

The Short Oxford History of Europe

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## The Later Middle Ages

# The Short Oxford History of Europe

General Editor: T. C. W. Blanning

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Middle Ages

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Edited by Isabella Lazzarini

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## General Editor's Preface

The problems of writing a satisfactory general history of Europe are many, but the most intractable is dearly the reconciliation of depth with breadth. The historian who can write with equal authority about every part of the continent in all its various aspects has not been born. Two main solutions have been tried in the past: either a single scholar has attempted to go it alone, presenting an unashamedly personal view of a period, or teams of specialists have been enlisted to write what are in effect anthologies. The first offers a coherent perspective but unequal coverage, the second sacrifices unity for the sake of expertise. This new series is underpinned by the belief that it is this second way that has the fewest disadvantages and that even those can be diminished if not neutralized by close cooperation between the individual contributors under the directing supervision of the volume editor. All the contributors to every volume in this series have read each other's chapters, have met to discuss problems of overlap and omission, and have then redrafted as part of a truly collective exercise. To strengthen coherence further, the editor has written an introduction and conclusion, weaving the separate strands together to form a single cord. In this the brevity promised by the adjective 'short' in the series' title has been an asset. The need to be concise has concentrated minds on what mattered in the period. No attempt has been made to cover every angle of every topic in every country. What this volume does is a short but sharp and deep entry into the history of Europe in the period in all its most important aspects.

T. C. W. Blanning

*Sidney Sussex College  
Cambridge*

## Editor's Preface

To write about the history of Europe in the later Middle Ages is a challenge: well established grand narratives of decline or anticipated modernity weigh heavy on a period whose main feature seems to be the most transitional among all transitions, always in between among more solidly constructed images of past ages.

Moreover, this specific volume has a very distinctive story: it was designed in the early 2000s by Malcom Vale and it was inherited by me much later. As a consequence, its second life had to adjust to a previous, unfinished frame, and to the 'old' themes some new entries had inevitably to be added, partly modifying the traditional scheme of the series. The result—I hope—is at once coherent with the first project and with the research interests that followed.

As second and final editor, I wish to thank first of all the general editor, Tim Blanning, who trusted me to take the volume to completion: I sincerely hope that he will be satisfied by the result. My thanks go also to Malcolm Vale, who imagined the volume in the first place, and to the 'old' group of authors (John Watts, Robert Swanson, and Matthew Kempshall), who kindly agreed to rescue from their drawers the first, probably half-forgotten contributions, and patiently reread and reimagine them by adding new ideas and bibliographical updating. We all know how painful such a process can be. Among them, sadly, a long-time friend and colleague is no longer with us: Stephan (Lorenzo or Larry) Epstein, whose brilliant talent and warm personality are deeply missed by the many who knew him, died suddenly on 3 February 2007. His chapter has been masterfully reread and completed by Chris Dyer, to whom goes my heartfelt gratitude. My 'new' fellow authors have all my thanks as well: Catherine Holmes, Catherine Kovesi, and Alexander Lee have been a pleasure to work with, and their contributions fitted smoothly with the rest of the volume, adding to it a 2020s distinctive flavour. Finally, my work as editor has been greatly facilitated by the kindness, effectiveness, and support—through the good and the bad times—of Stephanie Ireland, Cathryn Steele, and the staff at OUP.

Isabella Lazzarini

*Edinburgh, December 2019*

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