



## Europe in the High Middle Ages (The Penguin History of Europe)

By William Chester Jordan

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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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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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)

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From [Booklist](#)

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*

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Review

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