The Making of Europe: A Brief Summary

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*The Making of Europe* is an exceptionally bold, three-hundred-page essay on the processes of European expansion and on how this expansion “made Europe.” Its subject matter and core themes are pithily provided by the subtitle: “Conquest, colonization and cultural change 950–1350.” Such groupings of subjects, and their frequent but not inevitable interconnection, are the book’s defining characteristic.¹

Subject Matter

Discussion of the various subjects and themes are intertwined, with the order of chapters perhaps hinting at, but simultaneously rendering impossible any firm conclusions about, Bartlett’s prioritization: the military aristocracy predominate in chapters 2 to 4, followed by economic development in chapters 5 to 7, and cultural relations (including religion) in chapters 8 to 10, before the book concludes with chapters on “The Europeanization of Europe” and “The political sociology of Europe after the expansion.” Yet any perceived progression from the crucial military through the socio-economic to the mere superstructure of the cultural is undermined by the presence of chapter 1, on the institutional Church; is revealed as misleading by, for example, the treatment of cultural issues in chapter 4, “The image of the conqueror”; and is brought to a juddering halt by statements such as “historians label the period between the fourth and sixth centuries the *Völkerwanderungszeit*, the ‘migration period’, but, in terms of number of migrants and long-term effects, the migratory movements of the High Middle Ages merit the appellation even more fully.”² Violence, warfare and predation, are quite properly emphasized, in contrast to the anemia of some cultural histories, yet Bartlett points out that “it would be easy to concentrate a strictly military eye on this expansionary movement, but as important is the process of cultural change which

¹ See e.g. *Making of Europe*, p. 292: “Between 950 and 1350 Latin Christendom roughly doubled in area, and, while this religious expansion did not always involve either conquest or immigration, it often did”; cf. p. 300 “Colonization and conversion were sometimes synonyms and sometimes not.”

² *Making of Europe*, p. 111.

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interwove with the more simply military tale and was not merely a function of it.” Furthermore, the inter-relatedness of developments is not just a feature of Bartlett’s modern analysis but also of medieval comment: recruits were enticed to migrate eastwards in Europe by advertising rhetoric such as “Saxons, Franconians, Lotharingians and Flemings, here you will be able both to save your souls and, if you will, to acquire very good land to settle.”

Geographically, the core area from which expansion came was “Frankish Europe,” the lands once ruled by the Carolingians, although Bartlett’s is quite properly a Frankish Europe in which Germany is much more prominent than in many a history of medieval Europe. The areas in which expansion occurred – what Bartlett at times calls (with cautions) the periphery – were Eastern Europe, the Holy Land, southern Italy including Sicily, Spain, and Scandinavia. Expansion in turn led to new areas becoming part of the core, for example the lower Elbe becoming “no longer a precarious frontier, but the fulcrum of a vast trading system linking London and Novgorod. … Places like Hamburg, Pisa and Barcelona lost their frontier status and became instead prosperous centres of colonizing and mercantile activity.” Can it be any accident that the book is mainly the product of Bartlett’s time at Chicago, another frontier settlement that became a commercial fulcrum?

The outcome of expansion was marked largely but not invariably by “standardization,” “transformation and convergence,” “homogenization” within Europe. There were powerful processes of integration, as when profits from Livonian trade and agriculture helped to fund an attack on Egypt in the early thirteenth century, and as more generally in the process that Bartlett calls “the Europeanization of Europe.” Standardizing diffusionist patterns were common, although not universal. At the same time, cultural categorizations could be exclusionist, most notably in attitudes to subject peoples in some colonized areas.

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3 Making of Europe, p. 269.
4 Making of Europe, pp. 136–137; see also e.g. pp. 123, 153.
5 Making of Europe, p. 20.
7 Making of Europe, pp. 292–293.
8 See e.g. Making of Europe, pp. 10–11, 21, 220, 274, 277, 283, 289, 306, 311.
9 Making of Europe, pp. 268, 269.
10 See esp. Making of Europe, p. 280. Note how in some matters, such as the widening use of charters, a “fairly regular pattern” can be identified; Making of Europe, p. 283.
11 See esp. Making of Europe, chs 8 & 9; also e.g. pp. 23, 311–313.