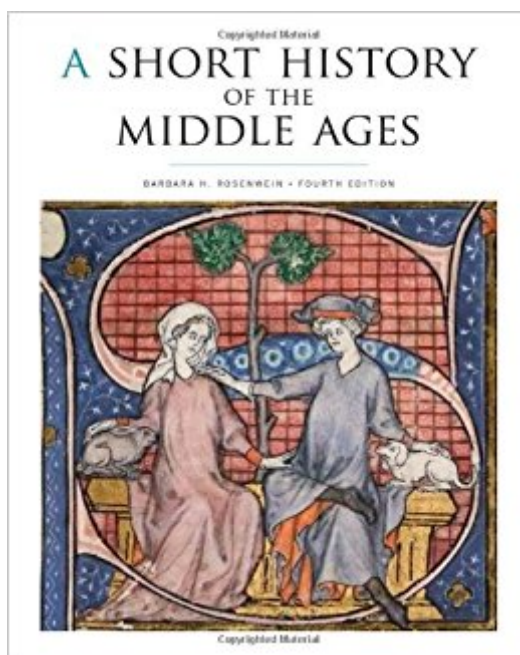


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# A Short History Of The Middle Ages, Fourth Edition



## Synopsis

Barbara H. Rosenwein's bestselling survey text continues to stand out by integrating the history of three medieval civilizations (European, Byzantine, and Islamic) in a lively narrative that is complemented beautifully by 70 full-color plates, 46 maps, and 13 genealogies, many of them new to this edition. The fourth edition begins with an essay entitled "Why the Middle Ages Matter Today," and the book now covers East Central Europe in some depth. This edition includes three "Seeing the Middle Ages" features, each discussing a work of art in depth: An Ivory Diptych of Christ and the Virgin, Saint Luke, Gospel Book of Otto III; and A Shrine Madonna. The sections for further reading have been updated, and ancillary materials, including study questions, can be found on the History Matters website ([www.utphistorymatters.com](http://www.utphistorymatters.com)).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a great introduction to medieval history in Europe and the Near East. Rosenwein starts with the fall of the Roman Empire and takes us all the way to the start of the high middle ages. Along the way we get the meat of the dark ages - one of the most interesting periods in my book. This book is very short for such breadth. The pace is incredibly rapid yet the book never feels rushed. The brevity is an asset - the book is easy and quick to read. It actually lives in our bathroom (!) Yet the tone is scholarly and even handed. There some very good content here. Focus is evenly split amongst Byzantine Greek, Islamic Arabia, North Africa & Al Andalus, and Europe. The most powerful insight Rosenwein gives us in that all these disparate cultures are the descendants of ancient Rome - each in their own unique but related ways. There are timelines and family trees with

successions of kings. These listings are not comprehensive, but give you a good taste. The book is beautifully illustrated. This isn't the meal - but rather an exquisite appetizer. Recommended.

This is a wonderful introductory medieval text. No introductory text can be all things to all people, but this one is still remarkable in its ability to address the most pressing issues. If allowed half stars I might have gone with 4 1/2 instead of 5, but it is closer to 5 stars than 4. The things that Rosenwein does VERY well include: 1) Chapter one is background on the Classical/Roman era to give students some perspective on the origin of the Middle Ages. 2) Inclusion of cultures beyond Western Europe is a huge plus. There is adequate coverage of events in Byzantium, the Islamic World, and later, of the Ottomans. 3) Includes excellent discussion of the art of the times. This includes the excellent, full page, high quality color pictures of relevant art and architecture. 4) A quality book overall. The maps are also often in full color, with a few in black and white. 5) A very readable academic style. The edge between being "unacademic" and being so scholarly as to be unaccessible is a fine one. Rosenwein sticks to it very well, seldom falling to either side. There are, of course, areas of interest where I wish that she would go into more detail, but as other reviewers and commenters have noted, this IS an intro text, designed to be "short" and also it is aimed at the average undergrad who may not have a strong background in history. Professors constantly struggle with finding good quality books that students will actually read! A good professor will be able to adequately augment in the places where more depth is needed. Overall, I would highly recommend this book for the classroom, and for anyone who is interested in a broad view of 1200 years of history, this is an enjoyable introduction, although if military/political history of only Western Europe (France, England, Germany, Italy) is your only interest, this may not be the book for you.

My 2-star review is comprised of one star for the lack of cohesion and structure of its content. It reads as if random paragraphs were haphazardly ordered by chapter. The worst way to have a history/anthropology book is to have what boils down to a hodgepodge gathering of encyclopedia entries with only chronological order. The second star is for the companion website from which the professor lazily copy/pasted short essay and multiple choice questions used for quizzes and tests.

This book, a college text, is a sad commentary on the state of education today. In her summation, Rosenwein asks what remains of the Middle Ages, and answers 'colonialism' (I'm not making this up) but leaves out the birth of the national state, the birth of capitalism, the development of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and Islam - which is perhaps why she can say that only little

'bits and pieces' of the middle ages remain, mostly changed beyond recognition, but the past is interesting because it is 'not us.' What complete and utter nonsense. Oh yes, and her assessment of the fall of Rome and disappearance of cities is: "the rich won." The rich won? Yes, they refused to pay taxes, while the middle class Roman townspeople of the 4th century had to make themselves serfs because the Roman taxes had become ruinous. Taxes are the only cause for the disappearance of cities she mentions. This is not only weak history, it is weak education. She didn't mention the loss of literacy, a money economy, and law and order, because she's busy telling us the barbarians were just like Romans. She also states that the Roman elites were not surprised or upset when Rome fell, as they were used to barbarian leaders. Here's an example of her viewpoint and prose style: "In other respects as well, the new rulers took over Roman institutions; they issued laws, for example." It's discouraging to think this is considered college level history. I've just read two other fascinating and intelligent histories of this period, which illuminate the tremendous importance of medieval economic and political developments to the modern world: "Dawn of a New Era: 1250-1453" by E. Cheyney, and "The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350" by Robert S. Lopez.

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