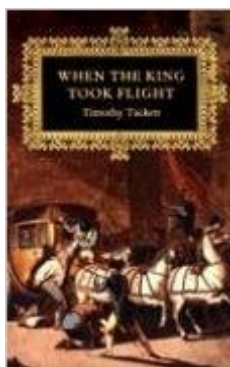


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When The King Took Flight



Synopsis

On a June night in 1791, King Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette fled Paris in disguise, hoping to escape the mounting turmoil of the French Revolution. They were arrested by a small group of citizens a few miles from the Belgian border and forced to return to Paris. Two years later they would both die at the guillotine. It is this extraordinary story, and the events leading up to and away from it, that Tackett recounts in gripping novelistic style. The king's flight opens a window to the whole of French society during the Revolution. Each dramatic chapter spotlights a different segment of the population, from the king and queen as they plotted and executed their flight, to the people of Varennes who apprehended the royal family, to the radicals of Paris who urged an end to monarchy, to the leaders of the National Assembly struggling to control a spiraling crisis, to the ordinary citizens stunned by their king's desertion. Tackett shows how Louis's flight reshaped popular attitudes toward kingship, intensified fears of invasion and conspiracy, and helped pave the way for the Reign of Terror. Tackett brings to life an array of unique characters as they struggle to confront the monumental transformations set in motion in 1789. In so doing, he offers an important new interpretation of the Revolution. By emphasizing the unpredictable and contingent character of this story, he underscores the power of a single event to change irrevocably the course of the French Revolution, and consequently the history of the world.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 9/18/04 edition (October 18, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674016424

ISBN-13: 978-0674016422

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.8 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #179,788 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #75 in Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Rural #352 in Â Books > History > Europe > France #537 in Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Europe

Customer Reviews

Timothy Tackett is one of the more curious members of the current generation of French historians. He actually goes into archives and tries to figure out what people thought and did. Ordinarily this is

what historians do as a matter of course, but under the reign of the Pope of Revisionism, Francois Furet, extensive archival research is replaced with, in the works of Furet, Mona Ozouf or Keith Baker, long analysis of a select and limited number of documents. Tackett by contrast, after starting with a monograph on Catholicism in particular region, has provided two invaluable monographs based on the fullest research yet to date. The first was the on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, while the second was a thorough study of the National Assembly. In contrast to the Furet school's subtle insinuation that the Revolution was doomed at the outset because the Revolutionaries were dangerously utopians, Stalinist "avant la lettre," Tackett shows that the Revolutionaries were reasonable people in difficult circumstances. For the past few years he has been working on the origins of the Terror. Somewhat to my disappointment, this is not that book. It is a sort of a preview, as once again we are told about the Flight to Varennes, as Louis XVI sought to flee a hostile Paris and move near the border where loyal troops. There he hoped to renounce everything that had happened to the revolution since several weeks BEFORE the fall of the Bastille, including he own public oaths of loyalty to the Revolution. However delays, along with several indiscretions by the King who was supposed to be in disguise, lead vigilant men to realize what was up and to capture him. The sources for this have all been reasonably available.

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