

# Women in England in the Middle Ages

By Jennifer Ward



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Medieval women faced many of the problems of their modern counterparts in bringing up their families, balancing family and work, and responding to the demands of their communities. Of many women in the period of a thousand years before 1500 we know little or nothing, though their typical ways of life, on farms or in the towns, can be reconstructed with accuracy from a variety of sources. We know more about a far smaller number of elite women, including queens such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Margaret of Anjou; noblewomen, whose characters and attitudes can be sensed directly or indirectly; and a variety of religious women. Literary sources help flesh out real attitudes, such as those of Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Jennifer Ward shows the life-cycle of medieval women, from birth, via marriage and child-rearing, to widowhood and death. She also brings out the slow changes in the position of women over a millennium.



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