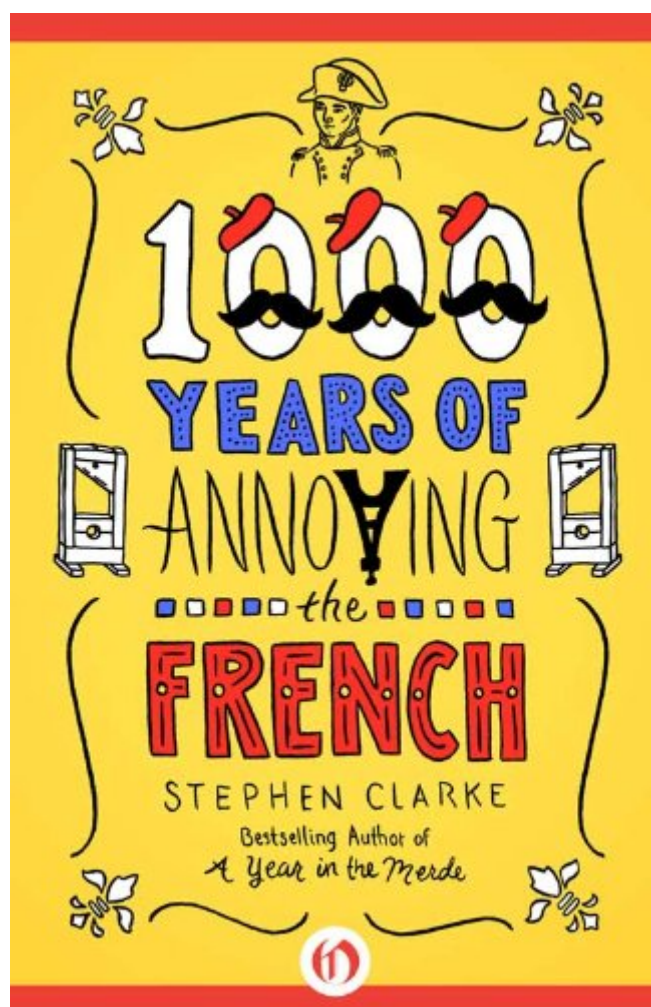


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1000 Years Of Annoying The French



Synopsis

The author of *A Year in the Merde* and *Talk to the Snail* offers a highly biased and hilarious view of French history in this international bestseller. Things have been just a little awkward between Britain and France ever since the Norman invasion in 1066. Fortunately after years of humorously chronicling the vast cultural gap between the two countries author Stephen Clarke is perfectly positioned to investigate the historical origins of their occasionally hostile and perpetually entertaining pas de deux. Clarke sets the record straight, documenting how French braggarts and cheats have stolen credit rightfully due their neighbors across the Channel while blaming their own numerous gaffes and failures on those same innocent Brits for the past thousand years. Deeply researched and written with the same sly wit that made *A Year in the Merde* a comic hit, this lighthearted trip through the past millennium debunks the notion that the Battle of Hastings was a French victory (William the Conqueror was really a Norman who hated the French) and pooh-poohs French outrage over Britain's murder of Joan of Arc (it was the French who executed her for wearing trousers). He also takes the air out of overblown Gallic claims, challenging the provenance of everything from champagne to the guillotine to prove that the French would be nowhere without British ingenuity. Brits and Anglophiles of every national origin will devour Clarke's decidedly biased accounts of British triumph and French ignominy. But 1000 Years of Annoying the French will also draw chuckles from good-humored Francophiles as well as anyone who's ever encountered a snooty Parisian waiter or found themselves driving on the Boulevard Périphérique during August. (The Daily Mail). A bestseller in Britain, this is an entertaining look at history that fans of Sarah Vowell are sure to enjoy, from the author the San Francisco Chronicle has called "the anti-Mayle." . . . acerbic, insulting, un-PC, and mostly hilarious. •

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Customer Reviews

First: I have never read the "Merde" books, so I am not a Stephen Clarke-can-do-no-wrong-zombie. I have no idea what his other books are like. Second, I also am an Anglophone who lives in France (outside Paris), so lots of his comments are funny *to*me* because his insights about the French are so spot-on, and you'd have to live here to get some of his insider's ribbing. This is an admirable pop history survey which reviews the relationship between England (and the U.K.) and France: the love-hate and all out wars, the underlying admiration each has for each, and the colorful characters (like Clarke) who have drifted back and forth across the Channel. This is a very funny book, but also wonderfully historical, and the partisanship (for the English) is kept at a level that would even pass for banter and fun conversation at Elyse Palace. Clarke has an engaging writing style which is easy to read and doesn't get bogged down, but adds good detail and has wonderful pacing. I often test books for good prose by reading aloud, and Clarke passes the test. I have to admit I preferred the earlier history sections concerning the Viking William the Conqueror, Joan of Arc, and the details on the thirty and hundred years wars, and Henry 1st's diddling of English maids, the latter history is both too near and too painful to have the same light tone that he sustains for most of the topics here. Charles de Gaulle comes off (somewhat deservedly) badly, and Clemenceau's insistence like a stubborn Vendee peasant that every sou of WWI be paid for by Germany is (though accurate) told a bit one-dimensionally. Another flaw is the book is aimed for a specific U.K. readership, and so Clarke's tone and prose often is like he is writing just for a Britisher.

This amusing gallop through the last thousand years of the relationship between France and the various parts of the British Isles is a bit like an updated and more grown-up (and much less inaccurate) version of "1066 and all that" combined with a grown-up version of the "Horrible Histories" series of books and TV programmes. Author Stephen Clarke doesn't really dislike the

French but he loves teasing them, and particularly loves pointing out the discrepancies between their illusions and the truth - but he has no qualms whatsoever in exposing the similar discrepancies in the English (or American, or Scots) view of history or about taking the mickey out of the Brits. From the Norman conquest to the present day, Clarke has great fun skewering the myths which people on both sides of the channel - and both sides of the Atlantic - have believed about the relationship the French and "Les Anglo-Saxons" including Americans: this book points out that Barak Obama became an Anglo-Saxon in French eyes when he was elected President of the USA.) Examples of the humour in the books: (After mentioning that the Icelandic Sagas were not stocked in French public libraries in the 1400s:) "Probably because in the 15th century France didn't have any public libraries." (Of Voltaire's books about how much more democratic the English aristocracy was than the French ...) "Yes, an 18th century English Lord as a model of democracy: it makes you realise just how bad things must have been in Paris.

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