It's too often thought that the work of the humanities is a solitary pursuit—that it's mostly lone scholars, sitting with their musty books, thinking deep thoughts. As The Bright Ages was composed mostly in the midst of a pandemic, we sat alone with our musty books, illuminated by the dim light of our computer screens, so that's true enough when it comes to the actual writing. Nonetheless, this book owes a tremendous amount to the exhilarating scholarship that continues to be done on the whole medieval world. The European Middle Ages have been chronicled since they were happening, even if the conception of it as a discreet period was only launched into being beginning in the late fourteenth century and then cemented into the modern academy in the nineteenth century. But something significant has changed in how we think about the past just in the past few years, as scholars try to formulate new (and better) questions that are more honest to the people, places, and events we collectively study.

Often works we mention in regard to one chapter illuminate several others as well, but for the sake of brevity we've listed them only once. In addition, understanding the European Middle Ages requires facility in traditions of scholarship across many countries, and in many, many languages, but we decided to list here only works in
English, and limit our suggestions to those that are more freely available than others.

Our suggestions for further reading are intended to allow you to dip your toe into a vast ocean of work. Its currents have comforted and terrified, warmed and chilled, but its mysteries have always fascinated us. What we have here is just the beginning of a journey.

**Introduction**

Every topic touched on in this book is a rabbit hole, a hyperlink, a portal to decades or even centuries of study and conversation. The European Middle Ages are vast, even beyond the more than thousand years of their purported existence. For a general overview of the makings of the idea of the period, including the phrase “the Dark Ages,” you could read Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Houghton Mifflin, 1948), Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2003), or John Arnold, *What Is Medieval History?* (Polity, 2008). Important within that is the realization that power constrains how we divide up the past and how we think about our sources, and for that, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995). On the journey of the medieval coconut, see Kathleen Kennedy, “Gripping It by the Husk: The Medieval English Coconut,” *The Medieval Globe* 3:1 (2017), article 2. Recently, exceptional research has been made more widely available thanks to a stronger ethic of public engagement, and blogs such as InTheMedievalMiddle.com stand out; Sierra Lomuto’s “White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies” (December 5, 2016) is an important example of this kind of work, one that has set the tone for conversation in succeeding years.
Chapter 1

Judith Herrin, *Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2020), is the most recent book to unpack the history of this vitally important city where we began our own story, though there are plenty of others, such as Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Galla Placidia herself has, understandably, attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and there is much to digest in order to get the full scope of her incredible life. Perhaps start with Hagith Sivan, *Galla Placidia: The Last Roman Empress* (Oxford University Press, 2011), or Joyce E. Salisbury, *Rome’s Christian Empress: Galla Placidia Rules at the Twilight of the Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); but for an overview of women in late antique Rome, see Julia Hillner, "A Woman's Place: Imperial Women in Late Antique Rome," *Antiquité Tardive: Revue internationale d’histoire et d’archéologie* 25 (2017), pages 75–94. On the magnificence of the mausoleum in Ravenna generally, see Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage* (University of Toronto Press, 2003); but particularly for its blue sky details, the idea that it works as a kaleidoscope, see Ellen Swift and Anne Alwis, "The Role of Late Antique Art in Early Christian Worship: A Reconsideration of the Iconography of the ‘Starry Sky’ in the ‘Mausoleum’ of Galla Placidia," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010), pages 193–217. If you want to dive into the primary sources themselves, a decision we always recommend heartily, here start with Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, translated by C. Mierow (Oxford University Press, 1915).

Chapter 2

A solid discussion of Theodoric’s attempt to recapture Rome can be found in Jonathan J. Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*
Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Routledge, 1996), offers a great introductory pathway into the world of the historian and the monarchs he served, though more specialized analysis can be found in academic articles such as Henning Börm, “Procopius, His Predecessors, and the Genesis of the Anecdota: Antimonarchic Discourse in Late Antique Historiography,” in *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, edited by Henning Börm (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), pages 305–46. For a necessary reevaluation of the critical role Theodora played during the Byzantine sixth century, read David Potter’s *Theodora: Actress, Empress, Saint* (Oxford University Press, 2015); and if you want to know more about the continuing medieval tradition of chariot racing, the sport that ostensibly almost brought down the empire, we recommend Fik Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). But over all of this looms Hagia Sophia. On that building specifically, we suggest Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). On the architectural world of Hagia Sophia, turn to Robert Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford University Press, 2019). And, again, we always encourage you to read some of the primary sources for yourself. Procopius himself always entertains, so see his collected works translated within the Loeb Classical Library series. His *Secret History*, translated by Peter Sarris (Penguin, 2007), is readily available as well.

**Chapter 3**

The world-changing events that occurred in Arabia during the seventh century have understandably inspired a literature that’s as vast as any topic in all of human history. To start with the figure at the center of those events, we suggest Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Harvard University Press, 2014).
University Press, 2014). Also important is to think about the religious, cultural, and political movement that Muhammad began, as well as how it developed in the years immediately after his death, and for that see Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2012). There are many works detailing how the believers quickly moved out of the Arabian Peninsula, spreading across the Mediterranean world and beyond, encountering (and defeating) Byzantium and Persia, but the reader should beware of modern polemic masquerading as history. A general introduction such as Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Da Capo, 2008), offers a good overview of the period, while the full extent of the expansion can be grasped in more specialized academic work like Michael Flecker, “A Ninth-Century Arab or Indian Shipwreck in Indonesian Waters,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 29 (2000), pages 199–217. The specifics of the encounter with Byzantium, and Patriarch Sophronios, rightly fascinate, and more detail can be found in Jacob Lassner, *Medieval Jerusalem: Forging an Islamic City in Spaces Sacred to Christians and Jews* (University of Michigan Press, 2017); or the collection of essays in *Byzantium and Islam*, edited by Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff (Yale University Press, 2012); or in much more detail in articles such as Daniel Sahas, “The Face to Face Encounter Between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb: Friends or Foes?” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, edited by Emmanouela Grypeou and Mark N. Swanson (Brill, 2006), pages 33–44.

**Chapter 4**

The two primary threads that entangle in this chapter are, first, on Italy and the continuation of the city of Rome in the early Middle Ages, and second, the relationships between elite women and church
leaders (and historians) of the time. For Italy, turn to Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400–1000* (University of Michigan Press, 1989); also Christina La Rocca, *Italy in the Early Middle Ages, 476–1000* (Oxford University Press, 2002). On that peninsula and in that city lay the nascent papacy, with Gregory the Great at its center. On him there are numerous biographies. A recent one is George E. Demacopoulou, *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). But as we labored to show in this chapter, if we really want to know more about the early European medieval world, men are only part of the story, half of the picture. On the central role that women played, we suggest works such as Jennifer C. Edwards, *Superior Women: Medieval Female Authority in Poitiers’ Abbey of Sainte-Croix* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and E. T. Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite* (Brill, 2015); as well as more specialized articles such as Ross Balzaretti, “Theodelinda, ’Most Glorious Queen’: Gender and Power in Lombard Italy,” *Medieval History Journal* 2 (1999), pages 183–207, and Walter J. Wilkins, “Submitting the Neck of Your Mind: Gregory the Great and Women of Power,” *Catholic Historical Review* 77 (1991), pages 583–94. If you want to go back to the sources themselves, works by the two Gregorys (of Tours and the Great) are generally available in decent translations online. There’s also Gregory of Tours, *A History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin, 1976).

**Chapter 5**

Although the poem *Beowulf* looms large in most people’s imaginations when they think of early medieval England, and rightfully so, we hope that this chapter has shown how much more there is to this place and this period. Still, you should read *Beowulf*. We both enjoy
Beowulf, translated by Seamus Heaney (W. W. Norton, 2001), as well as a very recent translation that aligns with how we deal with the story here, Beowulf, by Maria Dahvana Headley (FSG, 2020). Although it’s just one monument, it’s a magnificent one, and the study of the Ruthwell Cross might begin with Eamonn Ó Carragáin, Ritual and Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition (University of Toronto Press, 2005), but our discussion also owes a lot to the insightful scholarship of Catherine E. Karkov, “Weaving Words on the Ruthwell Cross,” in Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker, edited by Maren Clegg Hyer, Jill Frederick, et al. (Boydell & Brewer, 2016), pages 183–98. Also, on medieval European art generally, Herbert L. Kessler, Seeing Medieval Art (University of Toronto Press, 2004), is brilliant. Women play an important part of the story of this (and almost every) chapter, and rightfully so. For more here on queens, see generally Theresa Earenfight, Queenship in Medieval Europe (Palgrave, 2013). On religious women, Sarah Foot, Veiled Women: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England, 2 vols. (Routledge, 2000); and also about the fascinating leader of Whitby, see Patrick J. Wormald, “Hilda, Saint and Scholar,” in The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and Its Historian, edited by Patrick Wormald and Stephen Baxter (Wiley, 2006), pages 267–76. Most of the work of Bede is available online but his most famous work is Ecclesiastical History of the English People, translated by Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin, 1990). Finally, importantly, the idea of early medieval Britain as a crossroads, a place on the periphery but interconnected to many other places, has been the subject of intense study in the last few years. See generally for a culture that evolved and adapted within a larger world Susan Oosthuizen, The Emergence of the English (ARC Humanities Press, 2019); as well as the work of Dr. Caitlin Green, collected at www.caitlingreen.org. Further on this topic, we recommend Mary Rambaran-Olm and Erik Wade, Race in Early Medieval England
(Cambridge Elements, 2021); but also consider local studies such as S. E. Groves et al, “Mobility Histories of 7th–9th Century AD People Buried at Early Medieval Bamburgh, Northumberland, England,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 150 (2013), pages 462–76.

**Chapter 6**

The story of Charlemagne’s elephant Abul-Abass still delights, and his story has recently been unearthed in detail in Paul M. Cobb, “Coronidis Loco: On the Meaning of Elephants, from Baghdad to Aachen,” in *Interfaith Relationships and Perceptions of the Other in the Medieval Mediterranean: Essays in Memory of Olivia Remie Constable*, edited by Robin Vose et al. (Palgrave, 2021); and you can read more about the ideological connotations of his arrival at Aachen in Paul Edward Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (Palgrave, 2004). If you want to take a step back to get an overview of the period as a whole, the best place to start is now Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), as well as the collected and translated primary sources in Paul Edward Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), and the full text of the *Royal Frankish Annals* in *Carolingian Chronicles*, translated by Bernhard Walter Scholz (University of Michigan Press, 1970). To learn more about Charlemagne himself, there’s now the magisterial and essential Janet L. Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (University of California Press, 2019); but you can also learn more about the afterlife and legend of the emperor in Matthew Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory: The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks, and Jerusalem Before the First Crusade* (Oxford University Press, 2011). The best way to find out more about Dhuoda is to read her words. See Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman’s Counsel for Her Son*, translated
by Carol Neel (Catholic University of America Press, 1999). Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Cornell University Press, 2012), and Andrew J. Romig, *Be a Perfect Man: Christian Masculinity and the Carolingian Aristocracy* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), both also do great work to help us understand both the aristocracy and the period as a whole.

**Chapter 7**

There are so many books on the Norse and their legacy, many appearing in just the past few years. Among them, Neil Price, *Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings* (Basic Books, 2020), stands out, and Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings* (Princeton University Press, 2014), although a few years older, is still very good. Also critically important to remember is that there weren’t just men in the Viking world; for that look to the new Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (Bloomsbury, 2020). For a sense of the scope of their voyages into Asia, see such works as Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Knopf, 2016), but also Marianne Vedeler, *Silk for the Vikings* (Oxbow Books, 2014). One of the main reasons Vikings traveled was to enslave people. They were a slave society and we shouldn’t ever forget or romanticize that. For more on that aspect, see Ruth Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (Yale University Press, 1988), as well as more recently and more generally, Alice Rio, *Slavery After Rome, 500–1100* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Many primary sources from the period survive, though often, alas, long postdating the events they describe. Many of those texts have been published as Penguin Classics. Of those, you could select *The Vinland Sagas*, translated by Keneva Kunz (Penguin, 2008), or Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald’s Saga*, translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (Penguin, 1976).

**Chapter 8**

The turn of the first millennium in Europe, the moments of the “Terrors of the Year 1000” and “feudal revolution,” has tended to fall between the scholarly cracks of late, with attention (at least in the English-speaking world) focusing on the Carolingians before and Crusades after. There is still a lot to explore in this period. Our chapter considers interrelated religious and political changes. If you want to know more about the aristocracy, start with Dominique Barthélemy, *The Serf, the Knight, and the Historian*, translated by Graham Robert Edwards (Cornell University Press, 2009), or Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (Cornell University Press, 1998). For more on the connection between religious changes and political ones, Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Boydell & Brewer, 2013), is exceptional; and the brief Geoffrey Koziol, *The Peace of God* (Arc Humanities Press, 2018), is a good, readable introduction. For more on medieval religious devotion to saints, still essential is Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, 2014). The creation of castles is an important development in this period too, and we benefited from Charles Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society: Fortresses in England, France, and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 2003). For a reevaluation of the meaning of apocalyptic expectation in the early European Middle Ages, the essays in *Apocalypse and Reform from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, edited by Matthew Gabriele and James T. Palmer (Routledge, 2018), are quite good. But read the sources; despite the

Chapter 9

The Crusades have likely sparked more historical writing than any other event in medieval European history. Most of the primary sources have been translated. Extracts from the Latin sources are collected in the readily available Edward Peters, *The First Crusade: “The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres” and Other Source Materials* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and the most-copied full-text Latin account can be found at Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, translated by Carol Sweetenham (Ashgate, 2005). Important to the events, but written much earlier, are the works of Augustine of Hippo, especially his mammoth *City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (Penguin, 2004). Thankfully, sources from languages other than Latin and European vernaculars are now being translated and made available to us. For a Byzantine perspective, you can’t do much better than Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, translated by E. R. A. Sewter (Penguin, 2009); and for a Syrian Arabic one, Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, translated by Paul M. Cobb (Penguin, 2008). As far as modern scholarship, English-speakers are spoiled for choice. Absolutely start with the brief and insightful Susanna A. Throop, *The Crusades: An Epitome* (Kismet Press, 2018), and the important Paul M. Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades*

**Chapter 10**

For more on Peter of Cluny’s journey south and the translation of the Quran into Latin, the critical work is Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and also Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1150)*, translated by Graham Robert Edwards (Cornell University Press, 2003). For more general overviews of multireligious Iberia, see María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Back Bay Books, 2003); as well as Jerri-lynn D. Dodds, María Rosa Menocal, and Abigail Krasner Balbale, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* (Yale University Press, 2009); and most recently Brian A. Catslos, *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain* (Basic Books, 2018). In addition, Hussein Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), engages just these topics with a narrower scope but some important observations about how modern understandings of religion have been projected backward onto the medieval past. To that end, not about medieval Europe specifically, but important to the

Chapter II

The life of the great Rambam (Moses Maimonides) has inspired numerous biographies, including relatively recently Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton University Press, 2009), and Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization’s Greatest Minds* (Doubleday, 2010). The same could be said for the other central figure in this chapter, the sultan Saladin. Jonathan Phillips, *The Life and Legend of the Sultan Saladin* (Yale University Press, 2019), is a fine very recent biography; and we also recommend, for his time in Egypt, Ya’acov Lev, *Saladin in Egypt* (Brill, 1998). The larger social and political forces that buffeted Maimonides’s life, pushing him from Iberia, across North Africa, and finally to Egypt, are fascinating in and of themselves. For more on those, see Amira K. Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), as well as more specifically on the question

**Chapter 12**

We cannot convey how much of a joy and delight it is to read Marie de France, so you should just do it for yourself with her *Lais*, translated by Keith Busby (Penguin, 1999). Hildegard’s visions are also wonderful. See Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, translated by Mark Atherton (Penguin, 2001). And as should be expected, there’s a ton of really great analysis of both of their work, for example, Geoff Rector, “Marie de France, the Psalms, and the Construction of Romance Authorship,” in *Thinking Medieval Romance*, edited by Katherine C. Little and Nicola McDonald (Oxford University Press, 2018), pages 114–33; as well as the various essays collected in *A Companion to Marie de France*, edited by Logan E. Whalen (Brill, 2011); and Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, *Marie de France: A Critical Companion* (D. S. Brewer, 2014). On Hildegard, see such works as Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life* (Routledge, 1998), and *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco (Brill, 2013). Of the three women around whom this chapter revolves, Eleanor of Aquitaine is likely the most famous, but also the one whom we oddly perhaps know the least about, and who suffers the most from a plethora of mediocre biogra-

Chapter 13

This chapter centers on the rise of the papacy as an institution, pivoting around the career of one figure—Innocent III. There’s no finer introduction to the institution in the Middle Ages than Brett Edward Whalen, The Medieval Papacy (Palgrave, 2014). On Innocent himself, see John C. Moore, Pope Innocent III (1160/61–1216): To Root Up and to Plant (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). Crusading, as we’ve seen, dominated the papal world at this time. For the expeditions facing east, against Muslims and the Byzantines, look to Jessalynn Bird, Papacy, Crusade, and Christian-Muslim Relations (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), as well as David M. Perry, Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015). But then Europe turned inward, and began to be consumed by concern with heresy. The work of R. I. Moore is essential and field-defining here. His most recent book is The War on Heresy (Belknap Press, 2014). One can also look to general introductions to medieval heresy such as those of Christine Caldwell Ames, Medieval

Chapter 14


**Chapter 15**

The movement across the steppe, between Europe and Asia, is perhaps one of the most consequential in all the Bright Ages. Often, discussions about that persistent encounter across centuries centers around religious contact, first in the modern Middle East. For that, there’s the exceptional Christopher MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). As that encounter moved deeper into Asia, particularly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it encompassed the friars. Still useful is Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia* (University of Toronto Press, 1980); and you can read one of those friars’ journals in William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, translated by Peter Jackson (Hackett, 2009). But more recent work, attentive to issues of
race, has made us rethink how we talk about this period. See Shirin Azizeh Khanmohamadi, *In the Light of Another's Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); as well as Sierra Lomuto, “Race and Vulnerability: Mongols in Thirteenth-Century Ethnographic Travel Writing,” in *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality*, edited by Anne E. Zimo et al. (Routledge, 2020), pages 27–42. It’s critically important that, as we tried to show in this chapter, we make sure we think of the Mongols and other groups along the Silk Road as subjects and not just objects. For that, such works as Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road* (St. Martin’s Press, 1999), and Jack Weatherford, *The Secret History of the Mongol Queens: How the Daughters of Genghis Khan Rescued His Empire* (Broadway, 2011); as well as more specialized articles noting the expansive connections the empire made, such as Hosung Shim, “The Postal Roads of the Great Khans in Central Asia under the Mongol-Yuan Empire,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 44 (2014), pages 405–69.

**Chapter 16**

There are many massive and thoughtful collections of sources that enhance our understanding of the Black Death both in Europe and across the Mediterranean. Two such books are *The Black Death*, edited by Rosemary Horrox (Manchester University Press, 1994), and John Aberth, *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348–1350: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford St. Martins, 2005). David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* (Harvard University Press, 1997), attempts to think through the transformations the plague brought. His conclusions should be treated with caution, though, as new research has demonstrated how several of his hypotheses need to be revisited. More recently, Bruce M. S. Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late Medieval World* (Cambridge
University Press, 2016), has attempted to do something similar and think about the big-picture changes wrought not just by plague but by significant climate change at the end of medieval Europe. But if one wants to understand the Black Death itself, one absolutely must start with the work of Monica H. Green. Her recent essay “The Four Black Deaths,” American Historical Review 125 (2020), pages 1601–31, has changed the way we think about everything. In addition, the collection of essays in Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death, edited by Monica H. Green (Arc Humanities Press, 2015), were first steps toward demonstrating how global the Second Plague Pandemic truly was. The essay in that collection by Robert Hymes, “Epilogue: A Hypothesis on the East Asian Beginnings of the Yersinia pestis Polytomy,” pages 285–308, is particularly important for showing the plague’s origins, as well as the necessity of interdisciplinarity in researching this topic. Gérard Chouin, “Reflections on Plague in African History (14th–19th c.),” Afriques 9 (2018), also shows why Africa needs to be a part of this conversation. Finally, when talking about disease, we cannot forget that medieval people were people, with bodies that suffered. To get a sense of how Europeans in the period thought about themselves, see Jack Hartnell, Medieval Bodies: Life and Death in the Middle Ages (W. W. Norton, 2019).

Chapter 17

Everyone should read Dante. One of the most readily available translations is Dante Aligheri, The Divine Comedy, translated by Mark Musa (Penguin, 2014). Dante’s time in both Florence and Ravenna, outside his writings, is rich and exceptional, and brought vividly to life in John Took, Dante (Princeton University Press, 2020). You could spend a lifetime reading commentary on Dante, but in English and on

There were, of course, other important cities on the Italian peninsula during the late Middle Ages, and the ferment caused by their rivalries is a cause of understandable, and endless, fascination. For example, on Venice, see Deborah Howard, Venice and the East (Yale University Press, 2000); or for an overview you could start with Trevor Dean and Daniel Philip Waley, The Italian City Republics (Routledge, 2013); on the economic and social life of those cities, Sheilagh Ogilvie, Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds 1000–1800 (Cambridge University Press, 2011). But as we mention in the chapter, we ought always to be thinking of cities as part of the medieval landscape, and there's now no better place to get a sense of them than the meditations in Miri Rubin, Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

EPILOGUE

On the fascinating debate between the friar de las Casas and the humanist Sepulvéda—perhaps the end of the Bright Ages—there are many works worthy of your time, including Anthony Pagden, The Fall
of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology (Cambridge University Press, 1982), and Lewis Hanke, All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians (Northern Illinois University Press, 1994); as well as, most recently, the excellent Rolena Adorno, Polemics of Possession in Colonial Spanish American Narrative (Yale University Press, 2007). That debate, however, didn't set out a “middle” time period. For that, we certainly owe quite a bit to Petrarch, and the old but insightful essay by Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages,’” Speculum 17 (1942), pages 226–42, remains helpful. Also important here is the work of the nineteenth-century historian, particularly Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, translated by S. G. C. Middlemore (Penguin, 1990). Burckhardt inadvertently remains useful though, demonstrating how the idea of the Middle Ages shapes how we think about the period. Studying those ideas, especially in the twenty-first century, can be as important as studying the period itself. Luckily, we are in awe of the magnificent work being done in this regard. For an overview, begin with works like David Matthews, Medievalism: A Critical History (Boydell & Brewer, 2015); or Andrew B. R. Elliott, Medievalism, Politics, and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century (D. S. Brewer, 2017); or the essays collected in Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of “the Middle Ages” Outside Europe, edited by Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Finally, the issue of race in the Middle Ages, as well as that idea’s legacy, as it’s been appropriated and deployed is finally getting the wider scholarly attention it deserves. See for example Geraldine Heng, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Cord J. Whitaker, Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). In the end, the humanity and
horror of the Bright Ages belongs to everyone. By examining the medieval past as it’s been analyzed by Black Americans, Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages* (Palgrave, 2018), shows us possible worlds—a goal so very close to the heart of our *The Bright Ages*. 