Homework Assignment # 3

**Reconstructing how ordinary people lived through documents**

The following packet consists of eleven short excerpts from medieval English documents, illustrating how ordinary people lived. It is a historian’s job to read these pieces of everyday life, and figure out from them what life was like.

Read all the short excerpts (which are in three groups), and answer the questions after each group.

**Part 1 – Going Away to College**

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| *College Life: Letters between Students and their Fathers, c. 1200* |
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| *The "university" was one of the longest-lasting products of the zenith of High Medieval culture. It developed from cathedral schools, in which masters instructed adolescent boys in the seven "liberal arts" that were the standard curriculum of the era. However, then as now, the university was not merely a setting for instruction in the trivium and quadrivium. One must remember that these were young men, often living far from home and on their own, and the masters could not be everywhere at once...*  *Source: Sources of the Western Tradition: Volume I: From Ancient Times to the Enlightenment, ed. Marvin Perry, Joseph R. Peden, and Theodore H. Von Laue, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995), 182. Used with permission from G.G. Coulton, Life in the Middle Ages,Vol. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928/29).*  **FATHERS TO SONS**  **I**  I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies, whence it happens that you have read but one volume of law while your more industrious companions have read several. Wherefore I have decided to exhort you herewith to repent utterly of your dissolute and careless ways, that you may no longer be called a waster and your shame may be turned to good repute.  **II**  I have learned - not from your master, although he ought not to hide such things from me, but from a certain trustworthy source - that you do not study in your room or act in the schools as a good student should, but play and wander about, dis­obedient to your master and indulging in sport and in certain other dishonorable practices which I do not now care to explain by letter.  **SONS TO FATHERS**  **I**  "Well-beloved father, I have not a penny, nor can I get any save through you, for all things at the University are so dear: nor can I study in my Code or my Digest, for they are all tattered. Moreover, I owe ten crowns in dues to the Provost, and can find no man to lend them to me; I send you word of greetings and of money.  The Student hath need of many things if he will profit here; his father and his kin must needs supply him freely, that he be not compelled to pawn his books, but have ready money in his purse, with gowns and furs and decent clothing, or he will be damned for a beggar; wherefore, that men may not take me for a beast, I send you word of greetings and of money.  Wines are dear, and hostels, and other good things; I owe in every street, and am hard bested to free myself from such snares. Dear father, design to help me! I fear to be excommunicated; already have I been cited, and there is not even a dry bone in my larder. If I find not the money before this feast of Easter, the church door will be shut in my face: where­fore grant my supplication, for I send you word of greetings and of money.  Well-beloved father, to ease my debts contracted at the tavern, at the baker's, with the doctor and the bedells [a minor col­lege official], and to pay my subscriptions to the laundress and the barber, I send you word of greetings and of money."  **II**  Sing unto the Lord a new song, praise him with stringed instruments and organs, rejoice upon the high-sounding cymbals, for your son has held a glorious disputation, which was attended by a great number of teachers and scholars. He answered all questions without a mistake, and no one could get the better of him or prevail against his arguments. Moreover he cel­ebrated a famous banquet, at which both rich and poor were honoured as never before, and he has duly begun to give lec­tures which are already so popular that others' classrooms are deserted and his own are filled. |

1. **What sorts of problems could a student get into at a medieval university?**

## What difficulties could arise between the “locals” and the student population?

## What does this tell us about the sorts of things a student needed to get an education, and what he had to do?

## Part 2 – Having a good time

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| *Sports in the City of London*, 1180  *From William FitzStephen’s introduction to the life of St. Thomas A Becket, trans. By H.E. Butler, reprinted in Everyone a Witness: the Plantagenet Age, ed. Arthur S. Finlay (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976) 112-14* |
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| London in place of shows in the theatre and stage-plays has holier plays, wherein are shown forth the miracles wrought by Holy Confessors or the sufferings which glorified the constancy of Martyrs.  Moreover, each year upon the day called Carnival - to begin with the sports of boys (for we were all boys once) - boys from the schools bring fighting-cocks to their master, and the whole forenoon is given up to boyish sport; for they have a holiday in the schools that they may watch their cocks do battle. After dinner all the youth of the City goes out into the fields in a much-frequented game of ball. The scholars of each school have their own ball, and almost all the workers of each trade have theirs also in their hands. Elder men and fathers and rich citizens come on horseback to watch the con­tests of their juniors and after their fashion are young again with the young; and it seems that the motion of their natural heat is kindled by the contemplation of such violent motion and by their partaking in the joys of untrammelled youth.  Every Sunday in Lent after dinner a 'fresh swarm of young gentles' goes forth on war-horses, 'steeds skilled in the contest, of which each is 'apt and schooled to wheel in circles round'. From the gates burst forth in throngs the lay sons of citizens, armed with lance and shield, the younger with shafts forked at the end, but with steel point removed. 'They wake war's semblance' and in mimic contest exercise their skill at arms. Many courtiers come too, when the King is in res­idence; and from the households of Earls and Barons come young men not yet invested with the belt of knighthood, that they may there contend together. Each one of them is on fire with hope of victory. The fierce horses neigh, 'their limbs tremble; they champ the bit; impatient of delay they cannot stand still'. When at length 'the hoof of trampling steeds careers along', the youthful riders divide their hosts; some pursue those that fly before, and cannot overtake them; others unhorse their comrades and speed by.  At the feast of Easter they make sport with naval tourneys, as it were. For a shield being strongly bound to a stout pole in mid-stream, a small vessel, swiftly driven on by many an oar and by the river's flow, carries a youth standing at the prow, who is to strike the shield with his lance. If he break the lance by striking the shield and keep his feet unshaken, he has achieved his purpose and fulfilled his desire. If, however, he strike it strongly without splintering his lance, he is thrown into the rushing river, and the boat of its own speed passes him by. But there are on each side of the shield two ves­sels moored, and in them are many youths to snatch up the striker who has been sucked down by the stream, as soon as he emerges into sight or 'once more bubbles on the topmost wave'. On the bridge and the galleries above the river are spec­tators of the sport 'ready to laugh their fill'.  On feast-days throughout the summer the youths exercise themselves in leaping, archery and wrestling, putting the stone, and throwing the thonged javelin beyond a mark, and fighting with sword and buckler. 'Cytherea leads the dance of maidens and the earth is smitten with free foot at moonrise.' In winter on almost every feast-day before dinner either foaming boars and hogs, armed with 'tusks lightning-swift', themselves soon to be bacon, fight for their lives, or fat bulls with butting horns, or huge bears, do combat to the death against hounds let loose upon them.  When the great marsh that washes the northern walls of the City is frozen, dense throngs of youths go forth to dis­port themselves upon the ice. Some gathering speed by a run, glide sidelong, with feet set well apart, over a vast space of ice. Others make themselves seats of ice like millstones and are dragged along by a number who run before them holding hands. Sometimes they slip owing to the greatness of their speed and fall, every one of them, upon their faces. Others there are, more skilled to sport upon the ice, who fit to their feet the shin-bones of beasts, lashing them beneath their ankles, and with ironshod poles in their hands they strike ever and anon against the ice and are borne along swift as a bird in flight or a bolt shot from a mangonel. But sometimes two by agreement run one against the other from a great distance and, rais­ing their poles, strike one another. One or both fall, not without bodily hurt, since on falling they are borne a long way in opposite directions.  Many of the citizens delight in taking their sport with birds of the air, merlins and falcons and the like, and with dogs that wage warfare in the woods. The citizens have the special privilege of hunting in Middlesex, Hertfordshire and all Chiltern, and in Kent as far as the river Cray. |

1. **What sorts of sports were particularly popular in London during this period?**

## How violent were these activities?

**Part 3 – Crime in the City**

Coroner’s Rolls, City of London, 1322-1337

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| *The Coroner's Office was established in London in 1194, as part of the general legal reform of the English kingdom by Henry II. The Coroner was charged with investigating episodes of sudden or unnatural death, and the goal was to satisfy the community at large that the death could be explained. Thereby, the community's psychological needs could be met - but it was also the Coroner's duty to determine whether criminal charges should be brought or financial compensation be assessed.*  *The documents below are from a remarkable series of Coroners' Reports in the 1320s and 1330s. Within these odd (and often tragic) little stories are nuggets that can be used by social historians attempting to reconstruct life in the Late Medieval period.*  *Source: Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London,1300-1378. ed. R. R. Sharpe, London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1913), 56-57, 63-69, 86-87, 127, 183. Language has been modernized by the editors.*  **1. ON THE DEATH OF ROBERT. SON OF JOHH de ST. BOTULPH**  Saturday before the Feast of St. Margaret [20 July] in the year [16 Edward II, A.D. 1322], information was given to the... Coroner and Sheriffs that a certain Robert, son of John de St. Botulph, a boy seven years old, lay dead of a death other than his rightful death in a certain shop which the said Robert held of Richard de Wirhale in the parish of St. Michael de Pater­nosterchurch in the Ward of Vintry. Thereupon the Coroner and Sheriffs proceeded there and, having summoned good men of that Ward and of the three nearest Wards, namely Douuegate, Queenhithe and Cordewanerstreet, they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors say that when on the Sunday next before the Feast of St. Dunstan [19 May], [Robert son of] John, Richard son of John de Chesthunt, and two other boys, names unknown, were playing on certain pieces of timber in a lane called "Kyrounelane" in the Ward of Vintry, a certain piece fell on [Robert] and broke his right leg. In the course of time Johanna, his mother, arrived, and rolled the timber off him, and carried him to a shop where he lingered until Friday... when he died at the hour of Prime of the broken leg and of no other felony, nor do they suspect anyone of the death, but only the accident and the fracture. Being asked who were present when it happened, they say the aforesaid Robert, Richard son of John de Chesthunt and two boys whose names they know not and no others.  Four neighbors attached, namely: Richard Daske, by Peter Cosyn and Roger le Roper. Anketin de Gisors, by Robert de Wynton and Andrew de Gloucester. Thomas le Roper, by Richard de Colyngstoke and Thomas atte March. John Amys, by John de Shirbourne and John de Lincoln.  **2. ON THE DEATH OF NICHOLAS. SERVANT TO SIMON de KNOTTYNGLEY**  On Monday in Pentecost week the year [A.D. 1324], it happened that Nicholas, the servant of Simon de Knottyngley, lay killed before the gate of the house of William de Pomfreit in the high street in the parish of St. Botulph de Bisshopsgate.... On hearing this, the... Coroner and Sheriffs proceeded there, and having summoned good men of that Ward and of the three nearest Wards..., they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors say that on that Monday, at break of day, William de la March, the late palfrey-man [a type of groom] of Henry de Percy, Thomas the servant of Henry de Percy's cook, John the servant to Henry Krok, who was Henry's esquire, assaulted, beat and wounded Nicholas in the house held by Alice de Witteney, a courtesan, whose landlord was John de Assheby.... William de la March struck Nicholas with a knife called an "Irishknife" under the right breast and penetrating to the belly, inflicting a wound an inch long and in depth half through the body. [Nicholas] thus wounded went from there to the place where he was found dead, where he died at daybreak of the same day. Being asked what became of the said William, Thomas and John, the jurors say that they immediately fled, but where they went or who received them they know not, nor do they suspect any one except those three. Being asked as to their goods and chattels, the jurors say that they had none, so far as could be ascertained. Being asked who first found the corpse, they say it was Thomas, son of John le Marshall, who raised the cry so that the country came. The corpse was viewed on which the wound appeared. [Order] to the Sheriff to attach the said William, Thomas and John as soon as they be found in their bailiwick.  Afterwards the William de la March was captured by Adam de Salisbury, the Sheriff and committed to Newgate [prison]. William has a surcoat which is confiscated [because of] his flight, worth two shillings, for which Adam de Sal­isbury the Sheriff [is responsible].  Four neighbors attached, namely: John Assheby, by Thomas Starling and Walter de Stanes. Walter de Bedefunte, by Walter de Northampton and John le Barber. William de Pomfreit, by William de Chalke and Roger Swetyng. Adam le Fuitz Robert, by Eustace le Hattere and Thomas de Borham.  **3. ON THE DEATH OF THOMAS le POUNTAGER**  On Saturday the Feast of St. Laurence [10 Aug.] the year [A.D. 1325], it happened that a certain Thomas, son of John le Pountager, lay drowned in the water of the Thames before the wharf of Richard Dorking in the parish of St. Martin, in the Ward of Vintry. On hearing this, the Coroner and Sheriffs proceeded there, and having summoned good men of that Ward and of the three nearest Wards... they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors say that when on the preceding Friday, at dusk, Thomas had placed himself on the quay of Edward le Blount to bathe in the Thames, he was accidentally drowned, no one being present; that he remained in the water until Saturday, when at the third hour John Fleg a boatman discovered his corpse and raised the cry so that the country came. The corpse viewed on which no wound or bruise appeared.  The above John Fleg, the finder of the body, attached by Robert de Lenne and Robert de Taunton. Four neighbors attached [their names are listed in the report].  **4. ON THE DEATH OF JOHANNA, DAUGHTER OF BERNARD OF IRLAUNDE**  Friday after the Feast of St. Dunstan [19 May] the year [A.D. 1322], it happened that Johanna daughter of Bernard de Irlaunde, a child one month old, lay dead of a death other than her rightful death, in a shop held by the said Bernard... in the parish of St. Michael, in the Ward of Queenhithe. On hearing this, the Coroner and Sheriffs proceeded there, and having summoned good men of that Ward and of the three nearest Wards..., they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors say that when on the preceding Thursday, before the hour of Vespers, Johanna was lying in her cradle alone, the shop door being open there entered a certain sow which mortally bit the right side of the head of Johanna. At length there came Margaret, ... Johanna's mother, and raised the cry and snatched up Johanna and kept her alive until midnight Friday when she died of the said bite and of no other felony. Being asked who were present, [the jurors] say, "No one except Margaret," nor do they suspect [any other cause] except the bite . the corpse of the said Johanna viewed on which no [other?] hurt appeared [sic]. The sow appraised by the jurors at 13 d. for which Richard Costantin, the Sheriff; [is responsible].  The above Margaret who found the body attached by John de Bedford and Andrew de Gloucester. Four neighbors attached [their names are listed in the report].  **5. ON THE DEATH OF MATILDA CAMBERSTER AND MARGERY HER DAUGHTER**  Friday after the Feast of St. Ambrose [4 April, 1337], information given to the Coroner and Sheriffs, that Matilda la Cambester and Margery her daughter aged one mouth, lay dead of a death other than their rightful death in a shop in the rent of the Prior of Tortyton in the parish of St Swythin in the Ward of Walbrok. Thereupon they proceeded there, and having summoned good men of that Ward, they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors... say that on the preced­ing Thursday, after the hour of curfew when Matilda and Margery lay asleep in the shop a lighted candle which Matilda had negligently left on the wall, fell down among some straw and set fire to the shop so that the said Matilda and Margery were suffocated and burnt before the neighbors knew anything about it. The bodies viewed, &c.  Four neighbors attached [their names are listed in the report].  **6. ON THE DEATH OF LUCY FAUKES**  On Monday before the Feast of St. Michael [29 Sept., 1322], it happened that a certain Lucy Faukes lay dead of a death other than her rightful death in a certain shop which Richard le Sherman held of John Priour, senior, in the parish of St. Olave in the Ward of Alegate. On hearing this, the Coroner and Sheriffs proceeded thither, and having summoned good men of that Ward and of the three nearest Wards, ... they diligently inquired how it happened. The jurors say that on Sunday before the Feast of St. Matthew [2 Sept., 1322], about the hour of curfew, Lucy came to the shop in order to pass the night there with... Richard le Sherman and Cristina his wife, as she oftentimes was accustomed, and because Lucy was clad in good clothes, Richard and Cristina began to quarrel with her in order to obtain a reason for killing her for her clothes. At length Robert took up a staff called ÔBalstaf;' and with the force and assistance of Cristina, struck her on the top of the head, and mortally broke and crushed the whole of her head, so that she died at once. Richard and Cristina stripped Lucy of her clothes, and immediately fled, but where they went or who received them, [the jurors] do not know. Being asked who were present when this happened, they say, "No one except the said Richard, Cristina and Lucy." Nor do they suspect anyone of the death except Richard and Cristina. Being asked about the goods and chattels of Richard and Cristina, the jurors say that they had nothing except what they took away with them. Being asked who found the dead Lucy's dead body, they say a certain Giles le Portor who raised the cry so that the country came. Order to the Sheriffs to attach the said Richard and Cristina when found in their bailiwick.  ... Four neighbors attached [their names are listed in the report]. |

1. **What do these documents tell us about the living conditions for various classes of people in London in this period?**

## What do the homicide cases suggest about criminality in this era?

1. **What kind of law enforcement can be deduced from these documents?**