November 2010

From the Reference Desk-Reviews of Reference Titles

Tom Gilson

College of Charleston, gilsont@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gilson, Tom (2010) "From the Reference Desk-Reviews of Reference Titles," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 22: Iss. 5, Article 21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5654>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Edited by **Robert E. Bjork**, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (2010, 978-0-19-866262-4) is a four-volume set that will appeal to both interested lay readers and medieval specialists. Drawing on the efforts of more than 800 scholars, there are some 5,000 entries covering the essentials of European history from 500 CE – 1500 CE. In addition, there are articles discussing the influences of Byzantium and the Islamic world on Europe that serve to enhance the coverage.

An examination of the comprehensive thematic list of entries gives the reader a sense of the *Dictionary's* scope. There are articles on individual countries and place names as well as on cultural issues ranging from art to theology and from language to technology. Interestingly, there are also entries on historical context that focus on archaeological research and the historical writings of the time. Other major areas of study receiving serious attention include ecclesiastical, legal, military, political, social, and economic issues. Entries range in length from multipage discussions of major themes to paragraph-length definitions and brief biographies. The long, involved thematic articles are particularly impressive and are often divided into subsections to focus on specifics. The brief entries are straight to the point with relevant facts. All of the entries regardless of length have bibliographies. Helping to enhance the text are 500 illustrations and 50 maps. Each article also employs a star symbol (☆) by keywords in the body of the text to highlight other relevant entries. Naturally there is a general index, but unfortunately it only includes "personal names, historic events ... and some subject coverage." It appears that the idea is to utilize this index in tandem with the impressive thematic list of entries and the alphabetical arrangement of the articles to locate needed information. It may be old-fashioned, but a comprehensive index with specific page references might have been more effective, especially for the less experienced researcher.

Nonetheless, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages* offers thoroughly researched and well-balanced articles on the people, events, issues, and concerns that make up the complex tapestry of medieval European civilization. Editor **Robert E. Bjork** and his editorial team draw on the knowledge and skills of hundreds

of accomplished scholars and it shows. Scholarly

rigorous and painstaking in its preparation, this reference conforms to the demanding publication standards we have come to expect from **Oxford University Press**. As such it will find its way on to numerous academic library shelves adjacent to classics like **Scribner's Dictionary of the Middle Ages** edited by **Princeton's Joseph R. Strayer** (1989, 0684190737, available used on **Amazon**). Larger public libraries where there is interest should also give it serious consideration.

(On Sept 29th **OUP** announced the release of an online edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages* "in partnership with **Semantico**, a leading provider of services and technology for online publishing. "For more information, check out <http://www.oxford-digitalreference.com/>.)

Sage Reference just published a title that examines a key element in the process of academic scholarship. As the title implies, the *Encyclopedia of Research Design* (2010, 9781412961271, \$425) offers readers a resource that discusses "the discipline of how to plan and conduct empirical research." In order to accomplish that goal, these three volumes provide articles that cover "both quantitative and qualitative methods" as well as those on "descriptive statistics, important mathematical concepts," "important inferential procedures," and "the role of ethics in research." But that is not all.

Editor **Neil J. Salkind** and his editorial team provide a useful Reader's guide in volume one that provides the full scope of the *Encyclopedia* and is well worth examining. Much of the content is technical and will require some familiarity with the basic statistics, statistical procedures, and testing, as well as an awareness of software applications and some mathematical concepts. However, novice researchers will benefit from the articles offering explanations of various research designs and procedures, discussions of ethical issues, graphical displays of data like bar charts and scatterplots, and validity issues like bias and white noise. The more than 500 entries vary from 1,000 to 3,000 words in length, and all have "see also" references and a list of further readings. The text is illustrated by numerous formulas, graphs, tables, and charts.

While much of the *Encyclopedia of Research Design* is intended for a specialized audience and as noted above, familiarity with statistical methods and mathematical concepts are necessary for a full appreciation of many of the articles, the discussions of ethics, publishing, qualitative methods, and types of research designs will be accessible to other interested readers. **Sage** is to be congratulated for creating an encyclopedia that brings all of this information together and serves multiple needs. Serious researchers will be grateful to have a reference that serves as a practical and useful

tool. They will also be grateful for a resource that helps define the discipline by identifying the disparate elements needed for a full understanding of research design. Less experienced researchers will be happy to have quick and easy access to definitions of basic concepts and design methods. Four-year college and university libraries are the obvious audience for the *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, but individual researchers will also benefit from having it on their personal shelves.

As with most **Sage Reference** titles the *Encyclopedia of Research Design* is available electronically. In order to request a free 30-day online trial to this three-volume set, visit www.sagepub.com/freetrial.

Editor **Spencer Tucker** is a respected scholar who is responsible for a number of **ABC-CLIO's** award-winning encyclopedias on military history. In many ways, his most recent effort, the *Global Chronology of Conflict: From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East* (2010, 978-1851096671, \$395), acts to unite his previous works by tying together the events from all of the conflicts that he has covered — as well as others.

This six-volume chronology offers a highly useful timeline of warfare that stretches from Sumerian domination of Mesopotamia to the current conflict in the Middle East. As one would expect, the more modern the conflict, the more thorough is the chronology of events. Reflecting the growth of recorded knowledge, coverage moves from a year-to-year listing in the ancient world to events listed by specific dates in the late middle ages and beyond. However, this chronology is not merely a listing of dates and events. **Tucker** provides a synopsis of each event varying in length from a brief paragraph to a page or more, depending on the complexity of the event. While **Tucker's** main concern is military events, he also includes "political, diplomatic, and economic events that impact military history." Therefore, readers will find discussions of both the Louisiana Purchase along with **Napoleon's** invasion of Russia, the Treaty of Versailles as well as the Battle of Verdun and the attack on 9/11 along with the *Homeland Security Act*. Each volume covers a specific time period with overview essays for individual eras followed by the actual chronologies. There is also a biographical section covering the leaders of the time period as well as one for the weapons and armament used. These two sections also have a list of references for each entry. A general index found in each volume provides the page numbers of specific battles, treaties, etc. Using the index may take some readers time to adjust to. For example, when looking for the entries on the Battle of the Bulge you need to check under World War II. Once you get used to it, the index functions well. In addition to this

continued on page 48

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Every so often, it is a pleasure to come across something different — a little surprise that offers a break from a normal routine. So it is with this month's column. It's been a long time since a reviewer has enlightened us with her thoughts about a fiction title, and it has also been a while since a reviewer has exposed us to opinions about a non-fiction title that is not specifically related to library issues. **Kirstin Steele** and **Todd Rix** provide us with a pleasant alternative to the traditional *Monographic Musings* content.

While **Kirstin** is new to *Monographic Musings*, she is not new to *ATG*; she has been a guest editor for the Annual Report issue (2006). On top of that, she has authored a number of articles regarding collection development, technology, and space issues. You might remember **Todd's** work appearing in this column before; he has written thoughtfully about library Web design. Many thanks to **Kirstin** and **Todd** for their contributions.

Happy **Charleston Conference** and happy reading, everyone! — **DV**

Beckwith, Ruthie-Marie. *Seven Days at Oak Valley*. Albuquerque, NM: ABQ Press, 2009. 978-0977416165. 302 pages. \$14.95.

Reviewed by **Kirstin Steele** (Collection Management Librarian, Daniel Library, The Citadel) <kirstin.steele@citadel.edu>

As part of a small fiction genre, *Seven Days at Oak Valley* should be considered for public, academic, medical/patient, and high school library collections. The book, while editorially flawed, introduces readers to a promising young sleuth and to a world many of us have never known and rarely consider. The story has continued to haunt me since I finished reading, leading me to think **Beckwith** has a bright future as a serial novelist.

Tony Ervin is a young adult resident at **Oak Valley Training School and Hospital**, a state-run facility for people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities. His lifelong experience at **Oak Valley**, powers of observation, and job

as a mail carrier alert him to anomalies in the hospital's routine and put him in a unique position to connect them all to solve a pair of murders.

The first half of the book is largely dialogue yet offers little to help the reader distinguish among characters. Editorial irritations include an excess of clichés, spelling and homonymic errors, and characters with similar names and traits. I suppose in any story a certain amount of wading through location, situation, and character development is needed; unfortunately I wasn't able to "see" much of the characters, except **Tony**, until late in the book. As I've continued to mull over the story, the possibility has occurred to me that **Beckwith** purposely made the first part of the story flat or monochromatic so that the average reader experiences what intellectually disabled people might feel in restricted situations. For example, **Tony's** friend **Joey** speaks

with difficulty, dropping many initial consonants ("oody" and "ookie" for "bloody" and "cookie"). Because so much of the text is dialogue, translating **Joey's** speech makes reading slow and awkward. I was confused and frustrated, something I suspect **Tony** and **Joey** are much of the time. Another example is the trouble I had distinguishing between the "good guys" and the "bad guys." I found myself reading passages several times in order to grasp what had happened. I'm glad I was reading the book to review it; I fear other readers might not persist past the introductory chapters.

Happily for the reader, the pace picks up and as **Tony** begins to solve the murders, the characters around him come to life. His situations are believable and it's easier to feel who **Tony** is and at the same time observe how others see him. Solving the murders incidentally solves several other crimes; this wiping of the slate plus the empowerment **Tony** feels lies the groundwork for another adventure.

At the end of the book is a list of discussion questions, something I've not seen regularly outside of textbooks or specially marketed book discussion group editions. These questions encouraged me to continue pondering the book and to wonder about **Tony's** future, so I'm glad they were included.

Seven Days at Oak Valley is in many ways like an unassuming flower in the hospital's garden — initially unremarkable, possibly a bud, possibly a leaf, possibly even a dead seedhead. With attention, it unfolds to reveal themes, colors, and branches. I look forward to **Beckwith's** next blossom.

From the Reference Desk from page 46

index, each volume contains a list of all the biographies, all weapons, and all the maps to be found within the set, along with the pages where the information is found. Besides the maps, the text is complemented by numerous illustrations and photos.

Both **ABC-CLIO** and **Prof. Tucker** have spent a great deal of time and care on this reference. The *Global Chronology of Conflict: From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East* offers readers a wealth of facts based on years of scholarship in a handsomely produced and visually attractive set.

It should stand proudly on the shelf next to other standard military references as well as be seen as a complement to more broadly based chronologies like **ABC-CLIO's** *Chronology of World History* (1999, 978-1576071557, available used from **Amazon**.) In addition to being a solid choice for most academic libraries, this six-volume set is equally appropriate for larger public libraries where there is interest in military history. 🐼

Bennett, Judith A. *Natives and Exotics: World War II and Environment in the Southern Pacific*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2009. 978-0824833503. 439 pages. \$30.00.

Reviewed by **Todd Rix** (Instruction and Electronic Resources Librarian, Coker College) <trix@coker.edu>

As our library's resident World War II expert, I've read many volumes covering the various aspects of combat during those dark days of the 1930s and 1940s. From veteran's memoirs and in-depth histories of particular operations or battles to broad coverage of the entire conflict, most of these tomes cover the combat and heroics of front line troops. A few might mention the rear echelon soldiers, sailors and airmen, but most look at these troops with derision (with nicknames unprintable here). A few cover these troops well, like **David Colley's** *The Road to Victory: the Untold Story of World War II's Red Ball Express*.

Judith A. Bennett's *Natives and Exotics: World War II and Environment in the Southern Pacific* is unique because it is one of the first books to cover the great environmental impact of

having over two million men and women — Japanese, Dutch, Australian, British, and American — invade the hostile environment of the Southern Pacific. Although tales of combat are mentioned, most of the book deals with the rear areas and the troops that provided medical care, supplies, and food to the frontline soldiers and **Marines**.

Most casual readers of World War II history know that the Pacific theater was a difficult place to wage war, but most probably didn't know how difficult it was just to survive on some of those islands. Incessant rain, disease, poor sanitation practices, and lack of food/diversity of diet were some of the major environmental factors affecting both sides — and all of that happened before combat even started!

Bennett tells of the infamous fighting on

continued on page 50