

SUMMARY

In France, as in England, the period from about 1100 to 1500 was one in which monarchs set out to centralize their authority. From a small domain centered on the Ile de France, French rulers gradually gained control over a vast kingdom. They achieved this expansion of territory through war, diplomacy, and marriage. The major figures in the emergence of the French state were Philip II, who organized the early government bureaucracy that would become a mainstay of royal power; Louis IX, who brought dignity and honor to the monarchy; and Philip IV, who built on the successes of his predecessors and triumphed over the papacy.

During the Hundred Years' War, many of these gains were lost, and for a time, France was torn apart by warfare and the rival ambitions of powerful feudal nobles. The appearance on the scene of Joan of Arc, who inspired the French to renew their struggle against the English, helped set Charles VII and his successors on the road to restoring royal authority.

During the reign of Louis XI, the Spider king, France became a unified nation with the machinery of a centralized government in place. Unlike the Parliament in England, which won the right to approve taxes, the Estates General in France did not win similar authority and instead became subject to royal power.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the domain of the early Capetian kings. Compare it to the Carolingian Empire in 800 and to France in 1483.
- 2 Why were the rulers of France and England rivals throughout the Middle Ages? How did Philip Augustus use this rivalry for his own ends?
- 3 What was the cause of the struggle between Philip IV and the Church? How did Philip strengthen royal power in this struggle?
- 4 In what ways did the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism hurt the Church? How do you think it opened the way for the Protestant Reformation that began in the 16th century?
- 5 What role did Joan of Arc play in the Hundred Years' War? Why is she credited with helping to build the French nation-state?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Which books might describe the growth of the French nation-state?

- DENEUIL-CORMIER, ANNE. *The Wise and Foolish Kings*. New York: Doubleday, 1980. An interesting account of the Valois kings who ruled France from 1328 to 1498 and helped transform France from a fragmented medieval kingdom into a modern nation-state.
- FOWLER, KENNETH. *The Age of the Plantagenets and the Valois*. New York: Putnam, 1967. A survey of the origin of the Hundred Years' War and the structure of the late medieval society. It discusses the social and economic impact of the war on the civilian population and on the intellectual climate.
- PERNOUD, REGINE. *Blanche of Castile*. New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, 1975. A sympathetic biography of the wise and capable ruler who dominated Europe during the first half of the 13th century. Blanche, the granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and wife of Louis VIII, was determined to unify the dissident factions in France during her successful regency for her son, the future Louis IX.