

Paraphrases

Introduction (II. 1–7)

The King greets the addressees of the charter, mainly higher church officials and the leading nobles (here: the “loyal subjects”).

Article 1

The English Church is free to act and the King is not allowed to interfere in church matters.

Transition (II. 14 – 17)

The King promises to guarantee the following liberties to all “free men” and their heirs, and his own heirs are to keep this promise, too.

Article 8

Widows do not have to marry if they do not want to. But if they are wealthy and want to (re-)marry, they need permission.

Article 12

Only under certain specific circumstances is the King allowed to collect scutage (tax paid by the lords to avoid military service), and it must only be a certain and “reasonable” amount.

Article 13

This article confirms the traditional rights and the freedom of the City of London.

Article 14

When agreement on the collection of special taxes is needed, the individuals in charge will be asked to get together for this by letter.

Article 20

Punishments of crimes must be in proportion to the seriousness of the crime, and by no means should a punishment take away a person’s possibility to make a living. In all cases, well-respected men must assess the case and swear on it.

Article 30 & 31

These two articles protect an individual’s property from being stolen.

Article 38

No one can be put on trial without a reliable witness who can attest that the person has really committed the crime.

Article 39

Everybody has the right to be heard by a jury of his/her own class, and can only be judged by them or by the law of the land.

Article 40

Everyone has the right to a fair trial, and justice cannot be bought.

Tips / Questions

Introduction (II. 1–7)

Who is not addressed?

Article 1

What does this tell you about the relationship between king and church before 1215?
Do some research into the conflict between King John and Pope Innocent III.

Transition (II. 14 – 17)

In 1215, how many of England’s population were actually “free men”?

Article 8

What happens to the balance of power in a country if rich women/widows marry less well-off noblemen?

Article 12

Under which of the categories can this article be subsumed, and why? (rule of law/fairness of the law/due process of law/economic rights)

Article 13

How does this article reinforce the idea of rule of law, not just for landowners?

Article 14

This article and the meetings (and procedures) described eventually led to the creation of the British Parliament (the word “parliament” is Middle English and comes from Old French “parlement” = speaking). Can you think of reasons?

Article 20

This article can primarily be subsumed under the category “fairness of the law”. Explain.

Article 30 & 31

Do you know the story of Robin Hood? It is set in the time of King Richard the Lionheart and his brother, the future King John. Can you make a connection to Articles 30 and 31?

Article 38, 39, 40

These articles are considered the most lasting contributions of Magna Carta.
Think of reasons.
Tip: Revise the way in which you have organized your rights and freedoms today.