

John McGurk. *The Tudor Monarchies 1485–1603*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. iv, 124. Paper, \$11.85; ISBN 0-521-59665-3.

John McGurk takes the monarchy, “the most important institution in political and constitutional change” in western Europe in the 1400s and 1500s, as his starting point for a succinct survey of British history during the Tudor age. Change is the key term here, as McGurk seeks to address the controversy on how much the Tudors transformed English medieval government. His fine book’s traditional structure is largely chronological, with two introductory chapters on the monarchy (with a detailed tree for the York, Lancastrian, and Tudor families) and historical background followed by six more devoted to the monarchs. The chapters average thirteen pages, though Elizabeth I’s two sections (divided at 1588) get more than forty percent of the pages on the individual rulers. McGurk writes with the economy necessary to craft a concise and concrete summary of a vast topic.

This is a book to be studied carefully and used actively. Each chapter contains a misnamed section, “Document case study.” It is misnamed because each section contains an average of five to six brief excerpts from primary (mostly) and secondary documents. The documents are followed by an average of six to seven questions of varying usefulness. The interpretative questions are much better than the factual ones, such as one of the best coming in the first chapter. McGurk asks: “What dimension of kingship does 1.3 [“The crown as the supreme symbol of kingship,” using Richard II’s monologue in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (3.2.155–70)] add to those shown in 1.1 [Sir John Fortescue on “The monarch and the law”] and 1.2 [“The consecration of the sovereign by anointing with oil”]?”

The six-page conclusion thoughtfully addresses crucial scholarly debates on Tudor issues during the past three decades about the Wars of the Roses, “Overmighty Subjects,” Parliament, Tudor despotism, the centralization of royal authority, and the last fifteen years of Elizabeth’s reign. This conclusion serves as a concise annotated bibliography on revisionist opinions. A five-page bibliography, five-page chronology, and a serviceable three-page index complete the book.

Eight images enrich the text, including the cover illustration. Each Tudor monarch gets at least one portrait (the most for Elizabeth I, of course). McGurk turns the images themselves into case study documents. Two images are intriguing allegories of political power: the cover with the dramatic scene of the dying Henry VIII giving over his power to his son, surrounded by the destruction of popery; and Philip Moro’s portrait of Queen Mary’s husband, Philip II of Spain, riding a cow (i.e., ruling the Netherlands).

McGurk’s brief *Tudor Monarchies* is an addition to the Cambridge Perspectives in History series on European history themes and periods. It joins other small volumes on the fifteenth (*Lancastrians to Tudors: England 1450–1509*) and seventeenth (*Regicide and Republic: England 1603–1660*) centuries. *Tudor Monarchies* omits information on the author, who is an authority on late sixteenth-century Anglo-Irish relations. His publications include *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The 1590s*

Crisis (1997). Ireland figures prominently in his accounts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

The *Tudor Monarchies* is highly recommended as an introductory text for undergraduate or graduate courses that feature major primary or secondary materials. McGurk's excellent study will provide the necessary background for your students.

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Allan Todd. *Revolutions, 1789–1917*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. iv, 140. Paper, \$11.95; ISBN 0-521-58600-3.

This interesting little book summarizes and analyzes four great upheavals: the great French Revolution, the Revolutions of 1848, the French Commune of 1871, and the two Russian revolutions of 1917. Written in a lively style, the volume contains a wealth of factual information, including revealing anecdotes and memorable quotations. Clearly Todd has invested a great deal of research and thought in the preparation of the volume. Like other works in the series, *Cambridge Perspectives in History*, it includes a short selection of source materials, a few well-chosen illustrations, a chronological outline of major events, and a select bibliography of about two pages.

Many history teachers, unfortunately, will be unhappy with the organization of the book. Rather than writing narrative chapters devoted to the individual revolutions, Todd has devoted each of the ten chapters to a major theme, including historical background, revolutionary violence, the influence of ideology, leadership, mass participation, the role of women, counter-revolutionary reaction, and enduring legacies. Although this organization will perhaps please teachers who emphasize the comparative approach to history, it will be a major obstacle for those who prefer to concentrate on each of the revolutions as a unique and individual occurrence.

For students without any prior knowledge of the material, this thematic organization seriously detracts from its potential usefulness as a text. Students who have no idea about what happened in 1789, 1848, 1871, and 1917 will likely find this arrangement bewildering and confusing. In order to assimilate such a comparative approach, in my opinion, readers need to possess a basic knowledge about the people and events of the revolutions. It would be possible, of course, for the teacher to approach the individual revolutions chronologically by assigning the readings according to page numbers rather than according to chapters, but this would entail a certain amount of discontinuity.

Todd is very inconsistent in his use of the term "revolution." Initially drawing a sharp distinction between a reform movement and a revolution, he defines the latter as an instance "when people attempt to completely transform the social, economic, political and ideological features of their society." Many of the events described in the book, indeed most of the occurrences of 1848, do not appear to correspond to this definition.