

10-15-2009

## The Tudors: The complete story of England's most notorious dynasty, by G. J. Meyer (book review)

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### Recommended Citation

McCallister, Kathleen, The Tudors: The complete story of England's most notorious dynasty, by G. J. Meyer (book review) (2009). *Library Journal*, 134(17), 91.  
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs/83>

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the refocusing of attention on the evolution of Nazi ideology prior to 1923 make it an important addition to the field.—**Frederic Krome, Univ. of Cincinnati, Clermont Coll.**

**Kagan, Donald. *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History*. Viking. Nov. 2009. c.272p. maps. index. ISBN 978-0-670-02129-1. \$26.95. HIST** Classicist Kagan's *Thucydides* is not a biography but a blow-by-blow account of the hostilities between Athens and Sparta from about 460 to 405 B.C.E. Kagan compares Thucydides' great *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* with other surviving evidence to argue that, while Thucydides sometimes interpreted events to justify his own failed role in the war, as the first truly modern political historian, he included enough evidence to allow readers to come to different conclusions. Thucydides blames Athens's eventual defeat on the endemic tendency of democratic states to listen to demagogues. Kagan places responsibility on a series of military blunders committed by semi-amateur generals (like Thucydides himself) as two competing city states sought to weaken each other's spheres of influence through small-scale raids on towns and farmlands on the fringes of the two empires. **VERDICT** While not for the general reader, thanks to Kagan's command of his subject this excellent book bristles with insight into an era not unlike our own of brutal and momentous small-scale battles far, far from the homes and marketplaces of the central players in the war.—**Stewart Desmond, New York**

☆**Key, John. *China: A History*. Basic Bks: Perseus. Oct. 2009. c.642p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-465-01580-1. \$35. HIST** There are only a handful of English-language books that encapsulate the five millennia of Chinese history in one volume. To date, only John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman's *China: A New History*, Jacques Gernet's *A History of Chinese Civilization*, and Patricia Buckley Ebrey's *Cambridge Illustrated History of China* come close to Key's concise précis of the imperial dynasties, influential characters, and major turning points of Chinese history. Without sacrificing substance for brevity, Key manages to illustrate China's history very much as a narrative of the rise and fall of strong and feeble emperors, bureaucratic cliques and factionalism, the development of philosophical traditions and religious incarnations, and the constant restructuring of the empire's geographical boundaries. A journalist by trade, Key is well experienced in scripting historical tomes, with *India: A History* being most comparable in scale and ambition to this latest work.

**VERDICT** Readers already interested in, or wishing newly to embark upon, Chinese history will adore this book. Highly recommended.—**Allan Cho, Univ. of British Columbia Lib., Vancouver**

**Meyer, G.J. *The Tudors: The Complete Story of England's Most Notorious Dynasty*. Delacorte. Mar. 2010. c.640p. illus. maps. index. ISBN 978-0-385-34076-2. \$30. HIST** The reign of the Tudors consisted of just five monarchs—Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth I—and lasted for barely over a century, and yet the dynasty is one of the best known in history. Rather than follow the well-trodden path of the many previous biographers of these rulers, Meyer (*A World Undone: The Story of the Great War, 1914 to 1918*) focuses on the Tudors' reign as a whole, to produce a volume that is somewhat light on personal details but that provides a well-organized narrative of the major events and changes during the time, with attention to what each ruler achieved or failed to achieve. As in *A World Undone*, Meyer follows each chapter with a "background" section, which allows him to elucidate further various topics such as class structure or the hierarchy of the royal court. **VERDICT** An excellent resource for general readers; those wanting an expert but more personal look at the monarchs themselves may do better with Antonia Fraser's *The Tudors* or individual biographies such as J.J. Scarisbrick's *Henry VIII* or Anne Somerset's *Elizabeth I*, while Alison Weir's Tudor biographies are good popular history.—**Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia**

☆**Paul, Joel Richard. *Unlikely Allies: How a Merchant, a Playwright and a Spy Saved the American Revolution*. Riverhead: Penguin Group (USA). Oct. 2009. c.416p. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-1-59448-883-2. \$25.95. HIST** Numerous hagiographies portray the Founding Fathers as selfless, infallible leaders of the colossal struggle between liberty and tyranny, while lesser-known heroes fall between the cracks of time and are lost to history. In this notable reassessment, the critical roles played by Connecticut merchant Silas Deane, French playwright Caron de Beaumarchais (*Barber of Seville*), and the enigmatic Chevalier d'Eon in the successful outcome of the American Revolution are placed at the forefront. Drawing on a wealth of sources, Paul (Hastings Coll. of Law, Univ. of California) constructs an intriguing and readable account of three "unlikely" but extraordinary characters who in the face of substantial obstacles diligently labored to supply the Ameri-

can revolutionaries with arms at a critical juncture in the war and forged the decisive Franco-American alliance. Through grit, determination, and great personal sacrifice, Deane arduously struggled behind the scenes, emerging as the unsung hero of a tale with a brilliant cast of characters, including the infamous rake John Wilkes and the story's villain, Arthur Lee. **VERDICT** Paul's fast-paced, engaging narrative fills a gap in the historiography of the American Revolution and is essential reading for students of revolutionary diplomacy as well as general devotees of the age.—**Brian Odom, Pelham P.L., Pelham, AL**

**Uglow, Jenny. *A Gambling Man: Charles II's Restoration Game*. Farrar. Dec. 2009. c.592p. illus. index. ISBN 978-0-374-28137-3. \$35. HIST**

For those who remember the great English historian C.V. Wedgwood, who wrote so tellingly about the 17th century, reading this work will be like reading Wedgwood once more. Uglow (*Nature's Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick*) displays many of the same virtues, most notably a command of narrative and a use of trenchant detail to humanize a compelling story. Her narrative here, telling the story of the first ten years of the reign (1660–85) of England's Charles II, ranges across politics and diplomacy, court intrigues, fashion, the arts and sciences, and changes in the society and economy to produce a satisfying portrait of a fascinating age. These were critical years for the restoration of the monarchy after the Puritan interregnum, and Charles was a singularly attractive, though enigmatic, ruler. Energetic when he wanted to be and immensely talented, he was also easily distracted and an incurable womanizer. He appeared accessible—indeed, he was criticized for being too open—but he shared his thoughts with no one. Scandal soon roiled his libertine court. In the opposition to him that rose in Parliament one sees the beginning of the English party system. **VERDICT** An exceptionally interesting story that should please all lovers of history.—**David Keymer, Modesto, CA**

## LAW & CRIME

**Lipsky, Seth. *The Citizen's Constitution*. Basic Bks: Perseus. Nov. 2009. c.352p. index. ISBN 978-0-465-01858-1. \$25.95.**  
**Rakove, Jack N. *The Annotated U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence*. Belknap: Harvard Univ. Nov. 2009. c.368p. illus. ISBN 978-0-674-03606-2. \$24.95. LAW**

What are the frameworks through which we govern our country? In separate texts,

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