

DARK AGES DOCUMENTS

Document A: Textbook (Excerpt)

During the early Middle Ages much of Europe passed through a time of turmoil and confusion, of ignorance and lawlessness . . . The early Middle Ages may justly be called the Dark Age . . .

During the early Middle Ages, from 476 to about 1100, European civilization slipped back into semi-barbarism. The chief cause of this decline was lack of a government which could keep order. The Germanic Kingdoms which had been set up by 476 were unable to suppress violence. There were so many highway robbers that travel became dangerous. Europe suffered a decline in commerce and manufacturing, in education, in literature and the arts, and in almost all that makes possible a high civilization. Cities grew smaller and in some cases practically disappeared, and western Europe became a region of poverty-stricken farming communities, each virtually isolated from the rest of the world.

Source: Roehm, A., Buske, M., Webster, H. & Wesley, E., (1954). The Record of Mankind. Heath and Company.



Document B: Textbook B (Excerpt)

From 1000 to 1300, the economy of Europe developed and prospered. Available farmland tripled, and the food supply increased notably, bringing up the population. Europeans re-settled lands that had been depopulated by the ninth- and tenth-century invasions and also opened new lands for farming . . . Technological improvements like the heavy plow, the shoulder collar for horses, metal horseshoes, and more efficient water and windmills contributed to the jump in food supply. Between 500 and 1300 Europe's population grew from 25 million to more than 70 million.

Source: Cassar, G.H., Goff, R.D., Holoka, J.P., Terry, J.J., Upshur, Jiu-Hwa (Eds.). (2002). World History Before 1600: The Development of Early Civilization. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

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Document C: Abbey of Xanten Records (Modified)

The following document is from the yearly records of the Abbey of Xanten, a city in modern day Germany. An abbey is a place where Catholic monks and nuns live. The document describes Europe's troubles in the mid ninth century. It focuses on invasions by heathens, or non-Christian barbarian tribes. Specifically, it mentions the Vikings, or "Northmen," and Saracens, Arab tribes. Most of the names mentioned are cities or areas in Germany. Gaul is basically modern day France, and Christendom is the Christian part of Europe.

845 Twice in Worms there was an earthquake. In the same year the heathen broke in upon the Christians at many points, but more than twelve thousand of them died. Another party of invaders devastated Gaul, and more than six hundred of them died.

846 According to their custom, the Northmen plundered eastern and western Frisia and burned down the town of Dordrecht, with two other villages, before the eyes of Lothair [The Emperor]. He was in the castle of Nimwegen but could not punish the crime. The Northmen returned to their own country with many men and goods.

At this same time the Saracens killed all the Christians whom they found outside the walls of Rome. They also carried men and women away prisoners. Their crimes from day to day bring sorrow to Christians.

849 The heathen from the North caused trouble in Christendom as usual and grew greater in strength, but it is revolting to say more of this matter.

853 A great famine in Saxony so that many were forced to live on horse meat.

Source: Modified excerpt from the "Annals of Xanten," probably written by the abbey's monks in the middle of the 9th century.