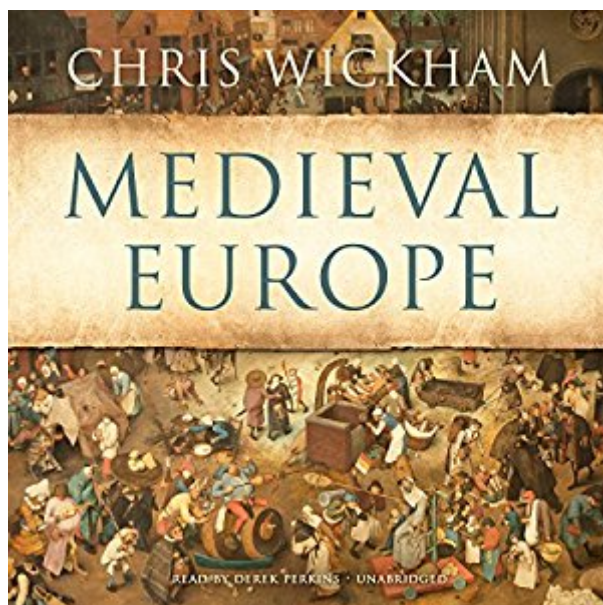


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# Medieval Europe



## Synopsis

The millennium between the breakup of the western Roman Empire and the Reformation was a long and hugely transformative period - one not easily chronicled within a single volume. Yet distinguished historian Chris Wickham has taken up the challenge in this landmark book, and he succeeds in producing the most riveting account of medieval Europe in a generation. Tracking the entire sweep of the Middle Ages across Europe, Wickham focuses on important changes century by century, including such pivotal crises and moments as the fall of the western Roman Empire, Charlemagne's reforms, the feudal revolution, the challenge of heresy, the destruction of the Byzantine Empire, the rebuilding of late medieval states, and the appalling devastation of the Black Death. He provides illuminating vignettes that underscore how shifting social, economic, and political circumstances affected individual lives and international events. Wickham offers both a new conception of Europe's medieval period and a provocative revision of exactly how and why the Middle Ages matter.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A wonderful book for a lay history buff, thought provoking, introducing new perspective and insights, comprehensive and revealing. Reading this book opened my eyes for how narrow history was taught in schools (during my school days, a while back). News for me were: Rome did not collapse, popes, emperors and kings had to consult, negotiate, make deals, bargain, with a wide array of stakeholders, adversaries and supporters. And - as today - money matters, most notably taxes (I

don't recall having heard about their importance in school). The later economic rise of European nations was not an accident either or, as the current mainstream narrative would have it, based mostly on exploitative colonialism or imperialism. While reading this book, I realized that the later European accomplishments in the development of technology, complex economies and military strength were to a large extent the result of a gradual development of a culture of allowing diverse ideas and innovations to flourish and putting them to the test in public discourse or practical application. This process, I learned, started already in the early middle ages and survived all the mayhem caused by wars, climate change and the black death as the driver of economic development from the renaissance, through the enlightenment, the industrial revolution all the way to the collapse of the old world order in 1914. Lastly, much to learn for observers of current day politics, and lessons to be learned that are still valid - if they were applied.

A well-written and interesting book, easily enjoyed by the layman interested in this time period. But there is hardly a word about the Investiture Controversy and this is surprising in even an overview.

I read this after finishing Robert Tombs' *The English and Their History*, which I consider one of the best history books I've ever read. Medieval Europe was quite a contrast in style and approach; a dense description of the succession of rulers and conquests with little discussion of the people, technology and culture. Sentences are long and complex, which might be fine for an academic work but tedious for the lay reader. I'm not suggesting that history should be dumbed down for public consumption, but surely there is a more engaging story to tell about this interesting time in European history than this book reveals.

This is a truly magnificent summary of what is known about the Middle Ages in Europe, where Europe is broadly conceived: the Byzantine Empire to Andalus, Iceland to Russia, although inevitably, in the current state of research, most attention focuses on developments in Western Europe. Wickham summarizes with great clarity the developing scholarly consensus on how Europe developed during this era; broad trends are visible, almost century by century, but with major differences between particular areas and considerable interaction especially during the later period. Nothing significant is omitted. Political developments take pride of place, but Wickham devotes ample space to the economy as it gradually revived after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, and also to social and religious conflicts. The culture of the Middle Ages, by contrast, is given relatively short shrift since many other surveys cover it. I read this book in preparation for a

trip to see French Gothic cathedrals, and I now feel much better equipped to place them in a proper historical context. Wickham's writing, furthermore, is engrossing, often pointed and always precise. The author intervenes more than occasionally to give his personal views, which, coming from such an accomplished scholar, are more than welcome. The maps and illustrations are excellent. In short, it would be hard to better this volume.

A very interesting book.

It was a successful present for our son. He is a bilingual teacher in history. (English / German)

I'm normally a big fan of non-fiction in all of strange forms, with a particular interest in history. So this particular volume on Medieval Europe intrigued and piqued my curiosity. The first couple of chapters initially kept my interest, but the later chapters caused me to doom the book to the purgatory of the never finished. I found myself yawning quite a bit the further along I read. My eyes glazed over, I began to force myself to read it and ultimately I began skipping huge sections of text trying to find something that would hold my interest. Ultimately, this book suffered from a malady that there is no cure for: dullness. Basically, it seemed to me that I was reading a bunch of lectures and a master thesis tied together with skillfully constructed synopsis at the beginning of each chapter. Is this a fantastic book to use as research material? Absolutely. Is this a book that you want to keep reading to the very end? Hardly. There are very few educators that can do good non-fiction that hooks the reader. Unfortunately, this gentleman isn't one of them.

Very well done

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