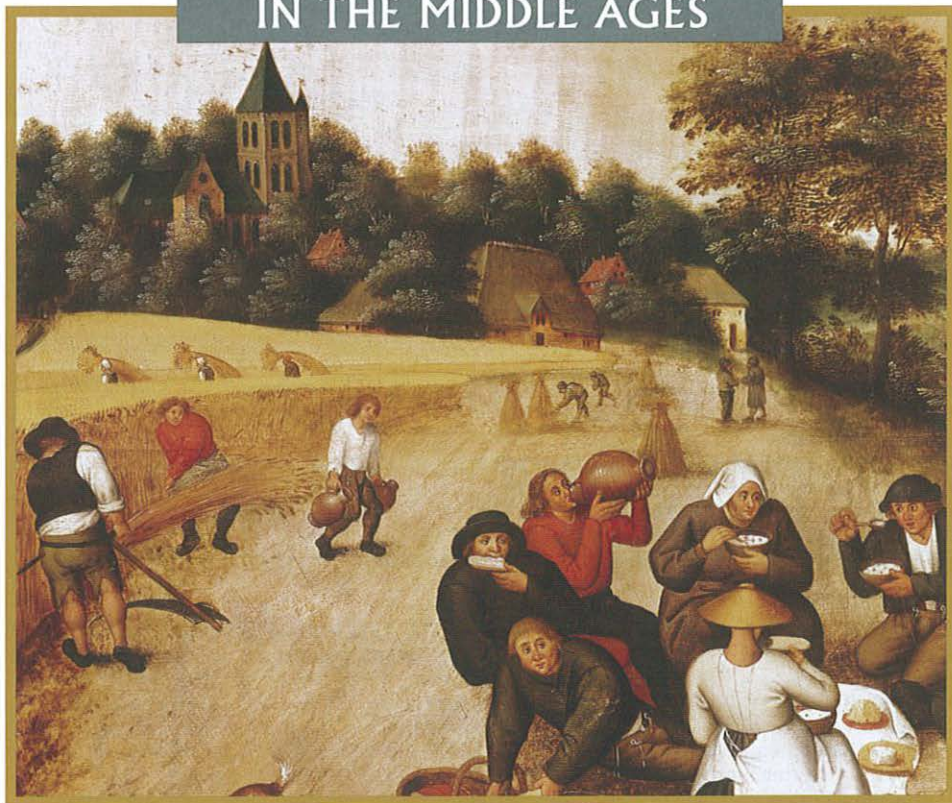




WORLD ALMANAC® LIBRARY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

feudalism and village life

IN THE MIDDLE AGES



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size, according to how prosperous the families were. Closes were usually divided into two sections: one included the house, outbuildings, and an outdoor work area; the other had a vegetable garden.

The poorest peasants, or *cottars*, lived in small cottages. These were typically one- or two-room houses that measured about 10 by 20 feet (3 by 6 meters). Most villagers lived in larger houses that averaged 14 by 50 feet (4 by 15 m), but some houses measured almost 100 feet (30 m) in length. The typical house had a large central living area and two or three bays or alcoves. At one end of the house, an area was set aside for sheltering animals and storing grain or equipment. The wealthiest peasants had houses with four or five bays, a small buttery and pantry, and a barn for housing livestock. Some houses also had lofts, used for sleeping and storage, that were reached by a ladder.

Peasant houses were flimsy and had to be rebuilt regularly. Depending on available materials, they were framed in timber or had the central room built of stone. Walls were made of wattle and daub (twigs and clay) or similar materials. Lords occasionally paid for the cost of building and repairing peasants' homes.

Roofs were thatched with straw or other plant material. Thatching was cheap, but it provided an ideal spot for insects, vermin, and birds to nest. Thatch also rotted and could catch fire from

Local Markets

Although the manor produced food for its people, it was not completely self-sustaining. Both bailiff and villagers needed to purchase many items in the local market town. There they obtained iron, stone for building, salt, carts, pottery, footwear, tools, baskets, and many other raw and manufactured goods. They could also purchase animals and seed. The villagers did not need to have money but could barter their surplus produce for needed goods.

Peasant Homes

Within the village, each peasant household had a homestead called a *close*. Closes varied greatly in



◀ Wealthy peasants are shown in this picture of a Flemish house. They have a cow stalled in a bay at the end of the house, and the people indoors are sitting in front of a fireplace. The little window in the slanted roof indicates a loft.

the smoke and ash that rose from the open hearth below.

The floors of cottages and houses were generally made of clay. Housewives spread straw on top to absorb mud and dirt as well as the droppings of pigs and chickens, which were allowed inside during the day. Peasant homes had windows without glass but with shutters, and they had sturdy wooden doors. The hearth was placed in the central living bay, although some houses had more than one hearth. Few villagers could afford a fireplace with a chimney.

Lords were responsible for providing their serfs with a minimum of furniture and farm tools and equipment. How much a serf received depended on the size of his holdings. In general, all serfs—including cottars—received a trestle table with a

tablecloth and some chests, pots, pans, and vats. Others got plows, harnesses, and even **draft animals**. Serfs bought or made the rest of the furniture and household items they needed.

Drainage Ditches

Villagers frequently built drainage ditches around their closes and between their gardens and their living areas. The ditches had other uses, however. Women washed clothes, and children played in them. Everyone used them for bathing. Although planks were placed across them so people could cross, boys sometimes crossed them by pole-vaulting instead.



◀ A blacksmith needed specialized equipment. The man on the left stands by a bellows, used to blow air on the fire, making it hot enough to soften iron. The men on the right hammer a piece of soft iron into shape. Blacksmiths made tools, ox shoes and horseshoes, and parts of carts and wheelbarrows.

Typical outbuildings were barns, sheds, and pens for animals. Grain was often stored in these buildings, and peasants did such work as milking and making butter or cheese, brewing, and even weaving in them. Outbuildings sometimes included a dower cottage for parents who had retired or a specialized building such as a smithy (blacksmith's shop) or carpenter's shop. Much of daily living took place outdoors.