

# The Hundred Years' War

...

A Case Study in Medieval Military Technology

# Trivia

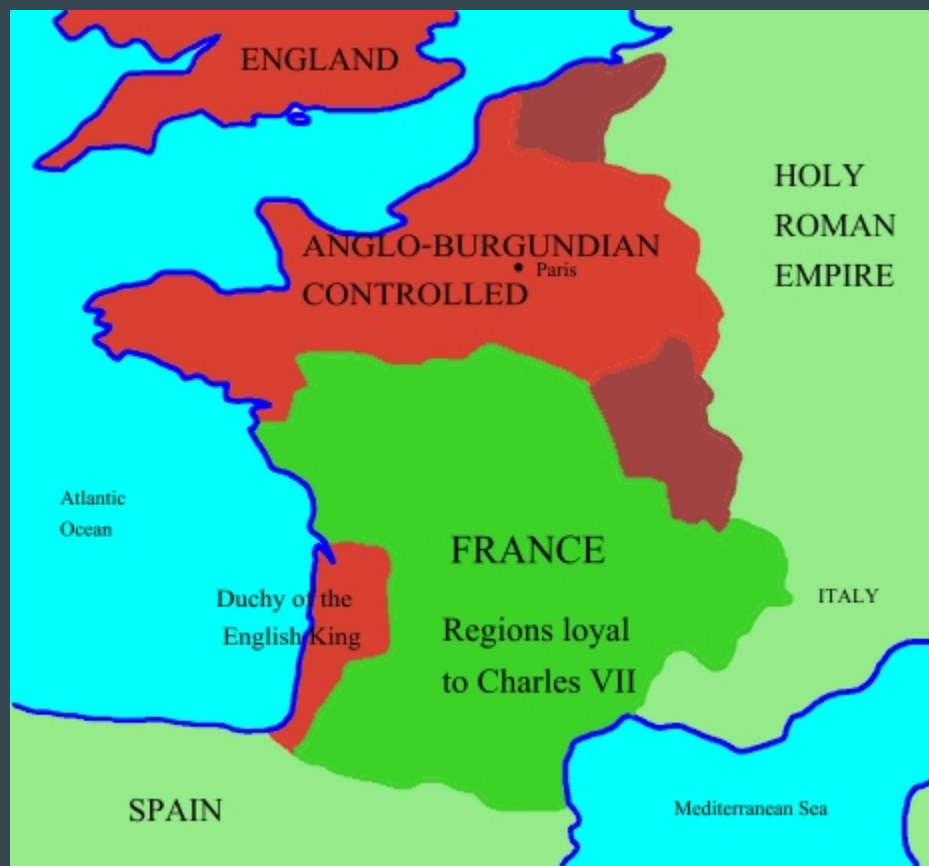
- When did the Hundred Years' War start and end?
- How many other wars can you identify that were named after time periods?
- What is the difference between England and Britain?

# Lecture goals

- Understand the causes and narrative of the Hundred Years' War.
- Identify the role of technology in the Hundred Years' War.
- Explain how new military technology reflected, and helped bring about, social and political change during the Hundred Years' War.

# The Hundred Years' War: Background

- Medieval England
  - Edward I
- Medieval France
  - Philip V
- Normans and 1066 invasion
  - “Anglo-Normans” become constant threat to sovereignty of French kings.
- Guyenne
- Auld Alliance



# Key events

- 1340: First English invasion of France
- 1346: Battle of Crécy
  - French defeat
- 1348: Battle of Poitiers
  - French king captured
- 1360-1369: Peace
- 1373: New English campaign
  - Not successful
- 1381: Peasants' Revolt in England
  - Motivated by heavy taxation
- 1382: Revolts in France
  - Also due to taxation

# Key events

- 1389-1415: Another peace
- 1415: New English invasion
- 1415: Battle of Agincourt
  - Archers comprise 80 percent of English army
  - French continue to rely on cavalry
  - 40 percent of French nobility killed
- 1435: Burgundians abandon the English
- 1449-1450: New French offensive
- 1453: Battle of Castillon
  - English defeat; end of the war

# Military innovations: Why the English won (at first)

- Foot soldiers
  - Inspired by earlier societies that did not adopt a cavalry-based model: Saxons, Vikings, Arabs/Berbers
  - Also reflects English financial limitations: Foot soldiers are less expensive
- Longbows
  - As opposed to crossbows: Faster to fire, less prone to damage by weather (major issue during rainstorm at Crécy)
- Use of pirates
  - Way to wage low-cost, politically low-risk war



# Why the French eventually won

- Creation of permanent royal army
  - As opposed to unreliable feudal levies and mercenary “free companies”
- Adoption of gunpowder artillery late in the war
  - Made possible by new financial strategies (new sales tax, currency debasement) in France
  - Makes fortifications much less useful
- Unrest in England
  - Positive-feedback cycle: As English lose possessions in France, English nobility become less and less supportive of English king
- Stronger motivation
  - French wanted to expel foreign invaders; English public saw little reason to support the war
  - Arguably, this gives rise to enduring anti-war sentiment in England that lasts into modern times

# Long-term legacy

- New financial strategies by the state
- Reintroduction of permanent, professional armies
  - Not seen since Roman times
- Popular suspicion of overseas war in England
  - Important during e.g., American Revolution
- Decline in importance of cavalry
  - And rise in importance of foot soldiers and archers, which leads to greater social prestige for commoners

# Group work

With your group, answer the question:

- Should the Middle Ages be interpreted primarily as a time of political, social and technological innovation, or primarily as a step backwards as compared to the ancient world?

Please email responses, along with your group members' names, to [tozzic@rpi.edu](mailto:tozzic@rpi.edu).