



# Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers

*Dominic Selwood*

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## **Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers** Dominic Selwood

Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers unveils the history you were never taught at school. With a breath-taking sweep spanning Rome to the modern day, popular historian and author Dominic Selwood challenges the traditional version of some of the best-known events of the past.

From ancient Christianity to the voyages of Columbus, and from the medieval Crusades to ISIS and the modern Middle East, this book debunks dozens of historical myths.

You will learn that:

- Magna Carta was an infamous failure in medieval times
- Richard the Lionheart was a cruel and dreadful king
- The Knights Templar were heretical, and have left a genuinely baffling mystery
- The painter of the Turin Shroud was found in the 1300s
- Christopher Columbus never saw America
- The first computer coder was a woman, a century before Alan Turing
- The man who unleashed mustard gas in the World War One trenches won the Nobel Prize for chemistry
- One incredible Spanish spy saved D-Day

... and lots more. This book will challenge everything you think you know about history!

## **Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers Details**

Date : Published December 12th 2015 by Crux Publishing

ISBN :

Author : Dominic Selwood

Format : ebook 278 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction

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## From Reader Review Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers for online ebook

### Joseph says

It is often said that history is written by the victors. But the "victors" in this context are not just the winners of wars and battles. They are also those who hold sway over public opinion or who manage to influence how history is taught from one generation to the next. As Dominic Selwood points out in his introduction to his book, the bare facts of history are rarely disputed - it is the spin which is given to these facts which is often debatable. And once a particular "interpretation" becomes standard, a certain intellectual laziness sets in, and prejudices about the past become entrenched.

In this book, an anthology of articles which originally appeared in The Daily Telegraph and the Spectator, Selwood gleefully pulls apart mainstream interpretations of history. The thirty-seven chapters span two millennia, from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem to the modern world, with a particular emphasis on the Medieval world (Selwood's main area of expertise). His is a declared revisionist agenda. Given the current renewed interest in medievalism, I suspect (or, rather, hope) that few will dispute his observation that the Dark Ages were not so dark after all or that the English Reformation was a bloody, politically driven affair which obliterated most of England's rich Catholic cultural heritage. His doubts about the morality of the fire-bombing of Dresden will doubtless strike a chord with many readers, as will his denunciation of the injustice suffered by the Knights Templar. On the other hand, fresh from the Magna Carta anniversary celebrations, his articles claiming that this hallowed document was, ultimately, no big deal, will likely lead to much shaking of heads. His spirited defence of Lord Elgin is also unfashionable. But Selwood is at his best and most entertaining when he is at his most controversial.

Besides being a historian, journalist and solicitor, Selwood has also written fiction, including a historical thriller. He certainly knows how to tell a good story. The pieces included in this anthology are tightly argued and underpinned by a thorough knowledge of the subject; yet, they are also enlivened by a strong narrative drive and an underlying sense of humour.

Not all articles are polemical in nature. There are, for instance, chapters about England's adoption of the Gregorian calendar and proto-computer programmer Ada Lovelace and two particularly hair-raising pieces about two World War II spies "Agent Garbo" and Noor Inayat Khan.

My quibble about this book is that there has been no attempt to edit the articles prior to their publication in book form. As a result, there is overlapping between some of the chapters, there are frequent references to contemporary events and recent anniversaries (with the risk that they might eventually start sounding "dated") and there are no references, bibliography or index as one would find in a conventional history book. But, then again, this is no "conventional history book". And it is this which ultimately makes it so readable.

This is a review of an ebook edition kindly provided by the publishers.

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### Brandy says

#### Great

Enjoyable way to revisit British history and learn new facts. Writing is funny and intelligent. Looking forward to another book

### **Amanda says**

I usually like books that debunk the great history myths, but I was disappointed by Selwood's book for several reasons. First, I *did* learn most of what he covered in school; the facts of history and the movie version may have gotten a bit jumbled in my mind, but I do remember learning that the Romans were a brutal people, Richard the Lionheart was a crappy king, Henry VIII broke with Rome because the Pope wouldn't grant him a divorce, and Columbus never made it to the future United States. I'm sure some people didn't learn any of these things and that many more have entirely forgotten them, but most of his topics are pretty well known.

I also have to point out that some of the things he says are a little dodgy: in Chapter 8 he describes Henry II as "cruel and venal" and then in Chapter 12 says that after coming to the throne after a 20 year civil war "Henry II healed the country's wounds with dedication and skill." He lists syphilis as one of the diseases brought to the Americas by the Europeans, but there is pretty conclusive evidence that it was there long before Columbus showed up; he attributes the phrase "war is hell" to Donald Rumsfeld when it is generally attributed to the American Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman; and he gives the impression that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were all kind and peace-loving--certainly many tribes weren't bellicose and most of them didn't practice human sacrifice (and even the ones that were and did didn't deserve to be victims of genocide), but Selwood shouldn't be perpetuating myths in a book that's claiming to debunk them.

So, while I appreciate that Selwood taught me about Noor Inayat Khan and presented actual facts in the case of Lord Elgin and the Parthenon, I cannot recommend this book.

Received via LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program.

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### **Karl Øen says**

No new knowledge gained from reading this book, I'm sorry to say...

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### **Konstantin Antypenko says**

Short pieces from Author newspaper column regarding history, mainly of UK.

Most interesting, some not and few are repeating ones on the same topic different time written, slightly different angle. Still readable and easy digestible one story at a time.

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### **Steve Cran says**

British author, Derek Selwood, has generated an easy to read book that gives the reader a different view of history . In fact it might be fair to suggest that the history we have been taught in school is not the real history that went down. Remember that History is always written by the winner.

Starting off in Roman times we have Josephus Flavius who wrote the Jewish Wars and ANtiquities of the Jews. He started out as a Jewish noble and aided in the fight against Rome . He was the only survivor. He ended up becoming a Roman citizen collecting a pension. He conveniently switched sides.

The author examines another Biblical era story the one oof Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. There is not a shred of proof that it even happened or that the Israelites traversed the desert escaping from Egypt. His analysis is mostly speculative as he suggests that the 10- commandments were not written in Hebrew But rather in Egyptian hieroglyphics. This is all speculation.

He takes a stab at British History by revealing some real juicy details. You might be shocked to learn that when Henry the 8th broke away from Rome to found the Church of England , the people were not for it, rather they were devout Catholics. Cromwell and his henchman at the behest of Henry the 8th stormed thorough country destroying works of art, looting Catholic Churches and monasteries and demolishing statues. Lots of people were killed. Prior to his break with Rome Henry the 8th was a devout Catholic.

I was not really shocked to learn that the British Royal family was of German descent. Something they were not proud of during the World Wars. Churchill made a big mistake at Gallipoli it costs him his job at the time. Inyat Noor Khan, an Indian Muslim naturalized to a British citizen died helping the British spy against the Nazis. She was super dedicated. There was a gentleman from Spain who ran a fake spy ring in Britain. His false information deceived the Nazis and helped the allies with winning the war.

Christopher Columbus has been in the news lately. They're removing his statues and why not ? He was no hero, he did not discover America. He only made it to Hispaniola. The first person to discover America was Leif Ericsson . Columbus was brutal . He enslaved the Native Americans his fellow Europeans killed the Native Americans in the most brutal fashion just for the fun of it. The European arrival meant genocide for the Native Americans. The white settlers were as racist as Hitler. Their goal was the annihilation of the Native Americans. Politician documents prove this out.

Often it seems that things are not what they seem. We of the Western Nations are not always thee good guy . America the land of the free was won on the oppression and genocide of Native Americans and yes it was genocide . Everything from/ broken treaties, disease infected blanket and that fire water (Booze). During the WWII the Americans and allies proved themselves to be just as genocidal as Hitler. Want to challenge your world view then open this book and get ready to have your eyes opened .

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## **Leif says**

Interesting collection of esoteric history that the author wrote for the Daily Telegraph...and you can tell it was written for a newspaper. There are some really cool articles in here, but the nature of the writing and the necessary brevity of the "stories" makes it all seem a little shallow. I am glad I read this ebook, but it was more of a party platter of "bet you didn't know this" history than I would have liked. Most are self-contained articles of the kind you will commonly find online. There is no astounding scholarship, just an enjoyable read.

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## **David Spiteri says**

Mind boggling correction of school history with extras. Recommended.

### **Lydia Foster says**

would have been more interesting if it wasn't so dry.

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### **Les Thomson says**

This is an informative, intriguing and fascinating read as long as the individual subjects that are being written about interest you. This was the only issue I had and it was all on me and not the fault of the book; I found myself either skimming through or completely ignoring chapters that were of no interest to me.

For the chapters that I did read, it's obvious that the author has a deep understanding of the subject he is writing about and for this, I really enjoyed the book.

A mixed bag, but definitely worth a read, if like me (well certain parts of it) history interests you.

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### **Daniel Patitz says**

#### **Surprise**

One revelation after another. Makes a lot of sense! Good read. Very interesting how the proof is presented. I enjoyed the whole book.

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### **Jim says**

Enjoyable short history bites and easy to read. I was familiar with many of the stories but it certainly added some detail I was unaware of.

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### **Talha says**

Easy and short myth busting articles on history. Organized into eras. Aimed at England

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### **Fred says**

Like a vandal gleefully turning over headstones in a cemetery, Selwood goes about knocking down everything we learned about history in high school. History is written by the victors, but modern day revisionists are intent on re-writing history to suit their own political views. Although there were some interesting facts in this book, I found it irritating and annoying. Not a book I would recommend.

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## Erika says

\*\*Full disclosure: I received this book in exchange for an honest review\*\*

A collection of articles originally written for The Daily Telegraph mainly focusing on the more obscure or misunderstood pieces of history that we should be learning in school but sadly rarely do.

Each chapter is a different article covering a different piece of history with just enough detail for you to gain interest and new knowledge but short enough that at no time does the pace get bogged down. The tone of the book is engaging and easy to read and the way the chapters are written this is also a perfect book if you are looking for something you can read a little bit at a time and put down here and there without loose track of what you have already read.

As for the history itself, the topics were very interesting and while I did already know quite a few of them the author made new connections and put things in a new context that I had not considered before and I love it when that happens. And there were enough that were new to me that I was thrilled to read about them and I have added several books to my to be read list to delve more deeply into the topics.

If you are a serious or casual fan of history there should be plenty in this book to appeal to you. I am very glad I got a chance to read this book.

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