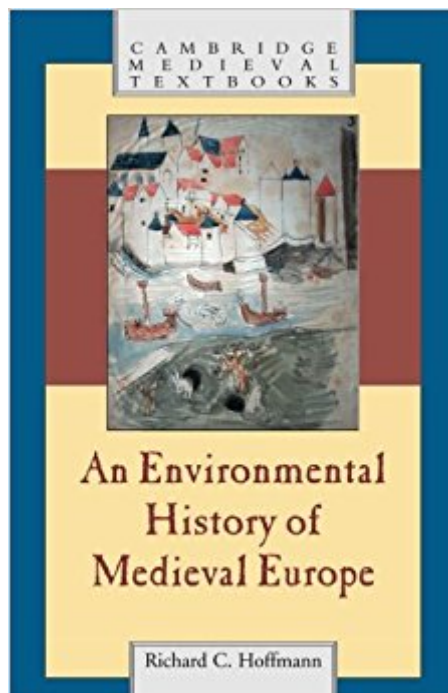




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An Environmental History Of Medieval Europe (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks)



Synopsis

As the very first book of its kind, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* provides a highly original survey of medieval relations with the natural world. Engaging with the interdisciplinary enterprise of environmental history, it examines the way in which natural forces affected people, how people changed their surroundings, and how they thought about the world around them. Exploring key themes in medieval history - including the decline of Rome, religious doctrine, and the long fourteenth century - Hoffmann draws fresh conclusions about enduring questions regarding agrarian economies, tenurial rights, technology and urbanization. Revealing the significance of the natural world on events previously thought of as purely human, the book explores issues including the treatment of animals, sustainability, epidemic disease and climate change, and by introducing medieval history in the context of social ecology, brings the natural world into historiography as an agent and object of history itself.

Book Information

Series: Cambridge Medieval Textbooks

Paperback: 427 pages

Publisher: Cambridge University Press (June 16, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 052170037X

ISBN-13: 978-0521700375

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.7 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #356,644 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #185 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Geography](#) #859 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Human Geography](#) #1033 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography](#)

Customer Reviews

"Contains the wisdom, and embodies the experience, gained from a career spent presenting this most interdisciplinary of subjects to classes of humanities students shy of science and nervous of numbers. The result is an accessible, readable and thought-provoking book with which any historian, environmental or otherwise, ought to be able to engage." Bruce M. S. Campbell, *The English Historical Review*... [Richard Hoffman] has provided a rich overview of medieval daily life

and thought with regard to the natural environment. He does not only focus on the interaction between nature and humans, but also contextualizes his findings in a larger framework of economic and social history, and the histories of law and mentalities. The book will serve as a readable introduction for students and scholars of medieval history, as well as enable specialists in environmental history to build on his work ... an essential book and a work to use as a reference for all medievalists and environmental historians.' Christian Rohr, *Speculum*

How did medieval Europeans use and change their environments, think about the natural world, and handle the natural forces affecting their lives? This is a pioneering survey of medieval relations with the natural world which integrates approaches from social and economic history and environmental studies.

John Aberth's review below leaves a bad taste in the mouth of this graduate student. Hoffman's work opens the scope of medieval environmental history beyond that of Marc Bloch or Lynn White, jr. in order to include new research on medieval ecosystems and the dynamic relationship between culture and the natural world. It is an impressive work of synthesis with a wholly different goal than that of the bitter Mr. Aberth's. Having read both books, I find that they have radically different approaches and purposes, despite their similar names. This book, unlike Aberth's, is the culmination of a career's worth of professional academic scholarship dedicated to the integration of ecological science and medieval environmental history.

While Hoffman sets out on an ambitious historical task, which has potential to be fascinating, this book is plagued by unclear writing and its very ambition. Hoffman attempts to tell a history from the fall of Rome until the 16th century – ambitious by any historian's account – and in so doing falls into many generalizations. This in itself is not bad, he does provide many specific examples of changing resource regimes through the book, but does so in a way that is not clearly argued and does not clearly follow a chronology. Overall, though, this book does have some interesting things to say about nature in medieval history. However, I think it would be better put to narrow its focus slightly or to tighten up its narrative so as to present a more engaging history.

As the author of a rival textbook on environmental history, I take exception to the publisher's claim on this website that this is the "very first book of its kind." It is not. I published my book (with

Routledge Press) fully a year before Hoffmann's book. This is not necessarily the fault of the author, but I think that Cambridge University Press should abide by some truth-in-advertising standards. Richard Hoffmann was a pioneer in medieval environmental history, but I do agree with the previous reviewer's comments, that Hoffmann's overall approach in his textbook--to try to tell a history of the entire Middle Ages through the lens of environmental history--is a problematical one. History, of course, is a complex subject and does not easily lend itself to being reduced down to one causal factor. Hoffmann is also enamored with environmental theory, which leads him to make some curious generalizations, particularly about the disease event known as the Black Death in the late Middle Ages. For a different, more thematic-oriented approach to the subject, see my *Environmental History of the Middle Ages*, published with Routledge Press in 2013.

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