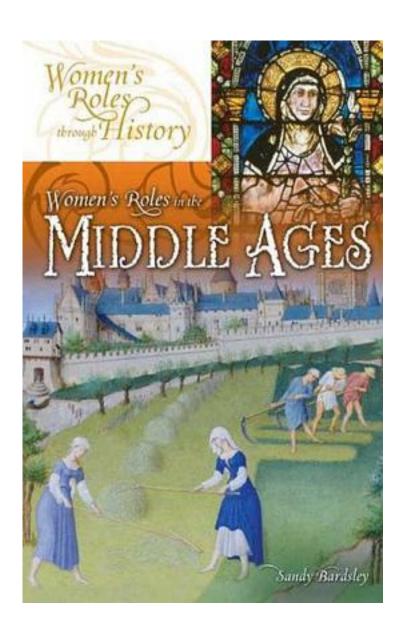
Women's Roles in the Middle Ages



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Information on women's roles and daily life in the Middle Ages has often been elusive. However, the author of this work has mined a wide range of primary sources, from noblewomen's writing, court rolls, chivalric literature, law codes and legal documents, to archaeology and artwork. This new survey provides readers with an excellent understanding of how women high and low fared in the fields of religion, work, family, law, culture, and politics and public life. Even though medieval women were divided by social class, religion, age, marital status, place and period, they were all subject to an overarching patriarchal structure and sometimes could transcend their prescribed inferior status. Numerous examples of these exceptional women and their words are included. Chapter 1 examines religion, focusing on women's roles in the church, and the experiences of Jewish and Islamic women in Western Europe. The second chapter examines women's work, looking in turn at the labour performed by peasant women, townswomen, and noblewomen. Women's roles within the family form the subject of the third chapter, which follows women throughout the typical lifecycle - from girl to widow - examining the expectations and experiences of women at each stage. Chapter 4, "Women and the Law," focuses on the ways in which laws both restricted and protected women. Women's roles in creative arts form the basis of the fifth chapter, 'Women and Culture." Finally, chapter 6 discusses women's experiences in politics and public life. While women as a group were typically banned from holding positions of public authority, some found ways to get around these strictures, while others were able to exercise power behind the scenes. While medieval women were, as a group, subordinate to their husbands and fathers, certain women, under certain circumstances, evaded subordination.

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