A
HISTORY
OF THE
MIDDLE AGES
284-1500

Sidney Painter

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First Edition 1953

Reprinted 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961,
1963, 1965, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1973

Reprinted in Demy 8vo format 1975, 1976, 1979

Published by

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

London and Basingstoke

Associated companies in Delhi Dublin

Hong Kong Johannesburg Lagos Melbourne

New York Singapore and Tokyo

ISBN 978-0-333-04317-2 ISBN 978-1-349-00284-9 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-00284-9

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Preface

WHEN the first modern historians of Europe surveyed the past of their civilization, they saw three great historical periods—Ancient times, which were for them essentially the era of Greece and Rome; their own period, which they called Modern; and the years that lay between, the Middle Ages. As their interest centered primarily in Western Europe, they were inclined to begin the Middle Ages in A.D. 476, with the death of the last Roman emperor to rule in the West. These historians had been educated in the classical tradition and were deeply impressed by the achievements of science. Hence it seemed clear to them that the Modern era began with the Renaissance, when classical studies were revived and modern science seemed to have its beginnings. Thus the period from A.D. 476 to the Renaissance comprised the Middle Ages. Needless to say, a period marked out in so casual a fashion was unlikely to have much cohesion. Soon it was generally recognized that the year 476 had no significance, and most scholars began the Middle Ages either with the accession of the Emperor Diocletian in A.D. 284 or with the beginning of the Germanic invasions. But in broad outline tradition has by now sanctified the basic concept of the Middle Ages as the period between ancient and modern times. This book begins with the accession of Diocletian and ends with the first sparks of the Renaissance.

If one examines the historical content of this period, one finds that it falls into three natural divisions. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries a distinct and extremely fascinating civilization took shape. This civilization that we call mediaeval reached its height in the thirteenth century. Thus these four centuries form the core of any history

of the Middle Ages. The six centuries from 300 to 900 were a period of transition from Roman to mediaeval civilization, and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the mediaeval change into the modern world. The first three chapters of this book should be regarded as introductory. One treats those features of the history of the Late Roman Empire that were of prime importance in the development of mediaeval civilization. Another traces briefly the story of the Byzantine Empire and its Greek Catholic culture. The third describes the formation of the Christian Western Europe in which mediaeval civilization was to develop. Nine chapters cover mediaeval civilization from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, and two describe the decline of mediaeval institutions.

The chapters are rather long, since each is intended to cover a broad and significant historical process. Chronological arrangement of events has been subordinated to the development of these major topics. Moreover, the various aspects of the history of states and individuals are sometimes scattered in different chapters. In order to minimize the disadvantages of this method of organization cross references are provided for the reader, and numbered subsections allow the teacher to rearrange the material to suit his own taste.

It is obviously impossible for the author of a general history to express specifically his gratitude to the scholars from whose works he has obtained his information or to the friends, colleagues, and students from whom he has drawn ideas and suggestions. He can, however, acknowledge his debt to the books that were used regularly for reference purposes during the actual preparation of the manuscript. William L. Langer's *Encyclopedia of World History* is a great boon to the writer who wants a fact in a hurry, and I used it continuously for this purpose. The *Cambridge Medieval History* was drawn upon heavily in areas where my knowledge was limited. Finally, the genealogies were taken largely from John L. La Monte, *The World of the Middle Ages*.

I also want to express my gratitude to Professor Peter Charanis of Rutgers University who read a large part of the manuscript, to Miss Lilly Lavarello, secretary to the Department of History of The Johns Hopkins University, who typed it, and to the entire staff of the College Department of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., who have borne patiently with an author who always knows what he wants and wants it very decidedly.

SIDNEY PAINTER

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