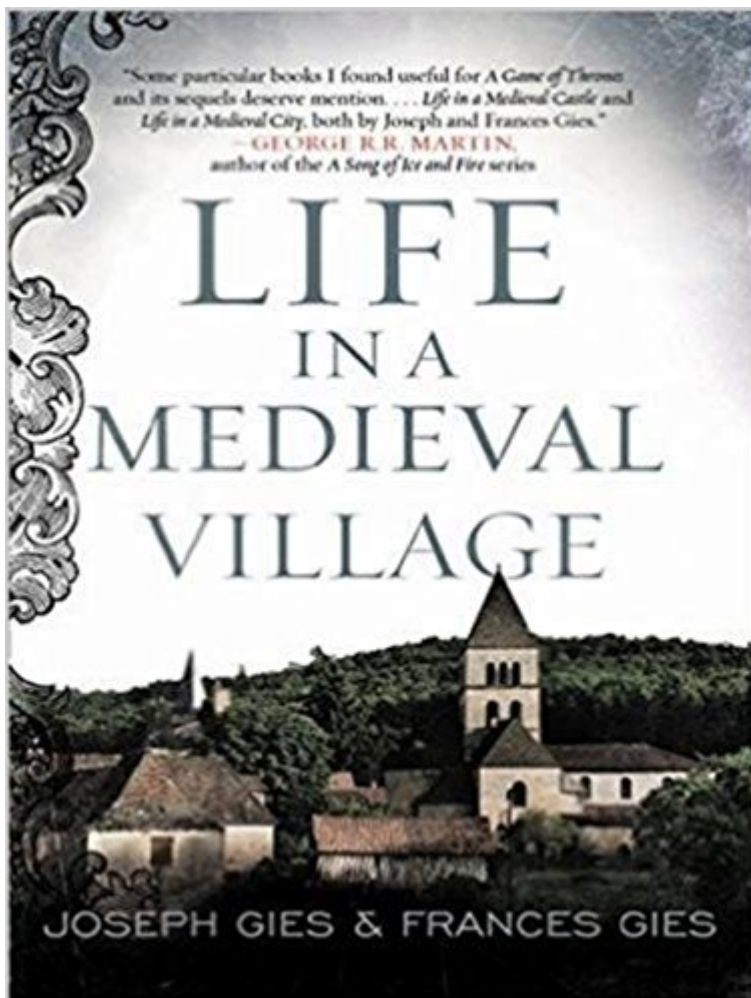


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# Life In A Medieval Village



## Synopsis

Life in a Medieval Village, by respected historians Joseph and Frances Gies, paints a lively, convincing portrait of rural people at work and at play in the Middle Ages. Focusing on the village of Elton, in the English East Midlands, the Gieses detail the agricultural advances that made communal living possible, explain what domestic life was like for serf and lord alike, and describe the central role of the church in maintaining social harmony. Though the main focus is on Elton, c. 1300, the Gieses supply enlightening historical context on the origin, development, and decline of the European village, itself an invention of the Middle Ages. Meticulously researched, Life in a Medieval Village is a remarkable account that illustrates the captivating world of the Middle Ages and demonstrates what it was like to live during a fascinating-and often misunderstood-era.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

According to the authors of Life in a Medieval City , the vast majority of medieval Europeans lived in villages--"permanent communities organized for agricultural production." This earnest but dry distillation of period documents and archeological records focuses on Elton, an extant village located 70 miles north of London. The Gieses examine the dynamics of Elton's open-field type of agriculture; the division of the villagers into free and unfree, rich and poor; and the relationship between peasants and their ecclesiastical lord. Also discussed are the peasants' simple dress; meager diet; primitive housing; quarrels and lawsuits; sexual mores; rites of marriage, death and inheritance; and penchant for ale. Coroners' rolls reveal that parents frequently neglected infants; court accounts demonstrate that witnesses of crimes were obligated to come to the rescue of the

victim. While valuable to history students, the barrage of facts presented here won't come alive for lay readers. Illustrations not seen by PW. BOMC, History Book Club and QPB alternates. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Using the English village of Elton, the Gies vividly detail the everyday lives of people during the Middle Ages. The development and difficult-to-define concept of the village is traced, and examples of daily occurrences in the village hierarchy, the inhabitants, marriage and family, work, and in the judicial system are given. The decline of the village as a major social system concludes the study. The book will be a challenge for most high-school students. Many aspects of village life are discussed; because of the brevity of the text, most concepts are not fully developed. Middle Age terminology is used extensively, and often it is not defined until after the term has been introduced. Reproductions and illustrations give glimpses of medieval life, but do not relate directly to the text. However, records of fines, sales transactions, marriages, etc. are quoted to emphasize a point, providing primary-source information, and the book is a good example of history as a living, changing form, for it outlines some new interpretations of life during this period. --Stuart A. MacCaffray, Jr., Lake Braddock Secondary School, Burke, VA Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I thought I knew all there was to know about medieval peasants, but had barely scratched the surface. Make no mistake, the Gieses are clear that life was nasty, brutish and full of toil for peasants in the middle ages, but there was quite a bit more to their lives than grinding out a living. Villages were complex systems with carefully maintained responsibilities and officer selected both from above and within. Anyone who thinks that medieval peasants were mindless serfs who did their lord's bidding while Robin Hood-type figures scampered freely through the forest is in for a surprise. A medieval village more closely resembled a modern office than a sloshing pool of ignorant labor. Every job, relationship, piece of property and just about every aspect of life were all accounted for in a system of rights, identities and obligations. The authors do a wonderful job of leveraging the source material, focusing on the town of Elton, its history and inhabitants. Some of its long lists of fines and fees might become a bit tedious for the average reader, though I found this fascinating. Antiquated terms like "woolsilver" (money paid for sheep shearing) and "leirwite" (a fine for fornication!) always peak my interest. Reading the proceedings of the Lord's court, you'll get a much better sense of where his responsibilities began and ended, and what rights he had relative to

everyone else. You'll also learn why, if you were a woman in the thirteenth century, you had little chance of being burned as a witch, but were quite likely to be hauled into court for brewing lousy beer. A detailed, but still readable, visit to medieval England, which was more diverse and complicated than I ever imagined.

"Life in a Medieval Village" offers a tour through basic areas of academic interest relating to English medieval village life, particularly in the 1200s, including but by no means limited to farming methods, the manorial justice system, and the physical structure of houses. As a point of reference, it primarily focuses on one particular village--one that today is all but completely vanished, as is sadly the case with so much from the middle ages. Throughout the text, the authors offer examples translated from various types of records of the era, too, to illustrate their points. These add another dimension--a human dimension--to the broader historical details being offered. I learned new things reading this book. For instance, that there was often a single communal bakery in a village for the baking of bread. It is not an exuberant popular history, but there is a charm about this book and the authors' style. The authors clearly love learning about the middle ages and desire others to share in their enjoyment. That generosity of spirit and intent seeps through to the reader.

If you're interested in learning more about day-to-day life in the Middle Ages, this is the book for you. It's written in an engaging manner and provides tons of well-researched details. This is a great book for history buffs, but also for anyone interested in world-building, be it for a novel or for a role playing game, like D&D. If you enjoy the non-plot-related details in Game of Thrones, you will like this book.

I chose a rating of four as I usually do as a book must be exceptional to earn a five. Although the authors made an effort to define unfamiliar terms in context, the mini-definitions section at the end would have been more effective if an easy way to access it and return to the text had been available. Perhaps a method similar to that for footnotes.

A scholarly yet readable depiction of life in the Medieval English village. Royalty was firmly established and village life highly structured and orderly. It is easy to see the roots of English respect for order and class.

If you are a fan of the Gies, I recommend you read this book. It's NOT as good as Life in a Medieval

City, which is a real five star book. That's my favorite of theirs. I'd give this one 4.5 stars. "Village" is still enjoyable if you are interested in the topic but not as good as "City". Read and enjoy!

Interesting book but reads like a textbook so a bit slow going.

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