



Crossroads

Travelling Through the Middle Ages

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- The story of the trade network and the lively exchange of goods and ideas, diplomatic missions and knowledge in Europe during the period from 300 to 1000 AD

Despite the numerous conflicts, the period from 300 to 1000 AD was also one of growth, continuity and peaceful coexistence. From the late eighteenth century a romantic view of the Middle Ages arose, resulting in the Gothic Revival and the art of the Pre-Raphaelites. Nation states today happily refer to the heroism of the Early Middle Ages, when kingdoms were born and present-day Europe began to take shape. A runic graffito in the Hagia Sophia, a gilt Byzantine helmet in the grave of a Frankish nobleman, a treasure hidden from the Vikings in the Low Countries containing an Arab dirham: these are just a few examples of the telling early-medieval finds in this book. Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages are often viewed as a time of decline, chaos, invasions and war. But there is another side to this period as well. There was a rich diversity of cultures in Europe – from Longobards and Merovingians to Byzantines and Avars – and a lively exchange of goods and ideas, sometimes over great distances. The Vikings set up a trade network that reached to Baghdad; the Silk Road brought commodities to Europe, but also diplomatic missions, knowledge and ideas. This is illustrated by the interludes in this book, the stories of ten travelers: pilgrims, scholars, diplomats, and an elephant.