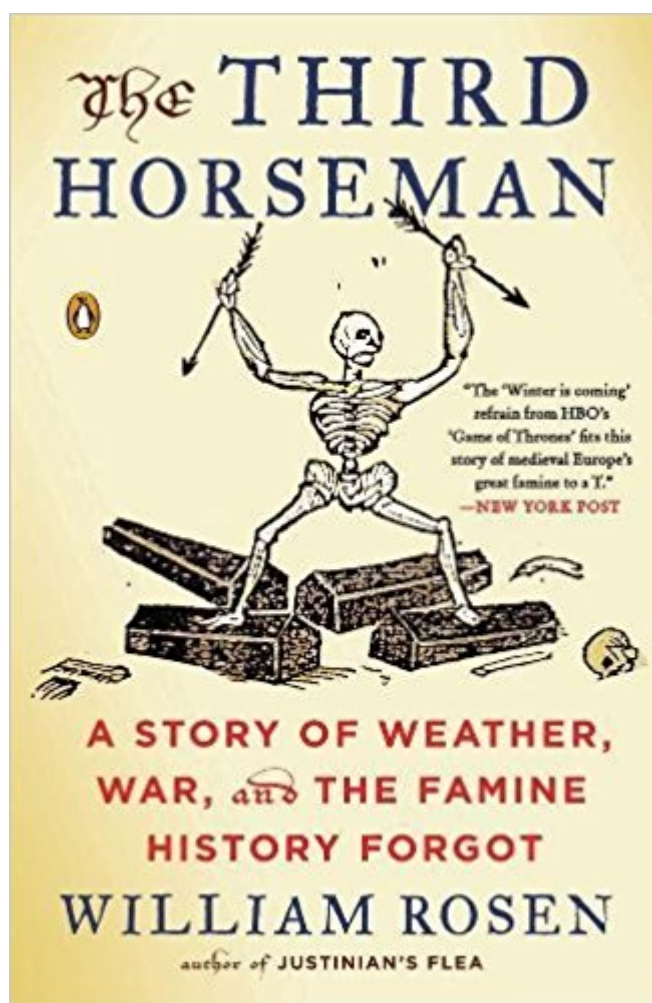




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The Third Horseman: A Story Of Weather, War, And The Famine History Forgot



Synopsis

The incredible true story of how a cycle of rain, cold, disease, and warfare created the worst famine in European history—years before the Black Death, from the author of *Justinian's Flea* and the forthcoming *Miracle Cure*! In May 1315, it started to rain. For the seven disastrous years that followed, Europeans would be visited by a series of curses unseen since the third book of Exodus: floods, ice, failures of crops and cattle, and epidemics not just of disease, but of pike, sword, and spear. All told, six million lives—one-eighth of Europe's total population—would be lost. With a category-defying knowledge of science and history, William Rosen tells the stunning story of the oft-overlooked Great Famine with wit and drama and demonstrates what it all means for today's discussions of climate change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A kink in Europe's climate during the fourteenth century indirectly triggered a seven-year cataclysm that left six million dead, William Rosen reveals in this rich interweaving of agronomy, meteorology, economics and history.... Rosen deftly delineates the backstory and the perfect storm of heavy rains, hard winters, livestock epidemics, and war leading to the catastrophe. --Nature "Rosen... delights in the minutiae of history, down to the most fascinating footnotes... Engrossing.... A work that glows from the author's relish for his subject. --Kirkus "Rosen (*The Most Powerful Idea in the World*) argues persuasively that natural disasters are most catastrophic when humankind's actions give them a push. The depredations committed in battle by Englishmen and Scots were augmented by

years of bad weather: the result was that people died in droves. The interactions Rosen describes have been studied but are seldom incorporated into popular history, and the author never overreaches in his conclusions, providing a well-grounded chronicle.... This book will appeal foremost to history lovers, but it should also interest anyone who enjoys a well-documented story.

—Library Journal

“William Rosen is a good enough writer to hold interest and maintain the fraught relations between nature and politics as a running theme. He ends *The Third Horseman* with a stark observation: in some ways, global ecology is more precarious nowadays than it was in the 1300s.

—Milwaukee Express

“Rosen is a terrific storyteller and engaging stylist; his vigorous recaps of famous battles and sketches of various colorful characters will entertain readers not unduly preoccupied by thematic rigor.... Rosen’s principal goal, however, is not to horrify us, but to make us think.... While vividly re-creating a bygone civilization, he invites us to look beyond our significant but ultimately superficial differences and recognize that we too live in fragile equilibrium with the natural world whose resources we recklessly exploit, and that like our medieval forebears we may well be vulnerable to a sudden shift in the weather.

—The Daily Beast

“Rosen is a natural and playful storyteller.

—The New York Times

“Rosen has a facility for the telling anecdote and the quirky aside.

—Bill Gates

“[Rosen] writes what might be called champagne prose: it slips down quick and easy but carries a punch.

—The Telegraph (UK)

William Rosen, author of *Miracle Cure*, *The Third Horseman*, *Justinian’s Flea*, and *The Most Powerful Idea in the World*, was an editor and a publisher at Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, and the Free Press for nearly twenty-five years.

Rosen has written a very readable historical overview of northwestern Europe during the late 1200s and early 1300s, however it is not about climate change. (I suspect the subtitle was chosen because of current interest in the issue.) The book is really a political history of the period. He presents a top level view of three political relationships; England vs. Scotland, England vs. France, and the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy. He does a very good job of simplifying a key time of history for this region of Europe, made complex by the overlapping family claims for land and power, at a time when the earth was moving into the “Little Ice Age” that was to last until the latter 1800s. The book is not what the title claims: it really does not address climate change and the great famine of the early 1300s — it really is more of a

political history of the period with occasional forays into discussions of the impact of poor or no harvests caused by too much rain and floods. I say this because the first five chapters (121 pages) of the book is about how Norse raids, the Normans, the development of feudalism, with a large focus on Edward I's attempt to subjugate Scotland which all makes for interesting reading. I frequently found myself wondering when he was going to get to his narrative on the impact of climate change. It's not until Chapter Six that he gets into any serious discussion of the rainy years of 1315 and 1316, the related famines that covered all of northern Europe, and how the climate was changing during the period. But even then it's not long before he turns to discussing politics and power among the regions I mention above. In fact, leaving aside that this is more a political history of power politics of the period, the book really supports the theory of "The Malthusian Trap." The author states in his conclusion that it wasn't two years of bad weather that killed so many, any more than the battles between the rival powers. "The conditions that destroyed millions of lives during the seven years of the Great Famine appeared during the four centuries of the Medieval Warm Period. From 900 to 1300, as ten million mouths grew to thirty million and as the least productive acres in Europe were cultivated to feed them the balance between producing food and consuming it grew more fragile every year. In other words, there were insufficient resources to support the existing population, especially when combined with the wars of the period and the demands this made on existing food and financial resources a perfect storm, so to speak. Overall I found this an interesting book to read. However, if you're already familiar with English, Scottish, and French dynastic struggles of the period you won't find much new.

Misleading title This book is mostly a history of the struggles between Kings Edward I and Edward II of England, Scottish leaders William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, and Phillip and Charles of France. There is lots on the intrigues, and battles, and changing alliances. It's a good, fun read if you want a history of English royalty in the early fourteenth century. But the book has very little to do with climate change and famine. Yes, these are discussed here and there, but mostly as background to the royal disputes of the time. When they are discussed, the explanations are very terse, and did not help me -- I had to turn elsewhere for more detail. If I were cynical, I would guess that the bits on climate and famine were added later, so as to dress up the book and make it more attractive given today's concerns. That said, the book is well written and a very easy read. I would

give it four stars as a traditional history of Kings Edward I and II. As a discussion of climate change and famine seven hundred years ago, I would give it one star. Over all, given the deceptive title, I'll go with two stars.

I'm really surprised by the rave reviews about this book. Think of the stated subject of this book, Climate Change and the Great Famine of the 14th Century, as a delicious side dish, in which the author seldom and then fleetingly indulges in. The rest of the book, the main dish, however, is about geopolitics and mainly the English-Scottish war. All you have to do is count the references to the Battle of Bannockburn: it's mentioned in intricate detail (including the battle order) 28 times in the Kindle version. The very complicated relationship between Isabella of France (108 mentions) and Edward II is given far more weight (and pages) than famine. The author sometimes goes to his tasty side (the famine) but mainly focuses on the English-Scottish border. How he tried squaring this with the book's title is a mystery, but as a reader you are sometimes shown the sleight of hand. When trying to explain the Avignon papacy, the author simply says in one amazing paragraph in page 166 that it would be a mistake to include it as part of the climate change narrative, but also a mistake not to include it. And based on that logic, off it goes to the races. This is not to put off the interesting medieval geopolitics told in the book (the aforementioned Scottish-English struggle, the Holy Roman Empire and the birth of Switzerland, the Hanseatic League, etc...) but very little about the famine.

Print is big enough to see well.

On the subject of weather, war and famine the book gave a good presentation. But the fact, while true, were smothered by the detailed and complicated history of the times

i thought i was getting a book focused on climate change but instead it was referred to often but not the focus, & the book was about the scottish rebellion against england; it concerned itself mostly with struggles between edward I & II. wallace & esp robert bruce; when he did talk about the effects of climate change & the famine, it was very interesting; the other was good but not what i signed up for; if you want to read about the scottish revolt, this is a good book but if you are interested in climate change, you may be disappointed

Decided to read it for a book report; glad I did because it really was a good read. Took a while to read but it was worth it

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