
Sources

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Tammy J. Eschedor Voelker, Editor

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Arthurian Figures of History and Legend: A Biographical Dictionary. By Frank D. Reno. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010. 264 p. \$39.95 (ISBN 978-0-7864-4420-5). E-book available (978-0-7864-5824-0), call for pricing

Arthurian Figures of History and Legend: A Biographical Dictionary is a unique and ambitious reference work which attempts to fuse serious analysis of the complex historical strands and controversies which lie behind the Arthurian legends with a ready reference format that is immediately accessible to students and general readers.

The approach is sometimes problematic because author Reno's treatment of Arthurian figures is colored throughout by a secondary agenda—to pose his own theories about the origins of Arthur in history and to re-examine instances of conflated personalities in Geoffrey of Monmouth and other sources that may mistakenly point toward the existence of a historic Arthur in fifth century Britain. Reno has written two previous monographs on the subject, *The Historic King Arthur* (McFarland, 1996) and *Historic Figures of the Arthurian Era* (McFarland, 2000), both of which explore the vast terrain of Arthurian scholarship and lead him toward his own conclusions. In many ways, his new work is a supplement to his previous scholarship, providing an overview of many of the key sources and debates.

The work is composed of some four hundred biographical entries devoted to a range of figures, including major characters in the legendary cycle, such as Merlin and Mordred, obscure warriors mentioned in the chronicles of Nennius and Bede, as well as the key historians and authors themselves. For example, there are entries devoted to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, as well as to William Caxton, the printer of an early edition of Malory, and the obscure fourteenth-century Benedictine monk, Ranulf Higden, who was skeptical that Arthur had existed. For clarity, Reno selects the most common occurrence of a name as the heading for an entry and then lists many of the variants readers are likely to encounter. Entries are fairly substantial, ranging in length from one paragraph to several pages of discussion, with an emphasis throughout on origins, historical sources, and the textual controversies at the heart of the historic Arthur debate. Figures such as Ambrosius Aurelianus, Riothamus, and Lucius Artorius Castus, which are certainly unfamiliar to general readers, are given considerable attention since they figure heavily within Reno's own scholarship into the historicity of Arthur. Students seeking context in such a dense, unfamiliar body of literature may sometimes find Reno's voice to be somewhat idiosyncratic. The entry on Riothamus, for example, ends with a point by point refutation of some of contemporary scholar Geoffrey Ashe's assertions about the historical Arthur.

Several earlier reference works may be more accessible to college students and general readers seeking a foundation in Arthurian studies. Editor Norris J. Lacy's *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Garland, 1996) remains one of the standard reference works, providing brief authoritative entries by over a hundred contributors, and embracing history,

literature, archaeology, theater, and film. Charles and Ruth Moorman's *The Arthurian Dictionary* (University Press of Mississippi, 1978) is a slim, ready reference volume which treats hundreds of historical and legendary figures, but entries are extremely brief snapshots, providing a mere line or two of context for each personality. The Moorman dictionary also pre-dates some of the recent developments in the debate over Arthur's historicity. Christopher W. Bruce's *The Arthurian Name Dictionary* (Garland, 1999), which is composed of some 5600 entries, is both thorough and accessible, but its focus is exclusively on legendary figures.

Arthurian Figures of History and Legend may be the only contemporary biographical reference work that thoroughly analyzes and evaluates the historic sources that lie behind the Arthur stories. To its credit, the work does not provide the broad strokes and thumbnail synopses that students might easily find elsewhere; it is dense and detailed, and assumes some level of familiarity with the essentials. It is also sometimes provocative in its assertions, which may or may not be appropriate for a work of this kind. This work is recommended for both undergraduate and graduate library collections.—David W. Wilson, *Information Literacy Coordinator, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas*

Battles that Changed History: An Encyclopedia of World Conflict. By Spencer C. Tucker. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2010. 655 p. acid free \$95 (ISBN 978-1-59884-429-0). E-book available (978-0-59884-430-6), call for pricing.

Historians have been fascinated by lists of great battles since at least 1851, when E. S. Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles* first appeared. *Battles that Changed History* is in many respects an admirable addition to the genre, but it only partially develops the theme of its title.

The volume consists mainly of 212 lucid, chronologically organized entries chosen for such reasons as decisiveness of the battle, the impact of charismatic leaders and demonstration of human will. Each entry includes a small chart with information about the combatants and an explanation of why the battle was important. The index and bibliography are extensive, and there are references at the end of each entry. Maps are few but detailed. There are no color illustrations.

It would seem that any battle can be said to have "changed history;" a discussion of how the author interprets that phrase would have been welcome. For instance, can a battle be said to have changed history more if it was relatively recent, or if it occurred a long time ago? The answer here favors more recent battles; half of those chosen occurred since 1800.

As for coverage of world conflict, there are some entries from China and other Eastern regions, but the great majority of entries involve Europeans or North Americans. Five battles fought by Alexander the Great are addressed, and five by Napoleon, but none, very surprisingly, by Genghis Khan. Also entirely missing in action are the Assyrians, who carved out multiple empires over hundreds of years.

Two books that bear comparison to Tucker's are Paul K.

Davis's *100 Decisive Battles From Ancient Times to the Present* (ABC-Clio, 1999) and *The Seventy Great Battles in History*, edited by Jeremy Black, (Thames & Hudson, 2005). There is considerable overlap in the battles chosen for the three books. Davis does briefly spell out his criteria for inclusion in his list, and he includes a greater proportion of premodern battles, but the geographic mix is about the same. Though he describes fewer battles, the essays are longer, and there are more maps. *Seventy Great Battles* emphasizes relatively well-sourced battles that marked milestones in strategy, tactics and technology. This book also features abundant use of full-color illustrations.

Though not as comprehensive as its number of battles would suggest, *Battles that Changed History* is a serviceable resource for public and high school libraries, especially for notable battles that are not included in other authors' lists.—Evan Davis, *Librarian, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana*

Booms and Busts: An Encyclopedia of Economic History from Tulipmania of the 1630s to the Global Financial Crisis of the 21st Century. Ed. by James Ciment. Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe Reference, 2010. 3 vols. alkaline \$339 (ISBN 978-0-7656-8224-6).

Focusing on one niche of economic history—the economic cycle—this three-volume set will serve as a good resource to answer questions from high school, undergraduate and public library patrons regarding the who, what, when, where and how of economic "booms and busts."

Coverage extends from the speculative behavior exhibited by the Dutch during the 17th-century "tulipmania" through the Great Recession of the late 2000s. While articles on the economies of the larger nations of the world are included, the primary focus is on the economic history of the United States during the closing decades of the twentieth century, including the housing and stock market boom of the mid-2000s and the financial meltdown and recession that followed.

The three introductory essays should be required reading: "Booms and Busts: Pre-Twentieth Century"; "Booms and Busts: The Twentieth Century and Twenty-First Centuries"; and, "Booms and Busts: Causes and Consequences." With 361 one-to-10 page entries in the "Topic Finder" under 16 broad headings—such as "Banks, Brokerage Houses, Financial Firms," "Corporations and Corporate Affairs," and "Economic Terms and Concepts,"—and three to 49 entries under each heading, the set covers this niche of economics from a variety of helpful perspectives.

There are numerous biographical entries, profiles of major banks and other financial institutions and helpful entries with detailed discussion of business-cycle theory. Narrative content is supported by an alphabetical and a topical table of contents, judicious placement of photographs and tables, and use of cross-references to other articles elsewhere in the set. There is also a variety of supplemental materials, including: a 153-item thumbnail-sketch historical chronology of significant events related to "booms and busts"; an 11-page glossary of words, acronyms, and theories used in the text; an extensive bibliography