



In Europe: Travels Through the Twentieth Century

Geert Mak

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From the First World War to the waning days of the Cold War, a poignant exploration on what it means to be European at the end of the twentieth-century. Geert Mak crisscrosses Europe from Verdun to Berlin, Saint Petersburg to Srebrenica in search of evidence and witnesses of the last hundred years of Europe. Using his skills as an acclaimed journalist, Mak locates the smaller, personal stories within the epic arc of history—talking to a former ticket-taker at the gates of the Birkenau concentration camp or noting the neat rows of tiny shoes in the abandoned nursery school in the shadow of Chernobyl. His unique approach makes the reader an eyewitness to a half-forgotten past, full of unknown peculiarities, sudden insights and touching encounters. Sweeping in scale, but intimate in detail *In Europe* is a masterpiece.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

In Europe: Travels Through the Twentieth Century Details

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Elaine says

While the portions on the 2 world wars (and the inter-war period in Germany) were riveting, the 2nd half of the century felt rushed. Moreover, while the first person narratives from the eyewitnesses to history were priceless, Mak's personal insights were flat, and even disappointing. To give the book and the century a goal/endpoint, he tries to make the rather soulless EU more than it is (even though unlike the isms that fill his book, European unification has never really impassioned any popular movement and even Mak gets very dull when he tries to elevate it.) There are also oddities of editing -- all the phrases in French, Italian and other languages are translated but an enormous number of German phrases and slogans are left in German, enough so that you sometimes lose the thread.

Kevin says

Ok, many pages, but each one is worth its own time and together they will give you a sympathetic portrait of contemporary Europe, one with more than a few surprises. Especially good at reminding us of Stalin's fatal rule and the contemporary French and British confusions. An excellent section on the Spanish Civil War. Read, learn, savor.

Mak took a year to travel around Europe, and to survey its histories from 1900 to 1999. He determined his itinerary by events from certain periods: for example, the month of November had him in Berlin, Niesky, Gdansk, Moscow, and Chernobyl; the years of history surveyed, 1980-1989.

The book is well-informed but never overtly scholarly. It's an erudite companion over terrain visible and buried. A perfect guide.

Philippe Malzieu says

It is an encyclopaedic project. To visit all the places having a historical importance in Europe during XXth century. With the meticulousness of a entomologist, he explores these places by testing here to find the truth. That starts joyfully in Paris with the World Fair of 1900. But already the festival is sad. All is place for the tragedy. Mak goes everywhere. He finds in Berlin, the place where Rathenau was assassinated. Rathenau was able to succeed. Without his death, no Hitler. The role of the chance in History.

And after WWII, Cold War...

It is the story of a kind of suicide, Why European people destroyed themselves. It is also the twilight of this culture. is it possible to make emerge a common conscience of this disaster? I acknowledge that I am skeptical.

This book has the same importance as those of Paxton and Furet

Jill says

Probably the best book I've ever read. Though also probably the most depressing time I could have possibly finished it.

'Europe's weakness, its diversity, is also its greatest strength. Europe as a peace process was a resounding success. Europe as an economic union is also well on its way. But the European project will surely fail unless a common cultural, political, and, above all, democratic space is soon created alongside the rest. For let us not forget: Europe has only one chance to succeed.'

'During the election campaigns, no one talks about normal issues any more, only about vague things like the 'universal question' and 'nation'. That keeps you from being accountable for anything. That way it's always the other guy.' - Bosnian journalist, talking about the pre-war general election.

Casper R says

What a book. Phenomenal research job in the first place, but also very well-written, and the right amount of depth. If you're familiar with the basic outline of European history (as I was), you will learn a lot. Powerful epilogue.

Sarah says

I think I will be reading this until I die. It's full of fascinating stuff, but fairly jumps all over the place. Obviously. As my European history isn't too bad I've decided I don't need to read it chronologically and will henceforth dip in here and there for the rest of my life. This seems to suit the book better.

Not blown away by the translation. It's certainly able, but it doesn't flow and it makes it rather a slog.

Edit: not finished but put aside for now, as I'm, erm, In Europe, with limited suitcase capacity. The ww2 stuff was riveting.

Peg says

In Europe is one of the best books I've read in quite awhile, and I've been recommending it to everybody I know. Geert Mak, a Dutch journalist, spent most of 1999 traveling through Europe, tracing the major episodes of European history from 1900 to 1999. He opens his journey in the cities dominating the scene at the beginning of the century--Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna--interweaving his observations about those same cities in the present day. As the book proceeds to World War I, his travels take him to Ypres, Verdun, and Versailles. To examine the interwar period, he sets out for Stockholm, Helsinki, Riga, and so on, through the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the rebuilding after the war, the founding of the European Union, the Cold War, Chernobyl, the fall of the Wall, disintegration of the USSR, and the war in the Balkans.

Through his eyes and those of his interviewees, readers get a taste of Guernica on the day it was bombed by

the Germans, set against itself at the end of the century, as Basque separatists consider how Europe's unification will help their status as a minority group inside Spain. In Budapest, people recall the pent-up energy that exploded in revolution, tempered by the concern that standards of living might have been better under the Soviet system. Sometimes the flash forward to the present day is comforting--Verdun and Ypres, now peaceful towns with huge cemeteries as the only reminders of what happened there--but more often than not it leads to unsettling but thought-provoking questions.

I know, it sounds like an overly ambitious project, trying to make sense of a whole chaotic century of European history in one book. But he carried it off brilliantly. Mak didn't mean to explain everything, everywhere, but he covered an impressive amount of ground in a methodical, intelligent manner. He writes with verve, economy, and a flair for storytelling. Often, he lets his interviewees tell the story in their own words, uninterrupted for pages. Beyond recounting the events, he asks thoughtful questions about what Europe really is and what it means. His epilogue should be published separately so everybody can read it--it's that good.

Mak sparked my interest in investigating many events and historical figures in greater depth. I was continually seeking out additional information about the subjects he discussed--not because he covered them poorly but because made them seem so fascinating that I wanted to learn more. I hunted down maps and bios online. I checked out library books and DVDs on Vichy France and the Resistance, the Spanish Civil War, the founding of the European Community, the Hungarian Revolution. I got so sucked in that I found myself hunting through Amazon for used copies of Jean Monnet's memoirs and the diaries of Victor Klemperer. I am not kidding. That is good storytelling! :) In fact, that may be the best testament to how good this book is: it's more than 800 pages, but I wanted even more. Whether you're preparing for a trip or content with some armchair travel, this book will not disappoint.

Lauren Albert says

A strange book that I can't compare to any other book I've read. Mak travels through time and through space to show you Europe (and Europeans) throughout the Twentieth Century. People are drawn very vividly as are events.

Yasin S. says

Kitap hakkındaki yorumumu yazmadan önce yazar? Geert Mak ile aramda geçen ki?isel bir ileti?imden bahsetmek istiyor?m.

18 ya??ndayken bir ??lg?nl?k yap?p Hollandaca ??renmeye karar vermi?tim. ?imdiki 18 ya??ndakilere b?y?k bir ??lg?nl?k olarak gelmese de bu baya zor bir hedefti. ?yle ki kimsenin konu?mad???, kaynak ve kursu olmayan ve ad?n?n bile (belki de Bel?ika'da ya?ayan 8milyon Felemenkin hatr?na) yanl?? olarak 'Felemenkçe' olarak bilindi?i bir ?lkede bu dili ??renmek ger?ekten mant?kl? bir karar de?ildi. Nas?l olduysa 2 y?! i?inde baya ilerleyip Hollandal?larla her t?rl? sohbet edebilecek hale gelmi?tim. G?r?n?te Hollandal?lar da kendi dillerini bilen bir yabanc?yla belki ilk defa kar??la?maktan ?ok memnundular. Hollanda'daki T?rkler bu kadar iyi konu?am?yor diyip beni bir sihirbaz? izler gibi hayranl?kla izlemeleri ho?uma gidiyordu. 2007 y?!?nda ?al??t???m otele gelen Hollandal? say?s?nda patlama olmu?tu. Ortal???n ??l bedevisi kaynamad??? son g?zel turizm y?llar?yd?. Bu benim y?z?mden de?il ama Geert Mak isimli bir yazar?n yazd??? bir kitaptan ?t?r?yd?i. Benimle muhabbet etmeyi ?ok seven Hollandal?lar devaml? ayn?

kitaptan bahsediyordu. De Brug yani köprü. Sonunda ben de meraktan kitabı okudum. Bildiğimiz Galata Köprü'sü ve onun üzerinde yaşıyan, geçimlerini kazanan ya da altındaki kafelerde çalışan sardarlar insanları hayatlarından bahsediyordu. Yıllardır üzerinden geçip gittiğimiz bu köprüde ne hayatlar yaşıyor? ben hiç farketmeden. Mak'ın olağanüstü gözlemciliği ve samimi anlatımı ile köprü apayrı bir dünya olmuştur. Hollandalılar da bu kitabı okuyup Ayasofya'yı veya Boğazı de il öncelikle köprüyü görmeye geliyorlardı. Bunu farkedene köprüdeki bazı kafeler camlarına Hollandaca yazılar yazmışlardı ve Geert Mak'ın fotoğrafları duvarlardaydı. Kitaptan gerçek simalar hala oradaydılar. Milyonlarca euroluk reklamlarla yapılamayacak ülke tanıtmak Mak tek bir kitapla yapmıştı ama kimse farkında değildi. Hollandacam olmasa ben de bunun farkına varamayacaktım. Çimden yazar ile iletişime geçmek ve ona teşekkür etme isteği duydum. Yazarın çalıştığı yayınevine onun adına bir mektup yazıp gönderdim. Kısa bir süre sonra o da bana cevap yazdı. 21 yaşında Hollandanın en önemli yazarlarından biri ile yazıyor olmak çok gurur vericiydi. Bundan Hollandalılara bahsetmemesem olmazdı. Bir gün Hollanda'dan telefonum arandı ve arayan önceki hafta otelimizde konaklayan bir misafirdi. Kendisi de meğerse buraya köprüyü görmeye gelen bir gazeteci yazarmı ve o ayki makalesinde benden bahsetmek istemişti. Çarkın otelden numaramı alması ve müsaitsem benimle röportaj yapıp yapamayacağını soruyordu. 30 dk kadar bir sohbet havasında röportajdan sonra bana derginin bir kopyasını gönderme sözü vererek kapattı. Gelecek ay dergi elime geçti. Bu sefer de Hollanda'nın en büyük haber dergisinde ismim ufak bir yazı hatası ile basılmıştı; Yassin olarak.

Bu 1000 sayfalık ağırlık kitabı da ilk önce yazarına olan saygımdan ötürü aldım. Geert Mak gibi birinin kitabı mutlaka okunmaya değer diye düşünüyordum. Kitap beklentilerimin de çok ötesindeydi. Daha önce okuduğum bir tarih kitabında kulağa pek hoş gelmese de '20. yüzyıl dünyasının tarihi Avrupa tarihidir' diyordu. Bu açıdan bakarsak bu kitap 20.yüzyıl dünyasını anlamak için önemli bir eser. Bu kitabında Sayın Mak 1999 yılında Avrupa kıtasının 1899'dan beri başından geçenleri anlatmak için 1 yıl süren uzun bir yolculuğa çıkıyor ve Avrupa tarihinde rol oynamış kilit şahıslara gidip geçmişinin izini sürüyor. Kraliçe Viktorya'nın cenazesinden başlayan bu uzun soluklu gezi 1. Dünya savaşı ve onun cepheleleri, yahudi karşıtı kampanyaların artması, Nazi'lerin iktidara gelişi, 2. Dünya savaşı, İspanya iç savaşı, Sovyet Rusyasının yıkılması ve Bosna Hersek savaşına kadar Avrupa'nın her köşesine ulaşarak sürüyor. Tarihi bizzat tanıkların gözünden anlatarak resmi tarih anlayışının dışına çıkıyor. 20.yüzyıl tarihine yön vermiş Kayser Wilhelm II, Yüzbaşı Dreyfus, Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, De Gaulle, Vichy, Mussolini, Franco, Stalin, Goebbels, Çavuşesku, Mitterand, Gorbaçov, Miloseviç gibi onlarca ismi yakından tanımanızı sağlıyor.

Bunları anlatırken de ikizlül ve taraflı bir dille değil tamamen halkın gözünden ve her fikirden insanın görüşüne ve röportajına yer vererek anlatıyor tarihi. Örneğin Yahudi soykırımı Almanların üzerine iterek klasik Avrupa yüzölçölüne bağvurmadan kendi ülkesini de defalarca eleştirerek soykırımı en doğrudan doğruya şekilde yapıyor: Holokost her şey bir yana kendi vicdanlarındaki sesini dinlemek yerine, kendi ofisleri, kendi askeri birlikleri ve kendi işyerlerindeki düzen ve disiplini ön plana çıkarmakta sakınca görmeyen yüzbinlerce Avrupalının sessiz sedasız katliamıyla gerçekleşene bürokratik bir tutumla. Aynı şekilde Britanya hava kuvvetleri RAF'nin Almanyada yaptığı bombardımanlarda maksimum sivil kayıplar verilebilmesi için yaptıkları stratejileri ve tasarladıkları bombaların detaylarını da ilk defa bu eserde okudum. Evlerin daha uzun süre yanabilmesi için önce cam ve kapıları kırarak bombalar ile bağlayıp ardından düdüğü apartmanı tamamen yakıp yıkması için zeminde infilak eden ve kurtarma ekipleri gelince onları da ölmesini sağlamak için saatler sonra patlayacak bombalar bırakılarak dehşetle okudum. Geert Mak bu ve bunun gibi yüzlerce detay ile tarihi çok daha yakından tanımanızı sağlıyor. Bu ansiklopedik eseri okumak eminim herkesin tarihe bakmasını deşitirecektir. Tam bir başucu eseri ve okuyabileceğiniz roman tadına en akıcı tarih kitaplarından biri. Avrupa tarihine ilginiz varsa okuma listenize mutlaka ekleyin.

Valentin Herman says

Putovanje kroz 20.stoljeće koje ostavlja prostor za jedno veliko, prostrano, vlastito putovanje i potragu za novim spoznajama, novim iskustvima, pojačanom željom za istraživanjem. Isprepletanje prošlosti i sadašnjosti, vizija neke neizvjesne budućnosti. Odlična knjiga koja vam pomaže lakše sagledati današnju sliku Europe, postepenim kolaž pristupom, uključujući bezbrojne sudbine "malog čovjeka" i ljudi koji su oblikovali povijest 20.stoljeća. Preporuka :)

Roos says

Dit boek heeft mij aangenaam verrast. Toen ik hierin begon had ik weinig hoge verwachtingen. Door de persoonlijke verhalen vertelt Mak de geschiedenis van Europa van de 20e eeuw. Het is niet echt officieel "historisch" maar het is wel ontzettend leuk gedaan!

Alleen die epiloog, dat had voor mij echt niet gehoeven. Dat was gewoon een essay over hoe Europa er in 2007 voorstond maar had eigenlijk weinig op met de rest van het boek.

Žuržica Novak says

Prvi dio pročitao - oduševljena. Moje preporuke ljubiteljima povijesti

Ana says

It's been about two weeks since I finished the book and I wanted to add a couple of thoughts to the review, because I feel like such a work deserves more praise than I managed in the original lines.

The thing that I want to start out with is the depth in which Mak has gone in order to produce this. It is unbelievable, I kid you not, the sheer quantity of information that you get from these 800 pages. Don't get me wrong, I've read heavier books, but this one is a class beyond everything out there. Not only do you get a spectacular narrative, which is in and by itself very hard to encounter nowadays, but I bet if you listed out all the trivia in this book, it would take you months to finish it. How in the world did the author manage to comprise so much knowledge into such a "succinct" piece of work is a question that I'll probably keep asking for years. I'm sure one day I'll get back to this book and still be amazed by it.

Another thing is the ability of the writer to describe people. Now, whenever you read history books, individuals tend to blend together, as the story focuses on the general current, or the mentality, or just as we know it, the "big picture". Mak seems to do very well in writing about the "little picture". Page after page, it's not only the countries you hear about, not only the economic status, the political relations, the international scheme, not only facts, numbers and statistics (even though, trust me, you get a lot of them as well), but the spotlight seems rather to be taken by villagers, cab drivers, brothel keepers, children with flowers in their hair, pub crawlers, night owls, heroes, anti-heroes, anyone and everyone that was emblematic enough to be inserted in the drama. There's an underlying *human* voice that tells the story of the 20th century, and I very, very much enjoyed that. For a lot of us out there, history can never be detached from the people who were a

part of it, and Mak spectacularly delivered in that field.

As far as history books go, this one is an absolute gem. I doubt there is another one like it, out there. I doubt there will ever be one to resemble it, either, because of its perfect timing. Written at the end of the 20th century, this work takes the reader through all of Europe's history since the 1900s. The turn of phrase is bewitching, the historical information abundant and the stories - of peoples, of places, of humans, of countries, of peace, of war, of love, of hate - beautifully intertwined to present a masterpiece of a painting of Europe.

For me, it has been a thrilling read, and I think that it will be for any history geek out there.

Nigel Massey says

Splendidly researched, but overly data-heavy. If you want to know how many people died in the battle of Stalingrad, then this is the book for you. The book is titled "In Europe" - and the author was certainly there. I appreciated his emphasis on Eastern Europe and Europe's Germanic/Slavic component; but there was very little sense of place in the narrative. Perhaps the concept was too wide to engage me intimately in an encounter with the Continent. Perhaps I was expecting to feel that he would entice me into accompanying him on his journeys: either way I was more informed than transported. I'm disappointed because I can't understand how someone can be "In Europa" without mentioning the impact of art, literature or music on the politics of the creative twentieth century that his book sets out to celebrate. Geert Mak

Bettie? says

BOTW

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09ntd0f>

Description: *The Dutch journalist Geert Mak travels through Europe at the close of the twentieth century reflecting on the history of the last 100 years and it's legacy. Nicholas Farrell reads.*

As the new millennium was about to dawn Geert Mak was commissioned by the newspaper he worked for to write a series of articles assessing the shape Europe was in and the legacy left behind by the twentieth century's turbulent history. Mak travelled back and forth all over the continent, painting a lively and engaging portrait of the places he visited and the people he encountered who shared their stories with him. Book of the Week begins with Mak setting off from Amsterdam for Paris where he finds the remnants of the spectacular World's Fair held there in 1900. Then he follows in the footsteps of Lenin as he made his fateful journey from Zurich to Petrograd, via Stockholm and Helsinki in 1917. He contrasts the Bolshevik leader's fiery politics with the more measured route taken by the Scandinavians. Then on to Odessa and Istanbul where traces of acceptance and tolerance are found amid the worst excesses of tyranny. Finally, to Moscow where he meets the Russian cosmonaut, Anatoli Artsybarski who recalls orbiting the Earth as the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991. A new piece by Geert Mak specially written for Book of the Week updates his reflections twenty years on.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4 - Book of the week:

The Dutch journalist Geert Mak travels through Europe at the close of the twentieth century reflecting on the history of the last 100 years and it's legacy. Nicholas Farrell reads.

Episode 2 of 5

It is 1999 and Geert Mak, the Dutch journalist, retraces the historic journey Lenin made in 1917 from Zurich to Petrograd by way of Stockholm and Helsinki.

Episode 3 of 5

Today, he takes in St Petersburg's faded grandeur and looks back to the moment in 1917 when Lenin first arrived in the city when it was called Petrograd.

Episode 4 of 5

Today, Mak takes in Kiev, Odessa and Istanbul where the past haunts the present, and he considers what it means to be a European.

Episode 5 of 5

Today, he meets a famous cosmonaut and looks at the fall out from the demise of the Soviet Union. To conclude Mak has written a new epilogue bringing his reflections on the continent up to date. Nicholas Farrell reads.

As the new millennium was about to dawn Geert Mak was commissioned by the newspaper he worked for to write a series of articles assessing the shape Europe was in and the legacy left behind by the twentieth century's turbulent history. Mak travelled back and forth all over the continent, painting a lively and engaging portrait of the places he visited and the people he encountered who shared their stories with him. Book of the Week begins with Mak setting off from Amsterdam for Paris where he finds the remnants of the spectacular World's Fair held there in 1900. Then he follows in the footsteps of Lenin as he made his fateful journey from Zurich to Petrograd, via Stockholm and Helsinki in 1917. He contrasts the Bolshevik leader's fiery politics with the more measured route taken by the Scandinavians. Then on to Odessa and Istanbul where traces of acceptance and tolerance are found amid the worst excesses of tyranny. Finally, to Moscow where he meets the Russian cosmonaut, Anatoli Artsybarski who recalls orbiting the Earth as the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991. A new piece by Geert Mak specially written for Book of the Week updates his reflections twenty years on.

Abridged by Rowan Routh

Produced by Elizabeth Allard.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09ntd0f>

Rob says

A kaleidoscopic book that shines a light on Europe's tumultuous, often terrible twentieth century. As you would expect of a conflict that saw 50 million people lose their lives, World War II dominates alongside the rise of totalitarianism – and it's a political view – there is little discussion of technology or popular culture.

Whether it's the best book on the subject I doubt – but it certainly gripped this reader.

Perhaps most interestingly, the text is strong on the early years of the European Union and in these financially stricken times, it's easy to forget the advances made (although Mak's portrait is always a balanced one).

Having devoured most of my source material on the subject from a decidedly British perspective, this broad thumbs up for Europe as a concept worth fostering was welcome. Latter chapters on the former Yugoslavia are especially strong now that time allows us to look back and attempt to understand events in that country and the early sections on the optimism of the turn of the century Europe are also worth savouring alongside predictably hard hitting and moving sections on the Somme, Auschwitz, Stalingrad and Berlin.

Lorenzo Berardi says

Despite its ambitiousness this book is very interesting and a must read for all the aspiring reporters. Mak wrote a great account of the Twentieth Century of the Old Continent. "In Europe" is a goldmine of historical informations given by a brilliant and well documented journalist.

Yet, like in many gems there are a few imperfections.

Sometimes Geert Mak could be a better observer like in Cassino where he surprisingly forgets to mention the famous bombardment of the monastery. Besides as a Dutchman he does not seem to show a great sympathy for Brussels. Indeed he did a wonderful job and his writing is never boring.

Like a good wine this book is becoming better year after year gaining a sociological as well as a cultural value. This because just nine years after its publication places like Saint Petersburg, Prague, Moscow, Warsaw and Bucharest are changed a lot.

A bit heavy to carry but extremely user friendly to read.

Shovelmonkey1 says

So I kept hold of this book for nearly a whole year without reading it. To be honest I started reading it once and it wasn't quite what i expected it to be so I put it down and wandered off into the arms of another book.

But having taken this to Turkey with me and read it on two really tedious five hour plane journeys where the highlight was being poked awake by KLM flight attendants who then try to purvey meaty bread snacks... grr... i'm asleep and i'm a vegetarian! I found in the end that once you get past about page 100, it's a great book, therefore, persevere people it is worth it. Well researched, well written, informative in a new and different way. This is a great, actually, no, it's an epic trip across Europe, and back several times, through war, invasion, famine and political upheaval. The statistics and the deaths listed in each chapter are frankly staggering and it is amazing to think that I was born in the same century as this violent upheaval that caused an estimated 20,000 people per day to loose their lives over a four year period.

Caleb says

An absolutely excellent book. It is long - 850 pages - but well worth the time to read it. A marvelous and spellbinding trip through time and across Europe. I picked it up by random at a bookstore and was well rewarded. You learn so much about the history of Europe, the context of current problems, and you see corners of the continent that I would love to visit but have not had a chance to (yet).
