

FOLD OUT THIS PAGE

Study the Background Information and the sources carefully. You should spend at least ten minutes doing this.

In answering the questions, you will need to use your knowledge of the topic to interpret and evaluate the sources. When you are asked to use specific sources you must do so, but you may also use any of the other sources if they are relevant.

Answer ALL the questions.

1 Study Source A.

What can you tell from this source about women and the law in the Middle Ages? Use the source to explain your answer. **[6]**

2 Study Source B.

This source is from later than the Middle Ages. Does this mean it is no use as evidence about the treatment of women by the law in the Middle Ages? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. **[8]**

3 Study Sources C and D.

How far does Source D prove that the historian's judgements in Source C are wrong? Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer. **[8]**

4 Study Source E.

Are you surprised by this source? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. **[9]**

5 Study Source F.

How reliable is this source as evidence about women in the Middle Ages? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. **[9]**

6 Study all the sources.

'In the Middle Ages the law kept women inferior to men.'

How far do the sources on this paper support this view? Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer. Remember to identify the sources you use. **[10]**

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN THE MIDDLE AGES

How far did the law in the Middle Ages keep women inferior to men?

Background Information

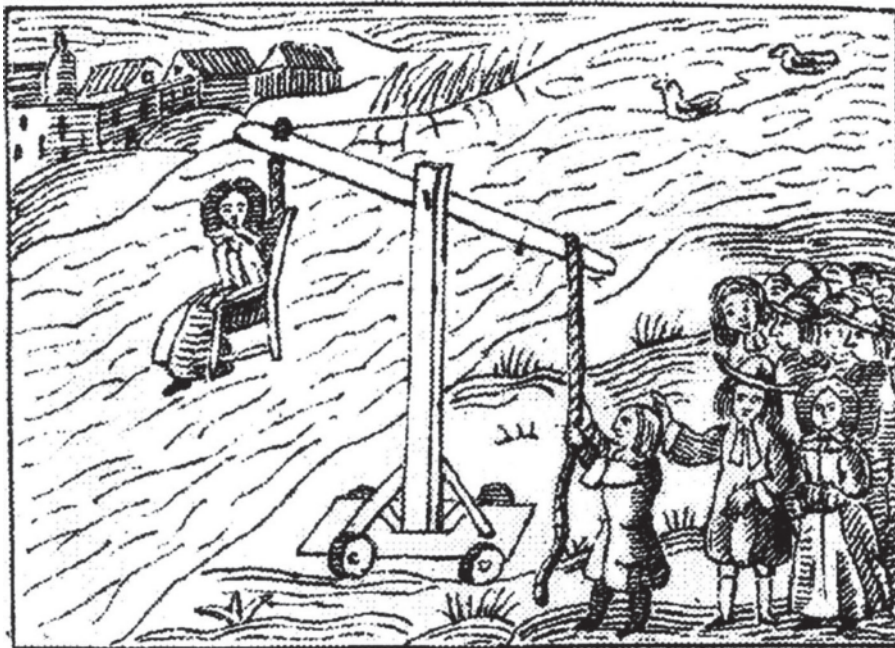
In the Middle Ages women had few legal rights. Male society regarded them as inferior to men. Unmarried women had to obey their fathers, and married women had to obey their husbands. The only women who could legally own property were widows. The law gave women some physical protection, usually through a male guardian, though some places also had laws against wife-beating. However, in general, the law did not concern itself much with women's rights, if only because women played such a small part in public life. But how far did the law keep women inferior to men?

SOURCE A

John Page and Agnes his wife appeared in court against John Baker in a case of a broken contract. They claim that Baker sold his wife to Agnes Page, for one pig (cost three shillings). Baker took possession of the pig and was well contented with it. Later Baker returned and demanded his wife back. He offered Agnes two shillings, which he did not pay. Baker says that he never made the contract to sell his wife, and now asks the court to decide the matter.

From Church court records, July 1330.

SOURCE B



A seventeenth-century woodcut. It shows a scold in a ducking stool.

SOURCE C

Women had a few legal protections. For example, the Church said that women could not be married earlier than the age of twelve, or without their consent. It was impossible to enforce such laws, but they did indicate what the Church regarded as acceptable. Women could not be priests, but they could become nuns. This placed them under Church law, rather than civil law, and the convent was recognised as a refuge for women. Women could be members of the nobility. As a noblewoman, a female gained the privileges of her noble husband. However, for most women, the number of legal privileges they enjoyed was tiny. In most cases they were restricted by the law, or forbidden rights and powers.

From a modern history of the Middle Ages.

SOURCE D

A very poor woman came to me in tears. She said that some time ago she had made an unofficial marriage with her husband by exchange of words. Later a case was brought before the Church court to decide whether they were legally married. The court decided they were, and the judgement was sealed with the official seal. The husband then ran away to another town to try to avoid the court's judgement. There he married another woman, at grave danger to his soul and to the scandal of many. We therefore ask you to warn the husband and try as effectively as you can to get him to give up this adultery, and to receive back his wife and treat her with marital affection. If he refuses, you should force him to do this by sentencing him to excommunication from day to day as necessary.

From a letter written by the Church authorities to a Church official in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, in the late 13th century. Excommunication meant that someone would be expelled from membership of the Church.

SOURCE E



An illustration from a prayer book, from about 1330. It shows a woman beating a man with a spindle.

SOURCE F

[Here a woman talks about relations between a wife and her husband.]

But tell me this, why do you hide
 The keys to your money box away from me?
 It is my gold as well as yours, indeed.
 So why would you mistrust your wife like this?
 Now, by Saint James, you shall not have your way.
 No matter how much you complain, you will not be
 Master both of my body and my gold.
 Women will not love husbands who keep watch over us,
 Or try to restrict where we go. We will go where we please.

From the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, around 1390. The tales were stories about a group of pilgrims travelling from London to Canterbury. As soon as they were published, the stories were recognised as being amongst the most important works of literature of the fourteenth century, especially for the realism of the characters in them.

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