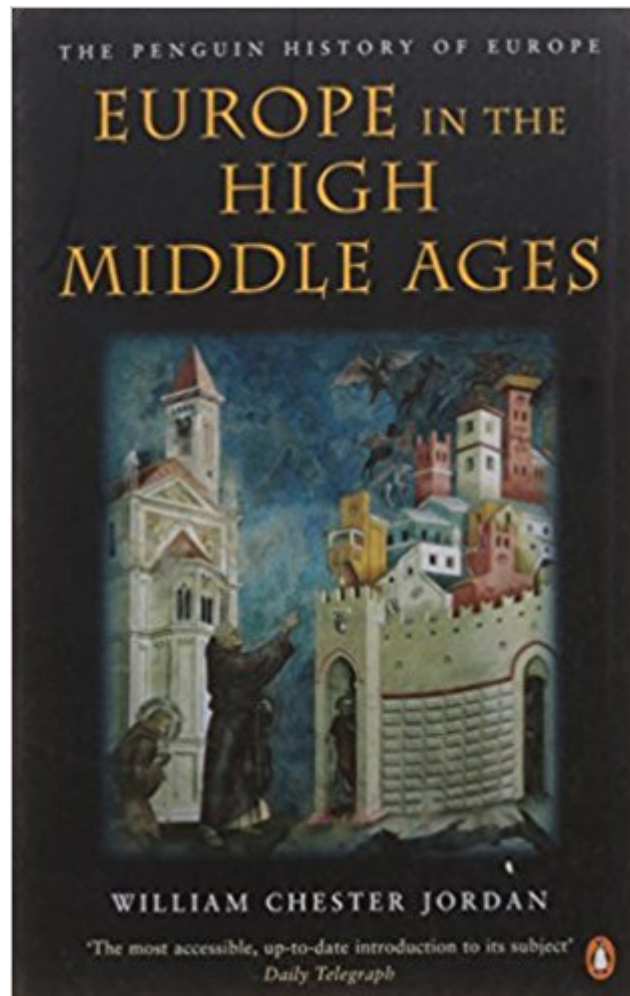




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Europe In The High Middle Ages (The Penguin History Of Europe)



Synopsis

"The Penguin History of Europe series... is one of contemporary publishing's great projects."--New Statesman

It was an age of hope and possibility, of accomplishment and expansion. Europe's High Middle Ages spanned the Crusades, the building of Chartres Cathedral, Dante's *Inferno*, and Thomas Aquinas. Buoyant, confident, creative, the era seemed to be flowering into a true renaissance-until the disastrous fourteenth century rained catastrophe in the form of plagues, famine, and war.

In *Europe in the High Middle Ages*, William Chester Jordan paints a vivid, teeming landscape that captures this lost age in all its glory and complexity. Here are the great popes who revived the power of the Church against the secular princes; the writers and thinkers who paved the way for the Renaissance; the warriors who stemmed the Islamic tide in Spain and surged into Palestine; and the humbler estates, those who found new hope and prosperity until the long night of the 1300s. From high to low, from dramatic events to social structures, Jordan's account brings to life this fascinating age. Part of the Penguin History of Europe series, edited by David Cannadine.

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Customer Reviews

As Jordan shows, the Middle Ages in Europe were indeed the best of times and worst of times. The beauties of Gothic architecture, the revivals of Latin literature, the rise of the university, the lyrical romances and chivalric chansons formed the high points of years that also witnessed famine, plague, political and religious squabbles, and the Crusades. Princeton historian Jordan (*The Great*

Famine) marvelously weaves the many and various events of the years 1000-1350 into a splendid historical tapestry. He discusses how various European countries experienced the Middle Ages, putting to rest the notion that the era was monolithic and affected everyone the same way. The conflict between the Catholic Church and the state lies at the heart of the medieval period, and Jordan adeptly chronicles that struggle. As the monarchy gained power, the Church found that even voices within, such as monastic movements like the Franciscans and the Dominicans, sought reform. By the end of the Middle Ages, the Church found itself in a crisis that laid the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation. Jordan's magisterial survey indicates how rich and significant the Middle Ages were in forming European culture. That this is the inaugural volume in the Penguin History of Europe augurs very well for the series. Illus., maps. (On sale Jan. 27) Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A glimpse of light between early medieval chaos and a plague-infested fourteenth century, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were an era of significant cultural and economic progress as well as the time of most of the things we traditionally associate with the Middle Ages, including Gothic cathedrals, knights, Crusades, and courtly love. Contextualizing these and other high points, this book gives a balanced, comprehensive description of Europe's first renaissance. Jordan is both concise and thorough, covering all geographic regions and supplementing his political narrative (who begot whom, who beheaded whom) with occasional discussion of cultural advances and everyday life (as well as ever-helpful genealogical tables). He is also somewhat fast moving, assuming at least a basic understanding of the most major events as he points up the underlying themes that define the High Middle Ages: the increasing power of the papacy, the effect of philosophical and violent contact with Islam, difficulty in succession, and others. The third in Penguin's eight-part series in European history is highly accessible yet academic enough to be valuable as a collegiate text. Brendan Driscoll Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An enjoyable tour of an intriguing time. Just enough detail to bring some of the memorable people to life while allowing the narrative to flow on leaving me with a felt sense of having visited the High Middle Ages myself.

This is part of a multi-volume series covering the history of Europe from Classical times to the present day. The work provides a basic coverage of the era from about 1050 to 1250 CE. The main

contours of Western European history are dealt with - and the focus is political history. There is a discussion of the events and processes underlying the consolidation of the power of the French and English monarchies and the failed attempts by the German Emperor to achieve the same thing. Unlike some earlier histories, there is also a fair coverage of the formation of Poland, Hungary and the Bohemian state. The role of the Church and Papacy in particular in the formation of Western Christendom also receives a good overview. In addition to the chapters addressing these subjects, there are separate chapters dedicated to intellectual life, art and architecture. There is a particularly good discussion of the impact of famine and plague that brings the period to a close. This indeed is an area of specialist expertise for the author. The author however leaves out some important parts of the story. That the High Middle Ages represents an important period of growth and arguably is the era when Western Europe first developed a distinctive culture that stood as an equal to that of its neighbours cannot be doubted. The author sets out well enough a broad outline of the narrative of these developments but if you are interested in a deeper understanding of why this transformation occurred, the discussion does not go much further than the basic narrative. An end to raids by Vikings, Hungarians and Arabs, population growth, an expansion of agriculture, technological change such as the spread of the heavy plough, the development of trade and cities, the establishment of deep and durable connections with Islam and Byzantium all made their contributions to the transformation of Europe but any real discussion of how these factors worked to bring about that transformation and what were the most important is missing. The absence of any real overview of economic history thus is a specific weakness. For example, the workings of the feudal system and indeed any discussion of what it was or whether it really existed outside certain parts of France could add to the narrative. The importance of the revival of trade especially long distance trade that connected the Champagne fairs to far off parts of the world is a major omission from the work, particularly given the importance of this trade to urban life - and to the broader context - see below. The revival of a vibrant urban life was an important feature of the period. The treatment of links with the Islamic world is disappointing. Although the Crusades are well covered as are aspects of the Reconquista, relations with Islam are portrayed essentially as a political conflict with Western Christendom resulting in defeat for Christians in the Holy Land and victory in Spain. Apart from some reference to the influence of Avicenna and Averroes on Christian thought, there is little or no discussion of the important positive role that interaction with Muslims played on the transformation of Europe. This included diffusion of technology such as the astrolabe, ship building, irrigation and new crops such as oranges and rice. The long standing relationship/alliance between Venice and Egypt a key partnership with Muslims was one of the cornerstones of inter-State

relations during the period. This relationship was to a great extent a foundation plank of Venice's power and wealth and therefore a key part of the story of the times. This gets no airplay. There is also no discussion of the tolerance that could and did exist alongside political and religious conflict especially in Spain and Sicily under both Muslim and Christian rulers. It was that tolerance that allowed Christians, Muslims and Jews to work together and develop much of the intellectual groundwork for what later became the Western tradition. There is complete absence of any discussion of life in Muslim ruled states in Spain and Sicily. This too is part of Europe and its past. No discussion of the High Middle Ages could be complete without some coverage of the subject but this is missing. There are specific instances where the lack of coverage of Muslim Europe and its multi-faceted relationship and engagement with Christian Europe can lead the author to make incomplete or even wrong statements. For example, he refers to the introduction of the astrolabe as a "new" instrument. In fact it was not new at all but used previously in the Islamic world before being transmitted to Christians. He also makes the statement that there were no universities in Spain. This may be correct in the sense that universities following the Western model were not founded in Spain during the era but the statement misses the leading role that equivalent Islamic centres of learning in Andalusia played in the development of new knowledge. Roger Garaudy makes the case that the real "renaissance" of learning during the High Middle Ages began there and later spread to Christian Europe. This may or may not be on point but suggests a general development of knowledge that encompassed both the Christian and Muslim world (in which the Muslims (and Jews) took an early lead) as part of a common process that underpinned the era. The coverage of Eastern Europe is also wanting. There is a good coverage of Poland, Hungary and Bohemia and to this extent, Jordan's book goes further than older histories to provide a more complete narrative. However, there is little or nothing on Orthodox Europe ie Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania. Byzantium itself is discussed but only insofar as it's interactions with Crusaders makes its way into the narrative. As a part of the narrative in its own right, Byzantium gets little mention. This too is a significant omission given the importance of the Greeks in the rise of Venice and the expansion of Christianity into the Slavic lands. The Russian connection is also important for example the contest between the Teutonic knights and Alexander Nevsky that in the end established the boundary between Orthodoxy and Catholicism within Europe. This gets little coverage. The failure to engage adequately with Islam and the Orthodox lands results also in missing the importance of long distance trade that linked Europe not just with Islam, Byzantium and Russia but also India and ultimately China. Europe during the High Middle Ages was sharply distinguished from earlier centuries by the beginning of its enduring links with a newly globalised world that had become

possible because of the Pax Mongolica and Islamic trade routes across the Indian Ocean. It was of course that long distance trade that became so important towards the end of the period in question that eventually propelled the developments of the fifteenth century taking Western Europeans across the Atlantic and directly into the Asia. That globalised world that began during the High Middle Ages, described by Janet Abu Lughod in her groundbreaking work "Before European Hegemony" is the ancestor of the world today. The High Middle Ages for Europe was not just a key formative period in more than one way but the global context is missing from the narrative. Despite these significant omissions, Jordan's work is a good basic introduction to part of the story. To complete that basic introduction, the reader will need to look elsewhere. The classic work of Henri Pirenne, Marc Bloch and Georges Duby might be a good start to looking at the economic history of the era although a serious reader will need to look further to contemporary works. The writings of the two Gies might provide a good overview of medieval technology and the story of its diffusion from as far away as East Asia. The globalised context is described admirably by Abu Lughod. A definitive general history of High Medieval Europe needs to integrate the story told by Jordan with the broader context set by the Islamic and Orthodox World and the economic and technological dimension that takes the narrative into a global setting. That definitive history is yet to be written.

Europe in the High Middle Ages by William Chester Jordan is the third book in the series The Penguin History of Europe. The High Middle Ages is the name given to the period of medieval history from 1000 to 1350. During these years, European civilization reached heights not seen in the West since the fall of the Roman Empire. The political situation in Europe stabilized somewhat, trade increased, cities grew, universities were established and learning flourished. The nations of Europe ceased to be helpless victims of foreign invasion and, through the Crusades even began to project power outside the continent. Although the nations of Europe began to take their modern shape during the high middle ages, political power was extremely decentralized, especially in France, more than in the period immediately before and afterwards. The Papacy became more prominent on the international stage and powerful Popes could even challenge kings and emperors for influence. It all ended in the middle fourteenth century with a change in climate that caused a decade of famine. Then the horrors of the Black Death struck Europe in 1349. No institution in Europe survived unscathed, and the optimism and vitality of the High Middle Ages was gone. When Europe began to recover from these disasters, it was no longer the Middle Ages, but the Renaissance, and the West was moving in a new direction. William Chester Jordan brings this fascinating period of history to life in his book. Like the other books in The Penguin History of

Europe, The High Middle Ages focuses less on a detailed chronology of events and more on a general overview of cultural and historic developments, especially including the political development of the emerging nation states of Europe and their relationship with the Papacy. There is also a lot of information on the intellectual trends of the High Middle Ages as well as a good account of how it all seemed to fall apart in the fourteenth century. Unfortunately, the author breaks off the story in 1350, just as the Black Death is ravaging Europe, leading to a kind of cliffhanger effect. Still, I can recommend Europe in the High Middle Ages for anyone who wants to learn more about that fascinating period of history.

This is a scholarly text that covers the time span from about the 11th century through the 14th. It was written by a Princeton professor and, of course, is well-documented and detailed. It is a fine book but can tend to dullness as so many of the political personages and policies are written about in great detail. It does, however, merit reading by the serious student of medieval history. It's just that some of these sorts of texts can get tiresome after sooooo many facts. Nonetheless, I wouldn't pass it by if I were seeking a good, well-rounded (basically political) text during this time period.

This addition to the Penguin series is good. A general survey of this time period and gives a grounding for readers interested in this subject.

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