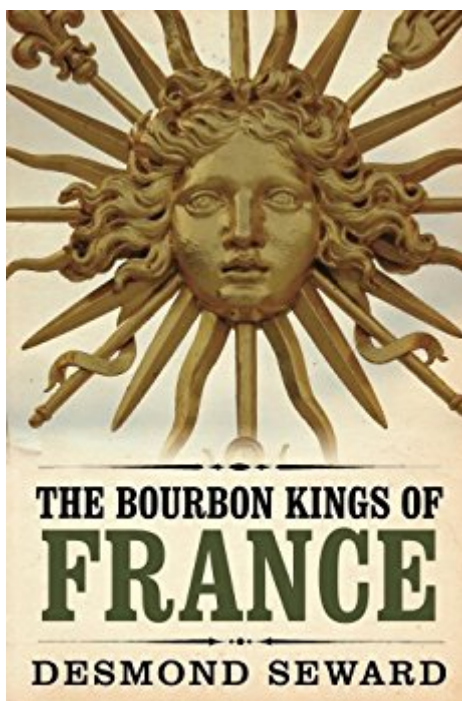


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The Bourbon Kings Of France



Synopsis

"Licentious or bigoted, noble or ignoble", wrote Nancy Mitford, "there has seldom been a dull Bourbon." The story of the Bourbon kings encompasses the two most glorious and turbulent centuries in French history, yet surprisingly, this is still the only narrative account of the dynasty for the general reader. They emerge from a shadowy line of medieval princes in 1589 to rule France for over 200 years, dominating Europe, launching an endless series of wars, creators of the dazzling splendour of Versailles, survivors from the holocaust at the French Revolution. They begin with the dashing figure of Henri IV, with his courage, gaiety and sixty-four mistresses; they include figures such as the Sun King Louis XIV and Louis XVI who ended under the guillotine; they close with the little-known "Henri V" - expected to return and rule France in 1873 but whose refusal to abandon the Lily banner of the Bourbons for the Tricolore finally lost the throne. Desmond Seward sets them in historical perspective, each with his entourage of generals, cardinals and whores, wrestling with a haughty aristocracy and financial crisis. Spiced with scandalous contemporary gossip, here is a splendidly readable book. "A blending of wide historical knowledge and vigorous independent judgement to make a lively, exciting but dependable account for the general reader." Sunday Times "Enormously entertaining ... an excellent read ... a cross between a package tour of the Bourbon dynasty and a Guide Michelin to the favourites, mistresses and ministers of the French monarchy." Spectator "Seward's biographies of French kings are always charming and informative. This collection of anecdotes about the Bourbon kings of France, who reigned, with some interruptions, between 1589 and 1830, is no exception ... a unique attempt at portraying a race of kings who were responsible for both the heights and the depths of the French kingdom ... Seward relies on contemporary accounts and memoirs as well as much recent scholarship to reveal the Bourbons in their glory and their despair." Choice (USA) "...strong on period atmosphere..." Spectator

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Customer Reviews

"Licentious or bigoted, noble or ignoble, there has seldom been a dull Bourbon," wrote Nancy Mitford. The Bourbon kings of France and Navarre ruled for more than two centuries and made France the greatest power in Europe -- but they also ended the monarchy in France, first by being one of the major causes of the Revolution and then by refusing to rule by constitution after their post-Napoleonic restoration. Seward is a Paris-born, Cambridge-trained historian who succeeds in combining scholarship with lively readability.

The Bourbons were odd rather than interesting, but they lived in interesting times (not always a good thing as Louis XVI might attest to). Mr. Seward makes good use of Bourbon peculiarities and exciting events to write a history of the Bourbons with all the boring stuff left out. For most readers the biographical sketches are long enough to get to know the subjects without ever being tedious. Moreover, although the author has an easy, breezy writing style, he is a knowledgeable and thoughtful biographer. He appreciates that the family has not enjoyed a good press and makes a good try at redressing the balance. Indeed, he probably tilts too far in their favor, but he is always reasonable. This is a fine introduction to one of history's most important royal families.

This is a very good book, well written, informative and balanced. The author covers the giants of French monarchy with comprehensive scope. He discusses the larger than life personalities as well as the politics and history of the times. I learned something new about each famous king. However I especially enjoyed reading about the lesser known monarchs that I knew very little about. The one annoying thing about the book that was extremely frustrating to me was the fact that the author frequently used phrases and expressions in French and although I tried to decipher the language it was difficult and distracting since I don't understand French. This arrogance does not detract from

my overall appreciation for the book. I learned a great deal and that, for me, is the bottom line.

The introduction says that this book is for a general audience; however, the way it uses names of people and names of movements makes it very difficult to follow if one is not already intimately familiar with material. Often kings and other key characters are known by many names, their given names, their titles of nobility and short forms of both of those. The author switches freely between names which makes the book very hard to follow. The author also uses different names for political movements/philosophies in different places. It would have been helpful if each chapter had a chart of key characters, a one sentence description, and ALL of the names by which they are known! This history is very interesting, but the author has made it so hard to follow his story that it became a tedious, unsatisfying read.

In my opinion this book has a number of problems for the reader. On the positive side the subject for me was extremely interesting and the book appeared to be well researched. My criticism had to do with the author's insistence on using numerous French phrases which were of little value even if they were translated. Also the names of the various characters were way too complicated and he often changed how these characters were referred to. I do not believe it was well written and it was a bit of a slog to work through the book. I'm not sure I would recommend it, surely there's a better written book on this particular topic.

This book reads like a history text book, it's a Hard book to read. If you love history, then there are several jewels in this book. French history of its Kings are confusing but I felt like this is a good book to familiarize yourself with the monarchs of France.

What a fun and entertaining ride this was. The Bourbon Kings of France have a long and twisted history. It's now shy about bringing the bad, or mad, points to the reader's attention.

I really enjoyed this book. It provides insight into the Bourbon kings that are not always remembered. I recommend it to those interested in French history.

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