



A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century

By Barbara W. Tuchman

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Barbara W. Tuchman—the acclaimed author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning classic *The Guns of August*—once again marshals her gift for character, history, and sparkling prose to compose an astonishing portrait of medieval Europe.

The fourteenth century reflects two contradictory images: on the one hand, a glittering age of crusades, cathedrals, and chivalry; on the other, a world plunged into chaos and spiritual agony. In this revelatory work, Barbara W. Tuchman examines not only the great rhythms of history but the grain and texture of domestic life: what childhood was like; what marriage meant; how money, taxes, and war dominated the lives of serf, noble, and clergy alike. Granting her subjects their loyalties, treacheries, and guilty passions, Tuchman re-creates the lives of proud cardinals, university scholars, grocers and clerks, saints and mystics, lawyers and mercenaries, and, dominating all, the knight—in all his valor and “furious follies,” a “terrible worm in an iron cocoon.”

Praise for *A Distant Mirror*

“Beautifully written, careful and thorough in its scholarship . . . What Ms. Tuchman does superbly is to tell *how* it was. . . . No one has ever done this better.”—*The New York Review of Books*

“A beautiful, extraordinary book . . . Tuchman at the top of her powers . . . She has done nothing finer.”—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Wise, witty, and wonderful . . . a great book, in a great historical tradition.”—*Commentary*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In this sweeping historical narrative, Barbara Tuchman writes of the cataclysmic 14th century, when the energies of medieval Europe were devoted to fighting interneceine wars and warding off the plague. Some medieval thinkers viewed these disasters as divine punishment for mortal wrongs; others, more practically, viewed them as opportunities to accumulate wealth and power. One of the latter, whose life informs much of Tuchman's book, was the French nobleman Enguerrand de Coucy, who enjoyed the opulence and elegance of the courtly tradition while ruthlessly exploiting the peasants under his thrall. Tuchman looks into such events as the Hundred Years War, the collapse of the medieval church, and the rise of various heresies, pogroms, and other events that caused medieval Europeans to wonder what they had done to deserve such horrors.

Review

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From the Publisher

Anyone who has read THE GUNS OF AUGUST or STILWELL AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN CHINA, knows that Barbara Tuchman was one of the most gifted American writers of this century. Her subject was history, but her profiles of great men and great events are drawn with such power that reading Tuchman becomes a riveting experience

In A DISTANT MIRROR, Barbara Tuchman illuminates the Dark Ages. Her description of medieval daily life, the role of the church, the influence of the Great Plagues, and the social and political conventions that make this period of history so engrossing, are carefully woven into an integrated narrative that sweeps the reader along.

I am a particular devotee of medieval and pre Renaissance music, so Barbara Tuchman's brilliant analysis of this period has special meaning for me - and I hope for many others.

George Davidson, Director of Production, The Ballantine Publishing Group

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Matthew Siller:

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