

Preface

The *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* is the fruit of the labours of over 600 scholars from a wide range of disciplines, brought together by a small editorial team, itself supported by thirty subject experts, and by the project management (and financial investment) of the three publishers.

A human and intellectual investment of such importance and length – a space of ten years separates the beginning of work on the *Encyclopedia* from its publication in English – cannot be the result of mere luck or a happy combination of circumstances. Two main factors have contributed to making the present editorial project possible and even necessary. The first is the extraordinary development that has taken place in medieval studies everywhere, not just in the English-speaking world. A glance at such projects as the *International Medieval Bibliography* and *Medio Evo Latino* shows a bibliographical explosion. This rapid growth is accompanied by a renewal of methods and approaches that has affected every medieval discipline, from history and art history to archaeology, philosophy and musicology. The time has clearly come to harvest and publish the fruits of this rich growth, to which most of the contributors to the *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* have contributed.

But this synthesis of the research of the last half-century would have been impossible had not the Middle Ages meanwhile left the twilight in which it had vegetated and had not the perception of it visibly changed. In the early 1960s, the prevalent idea of it was that of an obscure, even obscurantist, period, marked by ignorance and intolerance and sadly symbolised by the Inquisition. In one generation, thanks to historians to whom we are all in debt, of whom Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff are merely the most distinguished French names **{but would it not be better to mention some German, English or even American names?}**, the Middle Ages have been rediscovered in all their richness and put into a perspective closer to the reality. We do not intend to idealise a period that lasted nearly a thousand years (essentially from A.D. 500 to 1500) and was marked by harsh living conditions and behaviour whose brutality shocks our modern sensibilities, built as they are on ideas of tolerance and ideological pluralism. But what some see as the “darkness” of the Middle Ages should not make us overlook the greatness or undervalue the importance of this varied civilisation. So we have tried to present the whole range of medieval Europe, giving as much space to the East as to the West, and to show that the Middle Ages played an essential role in many fields such as land settlement, agricultural techniques, political institutions and even science. Umberto Eco has rightly reminded us in *The Name of the Rose* that spectacles were invented in the early 14th century.

The relatively restricted size of this *Encyclopedia*, when compared to the much more learned ones that have recently appeared in the United States and Germany, forbids us any claim to exhaustiveness, and the choices we have made must be justified. The first of these is that of geographical scope. Writing for a European public primarily concerned with its own history (the work is being published simultaneously in French, Italian and English), our centre of interest has been medieval Christendom – or rather Christendoms –, *i.e.* a set of regions extending from Iceland to Ethiopia and Central Asia. Articles devoted to other continents or civilisations appear only to the extent that Western Christians were aware of them and took an interest in them. However, the fact that the *Encyclopedia* is centred on the Christian world has led us to give plenty of space to those peoples and religions that were in contact with it over those thousand years; the Jews, since many of them lived within Christendom itself, and the Muslims, with whom Eastern and Western Christians, though often in conflict, also had fruitful economic and cultural exchanges. We have also taken care to deal with the “pagan” peoples (Lithuanians, Lapps, Cumans, Mongols, etc.) whom the Christians of the Middle Ages sought, with mixed success, to draw into their orbit.

A final requirement has guided the choice of articles and the general orientation: to help Europeans of the third millennium identify with an inheritance that still marks their way of life and some of whose aspects still charm them, but whose meaning escapes them. With this intention, we have deliberately given a privileged place to philosophy, theology, spirituality, liturgy and iconography. In doing so, we have put ourselves into the mind of the time, which – whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim –, while not ignoring or scorning economic and social realities, always tried to put them into a religious, intellectual or moral perspective. We have put special emphasis on those aspects of medieval civilisation that are hardest for most contemporary people – strangers alike to the old humanist and scholastic education and to religious systems or ecclesiastical institutions – to understand. Our hope is that this work, which tries to bring its readers the most exact possible scientific information, will help them understand better what Verlaine called the “enormous, delicate” Middle Ages, which have ceaselessly fascinated the European imagination since the beginning of the 19th century.

ANDRÉ VAUCHEZ

Preface to the English Edition

In the world of scholarship and learning, one of the most startling and far-reaching phenomena of the past fifty years has been the explosion of academic publishing. The causes of the explosion are not easily identifiable, although it is clear that one of the factors which has propelled it is the need felt by academic institutions (and, regrettably, governments) to measure individual scholarly performance, and the concomitant expectation that a young scholar will publish one book (or more) to achieve tenure, a second book to secure further promotion, and a substantial number of books and articles to attain to the highest academic posts. The impact of this explosion on the field of medieval studies – as probably on all scholarly disciplines – has been overwhelming. With countless books and articles on all aspects of medieval studies appearing each year, the possibility of exercising control over the scholarship published annually in even a small patch of the larger field of medieval studies becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible; and, one might add, the more interdisciplinary the field, the greater the difficulty. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the past few decades have seen the creation of various sorts of bibliographies and encyclopedias designed to provide streamlined guidance to the essential scholarship on a given medieval topic. There is the massive and excellent (though unillustrated) *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (ed. G. Avella-Widhalm *et al.*, 9 vols. in 17, Munich and Zurich, 1977-99), and those limited to English may consult the twelve-volume *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (ed. J.R. Strayer, New York, 1982-9). But because of their size and cost, these encyclopedias may be affordable by major libraries, but are scarcely affordable by individual scholars (a nine-volume edition of the *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, without index volumes, has recently been advertised at c. £1,800, \$2,900). There is also a number of one-volume dictionaries and encyclopedias, which vary in quality, but in their nature tend to be limited in scope and coverage.

There is thus a need for an encyclopedia of the Middle Ages on a scale smaller than the *Dictionary of the Medieval Ages* and the *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, which, unlike them, would be affordable by individual scholars, and would provide the illustration which they regrettably lack. These considerations led a consortium of British, French and Italian publishers to approach André Vauchez, a scholar particularly well known in his native France and in Italy, but increasingly also in the English-speaking world, to edit the present work. Vauchez assembled a team of some 30 (largely French-speaking) scholars, with the aim of producing an affordable, illustrated, two-volume dictionary of the Middle Ages. The aim was from the first to create an encyclopedia using the best scholarship available in Europe and North America.

The resulting work is now published – in somewhat different versions – in English, French and Italian. It containing some 3,200 articles of variable length by some 600 scholars, some 600 black and white illustrations and 30 full-page colour plates.

The French edition was published by Editions du Cerf in Paris in 1997 in two volumes as the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du moyen âge*. Despite the excellence of most of the entries, many entries – in spite of the editor's aim of supplying each entry with relevant bibliography – lack bibliography altogether. From a non-French point of view, however, the most serious defect of the French version is its Franco-centric orientation. For example, medieval English authors are given cursory, often inadequate, treatment, if they are treated at all (the French edition contained no article on *Beowulf*).

The Italian edition, the *Dizionario enciclopedico del medioevo*, was overseen by Claudio Leonardi of the University of Florence, and appeared in 1998 and 1999 in three large volumes. Leonardi and his collaborators were able to broaden the coverage by adding a number of articles.

The present English edition, translated by Adrian Walford from the French and Italian editions, has been able to build on its two predecessors, while preserving their overall scope and lavish illustration. An additional fifty entries have been commissioned, partly to enhance the English presence in the volume (articles on *Beowulf* and the Battle of Hastings have been added, for example). In addition, however, the present English edition goes beyond the French and Italian editions, namely in the matter of bibliography. A concerted effort has been made to provide every article with relevant and up-to-date bibliography, and we hope that this feature will be found useful by users of this English *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*.

In any event, the scope of the present *Encyclopedia* is vast, covering the fields of archaeology, art, architecture, economics, education, geography, history, institutions, languages, literature, philosophy, religion, theology, law, science and politics, and spanning a period from the seventh century to the fifteenth. We are unaware of a comparable work of reference on the Middle Ages which offers so much detailed information at a price which individual medievalists will be able to afford. It is hoped that it will be of value to scholars by providing them with information on fields outside their own expertise and in showing them the main sources for further research. Librarians, whether in academic institutions or in public libraries, will find it a useful one-stop guide. Students will be able to obtain a speedy overview of topics that they need. Publication of the *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* provides a happy means of inaugurating the new millennium for medievalists of all persuasions.

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