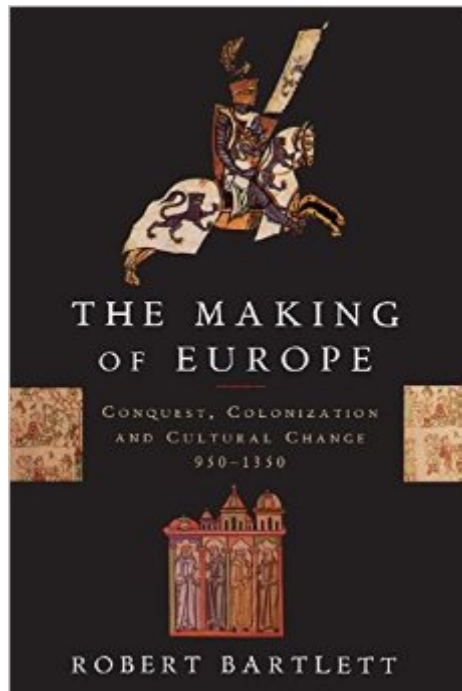


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The Making Of Europe: Conquest, Colonization And Cultural Change, 950-1350



Synopsis

From our twentieth-century perspective, we tend to think of the Europe of the past as a colonizer, a series of empires that conquered lands beyond their borders and forced European cultural values on other peoples. This provocative book shows that Europe in the Middle Ages was as much a product of a process of conquest and colonization as it was later a colonizer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the most enjoyable history book I have ever read. If the history of Europe is a long and interminably complicated one, then I would suggest that this single volume could be the key to unlocking that history and explaining the remarkable diversity of nations and cultures that co-exist within this single, small continent today. The author's clear, unpretentious prose style further enhances the readability of the book and while it is likely to be a must-read for students and academics, the general reader will find this book accessible and entertaining. Bartlett takes the reader on a rapid and utterly fascinating tour of medieval Europe, from the Celtic fringes of the British Isles to the uncharted wildernesses of Eastern Europe, and south to newly-reconquered Spain, between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. Amidst the profound social, religious, political and economic - not to mention shamelessly opportunistic - forces taking hold across the continent in this period, we can already begin to see the origins of the Europe we recognise today beginning to emerge. With countless examples drawn from historical sources from literally every corner of Europe, the reader is nonetheless given a refreshing perspective of the story of the continent as a whole - in human terms, rather than as colours and lines arbitrarily drawn on a map. I would advise

anyone with an interest in Europe as it is today, and how it came to be, to read this book. This book affected me quite deeply; I now see European current affairs in a new but much richer context, and I've been compelled to re-examine the way I look at history and its implications for future generations. On another level, I found this book helped me to re-evaluate my outlook on some of the concepts we often take for granted, such as nationality, culture and identity. I can't help thinking, therefore, that by reading this book and reflecting on its implications, many Europeans or North Americans of European extraction might want to take a fresh look at the meaning of their own identities and prejudices. Ethnic, religious, nationalistic, cultural and linguistic sources of tension and conflict can be identified, often at source, throughout the pages of this stunning book. And, for all the bloodshed and medieval argy-bargy, there's the unexpected bonus of the occasional giggle. Splendid.

The thesis of *The Making of Europe* is simply that Europe is not a geographical region but an idea. The power and eloquence of this statement is played out in over four hundred pages of tightly constructed and well written prose. Bartlett's writing makes for powerful and alluring reading, and I came away from reading much of the book educated and armed with an understanding of how we come to construct others as well as ourselves. Bartlett takes an intellectual historian's approach to how Europe came to be "made;" arguing that the continent was born out of the concepts of conqueror and conquered. This mentality had as much to do with the shaping of Europe as did the actualities of history. I first used the book as a reference for my undergraduate senior thesis and have since read most of it for its intellectual force and beauty of writing. Bartlett makes the usually dry subject of history moving and relevant to modern day people.

I agree with the second reviewer. This is the best history book I have ever read--for many of the reasons already listed. This book should be assigned reading for anyone planning to write history if for no other reason than the quality of the writing, the explanation of complex ideas and the force of its argument. I should add this book has some of the best charts and maps I ever seen, in the sense of how these charts elucidate and highlight the author's arguments. They are wonderfully interwoven in the text. The only other non-narrative history possibly as great as this is R.F. Foster's *Modern Ireland*.

This wonderful book is about the end of the Dark Ages, when trends were aligned in such a way that Europe finally began to overcome the long decline and chaos that followed the Roman Empire's

disintegration. During this period (950 to 1350 CE), the vast migrations and fluidity of the early middle ages ended decisively, allowing stable states, a reformed and largely unified western church, and oases of stability to flower into what would become modern Europe. It was a time of economic boom and technological advancement, the end of centuries of external threat, and expansion outwards, not only into the holy land but to central and northern Europe. The book is the perfect followup to the more impressionistic *Forge of Christendom*, which evokes many of these issues but neither describes nor analyses them in the depth that I found here. In 950 CE, Europe was a shrunken region under siege from non-Christian invaders (Arabs, Vikings, Hungarians, and certain Slavs, i.e. from all directions). As the Millennium approached, many in western Christendom believed that the apocalypse was imminent. While there had been a succession of relatively effective Emperors from the time of Charlemagne, their dynasties had proven unstable, rarely lasting more than 3 generations before disintegrating into power struggles. Then suddenly, the external threats either stalled (the Arabs) or were absorbed by conversion into Christendom. The relative calm that resulted enabled actors to undertake a series of fundamental measures that completely transformed the political and economic landscape. On the one hand, aristocrats adopted a new style of defensive fortification, the stone castle. This new technology of warfare consolidated their power base, allowing them to invest their resources into economic development - clearing land, forcing their serfs and peasants to pay taxes and stay within their territories for long-term servitude - rather than merely warfare. On the other hand, the Roman church initiated a series of reforms, in particular the clearer definition of orthodoxy, opening the way to persecutions for heresy and crushing the enormous diversity that had grown up during the extraordinary experimentation of the dark ages. Indeed, Christianity became a far more politicized ideology, a unifying glue (with administrative structures and educational institutions in place) that spawned that gigantic colonial venture called the Crusades in the Holy Land as well as east and north within Europe. While these developments narrowed diversity and did not promote political freedoms, they added focus to the work and missions of European rulers. Europe in this time became far more uniform as a territorial entity in its economy, institutional forms, political-religious ideologies, and urban plans. Even the names of rulers lost their local flavors, becoming those of the accepted saints as defined by Rome. This was a golden age for aristocrats (the landowners, knights, and upper clergy), who intermingled, spoke common languages, and moved into geographical areas designated to them by emperors; they exploited new policy instruments to buttress their power. In exchange for service to the Emperor or King, many commoners became aristocrats at this time. In addition to the church's support, they established scholastic universities, systems of uniform law based on the legal legacy

of Rome, and the foundation of cities and networks in which new economic activities could be undertaken. As the economy flourished and populations exploded in size and dynamism, Europe truly established an identity for itself. Much of the basic urban contours that they established at that time exist today. Bartlett covers this for the most part from the optic of "colonialism" - the movement of populations to new, often unoccupied areas for development. It was more or less the end of the migrations that established the essential outlines of the ethno-linguistic groups that exist today. This is, of course, only one dimension of the process: there was also an intellectual movement (scholasticism) that is largely uncovered, the economy is only occasionally mentioned, and other related developments (e.g. the Gothic era, another way to define the entire period) are neglected. The reader will need to explore those elsewhere. Also, it is so analytic that there is very little narrative, which makes it read a bit dry at times. This book is so full of ideas that it was very hard for me to put it all together in this review. I do not feel I have successfully covered either the nuance or even the substance, which means I must read it again. I would recommend this book for anyone interested in the West and/or the middle ages. It is fundamental reading and has forever changed my perception of the period.

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