his judges to condemn him, banish him, and confiscate his properties. By a remarkable coincidence, on the day of Coeur's sentence the sorely tried city of Constantinople fell,

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this time once and for all, to the Turks. It was the end of an era. Less than a week later, the convicted man made an *amende honorable*: kneeling, bareheaded, before a large crowd and holding a ten-pound wax torch in his hands, he begged mercy of God, king, and the courts.

One more adventure remained. For almost a year and a half after his trial, Coeur was kept imprisoned in France, in spite of his banishment, while most of his holdings were seized and sold off. Then, in the autumn of 1454, he managed to escape. Aided by several of his faithful agents, he crossed the Rhone out of France and fled to Rome, where the pope received him with honor. He never returned to France, nor to the house

that was his pride.

But he did take to the sea one last time. He arrived in Rome at a crucial moment in the history of the Church and of Western civilization. All Christendom had been shaken by the fall of Constantinople less than two years earlier and felt threatened by further advances of the Ottoman hordes. In the summer of 1456, Coeur, sixty years old and "toiled with works of war," set forth in command of a fleet dispatched by Pope Calixtus III to help retake Constantinople. On the twenty-fifth of November, on the island of Chios, his *vaillant coeur* was stopped, possibly by wounds he suffered in battle.

As he lay dying, Coeur sent one last appeal to Charles, begging the king to

show consideration for his children. At this point Charles could afford to be indulgent. In an act of royal compassion he conceded that since "the said Coeur was in great authority with us and rich and abounding in this world's goods and ennobled in his posterity and line . . . it pleases us to have pity on [his children]," and ordained that what might be salvaged from their father's estate, including the house at Bourges, be returned to them.

It was, after all, little enough for him to do, and in the end Coeur had an ironic revenge. The thought of poisoning continued to haunt the king. Four years later, fearing he might be poisoned by his own son, he refused to eat, and died of starvation.

Machiavelli

Would you buy a used car from this man?

Vincent Cronin

Machiavelli—the most hated man who ever lived: charged, down the centuries, with being the sole poisonous source of political monkey business, of the mocking manipulation of men, of malfeasance, misanthropy, mendacity, murder, and massacre; the evil genius of tyrants and dictators, worse than Judas, for no salvation resulted from his betrayal; guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, knowing Christianity to be true, but resisting the truth; not a man at all, but Antichrist in apish flesh, the Devil incarnate, Old Nick, with the whiff of sulphur on his breath and a tail hidden under his scarlet Florentine gown.

Machiavelli is the one Italian of the Renaissance we all think we know, partly because his name has passed into our language as a synonym for unscrupulous schemer. But Niccolò Machiavelli of Florence was a more complex and fascinating figure than his namesake of the English dictionary, and unless we ourselves wish to earn the epithet Machiavellian, it is only fair to look at the historical Machiavelli in the context of his age.

He was born in 1469 of an impoverished noble family whose coat of arms featured four keys. Niccolò's father was a retired lawyer who owned two small farms and an inn, his mother a churchgoer who wrote hymns to the Blessed Virgin. Niccolò was one of four children; the younger son, Totto, became a priest, and the idea of a confessional occupied by a Father Machiavelli is one that has caused Niccolò's enemies some wry laughter.

Niccolò attended the Studio, Florence's university, where he studied the prestigious newly-discovered authors of Greece and Rome. Like all his generation, he idolized the Athenians and the Romans of the Republic, and was to

make them his models in life. This was one important influence. The other was the fact that Florence was then enjoying, under the Medici, a period of peace. For centuries the city had been torn by war and faction; but now all was serene, and the Florentines were producing their greatest achievements in philosophy, poetry, history, and the fine arts.

This point is important, for too often we imagine the Italian Renaissance as a period of thug-like *condottieri* and cruel despots forever locked in war. We must not be deceived by the artists. Uccello and Michelangelo painted bloody battles, but they were battles that had taken place many years before. If we are to understand Machiavelli, we must picture his youth as a happy period of civilization and peace: for the first time in centuries swords rusted, muscles grew flabby, fortress walls became overgrown with ivy.

In 1494, when Machiavelli was twenty-five, this happiness was shattered. King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy to seize the kingdom of Naples; Florence lay on his route. In the Middle Ages the Florentines had fought bravely against aggressors, but now, grown slack and effete, they were afraid of Charles's veterans and his forty cannon. Instead of manning their walls, they and their leading citizen, Pietro de' Medici, meekly allowed the French king to march in; they even paid him gold not to harm their country.

This debacle led to internal wars, to economic decline, in which Niccolò's father went bankrupt, to much heart-searching, and to a puritanical revolution. Savonarola the Dominican came to rule from the pulpit. Thundering that the French invasion was punishment for a pagan way of life, he burned classical books and nude pictures and urged a regeneration of Florence through fasting and prayer. The French just laughed at Savonarola; he lost the confidence of his

fellow citizens and was burned at the stake in 1498.

In that same year, Machiavelli became an employee of the Florentine Republic, which he was to serve ably as diplomat and administrator. Machiavelli scorned Savonarola's idea of political regeneration through Christianity; instead, he persuaded the Florentines to form a citizen militia, as was done in Republican Rome. In 1512 Florence's big test came. Spain had succeeded France as Italy's oppressor, and now, at the instigation of the Medici, who had been exiled from Florence in 1494 and wished to return, a Spanish army of five thousand marched against Tuscany. Four thousand of Machiavelli's militia were defending the strong Florentine town of Prato. The Spaniards, ill-fed and unpaid, launched a halfhearted attack. The Florentines, instead of resisting, took to their heels. Prato was sacked, and a few days later Florence surrendered without a fight. The Medici returned, the Republic came to an end, Machiavelli lost his job and was tortured and exiled to his farm. For the second time in eighteen years he had witnessed a defeat that was both traumatic and humiliating.

In the following year an out-of-work Machiavelli began to write his great book *The Prince*. It is an attempt to answer the question implicit in Florence's two terrible defeats: what had gone wrong? Machiavelli's answer is this: for all their classical buildings and pictures, for all the Ciceronian Latin and readings from Plato, the Florentines had never really revived the essence of classical life—that military vigor and patriotism unto death that distinguished the Greeks and Romans. What then is the remedy? Italy must be regenerated—not by Savonarola's brand of puritanism, but by a soldier-prince. This prince must subordinate every aim to military efficiency. He must personally command a

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citizen army and keep it disciplined by a reputation for cruelty.

But even this, Machiavelli fears, will not be enough to keep at bay the strong new nation-states, France and Spain. So, in a crescendo of patriotism, Machiavelli urges his prince to disregard the accepted rules of politics, to hit below the belt. Let him lie, if need be, let him violate treaties: "Men must be either pampered or crushed, because they can get revenge for small injuries but not for fatal ones"; "A prudent ruler cannot, and should not, honor his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist"; "If a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous."

Machiavelli develops his concept of a soldier-prince with a couple of portraits. The first, that of the emperor Alexander Severus, is an example of how a prince should not behave. Alexander Severus, who reigned in the third century, was a man of such goodness it is said that during his fourteen years of power he never put anyone to death without a trial. Nevertheless, as he was thought effeminate, and a man who let himself be ruled by his mother, he came to be scorned, and the army conspired against him and killed him. Machiavelli scorns him also: "Whenever that class of men on which you believe your continued rule depends is corrupt, whether it be the populace, or soldiers, or nobles, you have to satisfy it by adopting the same disposition; and then *good deeds are your enemies*."

Machiavelli's second portrait is of Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI, who carved out a dukedom for himself and then brought it to heel by appointing a tough governor, Ramiro. Later, says Machiavelli, Cesare discovered that "the recent harshness had aroused some hatred against him, and wishing to purge the minds of the people and win them over . . . he had this official (Ramiro) cut in two pieces one morning and exposed on the public square . . . This ferocious spectacle left the people at once *content and horrified*."

The words I have italicized show Machiavelli's peculiar cast of mind. He grows excited when goodness comes to a sticky end and when a dastardly deed is perpetrated under a cloak of justice. He seems to enjoy shocking traditional morality, and there can be little doubt that he is subconsciously revenging himself on

the Establishment responsible for those two profound military defeats.

Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* for Giuliano de' Medici. He hoped that by applying the lessons in his book, Giuliano would become tough enough to unite Italy and drive out the foreigner. But Giuliano, the youngest son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, was a tubercular young man with gentle blue eyes and long sensitive fingers, the friend of poets and himself a sonneteer. He was so soft that his brother Pope Leo had to relieve him of his post as ruler of Florence after less than a year. Preparations for war against France taxed his feeble constitution; at the age of thirty-seven he fell ill and died. Machiavelli's notion of turning Giuliano into a second Cesare Borgia was about as fantastic as trying to turn John Keats into a James Bond.

This fantastic element has been overlooked in most accounts of Machiavelli, but it seems to me important. Consider the *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, which Machiavelli wrote seven years after *The Prince*. It purports to be a straight biography of a famous fourteenth-century ruler of Lucca, but in fact only the outline of the book is historically true. Finding the real Castruccio insufficiently tough to embody his ideals, Machiavelli introduces wholly fictitious episodes borrowed from Diodorus Siculus's life of a tyrant who really was unscrupulous: Agathocles. As captain of the Syracusans, Agathocles had collected a great army, then summoned the heads of the Council of Six Hundred under the pretext of asking their advice, and put them all to death.

Machiavelli in his book has Castruccio perform a similar stratagem. Just as in *The Prince* the second-rate Cesare Borgia passes through the crucible of Machiavelli's imagination to emerge as a modern Julius Caesar, so here a mildly villainous lord is dressed up as the perfect amoral autocrat. In both books Machiavelli is so concerned to preach his doctrine of salvation through a strong soldier-prince that he leaves Italy as it really was for a world of fantasy.

Machiavelli had a second purpose in dedicating *The Prince* to Giuliano de' Medici (and when Giuliano died, to his almost equally effete nephew Lorenzo). He wished to regain favor with the Medici, notably with Pope Leo. This also was a fantastic plan. Machiavelli had plotted hand over fist against the Medici for no less than fourteen years and was known

to be a staunch republican, opposed to one-family rule in Florence. Pope Leo, moreover, was a gentle man who loved Raphael's smooth paintings and singing to the lute; he would not be interested in a book counseling cruelty and terror.

How could a man like Machiavelli, who spent his early life in the down-to-earth world of Italian politics, have yielded to such unrealistic, such fantastic hopes? The answer, I think, lies in the fact that he was also an imaginative artist—a playwright obsessed with extreme dramatic situations. Indeed, Machiavelli was best known in Florence as the author of *Mandragola*. In that brilliant comedy, a bold and tricky adventurer, aided by the profligacy of a parasite, and the avarice of a friar, achieves the triumph of making a gulled husband bring his own unwitting but too yielding wife to shame. It is an error to regard Machiavelli as primarily a political theorist, taking a cool look at facts. *The Prince* is, in one sense, the plot of a fantastic play for turning the tables on the French and Spaniards.

What, too, of Machiavelli's doctrine that it is sometimes wise for a prince to break his word and to violate treaties? It is usually said that this teaching originated with Machiavelli. If so, it would be very surprising, for the vast majority of so-called original inventions during the Italian Renaissance are now known to have been borrowed from classical texts. The Florentines valued wisdom as Edwardian English gentlemen valued port—the older the better.

In 1504 Machiavelli wrote a play, which has been lost, called *Masks*. It was in imitation of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the subject of which is the Sophists, those men who claimed to teach "virtue" in a special sense, namely, efficiency in the conduct of life. The Sophists emphasized material success and the ability to argue from any point of view, irrespective of its truth. At worst, they encouraged a cynical disbelief in all moral restraints on the pursuit of selfish, personal ambition. Florentines during their golden age had paid little attention to the Sophists, preferring Plato, who accorded so well with Christianity and an aesthetic approach to life; but after the collapse in 1494 it would have been natural for a man like Machiavelli to dig out other, harder-headed philosophers.

The source for his doctrine of political unscrupulousness may well have been the Sophists as presented in Aristo-

phanes' play. The following sentence from one of Machiavelli's letters in 1521 is close to many lines in *The Clouds*: "For that small matter of lies," writes Machiavelli, "I am a doctor and hold my degrees. Life has taught me to confound false and true, till no man knows either." In *The Prince* this personal confession becomes a general rule: "One must know how to color one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver."

How was it that an undisputably civilized man like Machiavelli could advise a ruler to be cruel and deceitful and to strike terror? The answer lies in the last chapter of *The Prince*, entitled "Exhortation to liberate Italy from the barbarians." Often neglected, it is, in fact, the most deeply felt chapter of all and gives meaning to the rest. "See how Italy," Machiavelli writes, "beseeches God to send someone to save her from those barbarous cruelties and outrages"—he means the outrages perpetrated by foreign troops in Italy, a land, he goes on, that is "leaderless, lawless, crushed, despoiled, torn, overrun; she has had to endure every kind of desolation."

Machiavelli is a patriot writing in mental torment. He seldom mentions the deity, but in this chapter the name God occurs six times on one page, as an endorsement for this new kind of ruler. Machiavelli really believes that his deceitful prince will be as much an instrument of God as Moses was, and this for two reasons. First, Italy is an occupied country, and her survival is at stake; and just as moral theologians argued that theft becomes legitimate when committed by a starving man, so Machiavelli implies that deceit, cruelty, and so on become legitimate when they are the only means to national survival.

Secondly, Machiavelli had seen honest means tried and fail. Savonarola had hoped to silence cannon by singing hymns; Machiavelli himself had sent conscripts against the Spaniards. But the Italians had been then—and still were—bantams pitted against heavyweights. They could not win, according to the rules, only with kidney punches. And since they had to win or cease to be themselves—that is, a civilized people as compared with foreign "barbarians"—Machiavelli argues that it is not only right but the will of God that they should use immoral means.

We must remember that *The Prince* is an extreme book that grew out of an extreme situation and that its maxims must be seen against the charred, smoking ruins of devastated Italy. The nearest modern parallel is occupied France. In the early 1940's cultivated men like Camus joined the Resistance, committing themselves to blowing up German posts by night and to other sinister techniques of *maquis* warfare. Like Machiavelli, they saw these as the only way to free their beloved country.

But the most original and neglected aspect of Machiavelli is his method. Before Machiavelli's time, historians had been the slaves of chronology. They started with the Creation, or the founding of their city, and worked forward, year by year, decade by decade, chronicling plague, war, and civil strife. Sometimes they detected a pattern, but even when they succeeded in doing so, the pattern was *sui generis*, not applicable elsewhere. Machiavelli was the first modern historian to pool historical facts from a variety of authors, not necessarily of the same period, and to use these facts to draw general conclusions or to answer pertinent questions.

He applies this method notably in his *Discourses on Livy*, and among the questions he answers are these: "What causes commonly give rise to wars between different powers?" "What kind of reputation or gossip or opinion causes the populace to begin to favor a particular citizen?" "Whether the safeguarding of liberty can be more safely entrusted to the populace or to the upper class; and which has the stronger reason for creating disturbances, the 'have-nots' or the 'haves'?"

Machiavelli does not wholly break free from a cyclical reading of history—the term Renaissance is itself a statement of the conviction that the golden age of Greece and Rome had returned. Nor did he break free from a belief in Fortune—what we would now call force of circumstance—and he calculated that men were at the mercy of Fortune five times out of ten. Nevertheless, he does mark an enormous advance over previous historical thinkers, since he discovered the method whereby man can learn from his past.

Having invented this method, Machiavelli proceeded to apply it imperfectly. He virtually ignored the Middle Ages, probably because medieval chronicles were deficient in those dramatic

human twists, reversals, and paradoxes that were what really interested him. This neglect of the Middle Ages marred his study of how to deal with foreign invaders. Over a period of a thousand years Italy had constantly suffered invasion from the north; the lessons implicit in these instances would have helped Machiavelli to resolve his main problem much better than the more remote happenings he chose to draw from Livy. For example, at the Battle of Legnano, near Milan, in 1176, a league of north Italian cities won a crushing victory over Frederick Barbarossa's crack German knights. The Italians didn't employ duplicity or dramatic acts of terrorism, just courage and a united command.

So much for Machiavelli's teaching and discoveries. It remains to consider his influence. In his own lifetime he was considered a failure. Certainly, no soldier-prince arose to liberate Italy. After his death, however, it was otherwise. In 1552 the Vatican placed Machiavelli's works on the Index of Prohibited Books, because they teach men "to appear good for their own advantage in this world—a doctrine worse than heresy." Despite this ban, Machiavelli's books were widely read and his political teaching became influential. It would probably have confirmed him in his pessimistic view of human nature had he known that most statesmen and thinkers would seize on the elements of repression and guile in his teachings to the exclusion of the civic sense and patriotism he equally taught.

In France several kings studied Machiavelli as a means of increasing their absolutism, though it cannot be said that he did them much good. Henry III and Henry IV were murdered, and in each case on their blood-soaked person was found a well-thumbed copy of *The Prince*. Louis XIII was following Machiavelli when he caused his most powerful subject, the Italian-born adventurer Concini, to be treacherously killed. Richelieu affirmed that France could not be governed without the right of arbitrary arrest and exile, and that in case of danger to the state it may be well that a hundred innocent men should perish. This was *raison d'état*, an exaggerated version of certain elements in *The Prince*, to which Machiavelli might well not have subscribed.

In England Machiavelli had little direct influence. England had never been defeated as Florence had been, and Englishmen could not understand the kind

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of desperate situation that demanded unscrupulous political methods. The political diseases Machiavelli had first studied scientifically were in England called after his name, rather as a physical disease—say Parkinson's—is called not after the man who is suffering from it but after the doctor who discovers it. Machiavelli thus became saddled with a lot of things he had never advocated, including atheism and any treacherous way of killing, generally by poison. Hence Flaminio in Webster's *White Devil*:

O the rare trickes of a Machivillian!
Hee doth not come like a grosse plodding slave
And buffet you to death: no, my quaint knave—
Hee tickles you to death; makes you die laughing,
As if you had swallow'd a pound of saffron.

The eighteenth century, with its strong belief in man's good nature and reason, tended to scoff at Machiavelli. Hume wrote: "There is scarcely any maxim in *The Prince* which subsequent experience has not entirely refuted. The errors of this politician proceed, in a great measure, from his having lived in too early an age of the world to be a good judge of political truth." With Hume's judgment Frederick the Great of Prussia would, in early life, have agreed. As a young man Frederick wrote an *Anti-Machiavel*, in which he stated that a ruler is the first servant of his people. He rejected the idea of breaking treaties, "for one has only to make one deception of this kind, and one loses the confidence of every ruler." But Frederick did follow Machiavelli's advice to rule personally, to act as his own commander in the field, and to despise flatterers.

Later, Frederick began to wonder whether honesty really was the best policy. "One sees oneself continually in danger of being betrayed by one's allies, forsaken by one's friends, brought low by envy and jealousy; and ultimately one finds oneself obliged to choose between the terrible alternative of sacrificing one's people or one's word of honor." In old age, Frederick became a confirmed

Machiavellian, writing in 1775: "Rulers must always be guided by the interests of the state. They are slaves of their resources, the interest of the state is their law, and this law may not be infringed."

During the nineteenth century Germany and Italy both sought to achieve national unity, with the result that writers now began to play up Machiavelli's other side, his call for regeneration. Young Hegel hails the author of *The Prince* for having "grasped with a cool circumspection the necessary idea that Italy should be saved by being combined into one state." He and Fichte go a stage further than Machiavelli: they assert that the conflict between the individual and the state no longer exists, since they consider liberty and law identical. The necessity of evil in political action becomes a superior ethics that has no connection with the morals of an individual. The state swallows up evil.

In Italy Machiavelli's ideal of a regenerated national state was not perverted in this way and proved an important influence on the *risorgimento*. In 1859 the provisional government of Tuscany, on the eve of national independence, published a decree stating that a complete edition of Machiavelli's works would be printed at government expense. It had taken more than three hundred years for "a man to arise to redeem Italy," and in the event the man turned out to be two men, Cavour and Garibaldi. Both, incidentally, were quite unlike the Prince: Cavour, peering through steel-rimmed spectacles, was a moderate statesman of the center, and Garibaldi a blunt, humane, rather quixotic soldier.

Bismarck was a close student of Machiavelli, but Marx and Engels did not pay much attention to him, and the Florentine's books have never exerted great influence in Russia. In contemporary history Machiavelli's main impact has been on Benito Mussolini. In 1924 Mussolini wrote a thesis on *The Prince*, which he described as the statesman's essential vade mecum. The Fascist leader deliberately set himself to implement Petrarch's call quoted on the last

page of *The Prince*:

*Che l'antico valore
Nell'italici cor non è uncor morto.*

Let Italians, as they did of old,
Prove that their courage has not grown cold.

After a course of muscle building, Mussolini sent the Italian army into Ethiopia to found a new Roman Empire. He joined Hitler's war in 1940, only to find that he had failed to impart to modern Italians the martial qualities of Caesar's legions. The final irony occurred in 1944, when the Nazis were obliged to occupy northern Italy as the only means of stopping an Allied walkover, and Italy again experienced the trauma of 1494 and 1512. Mussolini's failures discredit, at least for our generation, Machiavelli's theory that it is possible for one man to effect a heart transplant on a whole people.

What is Machiavelli's significance today? His policy of political duplicity has been found wanting in the past and is probably no longer practicable in an age of democracy and television. His policy of nationalism is also beginning to date as we move into an era of ideological blocs. His insistence on the need for military preparedness has proved of more durable value and is likely to remain one of the West's key beliefs. His technique for solving political problems through a study of the past is practiced to some extent by every self-respecting foreign minister of our time.

Was Machiavelli, finally, an evil man? He made an ethic of patriotism. In normal times that is a poisonous equation, but defensible, I believe, in the context of sixteenth-century Italy. Machiavelli wrote on the edge of an abyss: he could hear the thud of enemy boots, had seen pillage, profanation, and rape by foreign troops. Imaginative as he was, he could sense horrors ahead: the ending of political liberty and of freedom of the press, which put the lights out in Italy for 250 years. He taught that it is civilized man's first duty to save civilization—at all costs. Doubtless he was mistaken. But it is not, I think, the mistake of an evil man.

Where Columbus Was Coming From

Violent Europe (circa 1492) had much art and some science, but was decidedly not a place of gentleness or environmentalism

Timothy Foote

Timothy Foote, a member of SMITHSONIAN's Board of Editors, is the author of a book about the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel and the Northern Renaissance.

There they all are, just as they were in the dingy engravings of our schoolbooks. The welcoming aborigines clad mainly in innocence. The handful of Spaniards with swords, their heads scrunched into pointy helmets. The Great Discoverer himself roasting in dark doublet and hose, usually on his knees in the sand, head raised to heaven. And beside them the shape of a great cross which, in perspective, looms higher than the distant masts of the three delicate little ships offshore.

For Americans it was a familiar enough image, long before all the heavy buildup to the 500th anniversary set in. Columbus, we knew, never put foot or keel on the continent of North America. He claimed what he called "the Indies" not for any collection of future Protestants from Northern Europe but for Catholic Spain in the 15th century. But we were happy to see the man as a hero and the moment on the beach in 1492 as the start of something that eventually produced the best hope yet for liberty and self-government.

The landing led to much else, of course. A recent cartoon, for instance, shows passengers on an antique vessel admiring a vast and rolling landscape. "I came here seeking religious freedom," one says, "but now I think maybe I'll go into real estate." Just lately the landing has also stirred liberal doses of quincennial surprise and outrage both at Col-

umbus (he was, it appears, a boastful slave trader with little concern for the environment) and at the cruel exploitation following his arrival, as Spanish adventurers claimed the land and enslaved many of its people.

Even in the long context of history, some shock is in order. If we are surprised, though, it may be because, apart from a Borgia orgy or two, we tend to think of the period that launched Columbus to the New World as a golden age. Bold thrusts across uncharted seas. Forays back in time to revive the lost learning of Rome and Greece. And that sunburst of artistic genius never since equaled. In *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Sex (But Were Afraid To Ask)*, Woody Allen urges a girl to hurry up and make love because "before you know it, the Renaissance will be here and we'll all be painting."

Showtime for humanism; in short, the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of Western science; the dazzling moment when modern man was born.

Modern man was a long way off, though, and human nature, then as now, was notoriously unreliable. Despite all the splendid expenditure of intellectual energy and egg tempera, Western Europe from 1450 to 1506, roughly Columbus' lifetime, was a time breathtakingly different from ours. Among other things, and this we tend to forget, it was a time when men believed so deeply that the body is but a sleeve of flesh containing an immortal soul, that in good faith they could see other men tortured to save their souls. It was a time so precarious that any rise in population was taken as a sign of prosperity. It was also a time much given to terror, war, pestilence, famine, slavery

and religious persecution, most emphatically *not* one to encourage gentleness or ecological concern.

During Columbus' lifetime, his eventual sponsors, Ferdinand and Isabella, united the kingdoms of Aragon (his) and Castile (hers), and with startling religious and secular ferocity turned Spain, with a population of under ten million, into a nation. The great event of the year 1492 was not Columbus' sailing but their victory in Granada, bringing back to Spain the last portion of Spanish soil in Moorish hands. That same year the Spanish Inquisition issued an ultimatum to all Spanish Jews: convert to Christianity or quit the country in four months. A major exodus to North Africa occurred in August 1492, the very month when the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria* hoisted sail and headed west into the stream of history.

The long boot of Italy, where the Renaissance was born, consisted of five principal parts: the kingdom of Naples, the republic of Florence (richly dominated by the Medicis), the dukedom of Milan, the Papal States, which waxed and waned according to churchly ambition, and Venice. Only Venice was a great power, a sprawling city-state that stretched for miles westward and north from the Adriatic. The parts of Italy were constantly fighting with one another, and later being fought over by Spain and France in combinations and alliances that shifted, sometimes from month to month, making carnage fairly constant. "And all this time," Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt wrote of the end of the 15th century and after, "the monarchs of the West year by year became more and more accustomed to a colossal

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political card game in which the stakes were this or that province of Italy."

Other Italian cities, nominally republics, had given themselves into the hands of despots, benevolent and otherwise, to insure a defense against roving bands of soldiers, and to maintain some kind of order within their gates. Venice alone remained a real republic, run by an austere and farsighted oligarchy, with overseas possessions like the island of Cyprus. The city served as a trading center for the Mediterranean world, as far as the Black Sea, and her fleet was a bulwark against the encroaching Ottoman Turks. Venice was renowned for her courtesans. She had a retirement fund and a pension system for domestic servants. She created the world's most skilled diplomatic corps. Her espionage service, like that of Israel today, was the envy of the world. "It can find out what the fish are doing and also about the fleet which Spain is preparing in her ports," one sultan wrote an agent in Seville.

In 1453, when Columbus was not yet 2 years old, the armies of the Ottoman sultan, Muhammad II, sent a shudder through Venice and all Christendom by taking Constantinople, center of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Byzantine Empire. In those days, if a city resisted, it was official policy, often not followed, to kill the men and sell the women and children into slavery. They killed Emperor Constantine in battle and converted the basilica of Santa Sophia into a mosque. Two years later they took Athens and converted the Acropolis into a mosque. The threat from Islam did not end until 1683, outside the gates of Vienna.

Like the city-states of Italy, the courts of 15th-century Europe, famous for splendor and squalor, were more medieval than modern. Think of nobles and ladies arrayed in gorgeous, particolored costumes that trailed in the mud, or swept among the rushes on the floor of the great hall where bones and leavings were gnawed by dogs. Baths were rare by modern standards, perfume prevalent. You brought your own knife to table, used it to cut off what you would eat, which was deposited on a slab of hardtack bread, known as a trencher. Whence the expression "a good trencherman." Basically you ate with your hands. (Even in the 16th century people ate with their hands. The great essayist Michel de Montaigne noted glumly that in his haste at meals he sometimes bit his fingers.)

There were new codes of manners (don't scratch yourself or pick your teeth at table) and how-to books (how to give a joust). Melees—mock war between mounted knights—caused so many injuries that the practice would soon be phased out. War never went out of style, but it was changing with the advent of guns and explosives. Meanwhile, one measure of how wide a road had to be was the length of a knight's lance if he rode with it sideways across his saddle.

Kingdoms were becoming nation-states or absolute monarchies, enlisting or extorting financial help from rich cities and merchants, raising forces to make war on rival countries and also to strengthen the crown by putting down brigandage and local disorders. The cumulative effect of violence on the common people, who suffered most from war, can hardly be imagined. Much of the fighting was done by groups of undisciplined men who fought for hire or for booty. In Italy they were led by *condottieri*, freelance commanders who also were pretty much a law unto themselves. One of the most feared, Bartolomeo Colleoni, still throws a chill into tourists who run across his grim likeness, a huge equestrian statue by Verrocchio that stands in a piazza in Venice.

If passing troops did not rape and burn and pillage, they lived off the land, stripping it so thoroughly that military commanders understood an army could never retreat along the same path it had advanced over. People huddled together, praying to be passed by, or ran for the nearest walled town. As guns and explosives were perfected, even walled towns were no guarantee of safety. And when the fighting eased off, bands of ex-soldiers roamed the countryside, robbing and killing, sometimes taking possession of whole towns.

Even so, it was a time of trade and pilgrimages to holy sites with saints' relics, and if a careful count could show that some saints must have had two heads and four arms, few of the faithful complained. In peace or war you tried not to travel except in a large group, and it was unwise to talk too openly about what route you planned to take. Even in the city no one went out at night. At dark all doors were locked and double-barred. Tallow candles cost a lot and smelled, so people slept from dark till dawn. City gates were locked at nightfall. If a tired traveler arrived a minute or so too late, he was out of luck—and in danger—until

morning, unless he could find a spot in one of the inns that grew up outside the city walls.

Violence and the threat of violence bred terror. Punishments were terrible, yet people eagerly flocked to see them. Few ages, except our own—and we screen it through the medium of film—had more morbid fascination with torment, killing and death, or more art and action to satisfy it. A patron saint of those who suffered from the Black Death (SMITHSONIAN, February 1990), which had killed off a third of Europe's population the century before, was the martyred Sebastian, painted again and again and again as a fleshly pincushion shot full of arrows. Skeleton-filled woodcuts were plentiful, variously depicting the Triumph of Death, the Dance of Death or the Art of Dying.

If executioners wanted to be especially humane, they strangled a man before hanging or burning him. Such leniency did not always please the crowd. Records show that spectators would sometimes buy a thief who was to be quickly executed and arrange to see him being drawn and quartered instead. Flaying and burial alive, head down, were also used. Cruelty permeated many pastimes. Bear baiting, dog fighting and the worrying of badgers were common. In the Low Countries, crowds at fairs enjoyed watching blind men with clubs being penned up in a small enclosure and coerced into trying to beat each other's brains out.

Religion and art, culture and learning, all profoundly intermingled, produced profoundly shocking and contrary effects. Pure, radiant faith and raw repression, philosophy and savage propaganda, incipient science and ingrained superstition. We know best and love most the art of architecture: timeless, stately piety (and geometric glimpses of Tuscan countryside) in the paintings by Piero della Francesca, who died in 1492, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* and, as the 1500s dawned, the Michelangelo ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Painters were more and more visibly enthralled by the visual beauty of the world, and even by ravishing pagan subjects (overlaid, of course, with Christian symbolism), like Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*.

Whatever a painting's subject, most were painted "for the Greater Glory of God." These days, however, we rarely tend to connect the religious spirit that infuses such paintings with the torment-

ing faith that helped produce figures like Torquemada, Queen Isabella's state inquisitor, or the auto-da-fé, an institution with which he tortured Spain. But they had a common source. If Christians spilled one another's blood copiously over the form of religion in the 15th century and after, it was partly because they never doubted that the world was a divine creation.

The civil war in the human heart, between the claims of this world and the next, ran right through the Renaissance. Worldliness among merchants and bankers, who gloried in activity and threw off the medieval notion that being rich was a spiritual liability, paid for civic improvements and history's greatest art boom. Worldliness in thought and inquiry led to humanism, which ultimately would threaten both the simple faith that allowed people to bear up under adversity, and the secular power of the Roman church. Worldliness and corruption among the leaders of that church all but destroyed it. (The term "nepotism" is linked to the proclivity that officially celibate popes had for favoring their "nephews"—sometimes bastard sons—for high office.) Throughout, unworlly purity within the church tried to reform it and failed, though thousands of the selfless religious took care of lepers and ran the hospitals, almshouses and orphanages.

SAVONAROLA'S "BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES"

Some of the early apostles of purity were gentle, like Saint Francis. Some were savage. In 1494, after the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent and the expulsion of his son Piero, the preacher-priest Savonarola took control of the city of Florence. He expanded the city's constitution to give more people the right to vote, but his main target was worldly excess, not only in the Florentine citizenry but in the papacy. He banned books and challenged the authority of the pope. At his fiery preachments, people gave up swearing for a time, and gaming. At huge public gatherings to expunge lechery and luxury, known as "bonfires of the vanities," they outdid one another in zeal, tossing into the flames rich clothes, perfumes, jewelry, wigs, toiletries, veils, dice, playing cards, musical instruments and paintings of beautiful women. After four years of this, history's most noto-

rious pope, Alexander VI, a Borgia who had his murderous son Cesare made a cardinal at age 17, accused Savonarola of heresy and had him hanged from, and burned on, a gibbet placed on a special causeway built out into the city's main square.

We think of the Western world's first movable type and the Gutenberg Bible in 1455, and concentrate on the upheaval news of the general spread of learning through printed books—some 20 million volumes in Europe by the time Columbus sailed in 1492. Among those titles, though, was a best-seller called *The Hammer of Witches*. Written by a pair of Dominican scholars and made public in 1486, with a little help from a papal bull against the heresy of witchcraft it helped set off two centuries of torturing, hanging, burning and drowning. The book describes how witches consort with the Devil and how they can be identified. It helpfully provided the formula for preparing the magic salve they rubbed on themselves so they could fly: first, feed stolen, consecrated wafers to toads; then burn the toads and mix with powder from the bones of hanged men and the blood of newborn infants.

Movable type was also used to mass-produce indulgences for remission of the penalties of sin, which a succession of popes sold pretty much like war bonds to finance ambitious projects. This was one of many outrages about to split the Christian world from within, setting off the Reformation and a train of religious wars that devastated much of Europe off and on for more than a hundred years. By 1506, the year Columbus died in Spain, bitter and forgotten, a man named John Tetzel, who had acquired a papal indulgence concession in Germany, was auctioning indulgences at mass meetings to the highest bidder, the very thing that was soon to outrage young Martin Luther.

Advances in the fields of engineering, design and science proceeded by fits and starts. More universities were founded. Arabic numerals began replacing Roman numerals in the pagination of books. Arabic and Greek learning in the fields of geometry, algebra, astronomy, geography and medicine were introduced into study. But people's notions of the Universe and of the human body remained hopelessly inaccurate. Even with the new type, word often didn't get around.

For example, the designs of Leonardo, the man who, more than any other, today

symbolizes the artistic genius and omnivorous curiosity of Renaissance humanism. We know now about his practical "inventions": all those marvelous things—drawn with almost machine-shop detail—like chain links, the spinning wheel, the rope ladder, the parachute. But Leonardo kept his designs to himself, except for warlike devices, including some exploding cannonballs that he offered to Lodovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, to get a job as Sforza's military engineer. The duke did not use them. And the rest of the more than 100 devices that prefigure the modern world of machinery were not rediscovered for centuries.

MILLERS WERE HIGHLY SUSPECT

Cookstoves had just been invented. Three years before Columbus set out on his third voyage, in 1498, the first drydock was built in England. But machinery was rare in Renaissance Europe, and most of it dated back to the Middle Ages or before. The big piece of machinery that a country person was most likely to see in his lifetime was a water mill, a great, clanking thing whose mysteries were known only to the miller. For centuries millers were hated characters (more even than lawyers today) because farmers suspected they took more than a proper share of the grain brought to the mill for grinding. It was widely thought that returned flour was bulked out with a little fine sand. There were strict punishments. Cheating was hard to prove, though, so people went on feeling cheated. The comic cuckolding of the miller in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was the equivalent of a modern anti-lawyer joke.

High school history teachers inspiringly tell us that in the inexorable march of progress, Nicolaus Copernicus, born during Columbus' lifetime, made the world understand that Earth orbited the Sun. (This theory had been explored by Arab astronomers two centuries before, but Western scholars were unaware.) Copernicus' reason was that if the Sun moved around Earth, the eccentric movements of planets and more distant stars didn't make mathematical sense.

Copernicus was largely right. But his outrageous claim made little impression. If Earth revolved around the Sun, scoffers pointed out, it would have to be spinning pretty fast. Wouldn't birds be left be-

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hind? If you dropped a stone from a tower, wouldn't it hit the ground yards away? For more than a century, even learned folk went on believing that the Sun and the planets moved around Earth on powered belts called spheres, which resembled the rings of Saturn and were driven by the outermost sphere, known as the prime mover.

Copernicus could not prove his theory because there was no telescope for accurate study of celestial bodies. Moreover, the church set about making it heresy to say that Earth orbited the Sun. It wasn't until 1610 that Galileo perfected a telescope good enough to see the moons of Jupiter and to observe that Venus had phases like our moon, which meant that it circled the Sun, virtually proving Copernicus right. By then, however, the struggle between science and religion had hardened enough so that Galileo was forced to recant his findings.

Sometimes a great leap forward produced by the revival of ancient science was actively pursued, but with limited results, not because of church disapproval, but because the new humanist scholars had a tendency to regard any scientific observations by the ancients as sacrosanct. Example: the rediscovery of medical writings by Hippocrates, and especially by the great second-century anatomist Galen, which encouraged further study and practice.

The church had been against the dismemberment of bodies ever since the Crusades, when dying crusaders sometimes got friends to promise to boil them down or cut them up, the better to transport them home. But after his rediscovery, Galen was recognized as the father of the science of anatomy, and approvals were given, especially to celebrated physicians and painters, to dissect human cadavers.

The work was mostly done in winter and in haste (there being no refrigeration), and performed on the bodies of convicted thieves and murderers who, presumably, had less chance at bodily resurrection than virtuous folk. At such events, the exalted physician did no cutting. He stood on a high pulpit reading from Galen, while below, the poor barber-surgeon did his best to prove that the cadaver matched Galen's description. Pictures of these scenes show crowds of students and plain rubbernecks pressing in around the corpse. Also, sometimes, a small dog waiting for any choice bits that may come his way.

Galen had used Barbary apes in his experiments, and there were some dramatic anatomical discrepancies. But since Galen could not be wrong, these were usually blamed on the ineptitude of the surgeon. Even Andreas Vesalius, one of the great anatomists of all time, born just eight years after the death of Columbus, deferred to Galen's errors. Yet he finally incurred the wrath of professors at the University of Paris because many of his findings, based on dozens of personal dissections of human bodies, disagreed with Galen's. What physicians could quote from Galen's text was, in a sense, their meal ticket in the profession; they did not want it jeopardized by anything so mere as accuracy.

A great hindrance to medicine was ignorance of physiology. Galen never understood that the heart is a muscle; he thought blood was moved back and forth, like the tide, impelled by some mysterious heavenly spirit. It was not until the 17th century that William Harvey unlocked the secrets of the circulatory system. In Columbus' time and for several hundred years after, doctors thought health and temperament were determined by the mix of the famous four humors (i.e., fluids) of the body: blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile). The ideal was balance. Whatever mix you received from the gene pool determined your disposition, then known as your "complexion." A choleric man was likely to be yellow-faced, lean, proud, ambitious, shrewd and quick to anger. A sanguine man, having much blood, was likely to be cheerful and optimistic. Doctors mostly sought to change a patient's body-fluid balance, the old standbys being puking, purging and bleeding.

Clearly the early Renaissance was no time to be sick. Public faith in the medical profession had fallen because doctors had proved so helpless during the plague years, earnestly suggesting such cures as inhaling the smell of billy goats. Besides, even after its worst period of killing, the plague did not go away either, and there was still no cure and almost no prevention. As late as 1484, when the 33-year-old Columbus had just asked for backing from King John II of Portugal and been rebuffed, the plague killed 50,000 people in Milan.

Diagnosis was like blindman's buff. Indiana University professor Ann Carmichael, author of *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* and doctor of

medicine turned medical historian, has been studying computerized medical and death records from 100,000 cases recorded in Florence and Milan circa 1450 and after. She notes that people did not really expect cures. Doctors were simply expected to provide some care and easing of pain.

Except for the bleeding and puking, Carmichael feels, much of the care was good. Doctors kept patients quiet, saw that wounds were cleaned and bandaged, and used effective herbs and salves, many of them left over from the medically underrated Middle Ages. Though Renaissance barber-surgeons were looked down upon by lordly physicians who spouted mock science and took high fees, they could set bones and cut off legs. (To ease the pain, the patient was given things like mandrake root, henbane or opium in wine. As late as the 18th century, however, it sometimes took five people to extract a tooth—four to hold down and one to pull.) Surgery and bone setting were expensive. If you fractured a wrist or dislocated a shoulder and hadn't the means, chances were you'd get an enduring bone infection or be left to heal gradually—more or less crooked and crippled for the rest of your life.

There were no antibiotics. Pus was taken as a sign of healing (whence, until late in the 19th century, the term "laudable pus"). Babies died in the thousands of gastrointestinal diseases. Even today, Carmichael notes, in the Third World, "diarrhea can turn a baby into a prune in less than four days." In the 15th century three out of five children failed to reach age 5; fully half did not make it to age 20.

The plague had taught people some things. As a great maritime power, Venice established the quarantining of sailors off arriving ships, initially for a period of 30 days. To cut down possible sources of contagion when plague threatened, many cities banned the resale of old clothes (which were burned instead). Communal public baths were banned, too.

Florence had a city ordinance forbidding citizens to throw dead cats into the river Arno. But there, as elsewhere, people were regularly buried in city churchyards that leached into nearby streams. In some places garbage was burned or collected to be tossed over the city walls. (In Paris as late as 1512, the pile outside the walls was so high that the king had it removed because he thought invaders

might climb up the garbage and scale the city's defenses.) In Italian cities piazzas were kept clean, but in the backstreets, refuse often simply lay around to be churned to a kind of black muck after rains. Farm animals living inside the cities added to the mess, but when cities, with a view to cleanliness, banned their presence inside the walls, things got worse. It turned out that city pigs had been performing a major cleanup service.

Occasionally the revival of ancient learning was swiftly absorbed; extended and applied to a real problem, changing Man's conception of the world. By far the happiest example, especially for Columbus' quincennial year, lay in the field of sailing, after Portugal's Henry the Navigator set up a center for sharing knowledge. One notable event was the recovery of *Geography*, a treatise written by Claudius Ptolemy in the second century A.D. and lost to Western Europe for hundreds of years.

In the 1400s, a European man in the street may possibly have figured the world was flat. But church scholars, as well as other learned men, had long regarded it as a globe. Nevertheless, they thought that its lower half was uninhabitable except for weird creatures, such as giants with a single huge foot. Around the Equator lay a "torrid zone," where the sea was boiling hot. For purposes of spiritual orientation, on most "world maps" of the time, Jerusalem was presented as the center of the world. On others, more realistic in intent, only the Mediterranean, Europe, the Middle East and the top part of the bulge of Africa had any detail. The Indian Ocean was a vague inland sea. The nether regions of the globe were as firmly closed as outer space to the questing imagination.

Ptolemy's *Geography*, printed up in book form in the late 1470s, helped change all that because it used information garnered from longtime Islamic experience, as well as from the far-flung records of the Roman Empire and the conquests of Alexander the Great. Ptolemy's maps projected the surface of the globe onto a flat surface, pretty much as we do today, and showed some detail about the East African coast and the Indian Ocean. Perhaps more important, Ptolemy had divided the complete circle of the globe into 360 degree units of longitude, estimating each degree as about 57 miles long at the Equator, considerably less than the 69 miles we now know to be the case.

"Maps," as J. R. Hale puts it, "are diagrams of the possible." To sail anywhere, risking your life, you must at least imagine where you are going. With Ptolemy's *Geography*, and others, in hand, Portuguese sailors who had been following the coast of Africa farther and farther south could imagine sailing around the tip of Africa to India and the Spice Islands, instead of paying Arab middlemen a whopping price for dear items like pepper and cloves. In 1487 Portuguese captain Vasco da Gama did just that, dramatically expanding Europe's vision of the world.

COLUMBUS COOKED HIS FIGURES

Then came Columbus. Using Ptolemy's distances, in addition to the observations of another scholar, Pierre d'Ailly, who reasoned that between Spain and the Indies there were only 135 degrees of open sea, Columbus cooked his figures to reduce the number of sea or land miles in each degree of longitude. By his reckoning, Japan lay only 2,760 miles from Spain, or roughly a quarter of what it is. Wild for financial backing, he once noted, "The end of Spain and the beginning of India are not far apart . . . and it is known that this sea is navigable in a few days' time with favoring wind." History has much derided the Spanish experts who were leary of Columbus' estimates. They were right. But Ferdinand and Isabella were right to back him anyway. By risking the equivalent of \$7,200 and the use of two ships (he had to charter the third) they got title to much of the New World.

Within 30 years, trading ships were shuttling back and forth where, shortly before, hardly a man had dreamed of going. The Western Hemisphere was being explored, the Pacific had been crossed and, with Magellan's voyage of 1519 (SMITHSONIAN, April 1991), Europeans had made it around the world. All this eventually meant a flood of silver, gold, land and sugarcane profits, as Spain became the most powerful country in Europe, with a far-flung, enduring empire. It also brought an appalling expansion of slavery.

There was little in Columbus' background to make him feel glum about any of the above. He was very much a man of his time in his courage and in his faith that God wanted all this to happen, as

well as in his passion for trade and his desire to exploit the physical world. His Europe was a smallish peninsula sticking out from the landmass of Asia, with much seacoast north and south reachable from inland, many harbors for shipping and rivers for waterpower and trade. Europe's way to the gold and spices of the East had been slow and expensive, since it was controlled by the Arab world and lay through the Middle East, until navigators solved the problem. As historian Fernand Braudel notes, 15th-century Europe needed to expand into the New World.

Columbus needed to make his trip pay. When it turned out there wasn't much gold where he landed, he naturally turned to the enslavement of the poor people of the Indies. Hadn't Aristotle, a fount of Renaissance learning and the father of scientific classification, decreed that mankind is divided into two classes, the few (and smart) destined to be masters, the many to be properly classified as slaves?

Slavery existed everywhere—including the New World (though no one knew that yet) and Africa. The Turkish sultan's whole army and many of his administrators were his personal slaves. William Phillips, author of the recent study *Slavery from Roman Times*, draws on data showing that by 1400, Arab traders working West Africa had brought back four million slaves for the Middle East alone.

The cruelty and expansion of slavery in the New World seems more reprehensible, however, precisely because in 15th-century Europe slavery was relatively rare and getting rarer. This was partly because Christianity taught that manumission of slaves was pleasing to God, partly because peasants were more efficient than slaves in handling European agriculture.

MANY FAMILIES HAD A SLAVE OR TWO

Christians were not allowed to enslave other Christians, but many city families in 15th-century Europe had a domestic slave or two. Mostly young, white and female, they lived with the family and found it relatively easy to marry or work their way to freedom. They were acquired as pagans, usually in Eastern Europe or Circassia, and baptized to save their souls only after they were in ser-

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vice. (As early as the 12th century, the word for "slave" in Italian, German, Spanish, French and English derived from the word "Slav.")

From the start, there was anguished complaint by a few Spaniards about Spanish mistreatment of native people in New Spain—and about slavery. By 1542, with slaves being brought in from Africa, the church and the Spanish government had banned enslavement of "Indians" in the New World, but for some groups in the Caribbean it was too late. They were all but extinct.

It is the fresh awareness of such things (often overlooked in previous, upbeat histories of the period), as well as the new environmental passion, that have led to condemnations of Columbus and what followed him. The European "discovery" of the New World, as one outraged chronicler recently put it, defiled the Garden of Eden, corrupted paradise, and brought little with it but "deforestation, extermination, cruelty, destruction and despoliation."

Such a view may be forgiven, perhaps, as distorted overstatement in a virtuous cause. It is hardly necessary, though, to start a list of hard-won and useful things that eventually resulted from Europeanized thought and action after the Old World arrived in the New: trial by jury, freedom of religion, medicine to cure or

prevent almost all manner of plagues, painless dental drills, attempts at universal education, the Bill of Rights and rights for women, the seeds of parliamentary democracy, hope at last for a united United Nations, not to mention the whole rich complexity of Hispanic America today.

The real foolishness of such judgments lies in the utopian delusion that there ever was a paradise here, and a hopelessly skewed perspective that seems to want us to believe that the globe has been going downhill since the Paleolithic period when, granted, few human beings were defiling it. The New World in 1492 (SMITHSONIAN, November 1991) was sparsely populated and largely underdeveloped. But war and slavery existed. So did slashing and burning for agriculture, and imperial exploitation. And those who ceremonially split a virgin's heart each day to please their deity, or sacrificed babies for rainfall (the more tears, the more rainfall, it was thought) can hardly be seen as denizens of a Garden of Eden, free of violence and greed, wholeheartedly dedicated to benevolence and ecological harmony.

If the biblical story of the Garden of Eden has any application here, in fact, it is only as a figurative reminder that humans are not angels. They seem, instead, creatures doomed by providence

or evolution to a prolonged, perhaps endless, struggle with greed, lust, violence and ignorance. Anyone who doubts it has only to glance at the daily papers.

Medieval Europeans knew this, but blamed Man's sinfulness for much that happens in the world, figuring that the issue mostly would be settled between the Devil (in those days he was "as real as a sore tooth") and the Deity. From the Renaissance on, men felt more prideful about mankind. This remarkable creation, cruel and greedy, yet capable of selflessness and heroism, located somewhere between the beasts and the angels in the great chain of being, had one unique and distinguishing skill and virtue—the compulsion and the capacity to learn and experiment—and so might yet prove able to change history for the better.

Since Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* we've understood that it will be a slow business at best, a matter of trial and error. Little use in blaming this race or that government. In any Garden of Eden drama, Man will always be the serpent—and Adam and Eve as well. James Madison said it all at the Constitutional Convention: "If men were angels no government would be necessary." Columbus, and the land that launched him, simply helped another act begin.

Luther: Giant of His Time and Ours

Half a millennium after his birth, the first Protestant is still a towering force

It was a back-room deal, little different from many others struck at the time, but it triggered an upheaval that altered irrevocably the history of the Western world. Albrecht of Brandenburg, a German nobleman who had previously acquired a dispensation from the Vatican to become a priest while underage and to head two dioceses at the same time, wanted yet another favor from the Pope: the powerful archbishop's chair in Mainz. Pope Leo X, a profligate spender who needed money to build St. Peter's Basilica, granted the appointment—for 24,000 gold pieces, roughly equal to the annual imperial revenues in Germany. It was worth it. Besides being a rich source of income, the Mainz post brought Albrecht a vote for the next Holy Roman Emperor, which could be sold to the highest bidder.

In return, Albrecht agreed to initiate the sale of indulgences in Mainz. Granted for good works, indulgences were papally controlled dispensations drawn from an eternal "treasury of merits" built up by Christ and the saints; the church taught that they would help pay the debt of "temporal punishment" due in purgatory for sins committed by either the penitent or any deceased person. The Pope received half the proceeds of the Mainz indulgence sale, while the other half went to repay the bankers who had lent the new archbishop gold.

Enter Martin Luther, a 33-year-old priest and professor at Wittenberg University. Disgusted not only with the traffic in indulgences but with its doctrinal underpinnings, he forcefully protested to Albrecht—never expecting that his action would provoke a sweeping uprising against a corrupt church. Luther's chal-

lenge culminated in the Protestant Reformation and the rending of Western Christendom, and made him a towering figure in European history. In this 500th anniversary year of his birth (Nov. 10, 1483), the rebel of Wittenberg remains the subject of persistent study. It is said that more books have been written about him than anyone else in history, save his own master, Jesus Christ. The renaissance in Luther scholarship surrounding this year's anniversary serves as a reminder that his impact on modern life is profound, even for those who know little about the doctrinal feuds that brought him unsought fame. From the distance of half a millennium, the man who, as Historian Hans Hillerbrand of Southern Methodist University in Dallas says, brought Christianity from lofty theological dogma to a clearer and more personal belief is still able to stimulate more heated debate than all but a handful of historical figures.

Indeed, as the reformer who fractured Christianity, Luther has latterly become a key to reuniting it. With the approval of the Vatican, and with Americans taking the lead, Roman Catholic theologians are working with Lutherans and other Protestants to sift through the 16th century disputes and see whether the Protestant-Catholic split can some day be overcome. In a remarkable turnabout, Catholic scholars today express growing appreciation of Luther as a "father in the faith" and are willing to play down his excesses. According to a growing consensus, the great division need never have happened at all.

Beyond his importance as a religious leader, Luther had a profound effect on Western culture. He is, paradoxically, the

last medieval man and the first modern one, a political conservative and a spiritual revolutionary. His impact is most marked, of course, in Germany, where he laid the cultural foundations for what later became a united German nation.

When Luther attacked the indulgence business in 1517, he was not only the most popular teacher at Wittenberg but also vicar provincial in charge of eleven houses of the Hermits of St. Augustine. He was brilliant, tireless and a judicious administrator, though given to bouts of spiritual depression. To make his point on indulgences, Luther dashed off 95 theses condemning the system ("They preach human folly who pretend that as soon as money in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs") and sent them to Archbishop Albrecht and a number of theologians.*

The response was harsh: the Pope eventually rejected Luther's protest and demanded capitulation. It was then that Luther began asking questions about other aspects of the church, including the papacy itself. In 1520 he charged in an open letter to the Pope, "The Roman Church, once the holiest of all, has become the most licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of brothels, the kingdom of sin, death and hell." Leo called Luther "the wild boar which has invaded the Lord's vineyard."

The following year Luther was summoned to recant his writings before the Diet of Worms, a council of princes

*Despite colorful legend, it is not certain he ever nailed them to the door of the Castle Church.

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convened by the young Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. In his closing defense, Luther proclaimed defiantly: "Unless I am convinced by testimony from Holy Scriptures and clear proofs based on reason—because, since it is notorious that they have erred and contradicted themselves, I cannot believe either the Pope or the council alone—I am bound by conscience and the Word of God. Therefore I can and will recant nothing, because to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor salutary. So help me God." (Experts today think that he did not actually speak the famous words, "Here I stand. I can do no other.")

This was hardly the cry of a skeptic, but it was ample grounds for the Emperor to put Luther under sentence of death as a heretic. Instead of being executed, Luther lived for another 25 years, became a major author and composer of hymns, father of a bustling household and a secular figure who opposed rebellion—in all, a commanding force in European affairs. In the years beyond, the abiding split in Western Christendom developed, including a large component of specifically "Lutheran" churches that today have 69 million adherents in 85 nations.

The enormous presence of the Wittenberg rebel, the sheer force of his personality, still broods over all Christendom, not just Lutheranism. Although Luther declared that the Roman Pontiffs were the "Antichrist," today's Pope, in an anniversary tip of the zucchetto, mildly speaks of Luther as "the reformer." Ecumenical-minded Catholic theologians have come to rank Luther in importance with Augustine and Aquinas. "No one who came after Luther could match him," says Father Peter Manns, a Catholic theologian in Mainz. "On the question of truth, Luther is a lifesaver for Christians." While Western Protestants still express embarrassment over Luther's anti-Jewish rantings or his skepticism about political clergy, Communist East Germany has turned him into a secular saint because of his influence on German culture. Party Boss Erich Honecker, head of the regime's *Lutherjahr* committee, is willing to downplay Luther's antirevolutionary ideas, using the giant figure to bolster national pride.

Said West German President Karl Carstens, as he opened one of the hundreds of events commemorating Luther this year: "Luther has become a symbol

of the unity of all Germany. We are all Luther's heirs."

After five centuries, scholars still have difficulty coming to terms with the contradictions of a tempestuous man. He was often inexcusably vicious in his writings (he wrote, for instance, that one princely foe was a "faint-hearted wretch and fearful sissy" who should "do nothing but stand like a eunuch, that is, a harem guard, in a fool's cap with a fly swatter"). Yet he was kindly in person and so generous to the needy that his wife despaired of balancing the household budget. When the plague struck Wittenberg and others fled, he stayed behind to minister to the dying. He was a powerful spiritual author, yet his words on other occasions were so scatological that no Lutheran periodical would print them today. His writing was hardly systematic, and his output runs to more than 100 volumes. On the average, Luther wrote a major tract or treatise every two weeks throughout his life.

The scope of Luther's work has made him the subject of endless reinterpretation. The Enlightenment treated him as the father of free thought, conveniently omitting his belief in a sovereign God who inspired an authoritative Bible. During the era of Otto von Bismarck a century ago, Luther was fashioned into a nationalistic symbol; 70 years later, Nazi propagandists claimed him as one of their own by citing his anti-Jewish polemics.

All scholars agree on Luther's importance for German culture, surpassing even that of Shakespeare on the English-speaking world. Luther's masterpiece was his translation of the New Testament from Greek into German, largely completed in ten weeks while he was in hiding after the Worms confrontation, and of the Old Testament, published in 1534 with the assistance of Hebrew experts. The Luther Bible sold massively in his lifetime and remains today the authorized German Protestant version. Before Luther's Bible was published, there was no standard German, just a profusion of dialects. "It was Luther," said Johann Gottfried von Herder, one of Goethe's mentors, "who has awakened and let loose the giant: the German language."

Only a generation ago, Catholics were trained to consider Luther the arch-heretic. Now no less than the Vatican's specialist on Lutheranism, Monsignor Aloys Klein, says that "Martin Luther's action was beneficial to the Catholic Church."

Like many other Catholics, Klein thinks that if Luther were living today there would be no split. Klein's colleague in the Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Father Pierre Duprey, suggests that with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) Luther "got the council he asked for, but 450 years too late." Vatican II accepted his contention, that in a sense, all believers are priests; while the council left the Roman church's hierarchy intact, it enhanced the role of the laity. More important, the council moved the Bible to the center of Catholic life, urged continual reform and instituted worship in local languages rather than Latin.

One of the key elements in the Reformation was the question of "justification," the role of faith in relation to good works in justifying a sinner in the eyes of God. Actually, Catholicism had never officially taught that salvation could be attained only through pious works, but the popular perception held otherwise. Luther recognized, as University of Chicago Historian Martin Marty explains, that everything "in the system of Catholic teaching seemed aimed toward appeasing God. Luther was led to the idea of God not as an angry judge but as a forgiving father. It is a position that gives the individual a great sense of freedom and security." In effect, says U.S. Historian Roland Bainton, Luther destroyed the implication that men could "bargain with God."

Father George Tavard, a French Catholic expert on Protestantism who teaches in Ohio and has this month published *Justification: An Ecumenical Study* (Paulist; \$7.95), notes that "today many Catholic scholars think Luther was right and the 16th century Catholic polemicists did not understand what he meant. Both Lutherans and Catholics agree that good works by Christian believers are the result of their faith and the working of divine grace in them, not their personal contributions to their own salvation. Christ is the only Savior. One does not save oneself." An international Lutheran-Catholic commission, exploring the basis for possible reunion, made a joint statement along these lines in 1980. Last month a parallel panel in the U.S. issued a significant 21,000-word paper on justification that affirms much of Luther's thinking, though with some careful hedging from the Catholic theologians.

There is doubt, of course, about the degree to which Protestants and Catholics

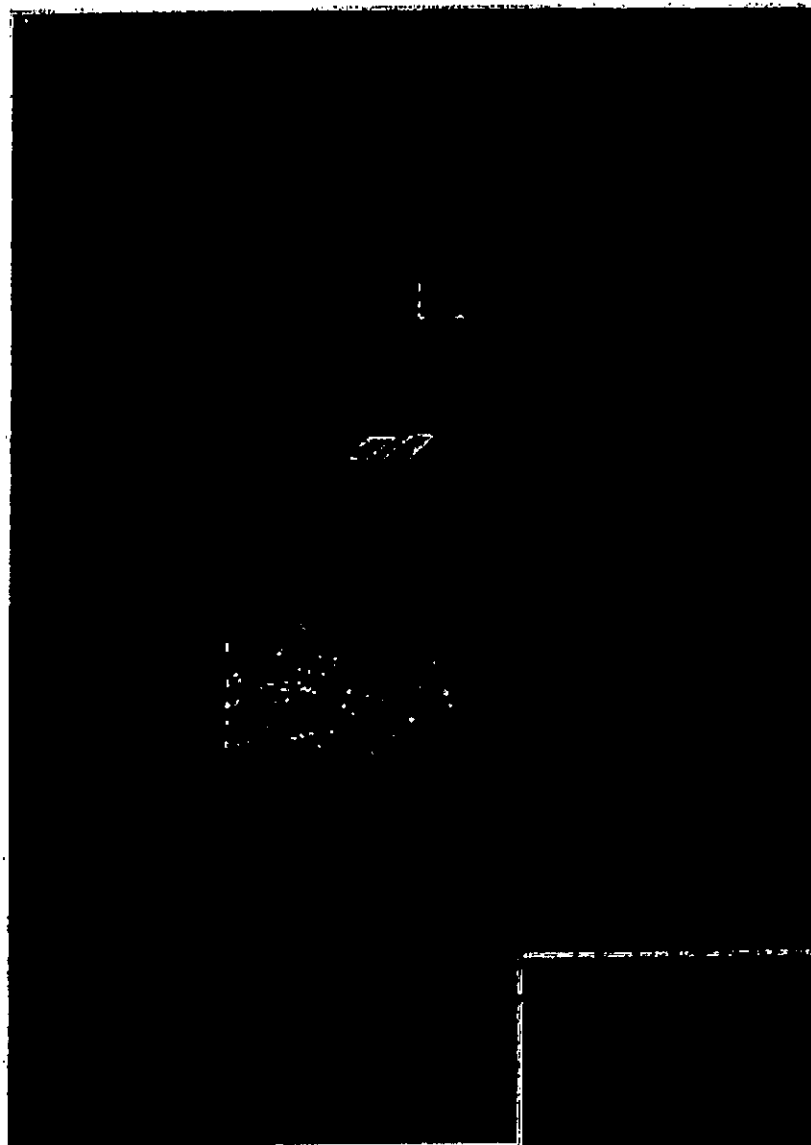
can, in the end, overcome their differences. Catholics may now be permitted to sing Luther's *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* or worship in their native languages, but a wide gulf clearly remains on issues like the status of Protestant ministers and, most crucially, papal authority.

During the futile Protestant-Catholic reunion negotiations in 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg, the issue of priestly celibacy was as big an obstacle as the faith vs. good works controversy. Luther had married a nun, to the disgust of his Catholic contemporaries. From the start, the marriage of clergy was a sharply defined difference between Protestantism and Catholicism, and it remains a key barrier today. By discarding the concept of the moral superiority of celibacy, Luther established sexuality as a gift from God. In general, he was a lover of the simple pleasures, and would have had little patience with the later Puritans. He spoke offhandedly about sex, enjoyed good-natured joshing, beer drinking and food ("If our Lord is permitted to create nice large pike and good Rhine wine, presumably I may be allowed to eat and drink"). For his time, he also had an elevated opinion of women. He cherished his wife and enjoyed fatherhood, siring six children and rearing eleven orphaned nieces and nephews as well.

But if Luther's views on the Catholic Church have come to be accepted even by many Catholics, his anti-Semitic views remain a problem for even his most devoted supporters. Says New York City Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum: "The anniversary will be marred by the haunting specter of Luther's devil theory of the Jews."

Luther assailed the Jews on doctrinal grounds, just as he excoriated "papists" and Turkish "infidels." But his work titled *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543) went so far as to advocate that their synagogues, schools and homes should be destroyed and their prayer books and Talmudic volumes taken away. Jews were to be relieved of their savings and put to work as agricultural laborers or expelled outright.

Fortunately, the Protestant princes ignored such savage recommendations, and the Lutheran Church quickly forgot about them. But the words were there to be gleefully picked up by the Nazis, who removed them from the fold of religious polemics and used them to buttress their 20th century racism. For a good Lu-



The room where Luther translated the New Testament; title page of his Bible

theran, of course, the Bible is the sole authority, not Luther's writings, and the thoroughly Lutheran Scandinavia vigorously opposed Hitler's racist madness. In the anniversary year, all sectors of Lutheranism have apologized for their founder's views.

Whatever the impact of Luther's anti-Jewish tracts, there is no doubt that his political philosophy, which tended to make church people submit to state authority, was crucial in weakening opposition by German Lutherans to the Nazis. Probably no aspect of Luther's teaching

is the subject of more agonizing Protestant scrutiny in West Germany today.

Luther sought to clericalize society and to free people from economic burdens imposed by the church. But he was

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soon forced, if reluctantly, to deliver considerable control of the new Protestant church into the hands of secular rulers who alone could ensure the survival of the Reformation. Luther spoke of "two kingdoms," the spiritual and the secular, and his writings provided strong theological support for authoritarian government and Christian docility.

The Lutheran wing of the Reformation was democratic, but only in terms of the church itself, teaching that a plowman did God's work as much as a priest, encouraging lay leadership and seeking to educate one and all. But it was Calvin, not Luther, who created a theology for the democratic state. A related aspect of Luther's politics, controversial then and now, was his opposition to the bloody Peasants' War of 1525. The insurgents thought they were applying Luther's ideas, but he urged rulers to crush the revolt: "Let whoever can, stab, strike, kill." Support of the rulers was vital for the Reformation, but Luther loathed violent rebellion and anarchy in any case.

Today Luther's law-and-order approach is at odds with the revolutionary romanticism and liberation theology that are popular in some theology schools. In contrast with modern European Protestantism's social gospel, Munich Historian Thomas

Nipperdey says, Luther "would not accept modern attempts to build a utopia and would argue, on the contrary, that we as mortal sinners are incapable of developing a paradise on earth."

Meanwhile, the internal state of the Lutheran Church raises other questions about the lasting power of Luther's vision. Lutheranism in the U.S., with 8.5 million adherents, is stable and healthy. The church is also growing in Third World strongholds like racially torn Namibia, where black Lutherans predominate. But in Lutheranism's historic heartland, the two Germanys and Scandinavia, there are deep problems. In East Germany, Lutherans are under pressure from the Communist regime. In West Germany, the Evangelical Church in Germany (E.K.D.), a church federation that includes some non-Lutherans, is wealthy (annual income: \$3 billion), but membership is shrinking and attendance at Sunday services is feeble indeed. Only 6% of West Germans—or, for that matter, Scandinavians—worship regularly.

What seems to be lacking in the old European churches is the passion for God and his truth that so characterizes Luther. He retains the potential to shake people out of religious complacency. Given Christianity's need, on all sides,

for a good jolt, eminent Historian Heiko Oberman muses, "I wonder if the time of Luther isn't ahead of us."

The boldest assertion about Luther for modern believers is made by Protestants who claim that the reformer did nothing less than enable Christianity to survive. In the Middle Ages, too many Popes and bishops were little more than corrupt, luxury-loving politicians, neglecting the teaching of the love of God and using the fear of God to enhance their power and wealth. George Lindbeck, the Lutheran co-chairman of the international Lutheran-Catholic commission, believes that without Luther "religion would have been much less important during the next 400 to 500 years. And since medieval religion was falling apart, secularization would have marched on, unimpeded."

A provocative thesis, and a debatable one. But with secularization still marching on, almost unimpeded, Protestants and Catholics have much to reflect upon as they scan the five centuries after Luther and the shared future of their still divided churches.

—By Richard N. Osling.
Reported by Roland Flamini and
Wanda Menke-Glückert/Bonn, with
other bureaus.