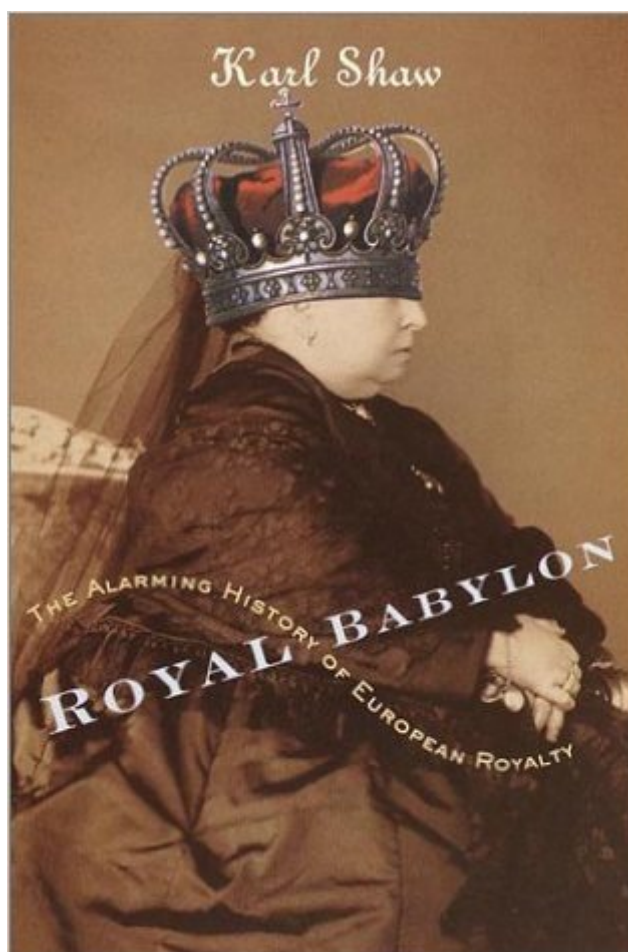


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Royal Babylon: The Alarming History Of European Royalty



Synopsis

An uproarious, eye-opening history of Europe's notorious royal houses that leaves no throne unturned and will make you glad you live in a democracy. Do you want to know which queen has the unique distinction of being the only known royal kleptomaniac? Or which empress kept her dirty underwear under lock and key? Or which czar, upon discovering his wife's infidelity, had her lover decapitated and the head, pickled in a jar, placed at her bedside? Royally dishing on hundreds of years of dubious behavior, *Royal Babylon* chronicles the manifold appalling antics of Europe's famous families, behavior that rivals the characters in an Aaron Spelling television series. Here, then, are the insane kings of Spain, one of whom liked to wear sixteen pairs of gloves at one time; the psychopathic Prussian sovereigns who included Frederick William and his 102-inch waist; sex-fixated French rulers such as Philip Duke D'Oreleans cavorting with more than a hundred mistresses; and, of course, the delightfully drunken and debauched Russian czars - Czar Paul, for example, who to make his soldiers goose-step without bending their legs had steel plates strapped to their knees. But whether Romanov or Windsor, Habsburg or Hanover, these extravagant lifestyles, financed as they were by the royals' badgered subjects, bred the most wonderfully offbeat and disturbingly unbelievable tales - and Karl Shaw has collected them all in this hysterically funny and compulsively readable book. *Royal Babylon* is history, but not as they teach it in school, and it underlines in side-splitting fashion Queen Victoria's famous warning that it is unwise to look too deeply into the royal houses of Europe.

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Customer Reviews

I have to admit I wasn't expecting much from an author whose previous works, according to the bio on the back cover, include *Gross: A Compendium of the Unspeakable, Unpalatable, Unjust and Appalling*, *Gross Too*, and *The Mammoth Book of Tasteless Lists*. However, I was very pleasantly surprised. Compared to *A Treasury of Royal Scandals: The Shocking True Stories History's Wickedest, Weirdest, Most Wanton Kings, Queens, Tsars, Popes, and Emperors* by Michael Farquhar, which covers much of the same ground in a far more tendentious fashion, 'Royal Babylon' is a very good book. The sell-copy on the book's cover makes 'Royal Babylon' sound like nothing more than recycled gossip and titillating stories about Those Nasty Royals. It's actually a somewhat more systematic history than that, with in-depth profiles of several monarchs and thumbnail sketches of many others. Shaw also charts thoroughly the recurring incidences of mental and physical illness in the massively inbred family trees of European royalty, and tells tales of drunkenness and debauchery that never made it into the official history books.

I enjoyed reading this light treatment of the royals of Europe, but was seriously distracted by the numerous errors in facts regarding names and relationships. As a retired professor of history, I find this to be very poor editorial work on the part of both the author and his editorial "professional" at the publisher! Just a couple of examples of what I consider serious errors: (1) p. 94 - "Louis [i.e., Louis XIV of France] was at one time enamored of his new sister-in-law, the buxom Austrian Princess Henrietta." This Louis had only one brother, Prince Philip of Bourbon, Duke of Orleans, who married twice: (1) Princess Henriette Anne of England, daughter of Charles I, King of England, and his wife, Princess Henrietta Maria of France; and (2) Elizabeth Charlotte, Countess Palatine of Simmern, daughter of Charles Louis, Elector Palatine, and his wife, Charlotte of Hesse-Cassel. There was NO SISTER-IN-LAW who was a 'buxom Austrian Princess Henrietta.' (2) Likewise, the entire treatment of Prince Philip of Bourbon, Duke of Orleans, the brother of Louis XIV, emphasizes the numerous heterosexual activities he supposedly had with multitudinous women....yet it is a confirmed fact that his primary sexual nature was homosexual and was known for his "mignons" and the way he and his followers dressed and cavorted at Versailles and other places. (3) p. 113 - "Alphonso [i.e., Alfonso XII of Spain] plunged into an almost suicidal depression from which he never quite recovered. He regained his poise sufficiently to honor his dynastic obligations, and a year later was remarried to Maria, daughter of the star-crossed Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand." The Iberian rulers named Alfonso (in English) rarely if ever had their names written as Alphonso...rather as Affonso.

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