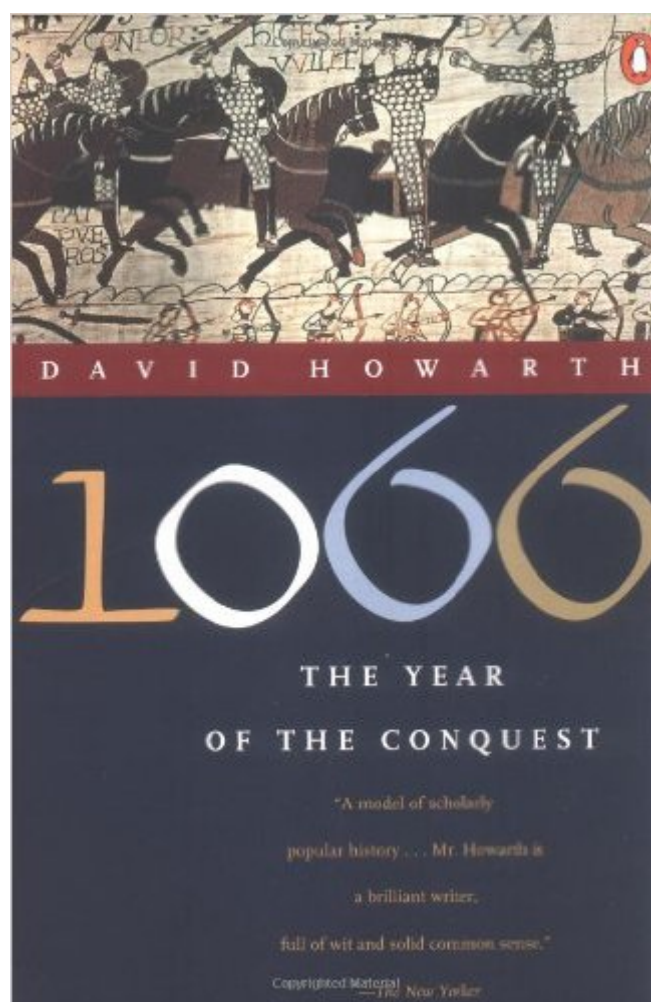


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1066: The Year Of The Conquest



Synopsis

Everyone knows 1066 as the date of the Norman invasion and conquest of England. But how many of us can place that event in the context of the entire dramatic year in which it took place? From the death of Edward the Confessor in early January to the Christmas coronation of Duke William of Normandy, there is an almost uncanny symmetry, as well as a relentlessly exciting surge, of events leading to and from Hastings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this short but well written narrative, Howarth paints moving portraits of King Edward the Confessor, Harold of England, William of Normandy, Earl Tostig, King Harald Hardrada, the people of England and other players in the Norman conquest. Howarth does not conceal his views, admitting at the outset that he "would have liked King Harold, heartily disliked King Edward the Confessor, felt sorry for Earl Tostig and terrified of Duke William, and found nothing whatever to say to King Harald Hardrada of Norway." This is history with a bit of passion, which makes it all the more enjoyable for the reader. "1066" will also make you appreciate how hard it is to know anything about a time like the Middle Ages, when very few people could read and write and those who could were invariably working for whoever won the latest battle. It will also give a sense of how contingent history is, of how the world might have become a very different place if a few events had happened in a different order. As it was, William the Conqueror arrived at exactly the right time, while King Harold was at the other end of England crushing King Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. What would have happened if William's fleet had been destroyed in a storm, or if he had arrived in England in the summer of 1066, when King Harold was ready and able to meet him? We'll

never know--King Harold and his army arrived at Hastings exhausted and depleted, and the rest, as they say, is history. Howarth approaches 1066 as if it were the stuff of a novel, and he has been criticized for doing so.

To put it simply, Howarth's book "1066, The Year of the Conquest" is a biased, factually-based, historical account of the year 1066 in England, encompassing both the plights of the royals AND the common people of the island, along with the English's neighbors to the south and east. If you are looking for the play-by-play of the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror's reign in England, you've come to the wrong book, my friend. Howarth examines just that profound year in English history, and does not go in full detail about what happened before or after 1066. Like other reviewers, I did notice Howarth's unabashed bias to the English in this work, but his non-objective feelings don't overwhelm the text. A jovial example is that not once, is the Norman king referred to as "William the Conqueror;" in fact, he is introduced to the reader as "William the Bastard." That aside, I had a splendid time reading this short work (only 200 pages). Howarth's writing style keeps the reader engrossed and he has a gift of turning the historical facts into a readable and impassioned story. One thing I really liked was the absence of footnotes. In the text, Howarth will cite the text he is using, what biases it may have, and how accurate it might be with regards to first-person accounts, years after 1066 it was written, etc. This citation style works extremely well in the text and I wish more authors would use it. The best part of the book might be the first chapter where Howarth chooses a random village and takes a Howard Zinn approach at it by explaining what the common folk did at that time, what they ate, where they lived, etc. It really gives a reader a better understanding of the Middle Ages, after all, not everyone got to live in a castle.

There were several strong features of David Howarth's book 1066. First, there was excellent characterization. King Harold and Duke William were fully portrayed in all their strengths and weaknesses. They are both drawn as humans with a mixture of assets and contradictions. William was a military prodigy since age 19 whereas Harold was a strong self-made man trying to cobble England back together after the rule of Edward the Confessor. The story is full of heroes and villains. King Edward the Confessor was a problematic ruler who set the stage for the conflict, supposedly promising the crown of England to William, which was against English law. Harold's cruel sadistic traitor brother, Tostig, caused much ruin and destruction of the English nation. There are many other characters, including the wild Norseman Harold Hardrada who invaded England independently but simultaneously with Duke William the Conqueror. Harold could probably have

defeated one invasion but not two. Your heart sinks when Harold learns during the victory feast over his defeat of Harold Hardrada' army, that William has invaded and is marching inland. Second, there is excellent explanations about the technology of farming, law and courts, social structures, and warfare at the time. Howarth contrast the Norman knights, their code of chivalry, their use of horses in warfare, with the English footsoldier with his Norse two handed axe. Howarth is no fan of chivalry which he argues is a destructive social structure that diverts the male children of the aristocracy into warlike activiees starting at age 8 and that creates professional warriors who disdain work and their fellow citizens while they seek and glorify violence and warfare.

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