

Chapter 9

The Early Middle Ages

ORDEAL OF A QUEEN

◆ Section I (pages 201-205)

Between 500 and 1000, thousands of trials by ordeal took place in western Europe as Germanic customs replaced Roman laws. Even people in high places were not above such ordeals. The person on trial below is Emma, a tenth-century queen married to Canute, king of Normandy, England, and Denmark.

... On the appointed day the clergy and the people came to the church and the king himself sat on the tribunal. The queen was brought before her son and questioned whether she was willing to go through with what she had undertaken. . . . Nine glowing plowshares [the part of a plow that cuts the furrow] were placed on the carefully swept pavement of the church. After these had been consecrated by a short ceremony the queen's shoes and stockings were taken off; . . . and, supported by two bishops, one on either side, she was led to the torture. The bishops who led her were weeping and those who were much more afraid than she were encouraging her not to fear. Uncontrollable weeping broke out all over the church and all voices were united in the cry "St. Swithin, O St. Swithin [a ninth-century bishop], help her!" If the thunder had pealed forth at this time, the people would not have heard it, with such strength, with such a concourse of voices did the shout go up to Heaven that St. Swithin should now or never hasten to

her aid. . . . In a low voice the queen offered [a prayer to St. Swithin] as she undertook the ordeal . . .

Behold the miracle! With the bishops directing her feet, in nine steps she walked upon the nine plowshares, pressing each one of them with the full weight of her whole body; and though she thus passed over them all, she neither saw the iron nor felt the heat. Therefore she said to the bishops: "Am I not to obtain that which I especially sought? Why do you lead me out of the church when I ought to be tried within it?" For she was going out and yet did not realize that she had gone through the ordeal. To which the bishops replied as well as they could through their sobs: "O lady, behold, you have already done it; the deed is now accomplished which you think must yet be done." She gazed and her eyes were opened; then for the first time she looked about and understood the miracle. "Lead me," she said, "to my son, that he may see my feet and know that I have suffered no ill."

1. What ordeal was Queen Emma forced to undergo?

2. How did those observing the ordeal feel about Emma?

3. What miracle took place? _____

4. What did the miracle prove to those who accused her? _____

5. On a separate piece of paper, compare this method of trying an accused person with Roman standards of justice (text page 159).

CHARLEMAGNE'S GOOD SENSE

The following story was recorded by Einhard, Charlemagne's secretary. Charlemagne had just been to church, dressed plainly and covered by a sheepskin. His courtiers had just returned from a buying spree at a fair in Pavia. Charlemagne decided to play a trick on them. Following this story is the oath of allegiance taken by Charlemagne's officials.

1

[His courtiers strutted in, wearing] robes made of pheasant skins and silk, or of the necks, backs and tails of peacocks in their first plumage. Some were decorated with purple and lemon coloured ribbons; some were draped round with blankets and some in ermine robes.

The king, with a malicious twinkle, suddenly said, "Let us go hunting . . . in the very clothes we are wearing at this moment." The nobles had to obey. They scoured the thickets, were torn by branches of trees, thorns and briars; they were drenched with rain and defiled by the blood of wild beasts. In this plight they returned home.

Then the most crafty Charles ordered, "Let no one take off his dress of skins before he goes to bed; they will dry better upon our bodies."

Next day, Charles said to his chamberlain, "Give my sheepskin a rub and bring it to me." It came quite white and perfectly sound. Then,

when his bedraggled courtiers appeared, the king said, "Most foolish of mortals! Which of these dresses is the most valuable and useful—mine, bought for a piece of silver, or yours, bought for pounds?"

Their eyes sank to the ground, for they could not bear his most terrible censure.

2

I promise that, from this day forward, I will be the most faithful man of the most pious Emperor, my lord Charles, son of King Pepin and Queen Bertha; and I will be so in all sincerity, without deceit or ill intention, for the honor of his kingship, as by right a man ought to behave towards his lord and master. May God and the saints, whose relics lie here before me, grant me their help; for to this end I shall devote and consecrate myself with all the intelligence that God has given me, for the remainder of my life.

1. What trick did Charlemagne play on his men?

2. How does the oath in the second selection help explain why Charlemagne's nobles had to obey his order to go hunting?

3. What lesson was Charlemagne trying to teach his courtiers?

4. Based on this anecdote, how would you describe Charlemagne the man and Charlemagne the king?

THE VIKING INVASIONS

Between 800 and 1000, Viking warriors from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark terrorized Europe from Ireland to Russia. The following accounts describe some early clashes between God-fearing English men and women and pagan Norsemen. The first account was written in the twelfth century by a church chronicler named Simeon of Durham. The second account comes from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle written at the end of the ninth century.

1
[In 793], the pagans from the northern regions came with a fleet of ships to Britain like stinging hornets and spreading on all sides like fearful wolves, robbed, tore and slaughtered not only beasts of burden, sheep and oxen, but even priests and deacons, and companies of monks and nuns. And they came to the Church of Lindisfarne, laid everything waste with grievous plundering, trampled the holy places with polluted steps, dug up the altars and seized all the treasures of the holy church. They killed some of the brothers, took some away with them in fetters, many they drove out, naked and loaded with insults, some they drowned in the sea.

2
[In 789] . . . A small fleet of Danes, numbering three fast ships, came unexpectedly to the coast, and this was their first coming. Hearing of this the king's officials, then staying at the town called Dorchester, leapt on his horse and with a few men made haste to the port, thinking they were merchants rather than enemies, and commanding them imperiously he ordered them to be sent to the royal villa, but he and his companions were straightway killed by them. . . .

1. Which account describes the destruction of the Church of Lindisfarne?

2. What does the other account describe?

3. The accounts differ dramatically in tone. Describe this difference in tone using evidence from the selections.

4. What factors might have influenced the tone of the first account? Consider author, subject, and date.

DUTIES OF LORDS AND VASSALS

In the year 1020, Bishop Fulbert of Chartres wrote the following letter to William, Duke of Aquitaine in southern France. The letter is the earliest surviving document explaining the bond between lords and vassals.

To William most glorious duke of the Aquitanians, bishop Fulbert the favor of his prayers.

Asked to write something concerning the form of fealty, I have noted briefly for you on the authority of the books the things which follow. He who swears fealty to his lord ought always to have these six things in memory; what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable. Harmless, that is to say that he should not be injurious to his lord in his body; safe, that he should not be injurious to him in his secrets or in the defenses through which he is able to be secure; honorable, that he should not be injurious to him in his justice or in other matters that pertain to his honor; useful, that he should not be injurious to him in his possessions; easy or practicable, that that good which his lord is able to do easily, he make not difficult, nor that which is practicable he make impossible to him.

However, that the faithful vassal should avoid these injuries is proper, but not for this does he deserve his holding; for it is not sufficient to abstain from evil, unless what is good is done also. It remains, therefore, that in the same six things mentioned above he should faithfully counsel and aid his lord, if he wishes to be looked upon as worthy of his benefice and to be safe concerning the fealty which he has sworn.

The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal reciprocally in all these things. And if he does not do this he will be justly considered



A French lord and his vassals

guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be detected in the avoidance of or the doing of or the consenting to them, would be perfidious and perjured.

I would have written to you at greater length, if I had not been occupied with many other things, including the rebuilding of our city and church which was lately entirely consumed in a great fire, from which loss though we could not for a while be diverted, yet by the hope of the comfort of God and of you we breathe again.

1. What are the six things that a faithful vassal should always keep in mind?

2. What must a vassal do besides avoid injurious behavior?

3. How should a lord act to his vassal?

4. According to this document, what formed the basis of the bond between a lord and his vassals?

Chapter **10****The High Middle Ages****THE POSITION OF JEWS**

◆ Section I (pages 223–227)

In the following document, dated 1084, the Bishop of Speyer in Germany grants Jews permission to live within his city. Local laws such as those described in the document were left in the hands of princes and bishops. Other laws relating to Jews were issued by the king.

1. I, . . . humble bishop of Speyer, when I wished to make a city of my village, thought that it would greatly add to its honor if I should establish some Jews in it. I have therefore collected some Jews and located them in a place apart from the dwellings and association of the other inhabitants of the city. That they may be protected from the attacks and violence of the mob, I have surrounded their quarter with a wall. . . . I have given them [their land] on condition that they pay every year three and one-half pounds of money coined in the mint of Speyer, for the use of the brothers.

2. I have given them the free right of changing gold and silver coins and of buying and selling everything they wish within their own walls and outside the gate clear up to the boat-landing [on the Rhine] and also on the wharf itself. And they have the same right throughout the whole city.

3. Besides, I have given them a piece of the land of the church as a burial ground. This land they shall hold forever.

4. I have also granted that, if a Jew comes to them from some other place and is their guest for a time, he shall pay no tolls [to the city].

5. The chief priest of their synagogue shall have the same position and authority among them as the mayor of the city has among the citizens. He shall judge all the cases which arise among them or against them. If he is not able to decide any case it shall be taken before the bishop or his chamberlain.

6. They are bound to watch, guard, and defend only their own walls, in which work their servants may assist them.

7. They may hire Christian nurses and Christian servants.

8. The meats which their law forbids them to eat they may sell to Christians, and the Christians may buy them.

9. To add to my kindness to them I grant them the most favorable laws and conditions that the Jews have in any city of the German kingdom.

1. Why did Jews need a wall around their quarter of the city?

2. What power does "the chief priest of their synagogue" have in the quarter?

3. What military service must Jews fulfill?

4. Compare the contents of this document with the medieval attitude toward Jews described on pages 224–225 of the text. In what way does this document reflect enlightened thinking within the context of the times?

THE MONK'S LIFE

Outside the splendor of the established church, monks lived simple lives. The vows below show the worldly values they abandoned when they joined an order. The poem that follows the vows was written by an Irish monk in the 800's. The monk, far from home, yearns for the company of his cat, Pangur Ban.

Monastic Vows

I, brother Gerald, in the presence of abbot Gerald and the other brothers, promise steadfastness in this monastery according to the rule of St. Benedict and the precepts of Sts. Peter and Paul, and I hereby surrender all my possessions to this monastery, built in the honor of St. Peter and governed by the abbot Gerald.

I hereby renounce my parents, my brothers and relatives, my friends, my possessions and my property, and the vain and empty glory and pleasure of this world. I also renounce my own will, for the will of God. I accept all the hardships of the monastic life, and take the vows of purity, chastity, and poverty, in the hope of heaven; and I promise to remain a monk in this monastery all the days of my life.

Pangur Ban

I and Pangur Ban my cat
'Tis a like task we are at,
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.

'Tis a merry thing to see,
At our tasks how glad are we
When at home we sit and find,
Entertainment to our mind.

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye,
Full and fierce and sharp and sly,
'Gainst the wall of knowledge, I
All my little wisdom try.

So in peace our task we ply:
Pangur Ban my cat, and I
In our arts we find our bliss,
I have mine and he has his.

1. What does Brother Gerald promise in the first vow?

2. According to the second vow, what things did a monk renounce upon entering a monastery?

3. While Pangur Ban chases mice, what does the monk do?

4. Over 11 centuries have passed since the lonely monk wrote the poem. Yet the poem speaks to us as though it were written today. What timeless emotions does the poem convey? What kind of a person does the monk appear to be?

THE COMET AS AN OMEN

The comet we now call Halley's Comet frightened early people, who took its appearance as an omen of bad times to come. The report below comes from a letter written in 837 to Ludwig, Charlemagne's son, on the occasion of a raid from northern invaders.

The appearance of this star which has lately arisen is reported by all who have seen it to be terrible and malignant. And indeed I believe it foretells evils which we have deserved, and foretells a coming destruction of which we are worthy. . . . it is meant to forewarn mortals that they may avert the future evil by repentance and prayers. . . . So we trust that merciful God will turn

this threatened evil from us also, if we repent with our whole hearts. Would that the destruction which the fleet of the Northmen is said to have inflicted upon this realm recently [be] sufficient occasion for the appearance of this comet. But I fear that it is rather some new distress still to come that is foretold by this terrible omen.



Detail from Bayeux Tapestry showing Halley's comet

1. What does the writer think that the comet foretells?

2. With what disaster did the appearance of the comet coincide?

3. The author of the report fears that the appearance of the comet foretells a greater disaster yet to come. Based on the date of the letter (837), was the author correct?

MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The letter below dates from 1170. It was written by Peter of Blois, who had studied medicine, law, and theology at the universities in Bologna and Paris. While traveling, a friend asked him to visit a sick knight. After the visit, he wrote this diagnosis and prescription to the doctor who would be caring for the knight.

... Sometimes the Lord reveals to one what He hides from others. Do not be annoyed to hear the manner of this illness and the aids which are to be used. It is a common fault among physicians to differ always about maladies. ... You will observe that the patient is surely suffering from [a form of malaria]; ... When I arrived on the very day that the fever set in I had the hepatic vein opened. ... I have employed repellents and have placed violet oil on the heart, liver, and forehead. It remains then ... for you to give the patient a refrigerant of scammony ash [a tropical herb], which is safer than vinegar and honey syrup or anything else, for in it all the harm of the scammony has disappeared through decoction [a boiling down process]. Best of all for him would be a decoction of cassia fistula [a tropical tree whose pods contain a mild laxative], of *Terminalia citrina* [the plumlike fruit of a tropical tree now used for tanning] with maidenhair fern, and the seeds of watermelon, gourd, and melon, if you

should see that the strength of the patient is sufficient for this. ... Hot applications of mallow, violets, and poppy seed should not be neglected for the feet; for there heat does a great deal of good. If a great heat should afflict the top of the head, as is customary, let the head be shaved and the head, forehead, and temples may be soothed with cloths dipped into rose water [with other herbs and fruit]. If there is an increase of thirstiness let the tongue be washed, as you know, with parsley, and be scraped with wood. For sleeplessness let there be applied a decoction of black poppy, mallow, violet, and henbane to the feet.

I write you these things not that you need to be taught, but in order that the medicine may be safer for you and more acceptable to the patient, since it proceeds from our common deliberation. ... You must be rigorously cautious around this man from whose healing a reputation of considerable honor will come and the usefulness of this will respond to your wishes.

1. Why does Peter of Blois think that the physician treating the knight might be "annoyed" to hear the diagnosis?

2. From what is the patient suffering? _____

3. What might be the "great heat" that afflicts the top of the head? _____

4. What seem to be the main sources of medicines in the 1100's?

5. Why does Peter of Blois urge the physician treating the knight to be cautious?

6. In an encyclopedia, look up the illness that has afflicted the knight. What are its symptoms? How is it treated today?

THE MUSLIM VIEW OF CRUSADERS

Usamah ibn-Munqid was a Muslim warrior and poet who lived in the twelfth century, some time around the Second Crusade. In the following selection, Usamah relates an encounter he had with a Frankish knight.

Their lack of sense.—Mysterious are the works of the Creator, the author of all things! When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah (exalted is he!) and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting, but nothing else; just as animals have only the virtues of strength and carrying loads. I shall now give some instances of their doings and their curious mentality.

In the army of King Fulk [a Muslim king] was a Frankish reverend knight who had just arrived from their land in order to make the holy pilgrimage and then return home. He was of my intimate fellowship and kept such constant company with me that he began to call me "my brother." Between us were mutual bonds of amity and friendship. When he resolved to return by sea to his homeland, he said to me:

"My brother, I am leaving for my country and I want you to send with me your son (my son, who was then fourteen years old, was at that time in my company) to our country, where he can see the knights and learn wisdom and chivalry. When he returns, he will be like a wise man."

Thus there fell upon my ears words which would never come out of the head of a sensible man; for even if my son were to be taken captive, his captivity could not bring him a worse misfortune than carrying him into the lands of the Franks. However, I said to the man:

"By your life, this has exactly been my idea. But the only thing that prevented me from carrying it out was the fact that his grandmother, my mother, is so fond of him and did not this time let him come out with me until she exacted an oath from me to the effect that I would return him to her."

Thereupon he asked, "Is your mother still alive?" "Yes," I replied. "Well," said he, "disobey her not."

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1. Why did the Frankish knight come to the holy land?

2. What request did the Frankish knight make of Usamah?

3. How does Usamah respond to the knight's request?

4. What was the real reason that Usamah refused the request?
