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Work in the Middle Ages

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Depicting a vast array of professions, classes, and activities, Robert Fossier explains the meaning and place of work in medieval societies.

While work is a value in our day and age, things were differently in medieval times; in fact, the word itself did not exist before the 16th century. Rather than being stigmatized, idleness was considered "holy," like a monk at his prayers—worthy of esteem, even admiration. Negotiation was "vulgar and impious," and labor a punishment that God had levied upon Adam and Even upon their expulsion. Confirming this curse were the practices of slavery and servitude: those who work that others may profit were subjugated creatures. Gradually, work made its way from being forced and degrading to a chance for redemption, a natural form of obedience to the Lord.

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