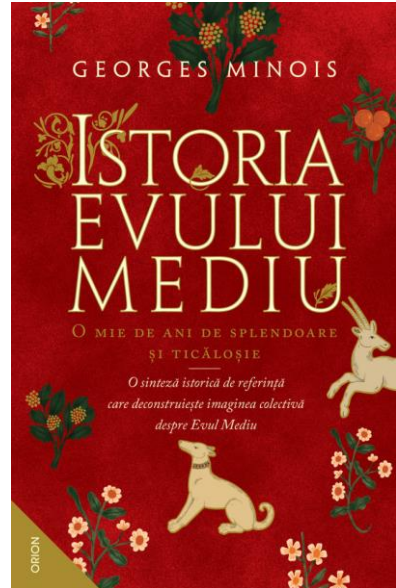


An Updated History of the Middle Ages

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Georges Minois, *Istoria Evului Mediu: o mie de ani de splendoare și ticăloșie* / *The History of the Middle Ages: a Thousand Years of Splendour and Abjection*. Translation from French and notes by Doru Mareș, Orion Publishing House, Nemira Publishing Group, Bucharest, 2021, ISBN 978-606-43-0684-5, 543 pages



Given the fact that the Middle Ages continues to be a period that fascinates and intrigues, because there, in the Middle Ages, lie our roots for our present goals and dramas, ranging from religious obscurantism to spiritual aims, from collective violence to the search of a high purpose in life, from the fear of future up to the dream of returning to nature, we have decided to analyze this worth-reading volume, written by Georges Minois in a manner that avoids clichés and sheds light on historical events interpreted in an exigent and valid manner.

In order to have a brief, but enlightening portrait of the author, we mention that Georges Minois is a PhD Professor in History, being one of the most respected historians of mentalities and collective representations from the Western space. He wrote more than 40 well-documented history books through which he managed to transmit valuable information in an accessible manner.

Furthermore, returning to the image of the Middle Ages created in our minds, we can state that most of it is artificial, sometimes fake and reduced to anecdote, transformed into legend which receives either a dark shadow or a glittering aura. When we speak about the Middle Ages, it is necessary to see its true face, to have coherence regarding its understanding and its impact on the present, because it is a connection between the medieval European individual and the nowadays human being, regarded from the point of view

of the rapports with one's neighbours, the Byzantine Orient and the Muslim world.

Moreover, almost half a millennium separates us from the Middle Ages and we continue to be fascinated by this period. Even though we are living in a time when information is at the tip of our fingers, not everything that is accessible is also verified and we believe it should not be absorbed without having cultural landmarks and the ability to think critically, judging things in correlation. Our opinion is that this period is insufficiently presented in history books, at school and one needs to know more in order to have a comprehensive image about what is situated between the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Renaissance (between 400-1500 A.D.)

This book includes recent information and it is meant to be a reaction to the deforming process of vulgarization and to the intended sabotage of history in schools. To continue, it brings logical and chronological order to a period which had, like all the ones from the history of humankind, its strong and weak points, its blooming and its decay. The intention of the author is to present both sides, the paradise and hell of the Middle Ages in order to grasp the meaning and their reflection on the present society. The present volume is a balanced radiography of that time, catching political, economic, socio-cultural aspects having chronology as its spine.

As far as the structure of this volume is concerned, there are three main parts, divided into fifteen chapters, as it follows:

Part 1: 400-1000 A.D. The Time of the Orient and the Age of Illusions

Chap.1 The Fall of the West (5th century)

Chap.2 Byzantium and the Barbarian Kingdoms (between the 6th-8th centuries)

Chap.3 The Shock of Islam (630-750)

Chap.4 Byzantium and Bagdad: the Glory of the Orient (between the 8th-10th centuries)

Chap.5 From Charlemagne to Otto or from the French Imperium to the Germanic Imperium (between the 8th-10th centuries)

Part 2: 1000-1300 A.D. The Time of the Occident and the Time of Reason

Chap.6 The Fall of the Orient: Political Weaknesses and Cultural Pitching

Chap. 7 The Affirmation of the Occident: Christianity between Theocracy and Caesaropapism

Chap.8 Feudal Monarchies and the European Expansion

Chap.9 Church, Society and Culture: an Ideal of Faith and Reason

Chap.10 The Economy and the Society of a (too) full World: the Limits of a Stationary Ideal

Part 3: 1300-1500 The Time of the Apocalypse and the Time of Transition

Chap. 11 The Knights of the Apocalypse: Hunger, Wars, the Plague and their Sequelae

Chap.12 Disoriented Spirits: the Flaws of Christianity and the Divorce of the Couple Faith-Reason

Chap.13 A Divided Occident: Towards National Monarchies

Chap.14 A Reunited Orient: from the Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Empire

Chap.15 A Changing Economy: Towards the Ruling of Money

Underlining in the introduction of the book that “History is not an exact science”¹, Georges Minois underlines the fact that the interpretation of historians is the one which brings subjectivity, taking into account the values and norms of the society they live in. What is essential is to avoid considering a specific version of history as the sacred, the ultimate one. To conclude, Minois proposes a detached perspective on the Middle Ages, regarded both with humour and irony, respecting, in the same time, the materiality of facts.

¹ Georges Minois, *Istoria Evului Mediu: o mie de ani de splendoare și ticăloșie*, Editura Orion, grupul editorial Nemira, București, 2021, Page 16.