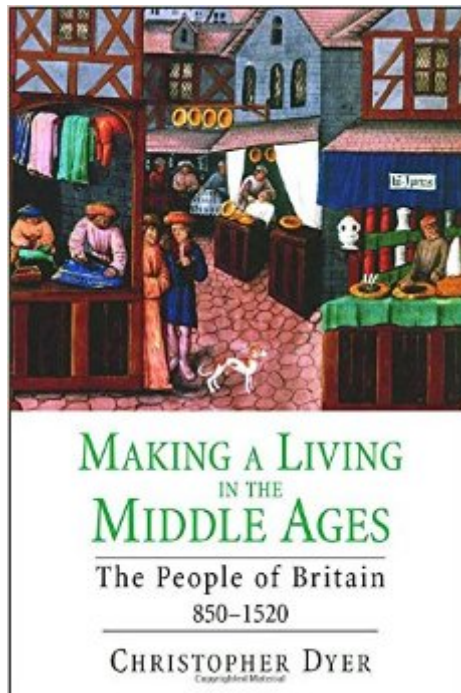


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Making A Living In The Middle Ages: The People Of Britain 850-1520



Synopsis

In his masterly new book, Christopher Dyer reviews our thinking about the economy of Britain in the middle ages. In analysing economic development and change, he allows us to reconstruct, often vividly, the daily lives and experiences of people in the past. The period covered here (850-1520) saw dramatic alterations in the state of the economy, and this account begins with the forming of villages, towns, networks of exchange and the social hierarchy in the ninth and tenth centuries, and ends with the inflation, population rise, and colonial expansion of the sixteenth century. This is a book about ideas and attitudes as well as the material world, and Dyer shows how people regarded the economy and how they responded to economic change. We see the growth of towns, the clearance of woods and wastes, the Great Famine, the Black Death and the upheavals in the fifteenth century through the eyes of those who lived through these great events. Changes were not always planned or directed by the rich and powerful, but arose from the uncoordinated ambitions and actions of thousands of ordinary people. Making a living in a changing world presented peasants, artisans and wage workers, as well as barons and monks, with dilemmas and decisions, which this book highlights. The lives of these people were also subject to impersonal forces, such as changes in the climate, but this book emphasises the choices that were made. This book will guide readers through the controversies on the impact of the Vikings and the Norman Conquest, the importance of population growth, the fourteenth-century crisis and urban decline. Dyer deals with issues in social history which had an impact on the economy, such as family structures, social control and social protest. He uses the evidence of archaeology and the landscape as well as the more conventional written sources. Clearly and robustly written, this book sets a new standard for the understanding of medieval life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Christopher Dyer presents a general economic history of England during the Middle Ages. He uses primary sources to support his claims and addresses a number of issues that this broad topic encompasses. His language is accessible to a wide audience, yet contains elements that require some scholarly background in order to fully appreciate the impact of the information that he presents. The main problems with Making a Living in the Middle Ages revolve around the inconsistency between Dyer's introduction and the majority of his book. This book was written very recently so one could assume that the author would take into consideration some of the most recent theories on the matter. While it is possible that this is the case, Dyer does not make specific reference to any such sources. Overall, the text is well written. Syntax and word choice make it accessible. His transitions were lacking, which would make it difficult to read if the reader lacked background knowledge. The vocabulary in the book was not at all difficult, and the author defines terms on initial and subsequent usages. When he fails to provide clear definitions, his context clues make his word choice accessible, providing a general impression of the meaning of the terminology. The book to me was appropriate with occasional oversimplification. The nature of the oversimplification was a lack of depth, but he has chose to cover an extremely broad topic, which I do not think should be approached in one book. The book deals with the economic history of England from 850 C.E. -1520 C.E. The author has a well-written introduction and clearly states the importance of the subject and his reasons for approaching it. I would not go so far as to say he fully addressed those reasons in his book.

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