

*THE REAL HISTORY OF Tom Jones* revivifies historical materials from which Henry Fielding constructed the greatest comic novel of the eighteenth century. This study recovers and explores the contexts necessary to understand Fielding's subtle art, such as the bloody conflict for the throne between Stuarts and Hanoverians, a contradictory class system, game laws that both protected and flouted individual property rights, and a justice system that proclaimed hanging for many crimes but let most criminals go. Drawing on evidence such as the peculiar appearance of eighteenth-century money, the fraudulent autobiography of a gypsy king, and a magical prayer book illustration, the book offers new readings of both *Tom Jones* and the political and legal landscape of Georgian England.