

Book review: treasury  
of royal scandals is a  
national bestseller  
book written by ...

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A Treasury of Royal Scandals is a national bestseller book written by Michael Farquhar that describes “ The Shocking True Stories of History’s Wickedest, Weirdest, Most Wanton Kings, Queens, Tsars, Popes, and Emperors. ” This book is a random collection of different royal families and individuals who despite their many differences, have some similarities. However, they are often dark and negative similarities. No matter what person, family, or civilization someone is talking about historically, six themes seem to always come up, are discussed, and are debated.

These themes include religious intolerance, disregard for the common public, dysfunctional personal lives, extreme pursuit of dynasty, a sense of superiority, and inequality towards women. These themes have influenced the outcomes of history from past to present - and may continue to in the future. It is within these themes that the similarities between the people and families mentioned within this book can be found. Religious freedom may be something that many people in the United States take for granted today, but people who lived during Pope Gregory IX’s rule were more familiar with religious intolerance.

Pope Gregory IX had made his uncle’s persecution of heretics an official function of the church when he established the Inquisition in 1232. During his rule, Catholics were encouraged to “ squeal” on other people’s acts of heresy, children testified against their parents, and mothers testified against their children. Anyone accused of heresy was dragged before papal inquisitors to answer charges, and once condemned, a victim was sent to be burnt at the stake. The entire town of Champagne, France was even put on

trial and burnt at the stake after the local bishop was accused of allowing heresy.

After Pope Gregory IX's death, Pope Innocent IV came to rule and "improved" upon the inquisition methods. He now allowed torture to be used, but only allowed a person to be tortured once. Unfortunately for those people, however, one torture session could last several weeks. It became obvious during the time of the inquisition, that there was no religious freedom what so ever. If there was one person whose life exemplified a disregard for the common people, that person was Gregory Rasputin.

Rasputin was a "greasy, drunken peasant, with the manners of a barnyard pig, and a staggering case of b. o. o boot, he was also king of creepy" (194). Of course, a man who cultivates this kind of reputation for himself clearly has no concern for the opinion of others. Rasputin's eyes were legendary - a pale blue color with the ability to pierce and caress, while still looking naive and cunning. Rasputin used these eyes to dominate every person he was talking to - with not only the intensity they had, but also the way he continually stared at people for long periods of time. Rasputin influenced and dominated the royal family through Alexandra, the wife of the tsar, who was blind to his inner intentions.

Although Alexandra refused to see this, the people saw perfectly. The people knew that Rasputin was a fraud whose influence on society was becoming more and more widespread as time went on, and eventually all of it would end in an uprising of some sort. Eventually, Rasputin was killed after many dramatic tries by Yusoupov (richest man in Russia and tsar's nephew by

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marriage). It seemed that Rasputin was not ready to die, however, since he was poisoned, shot, shot twice more, beaten upon, and drowned before he was declared dead.

Although many problems throughout history were between rulers and their people, some rulers also had dysfunctional personal lives. A good example of this is Napoleon, who chose to divorce his first wife in order to marry someone else who could possibly give him an heir, and who was constantly fighting with his brother (Joseph). Childless, Napoleon named his nephew heir to the throne, which outraged Joseph. Joseph had assumed that he would be heir to the throne and believed that he had the right to the throne as the eldest member of the family.

This assumption outraged Napoleon in return, and the quarrel between the two brothers continued. Over time, Napoleon's strive for power caused other arguments among his siblings, and in the end only three brothers (out of seven siblings) played active roles in his empires. It could probably be said that many of the rulers throughout history had their mind on everything, but what was best for their people. Therefore, it is only natural that Austrian Empress Maria Theresa constantly had her mind on creating a dynasty.

Maria was an especially curious monarch, who created the Chastity Commission - a special department of the police charged with suppressing vice. It was said that Maria even played a part in the commission, disguising herself and roaming Vienna in search of her unfaithful husband. When she was not busy " storming the bedrooms of her people," she concentrated on marrying off her children to the families that would help strengthen her

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position. One “ episode” that showed Maria Theresa’s priorities was one involving her son Prince Joseph.

He was heir to the throne and had fallen in love. Unfortunately, however, Princess Isabella of Parma (his chosen one) was a lesbian and had her eyes on someone else besides Prince Joseph. Maria Theresa never would have tolerated a lesbian relationship, that could jeopardize the dynasty, but that all ended when Isabella suddenly died of smallpox at the age of twenty-one. Despite the Prince being devastated by his loss, Maria Theresa wasted no time and immediately remarried him to a bride, whom he dared not even touch with his finger because of her “ painfully ugly” appearance.

There were few rulers, especially monarchs, who lacked a feeling of “ superiority over ordinary men” (34). Louis XIV of France definitely did not lack this trait of monarchs. In fact, Louis XIV also felt himself to be superior to other monarchs. It was said that “ Louis refused to be grouped with other kings under the term “ Their Majesties” because, he explained, from that there might be deduced “ anequality which does not exist” (34). During Louis’s seventy-two-year-reign (longest in European history), he strove to have all of the glory and prestige of France focus on himself.

Louis controlled everything from tree maintenance to how visitors should enter the garden of Versailles in a specific way to honor him. Two actions of Louis’s particularly displayed his feelings of superiority. The first of these actions was when he decided to call himself the “ Sun king,” because he wanted to be the sun and light up everything for all of France. However, it seemed that Louis wanted to light up things for himself, not France, as

shown by his next action that practically put France into bankruptcy. The “Sun King” rebuilt and enlarged the castle at Versailles, which he had fallen in love with at a young age.

Versailles became an icon that resembled the prosperity of France for the time, while it also almost drove France into bankruptcy. Perhaps it is the story of Henry VIII and his wives that seems to fit into almost every theme. However, it is Henry VIII's inequality towards women that stands out the most, as he divorced half of his wives for their ladies in waiting who were living in the same household throughout the entire divorce process. Henry's disregard for women's rights was legendary, as he married and divorced frequently in his conquest to have a son, who would become the heir to the throne.

For example, Henry declared himself Supreme Head of the Church in England in order to officially divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, by declaring their marriage unlawful. As a result, Catherine was never given a fair trial, and her only daughter (Mary) was declared illegitimate. Religious intolerance, disregard for the common public, dysfunctional personal lives, extreme pursuit of dynasty, a sense of superiority, and inequality towards women have all influenced history. However, although there have been many rulers involved in scandals, those rulers have also done great things.

At the times of some of these scandals, the accepted “practice” was different, but civilization has progressed to an entirely different level. Even though history may repeat itself some time or another (and has in many cases), it is some of these scandals that have brought us to where we are

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today. For example, it was Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn who bore Queen Elizabeth ("The Virgin Queen"), all as a result of Henry VIII's desire for a son and divorcing his first wife. So, encourage others to bring up, discuss, and debate these topics, which have helped shape history, good and bad, to the point it has reached today.