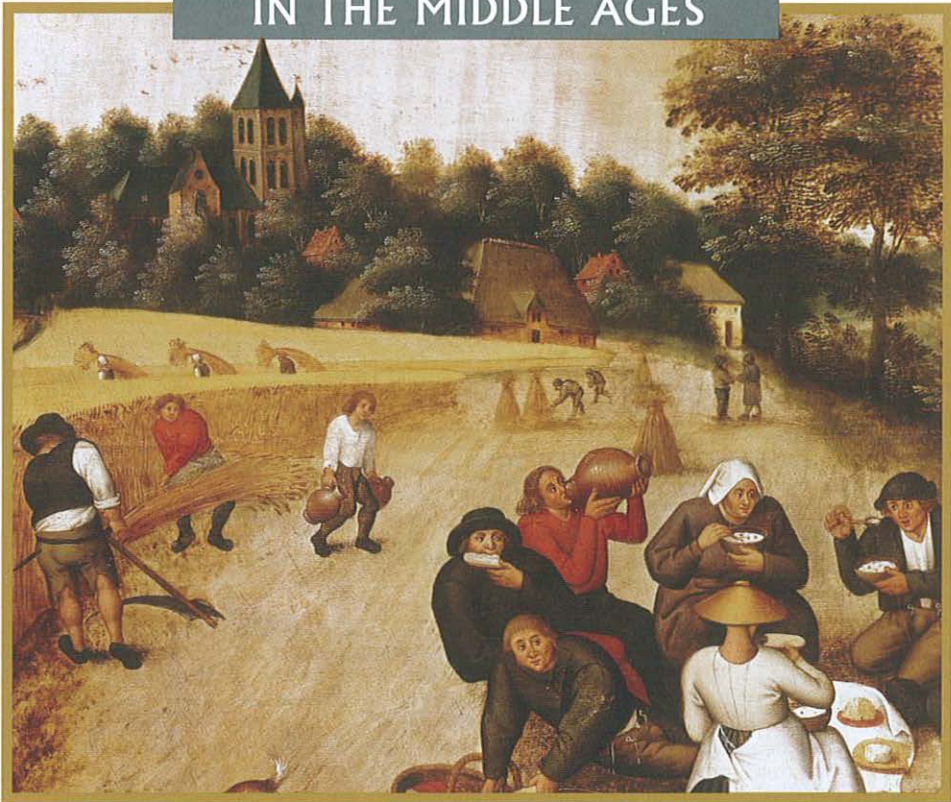




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feudalism and Village Life

IN THE MIDDLE AGES



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the lord's household

The lord and lady needed many people to help them run their affairs. Their financial advisors, the knights of their garrison, and their household staff all lived with them on the manor. As with other organizations in the Middle Ages, there were levels within the lord's household and responsibilities and duties assigned to those at each level.

Members of the Household

Noble households varied considerably. Besides the lord, the lady, and their children, other members of a noble household were knights, maidens who served as the lady's companions, and senior officials, such as the estate steward and chaplain. A large landowner also had a treasurer to help administer his finances and possibly auditors, who checked the accounts of the different manors. Clerks helped the treasurer and steward. Small landowners had smaller households, but they had the same senior officials.

In addition, lords had large domestic staffs. In small households, the lady might supervise the servants personally. Large households, however, sometimes had more than sixty servants, and

lords relied on the steward of the household to supervise all of them. Senior staff members included the chamberlain (who attended the lord in his chamber), the butler (in charge of the buttery), the marshal (responsible for the horses, stables, and outside workers), and the cook. These senior servants normally traveled with the lord, lady, and noble companions to their different manors. Other trusted members of the staff were the children's nurses, the barber, and messengers who carried letters great distances. The household also employed tailors, bakers,

▼ In this normal noble family dinner, the lord and lady sit at the table with their two chaplains, a nobleman, and two other ladies. Other members of their household would sit at other tables.





◀ The lady supervised the cook and other servants to make sure the dishes served were abundant and reflected her family's high station. She also made sure that servants did not waste any food.

laundresses, grooms, and people who cleaned and generally helped the senior staff.

The Lord and Lady

The lord made the decisions about his lands and supervised the work of his officials. He made sure his territories were protected. He stayed in contact with his vassals, held court, and served on his overlord's court. The lord paid close attention to his rents and other income because he had many expenses. He had to pay fees to his own lord and provide **dowries** for his daughters. A lord had to leave his sons lands when he died or educate them so that they could join the clergy. One of the lord's main concerns was arranging marriages for his children with rich and powerful families that would make his own family more rich and powerful. Moreover, he was expected to maintain a high standard of living. It was a sign of status that he could feed a large household as well as guests.

When the lord was away for military reasons or other business, the lady took over management of the estate. Upon her husband's return, however, she lost her position. Although she had power and influence in the household, the lady had no legal authority.

The lady of the manor ran the household. She supervised the everyday work of the kitchen, bakery, brew house, dairy, gardens, and orchard. She made sure enough food was put aside for the winter and oversaw the purchase of cloth, spices, and other goods the manor did not produce. It was her job to see that every member of the household was properly clothed.

An important part of a noblewoman's life was entertaining guests. Guests who lived nearby sometimes came just for dinner, but many stayed for several days. Hosting guests was a way of maintaining ties with family and friends and fulfilling feudal obligations to inferiors and superiors. Entertaining guests also helped advance a family's interests. By inviting other nobles to her home, a wife could help her husband forge military alliances. If her husband had political ambitions, she could establish closer ties with influential members of his overlord's household or create opportunities for her husband to advise and help his overlord. Through her connections, the lady could find a position for a young female relative as a companion to an important noblewoman. The young woman could then learn how to act among powerful people, make influential friends,



Noble Widows

Although a noblewoman of high rank had more status than a nobleman of lesser rank, widows were the only women who could completely control their own affairs. Widows controlled their own manors and could sue others in court. A noble widow could continue to entertain, travel, and maintain her network of friends and contacts as she had when her husband was alive. Without a husband, however, she had no political influence, unless she had a son who consulted her for help and advice on political matters.

and meet a wealthy future husband. Noblewomen also fulfilled their feudal duties by exchanging letters and small gifts with other members of the nobility.

The Lord and Lady's Children

The young children of nobles had little contact with their parents. Infants were placed in the care of wet nurses who cared for them until age

seven or eight. The nurse took the place of the mother. Not only was she expected to feed, bathe, and attend to the child's physical needs, but also to hug, kiss, and sing the child to sleep. Wet nurses even suckled young children in place of their mothers. Children spent their early years at play. They had all sorts of toys: rattles, balls, pretty stones, dolls, and horns. Their games and entertainments included puppet shows, various ball games, hide and seek, archery, and building sand castles.

At about age seven, children began their formal education. Noble parents could send their children to boarding schools in nunneries or have their children taught at home by a tutor, perhaps the manor's chaplain, assisted by other members of the household. Sometimes mothers taught their own children. Another option was to send children to the house of relatives or friends—ideally higher in rank or more educated than the parents—for schooling. Children were not always happy with this arrangement, however. Letters from several children to their parents express their unhappiness in other people's households.



◀ In the Middle Ages, books had to be copied by hand, a very slow process. It was unlikely for a household to have more than one copy of a book. Teachers read aloud to students. Repetition and review were used so that students would remember what they were taught.