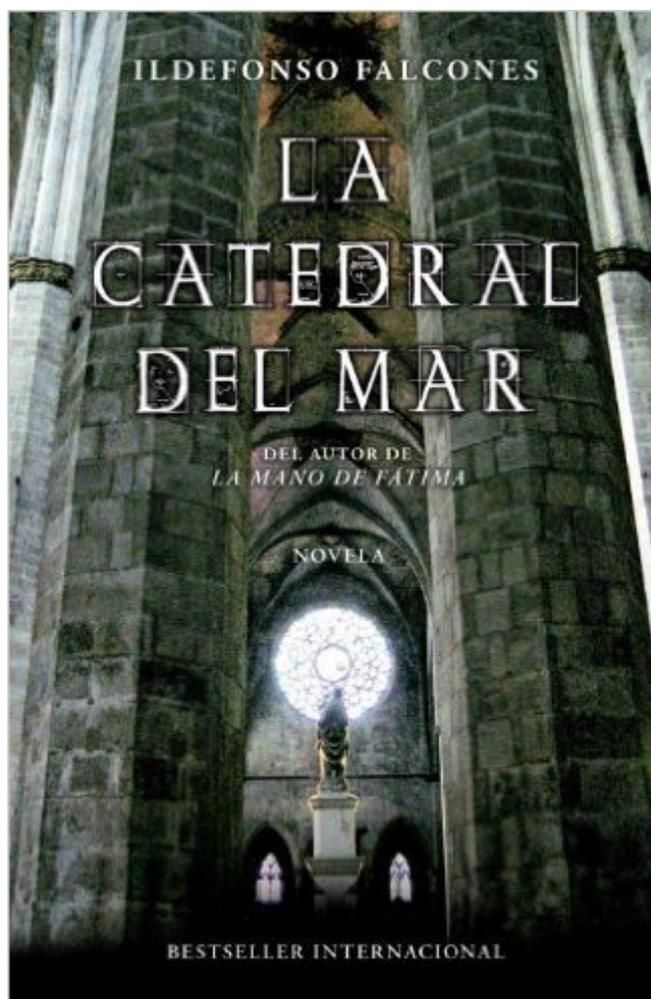


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La Catedral Del Mar (Spanish Edition)



Synopsis

Creíble y fascinante... tan maravillosamente estructurada que las últimas sesenta páginas se detonan como un cordel de fuegos artificiales. "The Washington Post" En el siglo XIV, la ciudad de Barcelona se encuentra en su momento de mayor prosperidad. Ha crecido hacia la Ribera, el humilde barrio de los pescadores, cuyos habitantes deciden construir, con el dinero de unos y el esfuerzo de otros, el mayor templo mariano jamás conocido: Santa María del Mar. Una construcción que es paralela a la azarosa historia de Arnau, un siervo de la tierra que huye de los abusos de su señor feudal y se refugia en Barcelona, donde se convierte en ciudadano y, con ello, en hombre libre. El joven Arnau trabaja como palafrenero, estibador, soldado y cambista. Una vida extenuante, siempre al amparo de la Catedral del Mar, que le iba a llevar de la miseria del fugitivo a la nobleza y la riqueza. Pero con esta posición privilegiada también le llega la envidia de sus pares, que urden una sádica conjura que pone su vida en manos de la Inquisición... La catedral del mar es una trama en la que se entrecruzan lealtad y venganza, traición y amor, guerra y peste, en un mundo marcado por la intolerancia religiosa, la ambición material y la segregación social. Todo ello convierte a esta obra no sólo en una novela absorbente, sino también en la más fascinante y ambiciosa recreación de las luces y sombras de la época feudal.

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Customer Reviews

(Spoiler) This is a historical novel set in 14th century Barcelona. Since I like historical novels as well as Spain and Barcelona, I was quickly attracted by this book and read the Dutch translation as soon

as it came out. It relates the life of Arnau from his lowly birth on his father's farm, his subsequent flight to Barcelona after being pursued by the landlord and his rapid career from carrying stone to the building site of the Santa Maria del Mar to joining the local nobility as a baron. Arnau is the hero of the story; he is portrayed as a humble man without any ambitions, who yet somehow manages to become the richest man in Catalan. This discrepancy makes the plot seem a bit contrived; the author needs a rich Jewish merchant (whose daughter's life is saved by Arnau) to set Arnau up as moneylender by providing him with capital and a Moorish slave who is a financial expert. Therefore it seems as if life is happening to Arnau, rather than being lived by him. The plot lacks credibility in more places, ranging from a character's rebuke of Arnau being filthy and smelly after a stint in jail (nobody washed in the Middle Ages and everybody smelled like hell) to the romantic love between Arnau and his stepdaughter Mar (which teenage girl wants to marry her stepfather who she lived with since her childhood?), to Arnau applying 21st century morals in Medieval times. Also I found the style of writing and dialogues a bit clumsy here and there (although this could have been the Dutch translation) and the characters one-dimensional. The most interesting theme of this book could have been the relationship between Arnau and his brother Joan who joins the Inquisition; however the author doesn't go very deep in elaborating the conflict between the two brothers.

The recent translation from Spanish into Portuguese of *La Catedral del Mar*, by Ildefonso Falcones, a Catalonian lawyer in his first venture in the literary world, has been well received here in Rio de Janeiro, and it became the topic for my November book club's discussion. The book is set in Catalonia in the 14th c. and has as its subject the building of the Gothic Cathedral mentioned in the title. It also relates the importance of this building to Barcelona and how society, from noble to serfs, was affected by the construction of the church. In the meanwhile we are given what I would call one of the best series of history lectures describing life in the middle ages. To give a solid structure to the text we follow the life of Arnau Estanyol who was born a serf and ended a baron. In this manner we can understand the daily duties of serfs, free men, to merchants and money lenders. We see the beginning of the Church's Inquisition, the life in the Juderia [Jewish neighborhood], the life and concerns of religious men, of free men, the way a mercantile city worked and the rights and obligations both of nobles and free citizens. Prejudices and values of all social layers are brought to the foreground. And yet, despite so much information, this is an interesting, fast-paced and easy to read book with only a couple of passages that could have been more succinct. I am referring here to a few explanatory dialogs that were chosen in a clear attempt to give the reader the necessary information about the era and its manners. This in no way diminishes the pleasure of reading this

novel, which was a true best seller in Spain, and responsible for the appearance of new tour routes covering Barcelona and the Catalan areas mentioned in the book.

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