



# Inventions of the Middle Ages

*Chiara Frugoni*

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## **Inventions of the Middle Ages** Chiara Frugoni

The middle ages have often been depicted as a period in which life had few comforts. Diet and health were poor, learning was preserved only for the select few through the monasteries and even the nobility had to do without. Nonsense, says the great medieval scholar Chiara Frugoni, in this delightful examination of the many inventions we owe to the Middle Ages. This 'backward' period gave us printed books, spectacles, anaesthetics, pets, chequebooks, glazed windows, clocks, underwear, playing cards, the fireplace, universities and the wheelbarrow - inventions, items and ideas without which our lives would be poorer, more painful and definitely less healthy. The evidence is provided by a rich seam of medieval art and letters. Eyeglasses, for example, turn up regularly on the noses of devotional figures in the corners of illuminated manuscripts, and a mechanical clock chimes sweetly in Dante's Divine Comedy. Frugoni reveals charming, remarkable stories of how each innovation began. The fork, considered an instrument of sin by 12th-century churchmen, found its salvation as a means of dealing with that hot and slippery Italian foodstuff - pasta, also invented at this time. From a father upbraiding his student son for playing at dice and visiting 'the most disreputable places', to the way gunpowder enabled men 'of base extraction and modest physical prowess' to render years of training in the chivalric arts meaningless, what is revealed here is the unique character of the Middle Ages itself. Case book with 83 color and black and white illustrations.

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