



Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe

Peter Spufford

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The years between 1200 and 1500 saw the economy of Europe transformed from being rural, feudal and localized to being urban, capitalist and expansionist. Professor Spufford, who has made a lifelong study of these changes, here brings together a vast amount of material from archives all over the world - letters, account books, legal documents, civil records - to build up a comprehensive general picture. He has also personally travelled many of the roads, rivers and mountain passes that were the arteries of medieval trade, bringing the whole subject to vivid life. The eight chapters of the book cover the financial revolutions of the 13th century that led to the rise of modern banking, borrowing and insurance; the market in luxuries and the role of the great courts; international fairs; trade routes and the hazards of transport; raw materials; manufactured goods; the wealth of cities and nations; and the balance of trade between countries.

Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe Details

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Lynn Abbey says

This is not to race through...there's something to be learned on every page. From what was traded into and out of Europe to how it was transported and what it cost every step of the way, Spufford has delved into what little record there is and reached some persuasive conclusions about medieval entrepreneurship. The first-edition hardcover illustrations are eclectic, but useful. An excellent companion to his "Money and Its Uses in Medieval Europe"

Tom says

Fascinating! Loved reading how medieval merchants were the link between Europe and Asia. Highly recommended for the history buff!

Jonathan says

Great scholarship. Not exactly what I had in mind when I started reading it. An amazing collection of detail regarding the designs and fates of medieval European cities.

The bottom line is that there was a lot more trade than most realized, even "basic" goods, and there was a huge trade imbalance with the eastern empires.

Would not recommend, except for the amazing illustrations.

Jóhannes Birgir Jensson says

An eye-opening book. Medieval Europe becomes much more modern reading this book, traveler cheques in the 1400s! The breadth of this book is incredible. It is not a one-sitting reading, it took me weeks to slowly make my way through but every step was rewarding and my view of medieval times was thrust closer to reality.

Mark says

The title of Peter Spufford's book is a little deceptive, as it is much more than a study of merchants in the Middle Ages. What Peter Spufford has done in this book is to provide an accessible description of the nature and forms of commerce in medieval Europe. This may sound like a dull subject, but in Spufford's hands it is anything but. Demolishing many myths, he demonstrates that the medieval European economy was both highly integrated and increasingly sophisticated, with numerous business innovations (such as marine

insurance and the holding company) pioneered during this era. In successive chapters he describes such aspects of the medieval economy as markets, commodities, and trading routes, explaining what was traded, where, and why. It's a fascinating take on an era more often associated with armored knights and peasants, any one that demonstrates that "globalization" is hardly a phenomenon exclusive to our modern era. Simply put, this is a magnificent study, and one that needs to be read by anyone interested in the Middle Ages.

Lynda says

Found and changed a lot of incorrect assumptions

Czarny Pies says

This beautifully illustrated history of the development of Europe's banking system provides an explanation for the layman of the great financial revolution that occurred in Europe during the Middle Ages that dramatically increased the overall level of prosperity and which allowed the accumulation of capital that would make the industrial revolution possible.

This book offers a simple yet accurate description of the role of banks and financial instruments in the economic, political and social development of Europe. To ice the cake, it is a delight to read.

Kris says

An aside: I really wish Goodreads allowed 1/2 stars...

I appreciated so many things bout this book, right down to the gloss paper and wonderful full-color images thought the book (hardcover version). I had the sense that I was reading from a scholar, but also someone who loved the world he was writing about. He traveled the routes he spoke of, albeit in the 20th century.
