

Primary Sources Readings: Middle Ages

“Contemplations¹ on Medicine and the Arts of the Physician” by Paracelsus

God is the master who measures the disease and the stars. He has ordered everything according to His wisdom; who can fathom² it? The patient who pins his hope on the medicament is not a Christian; but he who puts his hope in God is a Christian.



“Decree on Papal³ Power 445” by Valentian I

Lest even a slight commotion should arise in the churches, or the religious order be disturbed, we herewith permanently decree that not only the bishops of Gaul⁴, but those of the other provinces, shall attempt nothing counter to ancient custom without the authority of the venerable father⁵ of the Eternal City⁶.



A Feudal Oath of Loyalty between Serf and Lord

Thus shall one take the oath of fidelity⁷: I will be true and faithful, and love all which he loves and shun all which he shuns, according to the laws of God and the order of the world. Nor will I ever with will or action, through word or deed, do anything which is displeasing to him, on condition that he will hold to me as I shall deserve it, and that he will perform everything as it was in our agreement when I submitted myself to him and chose his will.

“Capitulary⁸ for the Jews” by Charlemagne⁹

Let no Jew presume to take in pledge or for any debt any of the goods of the Church in gold, silver, or other form, from any Christian. But if he presume to do so, which God forbid, let all his goods be seized and let his right hand be cut off... Let no Jew presume to have a money-changer's table in his house, nor shall he presume to sell wine, grain, or other commodities there. But if it be discovered that he has done so all his goods shall be taken away from him, and he shall be imprisoned until he is brought into our presence.

“Laws for Land Property” by King Harald Harfager of Norway

King Harald made this law over all the lands he conquered, that all the property should belong to him; and that the bonds, both great and small, should pay him land dues for their possessions. Over every district he set an earl to judge according to the law of the land and to justice, and also to collect the land dues and the fines; and for this each earl received a third part of the dues, and services, and fines, for the support of his table and other expenses. Each earl had under him four or more hurses, each of whom had an estate of twenty marks yearly income and was bound to support twenty men-at-arms, and the earl sixty men, at their own expenses. The king had increased the land dues and burden so much, that each of his earls had greater power and income than the kings had before; and when that became known at Thronhjelm, many great men joined the king and took his service.



¹ contemplations = thoughts

² fathom = understand

³ Papal = the Pope

⁴ Gaul = modern-day France

⁵ venerable father = the Pope

⁶ Eternal City = Rome

⁷ fidelity = loyalty

⁸ capitulatory = a law

⁹ Charlemagne = an early French king