

# The Good Book Guide

**rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna** by Adam Zamoyski. Harper Press, 2007. xviii + 634pp. Index. £25 hbk

This is a weighty volume: 569 pages of substantive text and an actual weight of 2½ lb! But it's only thus that it could be described as heavy. For years teachers and students have been awaiting a single volume encapsulating the final days of the Napoleonic Wars and frantic international diplomacy following a quarter century of European conflict. It has now arrived; the account is riveting.

As well as giving insights into the leading characters, their aims and objectives, Zamoyski shows how the problems facing the Vienna monarchs and statesmen were quite new. Never before had it been necessary for the entire map of the continent to be redrawn, which was the gargantuan task facing the Vienna peacemakers. Reconciling the aspirations of Tsar Alexander I, self-proclaimed saviour of Europe, with the more earthy ambitions of Austria's Metternich, Prussia's Hardenburg, and Britain's Castlereagh, not to mention the wily and cunning representative of the restored French monarchy, Talleyrand, proved almost impossible and, on several occasions, threatened to bring the Congress to a grinding halt in abject failure. Eventually an agreed settlement emerged, though only after Napoleon's escape from captivity in Elba and his final defeat at Waterloo.

What makes this book so immensely readable is that Zamoyski leavens his narrative with details of the private doings and sexual peccadilloes of many of the participants. It's unsurprising that so many of them returned home exhausted, not always by diplomatic negotiations.

This book is not for every A Level History student, but those capable of appreciating it will discover a brilliant read which will clarify a traditionally confused and confusing topic. Not all, however, will agree with Zamoyski's



*Chamberlain (right) and Hitler (left), Munich 1938*  
final assessment of the Congress's place in nineteenth century diplomatic history.

John Garland

**Appeasement in Crisis: From Munich to Prague, Oct. 1938 - Mar. 1939** by David Gillard. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. viii + 221pp. Index. £45 hbk

Diplomatic history, the relationships between the powers, is a fascinating part of European studies. It has attracted some of the past's finest historians. But currently it's rather unfashionable, not 'cool'. Partly, this is because of its inevitable complexity. It's rather like studying a multi-level chess match featuring several diverse players.

This book is an excellent example of diplomatic history, but for the reason already given it will prove unhelpful for perhaps the majority of A Level students. The author assumes a great deal of detailed knowledge of the period from his readers. Relatively obscure paladins of the diplomatic service and their military advisers feature prominently, as indeed they must in such an in-depth analysis.

But an excellent final chapter should prove extremely useful to the hard pressed examination candidate. Here

Gillard gives a succinct and up-to-the-minute examination of British foreign policy regarding Europe in the final months of peace, and the reasons for the ultimate failure of the modified form of Appeasement adopted by the Chamberlain government after Munich. After examining the input of politicians, diplomats and military men, his final word considers the analyses of policy development by some then contemporary historians, including E.L. Woodward and R.W. Seton-Watson. In many ways they seem to have appreciated most clearly the current realities. Good historians often do.

John Garland

**The State of the Middle East. An Atlas of Conflict and Resolution** by Dan Smith. Earthscan, 2006. 144pp. Index. £12.99 pbk

A first-class book, like a good wine, is a delight. This was my thought when I scanned this reference work. Closer inspection strengthened my initial notion. The author, whose works include *The Atlas of War and Peace*, is Secretary General of the peace building organisation, International Alert.

Divided into three parts, the contents of the first, The Shaping of the Middle East, range from the Ottoman Empire to Decolonisation and from Oil to The US Presence. The second and third parts, Arenas of Conflict and The State of the Nations, include summaries of the states and 14 themes that include water resources, military spending, life expectancy, refugees and human rights.

Concise and yet comprehensive, the book has a wealth of information in text, maps, charts and chronologies. Beautifully presented, this book will be a star addition to teachers' shelves and department libraries in schools that include the Middle East in work programmes or chosen specifications.

Geoffrey Williams

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