

Publisher's Note

Defining Documents in American History series, produced by Salem Press, consists of a collection of essays on important historical documents by a diverse range of writers on a broad range of subjects in American history. This established series offers a dozen titles ranging from Colonial America to Post War 1940s.

This volume, *Defining Documents in World History: Middle Ages*, broadens the scope of the series to include world history. *Middle Ages* surveys key writing and documents produced from 476 to 1500, and includes a number of maps to help the reader understand the state of the world during this period. The material is organized under five broad categories:

- Byzantium and Western Europe in the Early Middle Ages
- The Catholic Church and its Vicissitudes
- England and France
- The Near East and Beyond
- Philosophy, Religion, and Science

Historical documents provide a compelling view of ancient world history. Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

Essay Format

Middle Ages contains 40 primary source documents – many in their entirety. Each document is supported by a critical essay, written by historians and teachers, that includes a Summary Overview, Defining Moment, Author Biography, Document Analysis, and Essential Themes. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the collected texts, including journals, letters, speeches,

political and religious sermons, laws, government reports, and trial notes, among other genres. An important feature of each essays is a close reading of the primary source that develops evidence of broader themes, such as the author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, essays are organized by section themes, listed above, highlighting major issues of the period, many of which extend across eras and continue to shape life as we know it around the world. Each section begins with a brief introduction that defines questions and problems underlying the subjects in the historical documents. A brief glossary included at the end of each document highlights keywords important in the study of the primary source. Each essay also includes a Bibliography and Additional Reading section for further research.

Appendixes

- **Chronological List** arranges all documents by year.
- **Web Resources** is an annotated list of web sites that offer valuable supplemental resources.
- **Bibliography** lists helpful articles and books for further study.

Contributors

Salem Press would like to extend its appreciation to all involved in the development and production of this work. The essays have been written and signed by scholars of history, humanities, and other disciplines related to the essay's topics. Without these expert contributions, a project of this nature would not be possible. A full list of contributor's names and affiliations appears in the front matter of this volume.

Editor's Introduction

The Middle Ages is a period in European history falling between the classical age (ancient history) and the emergence of the Renaissance in the 15th century. Humanists of the Renaissance, in fact, were the first to employ the term “middle ages”—along with its synonym, “Dark Ages”—to describe the era that immediately preceded their own. That era was thought to have been something of a dark period in history because of its legacy of barbarism, ignorance (or scantiness of learning), superstition, and ecclesiastical crudity (under the Crusades, etc.). Alternatively, it was viewed as a kind of transition between the great achievements of the classical era and the later developments of the Renaissance—hence the notion of a “middle time.” Not that any of these characterizations holds up completely in light of the objective historical evidence—every era, after all, seems to have its own forms of barbarism and ignorance. But such is how the Renaissance scholars viewed the matter, and the designation stuck (although the term “dark ages” is no longer used).

The start of the Middle Ages is traditionally assigned the date of 476, when the last Roman emperor in the West, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by the German chief Odoacer. Although that event brought an end to the Western Roman Empire, the empire in the east, based in Constantinople (Istanbul), survived as the Christianized Byzantine Empire. The ancient world did not end abruptly in 476 but rather declined gradually from the 3^d century through the 7th century. By “declined” one means that longstanding institutions and systems of thought and governance were overturned and not necessarily replaced with institutions or systems of comparable stature or durability. Even so, the Middle Ages is the time when the Roman Catholic Church came to the fore throughout Europe, as the “pagan” beliefs of the earlier Roman era and the ensuing “barbarian” invasions gave way to Christian doctrine and a well organized clerical order. By the 5th century the bishop of Rome, known as the pope, was recognized as the head of the church. The Byzantine, or Eastern Orthodox Church took a different path.

The end date of the Middle Ages is a little fuzzier, in the scheme of things. It stands amid the transition to the Renaissance in 15th century. It is generally understood that in Italy, where the first effects of Renaissance culture were felt, the Middle Ages had come to

an end by the late 14th century. In the rest of Europe, on the other hand, it took another century before the Middle Ages had faded, yielding to a new Age of Discovery. By both convention and convenience, then, one can safely date the end of the Middle Ages in Europe at around 1500.

The Early Middle Ages

With the Roman Empire in sharp decline by the 4th century, various Germanic tribes, having already infiltrated the empire, began a migration through much of Europe. The Visigoths (or Vesi), for example, moved into the Danube River valley and then south to Italy. From there, likely in response to Hunnic invasions from the east, they migrated southwest to Gaul (France) and Iberia (Spain and Portugal). There they founded a Visigothic kingdom, which existed between 415 and 711, when Moorish invaders from North Africa disunited it. The Visigoths were replaced in the east by the Ostrogoths, who, under King Theodoric, conquered Italy and Sicily. With the death of Theodoric in 526, his kingdom collapsed, leaving the Lombards (or Langobards) to build a kingdom in northern Italy while the Byzantine emperor Justinian reestablished imperial rule in southern Italy and Sicily. Another Germanic tribe, the Vandals, ravaged Gaul, entered Spain, and extended their reach into northern Africa, where they established a kingdom. The latter kingdom disrupted Mediterranean shipping and pillaged widely until Justinian retook North Africa in the 6th century.

In Gaul, beginning in the late 5th century, the Franks moved in from the Rhine River region. Under their chief, Clovis (reigned 481-511), the Franks conquered other Germanic tribes and came to occupy most of Gaul. Clovis accepted Christianity and obtained the support of the pope for himself and his people. The move laid the foundation of the Merovingian kingdom, which existed until 751.

In Britain at the start of the Middle Ages, the Romans were expelled by the Angles and Saxons, two Germanic tribes that eventually mingled (hence Anglo-Saxon) and coexisted, not always peacefully, with the native Celtic peoples. Eventually, the Anglo-Saxons came to occupy most of Britain—Wales and northern Scotland excepted. By the 7th century, England consisted of seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Most of these later succumbed

to Viking invasions from the north. Only the kingdom of Wessex, under Alfred the Great (reigned 871-899), remained unconquered. Indeed, subsequent Wessexian leaders expanded their control into the rest of England, creating an Anglo-Saxon kingdom that survived into the 11th century. The conquest of England by Norman invaders from across the channel took place in 1066.

Meanwhile, another legacy of the “dark ages” was the rise of Catholicism (Christianity) along with the abandonment of Latin and Greek literatures, which were thought, now, pagan. Only a few of the clergy retained Latin, and Greek scholarship became a very limited activity. Boethius (480-522) wrote a treatise, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, while jailed under Theodoric and awaiting execution for treason. Gregory of Tours (538-594) wrote his *History of the Franks* in corrupted Latin and with little evidence. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) compiled a questionable summary of all knowledge to date. In contrast, Bede the Venerable (673-735), a Northumbrian monk, prepared a useful *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

The most significant figure of the early Middle Ages, though, was Charlemagne (Latin, Carolus; c. 742-814), creator of the Carolingian Empire, which covered most of western Europe. Charlemagne introduced a well functioning system of central and local administration, oversaw a uniform system of justice, strove to build a general economy, and helped to reform the church and religious education. In 800 he was crowned in Rome as emperor by Pope Leo III, thus inaugurating what later was called the Holy Roman Empire. Under Charlemagne, Latin study and religious education were preserved and further developed. Yet, a series of Viking and Arab attacks brought disarray toward the end of his reign. By 887 the Carolingian empire was gone, and within a hundred years Europe was a mosaic of competing feudal states. Feudalism, with its fiefdoms, lords, knights, and vassals, became the prevailing system through the end of the 13th century. The church, too, became feudal in nature, with bishops and abbots receiving fiefs in return for services rendered, including military services. Not even a revived Holy Roman Empire, on a smaller scale, under Otto the Great (reigned 936-972), could tame the evident turbulence in European politics and culture during this era. Although merchant and craft guilds, along with development of a middle or bourgeois class, contributed to a stable economic environment and the rise of large towns and cities, there continued to be enormous inequalities and

injustices throughout the region, along with corruption and ecclesiastical intrigue—just as there was, in equal measure, the cultivation of chivalry, or a code of conduct pertaining to knighthood and courtly interactions.

With the Investiture Controversy, a struggle for power took place between the German emperor Henry IV (reigned 1056-1106) and Pope Gregory VII (reigned 1073-1085). Gregory’s victory in 1077 weakened lay rulers’ control over the church. Yet, similar confrontations erupted in later years, most notably one in England between Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, and King Henry II. The struggle ended with Becket’s murder in 1170 and a newly strengthened king. During this period, too, the church sought to extend its control militarily by means of the Crusades. It encouraged the bringing of its dogmas and doctrines to the heathens and infidels of the world (i.e., pagans and non-Christians). The First Crusade (1096-1099) targeted Turks in Asia Minor and the Levant and largely achieved its ends. Later Crusades, however, proved less successful—though during the Fourth Crusade (1201-1202) Constantinople was taken from the Byzantine emperors.

The High Middle Ages

Between 1100 and 1300, medieval civilization in Europe reached its height. Relatively stable states, headed by kings, developed, along with strong institutions. There were new, more efficient economies and financial organizations. The church reached its peak in power and authority. Intellectual and artistic activities were such that scholars have variously applied the terms “renewal,” “revival,” or even “renaissance” (with a small “r”) to the period.

The English kings, whose power was almost absolute by the late 12th century, established an efficient central administration made up of an exchequer and a court contingent consisting of highly effective individuals. To confront major questions of the day, kings could assemble a council of court officials and leading magnates, although the final decision was the king’s along to make. The reign (1199-1216) of King John was marked by controversy. Locked in a struggle with Pope Innocent III, unpopular with the magnates for losing English possessions to France, and known to flaunt laws and civil procedures, John faced an aristocratic revolt in 1215 and was obliged to grant concessions to the barons of the realm in the form of a written document known as Magna Carta. The document affirmed that

the king was subject to the law, a premise central to the form of government known as constitutional monarchy. By the late 13th century, an assembly, or parliament, was in place, giving voice to lords and commoners.

In France, Germany, and Italy, meanwhile, different developments took place. France varied in its institutions by region. French kings, more so than the English, consolidated their power by pitting one region against the other. The French kings also retained absolute authority under the principle of the divine right of kings, which made them essentially vehicles of god. German kings, in contrast, remained relatively weak owing to the Investiture Controversy and to their failed attempts at controlling northern Italy. With few effective rulers, various princes assumed authority and made Germany into a patchwork of principalities, which remained central there into the 19th century. Italy, on the other hand, was convulsed by struggles between the German kings and the papacy, both of whom sought authority over it. With neither side achieving a decisive, lasting victory, what remained in Italy were independent city-states such as Venice and Florence. Similar city-states, or emergent states based on stable cities, were present in Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere. In such locations, capitalism took hold and flourished along with arts and letters.

Despite some heresies and challenges to its authority, the church stood triumphant in the 12th and 13th centuries. Crusades were ordered by the pope, kings were often humbled by ecclesiastical expressions of power, and church doctrine itself was occasionally adjusted to ensure its continuing supremacy over secular life. Even so, variations from the norm could and did occur—such as the establishment of the Franciscan friars, devoted to austerity and assisting the poor, by Francis of Assisi in 1209. Other specialized religious orders arose at this time, as well. Through it all, papal government remained exceptionally efficient and continued to accrue to the church a wealth of valuable holdings.

The Late Middle Ages

Except in northern Italy, by the late 13th century economic growth had halted and a lengthy cycle of stagnation took root, causing considerable social strife. There were peasant revolts in England, France, and the Netherlands. Worse, the Plague, or Black Death, cut through European society between 1348 and 1350, killing nearly a quarter of the population. In consequence, seigniorialism, or the manor system on which

feudal society was based, began to unravel. Peasants were released or claimed their freedom, as landholders could no longer sustain their enterprises. The middle class became ever stronger in light of the budding shift from manorial forms to capitalist (mercantile) forms of economic activity. Kings now sometimes aligned themselves with the commoners over the aristocracy in order to gain advantage. Such a broad-based alliance between ruler and ruled spelled the end of the feudal state and the rise of the nation state.

Thus, by the 14th century a variety of medieval patterns were being replaced by newer ones. In central Europe, the emerging Habsburg dynasty increased its power by acquiring the Low Countries (Netherlands) through the marriage of archduke Maximilian of Austria to the daughter of the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold. In Burgundy itself, lying between Germany and France and separate from either, a remarkable culture developed, rivaling that of England and France. Eventually, Spain too would become a Habsburg possession through another opportunistic marriage, and Spanish culture would flourish.

Meanwhile, for over one hundred years between 1337 and 1453, France and England would be at war (the Hundred Years' War). It began with a claim by Edward III that he was heir to the French crown and would recapture English possessions lost to France. Despite English combat successes at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356), the war drew out into an endless series of skirmishes and retaliations. The French court was dealing with its own internal factional conflict at the time, thus weakening its military efforts. In England, a string of weak kings left the English magnates largely in charge of political and legal affairs. Only when Joan of Arc (1412-1431), a peasant girl from Lorraine, sought to rally French forces at the Siege of Orléans (1428-1429), was a turning point reached and England was forced to give up its continental claims. And, yet, immediately after the Hundred Years' War, England faced a civil war, the War of the Roses (1453-1485), brought on by a dispute over the crown between rival families from York and Lancaster. The war ended when Henry Tudor defeated and killed the Yorkist king, Richard III.

Italy during this period was likewise marked by political and military maneuvering, as various small states aligned and realigned themselves under a shifting array of princes and mercenaries. Milan was seized by Francesco Sforza in 1450; Florence fell under the sway of the Medici family; the Papal States were wracked by

dissension and struggle; and Sicily went to the house of Aragon while southern Italy went to the Angevins. The Catholic Church, too, became notably unsettled, with Pope Clement V (reigned 1305-1314) and his successors taking up residence in Avignon (France) rather than in Rome. With Gregory XI, the papacy returned to Rome, in 1377, and yet the following year saw the eruption of a great schism whereby different claimants at different times and places declared themselves pope. The schism ended only in 1417, by which time the church had already suffered a great decline in prestige. Events during that long rivalry, and lingering criticisms afterward, laid the foundation for the rise of a new religious vision, one that eventually would take the form of the Protestant Reformation as set out by Martin Luther. By then, a new age was in the making.







Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

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ITALY IN 1175

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|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 |  | Lands of the Holy Roman Empire |
| 2 |  | States of the Church |
| 3 |  | Lands of the Republic of Venice |
| 4 |  | The Kingdom of Hungary |
| 5 |  | The Kingdom of Sicily |
| 6 |  | Lands of the Moors and Saracens |

■ Letter from Peter of Blois to Queen Eleanor of England

Date: 1173

Country: England

Author: Peter of Blois

Summary Overview

Eleanor of Aquitaine was the French-born queen of Henry II of England and one of the most influential European women of the Middle Ages. She and Henry were a dynamic and successful pair who produced eight children, many of whom would also become important figures in medieval Europe. However, they became increasingly estranged, and Eleanor eventually left England for Poitiers, in her own Duchy of Aquitaine, where she established a court known for its literature, music, and poetry. She received visiting monarchs and was able to achieve a degree of independence impossible in England.

By 1173, Henry had vastly extended his territory, invading Ireland and dealing with rebellions in Wales and in his territory on the continent. Eleanor joined with her three eldest sons in a revolt against their father. Though this letter from the French diplomat Peter of Blois implored her to return to her husband peacefully, she was arrested and imprisoned by Henry until his death in 1189.

Defining Moment

The marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry of Anjou was one of the great dynastic matches in European history. Eleanor was a ruler in her own right and had inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine only to be spirited away to marry the heir to the French throne, Louis VII. She would be the queen consort of France for fifteen years, but did not find Louis a suitable match, and after she accompanied the king on a crusade in 1147, their relationship began to unravel. Eleanor asked publicly for an annulment, which was finally granted in 1152. Less than two months later, Eleanor married Henry, Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, who was eleven years her junior. Two years later, Henry became the king of England as well.

Eleanor and Henry had eight children. The eldest of Eleanor's surviving sons was known as Young Henry, the

heir to the throne. He was ambitious, and even though his father had greatly enlarged their territory and had even gone so far as to crown Henry as the associate king, he had no real authority or land and grew bored and resentful. When the elder king made plans to give three castles in Young Henry's territory of Anjou to his younger brother, John, the young king left his father and went to the French court of his father-in-law (and his mother's first husband) in Paris, where enemies of the English king were plentiful. He may have travelled to Aquitaine, where his brothers Richard and Geoffrey were staying with their mother, or his brothers may have been summoned from England by their mother. In any case, it is clear that Eleanor supported the revolt of 1173, and with her help, Young Henry assembled a significant force.

The elder Henry had made enemies across Europe for his part in the slaying of the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. Though the elder Henry was not directly implicated in the murder, he had fought with Becket over the limits of church authority, and it was rumored that he had ordered the killing. In addition, Young Henry was willing to promise land and titles from his own inheritance to nobles who would fight for him.

The rebellion did not succeed, however. Eleanor was captured by Henry II and taken back to England, where she lived as a prisoner for the next sixteen years. Young Henry and his brothers were defeated by their father and reconciled with him after eighteen months of fighting.

Author Biography

Peter of Blois was born in 1130 in Blois, in modern-day France. He was well-educated in history and the classics as a young man, studying with notable teachers in Tours and Paris, and later travelling to Bologna to study law. In 1167 he traveled to Sicily to tutor the young Sicilian king, William II. He returned to France once

again, but immigrated to England by 1173 to assist the archbishop of Canterbury.

In England, Peter also became a diplomat for King Henry II, and helped to negotiate between the king, the pope, and other European heads of state, particularly Louis VII of France. Peter was a secretary to the king and an emissary to the pope during the 1173 revolt.

Though he urged Eleanor of Aquitaine to make peace with her husband, he later served her after the king's death. Peter held several important church positions in England, including archdeacon of Bath and London and dean of the college at Wolverhampton. He was a prodigious letter writer, and much of his correspondence survives. Peter died in 1203.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

To Aleanor, Queen of England.
From the Archbishop of Rouen & his Suffragans:

Greetings in the search for peace—

Marriage is a firm and indissoluble union. This is public knowledge and no Christian can take the liberty to ignore it. From the beginning biblical truth has verified that marriage once entered into cannot be separated. Truth cannot deceive: it says, "What God has joined let us not put asunder." Truly, whoever separates a married couple becomes a transgressor of the divine commandment.

So the woman is at fault who leaves her husband and fails to keep the trust of this social bond. When a married couple becomes one flesh, it is necessary that the union of bodies be accompanied by a unity and equality of spirit through mutual consent. A woman who is not under the headship of the husband violates the condition of nature, the mandate of the Apostle, and the law of Scripture: "The head of the woman is the man." She is created from him, she is united to him, and she is subject to his power.

We deplore publicly and regretfully that, while you are a most prudent woman, you have left your husband. The body tears at itself. The body did not sever itself from the head, but what is worse, you have opened the way for the lord king's, and your own, children to rise up against the father. Deservedly the prophet says, "The sons I have nurtured and raised, they now have spurned me." As another prophet calls to mind, "If only the final hour of our life would come and the earth's surface crack open so that we might not see this evil!"

We know that unless you return to your husband, you will be the cause of widespread disaster. While you alone are now the delinquent one, your actions will result in ruin for everyone in the kingdom. Therefore, illustrious queen, return to your husband and our king. In your reconciliation, peace will be restored from distress, and in your return, joy may return to all. If our pleadings do not move you to this, at least let the affliction of the people, the imminent pressure of the church and the desolation of the kingdom stir you. For either truth deceives, or "every kingdom divided against itself will be destroyed." Truly, this desolation cannot be stopped by the lord king but by his sons and their allies.

Against all women and out of childish counsel, you provoke disaster for the lord king, to whom powerful kings bow the neck. And so, before this matter reaches a bad end, you should return with your sons to your husband, whom you have promised to obey and live with. Turn back so that neither you nor your sons become suspect. We are certain that he will show you every possible kindness and the surest guarantee of safety.

I beg you, advise your sons to be obedient and respectful to their father. He has suffered many anxieties, offences and grievances. Yet, so that imprudence might not demolish and scatter good will (which is acquired at such toil!), we say these things to you, most pious queen, in the zeal of God and the disposition of sincere love.

Truly, you are our parishioner as much as your husband. We cannot fall short in justice: Either you will return to your husband, or we must call upon canon law and use ecclesiastical censures against you. We say this reluctantly, but unless you come back to your senses, with sorrow and tears, we will do so.

GLOSSARY

apostle: one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ; here the reference is to Paul

canon law: laws made by church leadership

ecclesiastical: relating to the clergy of the Christian church

Suffragans: suffragan bishops, assistants to senior bishops

Document Analysis

Peter of Blois's letter to Eleanor is intended to entice the queen back to her husband and encourage her to end the rebellion of her sons. Peter uses the language of traditional Christian marriage vows to remind Eleanor that she had agreed to obey her husband, and if she refused to do this, she was violating not only a promise she made to him, but the trust of the people she governed and ultimately the will of God.

Peter reminds Eleanor that marriage is indissoluble, and once entered into, it was not possible to separate from it. Eleanor is reminded that in the taking of wedding vows she and her husband had come together in "unity and equality of spirit," but with her husband as the head. The ideal of equality of spirit does not make husband and wife social equals in the eyes of the church, for "she is created from him, she is united to him, and she is subject to his power." Peter compares marriage to a body and argues that Eleanor's actions are tearing the body apart unnaturally. In addition, he claims that her separation from the king has inspired her sons' own rebellion against their father. He suggests that if she returns to the king, her sons will follow.

If the argument that marriage was indissoluble was not convincing enough to Eleanor and the argument that Henry was her and their sons' natural leader also failed to inspire obedience, Peter asks her to consider the impact on her people. He assures the rebel queen that "your actions will result in ruin for everyone in the kingdom." Surely even if she could not be made to obey her husband, the good of her kingdom and the will of God would be compelling enough to return her to Henry, Peter reasons. He carefully places the responsibility for the conflict on her; if she refuses to reconcile, there is nothing the king can do: "Truly, this desolation cannot be stopped by the lord king but by his sons and their allies."

The letter ends with a plea and a threat. The king has suffered enough from the loss of his wife and their sons, Peter argues. Eleanor needs to return herself and their sons to his affection, and they will be forgiven and their safety guaranteed. If she still refuses, however, "we must call upon canon law and use ecclesiastical censures against you." Peter underscores the fact that his side does not want to fight and hopes to still view Eleanor as a friend, but will be forced to take action in pursuit of justice if she does not repent.

Essential Themes

The main theme of this letter is the argument that Eleanor is obligated by her marriage vows, the teachings of the church, the will of God, and the good of her people to return to her husband. Peter provides insight into the church's views on women's place in society during the time period, as well as into diplomatic procedure. It is clear that Eleanor was powerful and respected, despite her actions that opposed the traditional power structure. Though she was threatened with physical harm and church censure, the arguments made in this letter were insufficient to sway her. If marriage was indissoluble, why had she been allowed an annulment from her first husband? If her husband was her head and she was subject to his authority, why had she been able to rule on her own terms so successfully?

Eleanor may have genuinely believed that her sons would be better rulers than her husband, and the country better off in their hands. It is also possible that she wanted revenge for Henry II's infidelities. Whatever the case, Peter of Blois failed in his mission to reunite the feuding monarchs. Eleanor went to join her sons in Paris, but was arrested on orders from Henry II and subsequently imprisoned. Even after the rebellion failed and the family was reconciled, she remained captive and was only freed after her husband's death. After her son

Richard was crowned king of England, Eleanor again became a highly influential political figure until her death in 1204.

—Bethany Groff, MA

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