

Millennium – The End of the World and the Forging of Christianity by Tom Holland.
Little, Brown 2008.

Devotees of Tom Holland's work, among whom I number myself, will be aware that as a historian he likes nothing better than to engage with a story that stretches over a vast canvas and involves a huge number of players. This was the case with *Rubicon* and *Persian Fire*, and it certainly applies to *Millennium*.

Holland tells the story of the events that changed Europe forever in the final century of the first millennium and the opening years of the second. He details the ebb and flow of the seat of power between papal Rome and imperial Byzantium, the influence and impact of Scandinavian invaders on both the continent of Europe and the island of Britain, the disruption caused as the forces of Islam spread that religion's influence and dominion across the Mediterranean and throughout the Middle East, and the growth of warring dukedoms and petty kingdoms in France and Germany some of whose leaders came to assume a stature that far outstripped their country of origin.

Tom Holland's genius is not only to make distant periods of history come to life but also to write with a light touch and a humorous eye about the movers and shakers by the force of whose will national and international history was made. *Millennium* is replete with Popes of all persuasions, from the irredeemably corrupt and self-serving to the visionary, with Kings of brilliance or stupidity, strength or weakness, and countless ordinary folk, priests and laity, farmers and knights, who followed others or rose to influence events themselves.

Cities also loom large in this compelling story: Rome and Constantinople, Cairo and Jerusalem, Aachen and Cordoba, and great institutions like the Abbey at Cluny and the Vatican itself.

Millennium is the best kind of history, informing and entertaining in equal measure, and eloquent testimony to Tom Holland's position as one of the best popular historians writing today.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh