We all love to learn about medieval history, but sorting through the thousands of books and articles out there can be daunting. Drawing on a background in medieval studies and archaeology, I've compiled the following reading list, categorized by topic, to help get you started. I've included the title and author of each work and listed books alphabetically in each category.

Be aware, that no list of five books or ten or fifteen or even twenty books are ever really going to ‘cover’ the Middle Ages. Academic courses of medieval history have 40 books or more that are considered basic material for all medievalists, and then there are the individual lists developed for specialized fields that can reach 100 works or more. This is just a start and there are certainly great medieval books out there that I have left out.

Enjoy!

For further reading, you can also check out my Medieval Archer’s Reading List.

(Note: It is my intent that this reading list be considered a living document. If you have read a book or article that you feel is an important contribution to learning about the Middle Ages and I have not included it here, feel free to submit the title and author (and a short description, if you like) for inclusion in the reading list at prolegomenon@gmail.com).

Primary Foundational Material

Arthurian Romances, Chrétien de Troyes

Beowulf, Unknown – (Note: Both Seamus Heaney and Howell Chickering offer facing-page translations if you are interested in dual-language comparisons).

Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer

Chroniques, Jean Froissart (c.1337-1410)
King Alfred's Reading List

Of course, you could always read the five books King Alfred (849 – 899) thought were essential for all people in his time:

Confessions, City of God, and Soliloquies, Augustine of Hippo
Ecclesiastical History of the English People, Venerable Bede
History Against the Pagans, Orosius
Regula Pastoralis and Dialogues, Gregory the Great
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
**Feudal Society**, Marc Bloch

**Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted**, Susan Reynolds

**Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800**, Chris Wickham

**Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women** and **Fragmentation and Redemption**, Caroline Walker Bynum

**In the Wake of the Plague**, Norman Cantor

**Making of Europe**, Christopher Dawson

**Medieval Civilization 400-1500 & The Birth of Europe**, Jacques Le Goff

**Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World**, Robert Lopez

**Religious Movements of the Middle Ages**, Herbert Grundmann

**Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages**, Christopher Dyer

**The Birth of the Western Economy**, Robert Latouche

**The Civilization of the Middle Ages**, Norman Cantor

**The Historians Craft**, Marc Bloch.

**The Making of Europe**, Robert Bartlett

**The Making of the Middle Ages**, R.W. Southern

**The Middle Ages, 395-1500**, Joseph Strayer

**The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages**, Norman Cohn

**The Rise of Western Christendom**, Peter Brown

**The Waning of the Middle Ages**, John Huizinga

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**The History of Medieval Scholarship**

There is some debate among academic circles as to how outdated historical books should be read (such as the works of C.S. Lewis or Henri Pirenne) because the majority of their theories and concepts have been either disproven or revised by modern scholarship. However, medieval scholars tend to recommend reading such books regardless, if for no other reason than to learn about the history of medieval scholarship and to understand why certain theories are no longer accepted. I have included well known, but outdated, medieval history texts in this section of the reading list but I have noted the caveat in the entry.

**Inventing the Middle Ages**, Norman Cantor – Inventing the Middle Ages is about modern medieval scholars. Cantor outlines a number of strong opinions regarding some of his colleagues, peers, and
predecessors but his account is subjective. This book was not meant as an introduction to the Middle Ages but does serve as a good starting point in understanding academic medievalists as a group.

**Mohammed and Charlemagne**. Henri Pirenne – This is another well-known book typically read in order to understand why the main thesis is longer accepted. The "Pirenne thesis" has been widely discredited in academia. (Note: If you aren’t familiar with the Pirenne thesis, Henri Pirenne suggested that the reason the Dark Ages were called dark is because wars started by Muslim conquests stopped trade in the Mediterranean. However, since then, researchers have realized that the Dark Ages weren’t as dark as once thought, and there is very little evidence that trade decreased during this period. The most famous refutation of the Pirenne thesis is *Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe* by Richard Hodges, but there are a great number of other articles and books that argue against Pirenne’s discourse as well.)

**The Allegory of Love** or **The Discarded Image**, C.S. Lewis – The Discarded Image is a classic but it is also quite outdated. Medieval scholars no longer agree with Lewis’ theories, however, both *The Discarded Image* and *The Allegory of Love* are still very important works that had a great influence on medieval theory in their day. Now, the majority of students who read these books do so in order to understand why modern scholarship disagrees with them.

**Art and Architecture in Medieval France: Medieval Architecture, Sculpture, Stained Glass, Manuscripts, the Art of the Church Treasuries**, Whitney S. Stoddard

**Art of the Middle Ages**, Janetta Rebo Benton

**Early Medieval Architecture**, Roger Stalley

**Early Medieval Art**, Lawrence Nees

**Early Medieval Art 300-1150: Sources and Documents**, Caecilia Davis-Weyer

**Gothic Art, 1140-c. 1450: Sources and Documents**, Teresa G. Frisch

**Gothic Art: Glorious Visions**, Michael Camille

**Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art**, Michael Camille

**Medieval Art**, Marilyn Stokstad

**Medieval Art**, Veronica Sekules

**Medieval Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture 4th-14th Century**, James Snyder

**Romanesque Art**, Andreas Petzold

**Snyder’s Medieval Art**, Henry Luttikhuizen

**The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century**, Emile Male
Chaucer

**A Preface to Chaucer**, D.W. Robertson

**Chaucer**, Donald Howard

**Chaucer and the Subject of History**, Lee Patterson

**Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire**, Jill Mann

**Chaucer's Sexual Poetics**, Carolyn Dinshaw

**Chaucerian Polity**, David Wallace

**Speaking of Chaucer**, E. Talbot Donaldson

**Social Chaucer** and **Hochon's Arrow**, Paul Strohm

**The Mythographic Chaucer: The Fabulation of Sexual Politics**, Jane Chance

Cooking and Food

**A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerye**, Anne Ahmed (ed.)

**Anglo-Saxon Food & Drink**, Ann Hagen


**Boke of Keruynge**, Peter Brears (ed.)

**Chiquart's "On Cookery"**, Terence Scully (trans.)

**Concordance of English Recipes: Thirteenth through Fifteenth Centuries**, Constance B. Hieatt, Terry Nutter, Johnna H. Holloway

**Cooking & Dining in Medieval England**, Peter Brears

**Cooking in Europe, 1250-1650**, Ken Albala

**Curye on English**, Constance B. Hieatt (ed.), Sharon Butler (ed.)

**Early French Cookery: Sources, History, Original Recipes and Modern Adaptations**, D. Eleanor Scully, Terrence Scully

**Eating Right in the Renaissance**, Ken Albala

**Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society**, Bridget Ann Henisch

**Food and Eating in Medieval Europe**, Martha Carlin (ed.) and Joel T. Rosenthal (ed.)

**Food in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays**, Melitta Weiss Adamson (ed.)
Food Through the Ages: From Stuffed Dormice to Pineapple Hedgehogs, Anna Selby
La Varenne’s Cookery, François Pierre De La Varenne, Terence Scully (Trans.)
Living and Dining in Medieval Paris, Nicole Crossley-Holland
Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History with 174 Recipes, Lilia Zaouali
Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination, Paul Freedman
Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks, Constance B. Hieatt
Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions, Minta Collins
Spices And Comfits: Collected Papers on Medieval Food, Johanna Maria Van Winter
Take a Thousand Eggs or More: A Collection of 15th Century Recipes, Cindy Renfrow
The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages (Studies in Anglo-Saxon History), Terence Scully
The Book of Sent Soví, Joan Santanach (ed.) and Robin Vogelzang (trans.)
The Good Housewife’s Jewel (Southover Press Historic Cookery & Housekeeping), Thomas Dawson
The Neapolitan Recipe Collection: Cuoco Napoletano, Terence Scully (trans.)
The Medieval Cook, Bridget Ann Henisch
The Medieval Cookbook, Maggie Black
The Medieval Kitchen: Recipes from France and Italy, Odile Redon
The Opera of Bartolomeo Scappi, Terence Scully (trans.)
The Spice Route: A History, John Keay
The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice, Michael Krondl
The Viandier of Taillevent, Terence Scully (trans.)
The Vivendier: A Fifteenth-Century French Cookery Manuscript, Terence Scully (trans.)
Two Fifteenth Century Cookery Books 1430-1450, Faulke Watling (ed.), Thomas Austin (ed.)

Art of Courtly Love, Andreas Cappellanus
Courtly Culture, Joachim Bumke
Crusades

Arab Historians Of The Crusades, Francesco Gabrieli
Chronicles Of The Crusades, Joinville and Villehardouin
Jerusalem Delivered, Torquato Tasso (Renaissance epic based on the Middle Ages)
Orlando Furioso, Ludovico Ariosto (Renaissance epic based on the Middle Ages)
The Crusades: A History, Jonathan Riley-Smith
The Crusades Through Arab Eyes, Amin Maalouf
The Fourth Crusade, Donald E. Queller
(See also: Thomas F. Madden)

Eastern Empires and the Middle East

A History of the Byzantine State and Society, Warren Treadgold
Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Omar Khayyam (c1048 - 1122)

Education

The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages, David L Wagner

Literature and Folklore

Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage, Maria Rosa Menocal
Dreaming Of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies Of The Perfect Life, Herman Pleij
European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Ernst Robert Curtis
From Memory To Written Record: England 1066 – 1307, M.T. Clanchy
Hunting in Middle English Literature, Anne Rooney
Politics and Economics

Politics and Economics

A History of Business in Medieval Europe, Edwin S. Hunt and James M. Murray
Early Growth of the European Economy, George Duby
Medieval Political Thought, Walter Ullmann
On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State, Joseph Strayer
Origins of the European Economy, Michael McCormick:
The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350, Robert S. Lopez
The King’s Two Bodies, Ernst Kantorwitz
The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages, Jean Gimpel

Religion and The Church

Religion and The Church

Augustine of Hippo, Peter Brown
Confessions, St. Augustine of Hippo
De clade Lindisfarannis monasterii (On the Destruction of the Monastery of Lindisfarne), Alcuin of York
Ecclesiastical History of the English People, Venerable Bede
Medieval Heresy, Malcolm Lambert
Monologion and Proslogion, Anselm of Canterbury
Summa Theologica and Summa contra Gentiles, Thomas Aquinas
The City of God Against the Pagans, Augustine of Hippo
The Consolation of Philosophy, Boethius
The Augsburg Confession
The Division of Nature, Johannes Scotus Eriugena
The Early Humiliati, Frances Andrews
The Story of Abelard’s Adversities, J.T. Muckle
Social History

- **Europe’s Inner Demons**, Norman Cohn
- **Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe**, James A. Brundage
- **Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages**, Jeffrey Richards
- **The Formation of a Persecuting Society**, R.I. Moore
- **The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris)**, Eileen Power (trans.)
- **The Great Household in Late Medieval England**, C. M. Woolgar
- **The Merchant of Prato: Daily Life in a Medieval Italian City**, Iris Origo
- **Women in the Middle Ages** or **Life in A Medieval Village**, Frances and Joseph Gies (Note – These books have been subject to number of negative reviews over the last several years. If you are interested further in the subject of gender in medieval scholarship, I recommend reading **Medieval Women** by Eileen Power.)

Thought and Philosophy

- **A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance**, William Manchester
- **Early Medieval Philosophy**, John Marenbon
- **The Beginnings of Western Science**, David C. Lindberg
- **The Evolution of Medieval Thought**, David Knowles

War and Conflict in the Middle Ages

- **A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century**, Barbara W. Tuchman
- **Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience**, Michael Prestwich
- **Early Carolingian Warfare**, Bernard S. Bachrach
- **War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy Under Edward III**, Clifford J. Rogers
- **War in the Middle Ages**, Philippe Contamine
Specialty or Area-Specific

Montaillou, the Promised Land of Error, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie - Southern France in the 14th century, the Cathars and their persecution, and the trials of heretics.

Rome Profile of a City, 312-1308, Richard Krautheimer - Focuses on the art, architecture, and ideology of Rome primarily from the point of view of Christian antiquity.

Biography

Alfred, Warrior King, John Peddie
Averroes: A Rationalist in Islam, Roger Arnaldez
Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity, Rosamond McKitterick
Charlemagne: The Great Adventure, Derek Wilson
Cnut, Emperor of the North, M.J. Trow
Dante: A Life, R.W.B Lewis
Eleanor: April Queen of Aquitaine, Douglas Boyd
Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours, Ffiona Swabey
Francis of Assisi, Adrian House
Francis of Assisi and His World, Mark Galli
Harun al-Rashid: And the World of the Thousand and One Nights, André Clot
Heloise and Abelard: A Twelfth Century Love Story, James Burge
Henry I, C. Warren Hollister
Henry II, W.L Warren
Ghengis Khan and the Making of the Modern World, Jack Weatherford
Key Figures in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia, Richard K. Emmerson
Mistress of the Monarchy: The Life of Katherine Swynford, Duchess of Lancaster, Alison Weir
Saint Francis of Assisi, G.K. Chesterton
Saladin: Hero of Islam, Geoffrey Hindley
Saladin: In His Time, P.H. Newby
Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World, Justin Marozzi
The Emperor Charlemagne, Russell Chamberlin
The First Scientist: A Life of Roger Bacon, Brian Clegg
The Greatest Traitor: The Life of Sir Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, Ruler of England 1327-1330, Ian Mortimer
The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance, Paul Strathern
The Perfect King: The Life of Edward III, Ian Mortimer
Thomas Becket, Frank Barlow
Queen Eleanor, Independent Spirit of the Medieval World: A Biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Polly Schoyer Brooks
Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, David Bates, Julia C. Crick, Sarah Hamilton, Frank Barlow