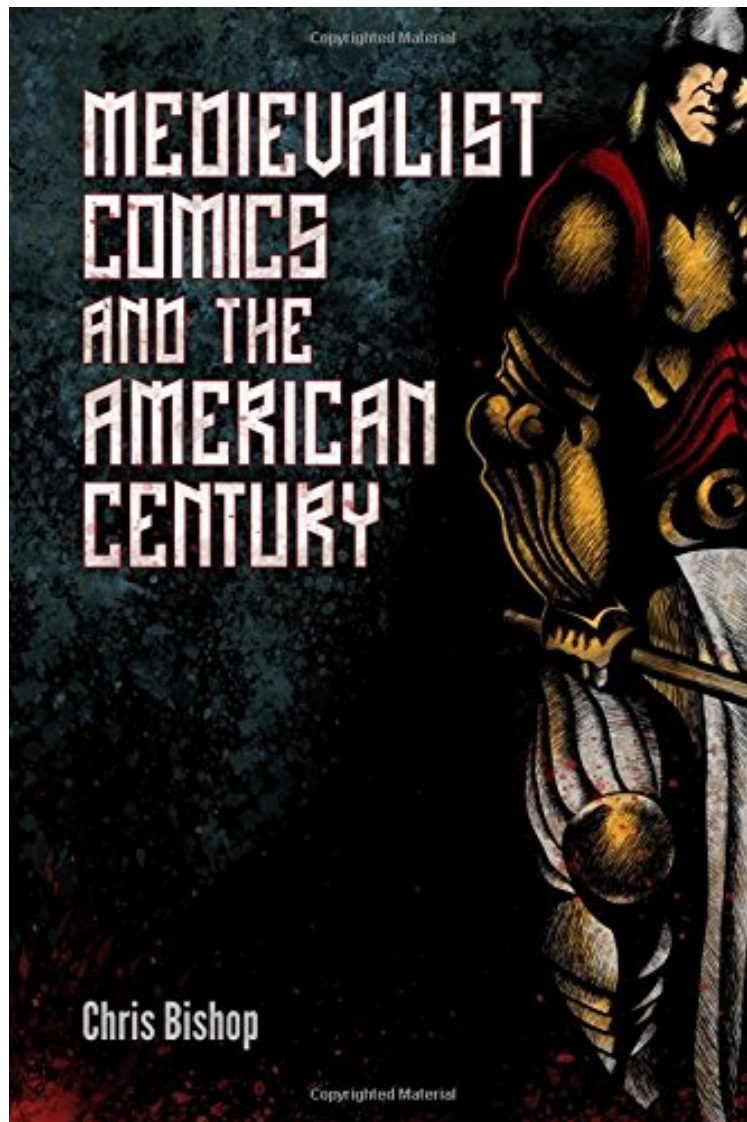


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Medievalist Comics and the American Century

Chris Bishop

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Chris Bishop : Medievalist Comics and the American Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Medievalist Comics and the American Century:

The comic book has become an essential icon of the American Century, an era defined by optimism in the face of change and by recognition of the intrinsic value of democracy and modernization. For many, the Middle Ages stand as an antithesis to these ideals, and yet medievalist comics have emerged and endured, even thrived alongside their

superhero counterparts. Chris Bishop presents a reception history of medievalist comics, setting them against a greater backdrop of modern American history. From its genesis in the 1930s to the present, Bishop surveys the medievalist comic, its stories, characters, settings, and themes drawn from the European Middle Ages. Hal Foster's Prince Valiant emerged from an America at odds with monarchy, but still in love with King Arthur. Green Arrow remains the continuation of a long fascination with Robin Hood that has become as central to the American identity as it was to the British. The Mighty Thor reflects the legacy of Germanic migration into the United States. The rugged individualism of Conan the Barbarian owes more to the western cowboy than it does to the continental knight-errant. In the narrative of Red Sonja, we can trace a parallel history of feminism. Bishop regards these comics as not merely happenstance, but each success (Prince Valiant and The Mighty Thor) or failure (Beowulf: Dragon Slayer) as a result and an indicator of certain American preoccupations amid a larger cultural context. Intrinsically modernist paragons of pop-culture ephemera, American comics have ironically continued to engage with the European Middle Ages. Bishop illuminates some of the ways in which we use an imagined past to navigate the present and plots some possible futures as we valiantly shape a new century.

The extent to which the medieval has in many ways played a crucial role in the construction of the modern is an area of investigation that has attracted increasing attention from scholars in recent decades. Focussing on a range of American comic books, Chris Bishop examines the reception history complexities of their impact on popular culture. The Arthurianism of Prince Valiant, the Robin Hood origins of The Green Arrow, the response to Germanic immigration of The Mighty Thor, the underlying feminist discourse of Red Sonja, and the modernity transported to the Middle Ages of Northlanders can all be understood as a search for contemporary identity, one in which the pressures of consumerism and socio-political realities are underlying forces. *Medievalist Comics and the American Century* breaks new ground in our understanding of the cultural history of western societies and does so in a way that is both enlightening and provocative. Martin Arnold, reader in Old Northern Studies at the University of Hull and author of *Thor: Myth to Marvel*, a *Times Literary Supplement* Book of the Year, 2011. About the Author: Chris Bishop, Canberra, Australia, teaches classics at the Australian National University. He has published widely on the history of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, as well as on comic book studies. In 2012 Bishop was awarded a Kluge Fellowship at the Library of Congress for his research.