

Framing the Early Middle Ages



FRAMING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800

CHRIS WICKHAM



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The Roman empire tends to be seen as a whole whereas the early middle ages tends to be seen as a collection of regional histories, roughly corresponding to the land-areas of modern nation states. As a result, early medieval history is much more fragmented, and there have been few convincing syntheses of socio-economic change in the post-Roman world since the 1930s. In recent decades, the rise of early medieval archaeology has also transformed our source-base, but this has not been adequately integrated into analyses of documentary history in almost any country. In *Framing the Early Middle Ages* Chris Wickham aims at integrating documentary and archaeological evidence, and above all, at creating a comparative history of the period 400-800. This he does by means of systematic comparative analyses of each of the regions of the latest Roman and immediately post-Roman world, from Denmark to Egypt (only the Slav areas are left out). The book concentrates on classic socio-economic themes, state finance, the wealth and identity of the aristocracy, estate management, peasant society, rural settlement, cities, and exchange. These are only a partial picture of the period, but they are intended as a framework for other developments, without which they cannot be properly understood. Wickham argues that only a complex comparative analysis can act as the basis for a wider synthesis. Whilst earlier syntheses have taken the development of a single region as 'typical', with divergent developments presented as exceptions, this book takes all different developments as typical, and aims to construct a synthesis based on a better understanding of difference and the reasons for it. This is the most ambitious and original survey of the period ever written.

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