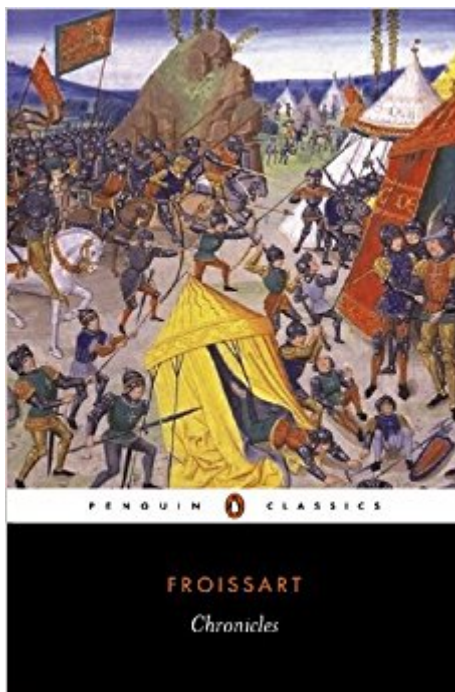


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Chronicles



Synopsis

One of the greatest contemporary records of fourteenth-century England and France. Depicting the great age of Anglo-French rivalry from the deposition of Edward II to the downfall of Richard II, Froissart powerfully portrays the deeds of knights in battle at Sluys, Crecy, Calais and Poitiers during the Hundred Years War. Yet they are only part of this vigorous portrait of medieval life, which also vividly describes the Peasants' Revolt, trading activities and diplomacy against a backdrop of degenerate nobility. Written with the same sense of curiosity about character and customs that underlies the works of Froissart's contemporary, Chaucer, the *Chronicles* are a magnificent evocation of the age of chivalry. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Jean Froissart was born in Valenciennes (c.1337) and came to England in 1361 where he joined the entourage of Edward III's Queen. While in England he travelled to Scotland and the Welsh Marches and to the Continent several times, finally settling in the Netherlands on the death of the Queen. He finally took holy orders, before returning to England in the court of Richard II, whose downfall he recorded in 1399. His first book of the *Chroniques* was published in three versions, the second book

was completed by 1388 and the third in 1390. He was still working on the fourth when he died c.1410. Geoffrey Brereton edited and translated several modern dramatists including Claudel, Sartre and Adamov, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He died in 1979.

Right. So, this Penguin Classics version of Froissart, the great French historian, is heavily abridged, selectively abridged, I should say, so that it concentrates almost exclusively on France and England during what is now called the Hundred Years War during the Fourteenth Century. I'm with most of the other reviewers here in wishing that it were not abridged, but if one is going to abridge it and to translate it for an English-reading audience, as Geoffrey Brereton has so masterfully done here, this is the way to do it. The first thing that will probably strike the modern reader of *The Chronicles* is the aristocratic tone of it and the long lists of - mostly forgettable - nobles who appear in each battle and the disregard, indeed, distrust and fear of the masses. It may seem to the modern ear like sycophancy, but the reader would do well to remember the old adage that, "The past is a different country. They do things differently there." Further, Froissart has a point, when he recounts in horror of the uprising of the Jacquerie that, "When they were asked why they did these things, they replied that they did not know; it was because they saw others doing them and they copied them. They thought that by such means they could destroy all the nobles and gentry in the world, so that there would be no more of them..." Most of the Western World now would sympathise with the Jacquerie, just as it sympathises with the "Arab Spring" which is ongoing as I write this, but it is worth one's while to consider the other side of the coin and to try viewing these current uprisings as Froissart would have. We don't know, and probably shan't for some time, how these things will come round in the end. It is worth noting that, towards the end of this edition, in covering the internecine strife in England under Richard II, most famous to English readers through Shakespeare's play, that Froissart unequivocally notes that beneath all the regality and nobility so prominently on display in the wars and grand events, that, "the citizens of London, who are rich and powerful, and draw their living chiefly from merchandise sent over land and sea, which enables them to live in great prosperity, are the real leaders of the kingdom, without whom the rest of the country would neither dare nor be able to do anything." But the overarching theme of Froissart is that of any historian who has studied and lived through human affairs and reflected deeply upon them: The passing nature of all that is deemed glorious by men in this world. As he reflects on the fortunes of the corrupt official Betisac and the Fate which quickly turned upon him: "But it must be supposed that Fortune played him this trick, so that when he thought himself most securely seated on top of her wheel, she spun him down into the mud - as she has done to thousands of others since the world began." And as she

will do, he might have added, to thousands of others yet to be born.

Froissart was a keen observer and a diligent reporter. He sought out sources who witnessed the events he described and questioned them carefully, sometimes over a period of months. His admiration for nobles and knights extends even to a lengthy interview with a "freebooter", a "knight" who had become a mercenary and lived by ransoming prisoners. Froissart's occasional errors in geography and number estimates are easily forgiven and are carefully pointed out by the editor. A clear window into the Hundred Years War and the societies that fought it.

The Penguin edition of Froissart's *Chronicles* translated from the French by Brereton in 1967 is the best modern English version of this history of the 100 Years' War I have found. It is condensed to apx. 500 pp. and some important passages are left out or paraphrased. There is heavy emphasis and detail on events in England, somewhat neglecting events in France and the continent. Froissart devoted attention in the original to both sides. The Penguin I ordered was new and reasonable priced.

Froissart's work, as translated into the modern English by Geoffrey Brereton, provides a glimpse into the history, culture and intrigues of the 100 Years War period from 1322-1400. The abridged work presented here is accessible for any reader. While there are significant abridgements as noted by other reviewers, the work itself is well put together and flows reasonably well, with the abridged pieces described by the editor in italics throughout the book. The translation into the modern English makes the book eminently readable for non-scholars, and the insights into culture, warfare, court life and historical events are both interesting and poignant.

The descriptions of battles, duels to the death, and bouts of intrigue are very engrossing. A must-read, to be sure.

Wonderful primary source, faithfully translated, and every bit as good as I've come to expect from the Penguin Classics series. Useful index of names, and with good academic commentary in the introduction.

A superior translation, gives one the sense of being there.

Great book.

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