



Napoleon Bonaparte: A Life

By Alan Schom

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A definitive biography of Bonaparte from his birth in Corsica to his death in exile on St Helena, this book examines all aspects of Bonaparte's spectacular rise to power and his dizzying fall. It offers close examination of battlefield victories, personal torments, military genius, Bonaparte's titanic ego and his relationships with the French government, Talleyrand, Wellington and Josephine. A consummate biography of a complex man.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

You won't come away from this energetic biography thinking much of the French emperor either as a man or as a general. Historian Alan Schom depicts Napoleon (1769-1821) as a cold-hearted manipulator: Schom's blistering accounts of the 1798-99 Egyptian campaign and the disastrous 1812 retreat from Russia show the French army decimated due to its leader's failure to inform himself about the lands he was invading or to properly plan for provisioning his troops. The fun of this book comes from vigorous prose that vividly evokes Bonaparte's titanic personality and the colorful band of schemers surrounding him.

From Library Journal

Until now, there has been no comprehensive, one-volume biography on Napoleon. This book ably fills that gap. Napoleonic scholar Schom (*One Hundred Days*, Atheneum, 1992) has written an objective account, describing the strengths and weaknesses of his complex subject and his tremendous impact on Europe. Unique to this book are the insightful discussions of Napoleon's relationships with his family, wives, mistresses, and other luminaries of the day and his little-known friendship with a leading French mathematician, Gaspard Monge. The author contends that Napoleon was a paranoid psychopath, and he uses numerous examples of kidnappings, murders, lies, and wars brought on by the Corsican to illustrate his case. He was also sadistic in his persecution of various individuals, from a simple German bookseller to his own brother Lucien. A wonderful biography; highly recommended. —David Lee Poremba, Detroit P.L.
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From Kirkus Reviews

A biography so negative, it even casts doubt on Napoleon's military genius. Historian Schom (*Trafalgar*, 1990, etc.) breaks no new ground in portraying the man who rose from the impoverished Corsican aristocracy to become emperor of France as a brutal, selfish manipulator who dreamed only of glory and cared little for other people. But even previous biographers who didn't think much of Bonaparte as a human being or a ruler usually conceded that he had no equal on the battlefield. Schom is at pains to refute this notion, beginning with a blistering account of the Egyptian campaign of 1798-99, during which the French army was decimated due to its general's failure to inform himself about the land he was invading or to properly plan for provisioning his troops, flaws that would have even more tragic consequences in Russia in 1812. The evaluation is so hostile, it's a little hard to understand how Egypt made Napoleon popular enough to sweep into power in November 1799--let alone how he managed to lead the French army triumphantly across most of Europe over the next 13 years. Despite his assertion that he covers "every aspect of [Napoleon's] life and character," Schom severely scants the monarch's sweeping political and social initiatives within France; not even the enduring Napoleonic Code gets much attention. This is old-fashioned narrative history, primarily concerned with personal intrigue among the elite and detailed accounts of battles, and lacking consideration of their broader context. On that limited basis, it's entertaining: vivaciously and rather sloppily written, effectively if not definitively researched (notes refer mostly to published sources rather than archives), with vivid character sketches of all the Bonapartes, the agreeable and promiscuous Josephine, cynical foreign minister Talleyrand, and other key figures. More suitable for those looking for the proverbial "good read" than anyone seeking deeper insights into a crucial transitional moment--and man--in French history. (32 pages b&w photos, 20 maps, not seen) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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