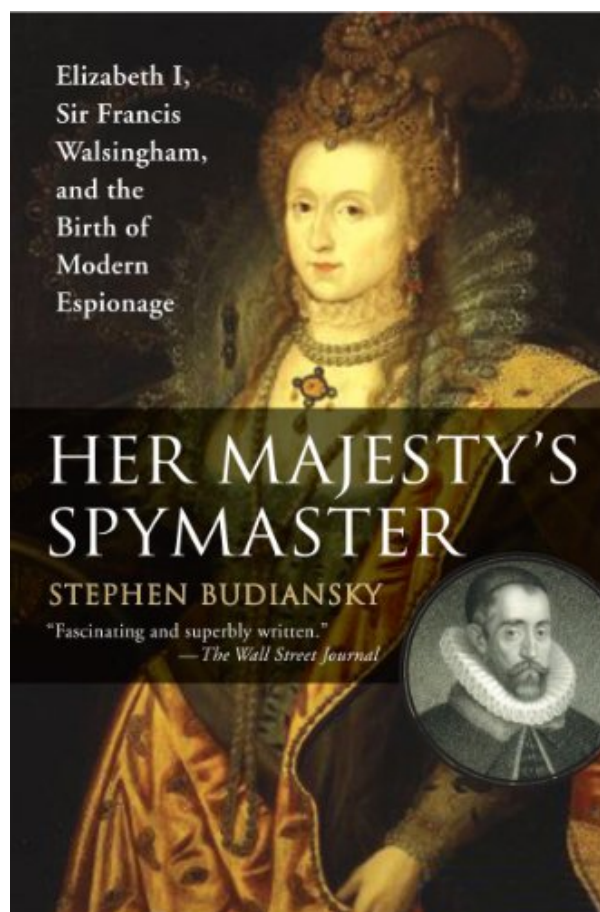
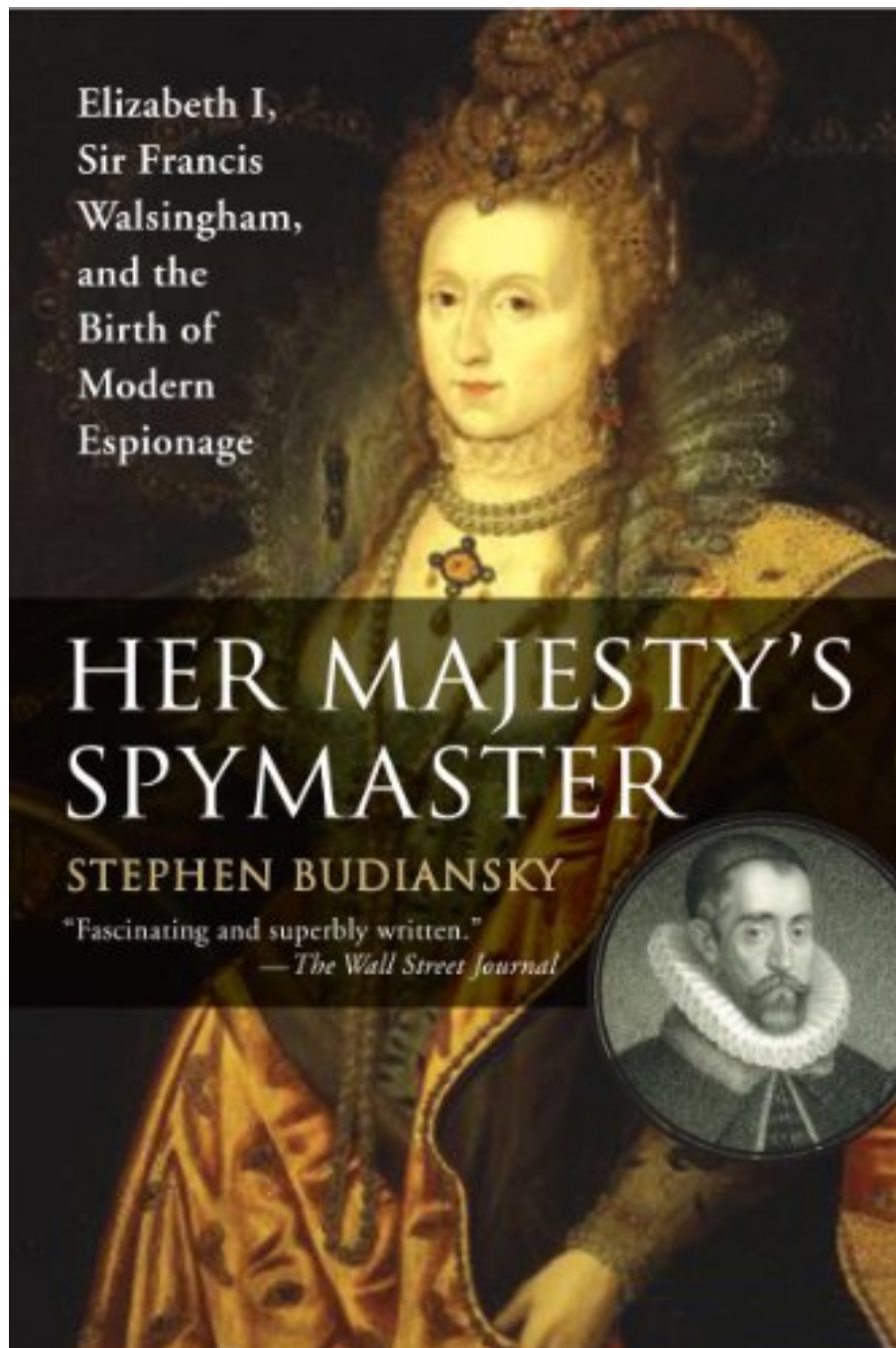


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HER MAJESTY'S SPYMASTER: ELIZABETH I, SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN ESPIONAGE

BY STEPHEN BUDIANSKY PDF

Sir Francis Walsingham's official title was principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I, but in fact this pious, tight-lipped Puritan was England's first spymaster. A ruthless, fiercely loyal civil servant, Walsingham worked brilliantly behind the scenes to foil Elizabeth's rival Mary Queen of Scots and outwit Catholic Spain and France, which had arrayed their forces behind her. Though he cut an incongruous figure in Elizabeth's worldly court, Walsingham managed to win the trust of key players like William Cecil and the Earl of Leicester before launching his own secret campaign against the queen's enemies. Covert operations were Walsingham's genius; he pioneered techniques for exploiting double agents, spreading disinformation, and deciphering codes with the latest code-breaking science that remain staples of international espionage.

- Sales Rank: #673175 in eBooks
- Published on: 2006-07-25
- Released on: 2006-07-25
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Review

Fascinating and superbly written. -- The Wall Street Journal

Most helpful customer reviews

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Excellent tale of intrigue

By Wayne Klein

In the 16th century England was at a crossroads. She couldn't possibly hope to match the sheer man power or size of the fleets at sea and hope to dominant world affairs. England would always end up playing catch up with Spain, France and other European powers with better resources. Intelligence and spying seemed to offer the key to help the islands in the Atlantic to dominate the world of politics. Queen Elizabeth turned to people like Sir Francis Walsingham.

Walsingham may not have invented spying or been the ultimate spymaster but he honed it to a fine art as did others in Queen Elizabeth's court. This was the time when monarchy was absolute rule after all and anything hinting at dissent was met swiftly and usually resulted in death. Author Stephen Budiansky has made this period fascinating by grafting a breezy style to this story. While people think they know a lot about the Elizabethan era in England, usually it's bits and pieces gleaned from studying Shakespeare or a course in college on the history of England during this time. The spying and doublecrosses that went on during this era are largely unknown to the average reader and, as a result, this may prove enlightening and entertaining.

This isn't written for academics. Like a lot of history books written for popular consumption this book escapes the dry, stilted text that makes you feel like you're buried in undergraduate classes again and it does bring to light an era largely forgotten by others and it makes it exciting. Based on what I know of the period, Budiansky does a good job with his scholarship and manages to make history---gasp!---entertaining as well as enlightening.

26 of 27 people found the following review helpful.

Great book for an undergrad or the casual reader!

By Todd Saint Pe'

Having just read the review by the esteemed Lisa Jardine (her "Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance" is a great book)for the Washington Post, I felt compelled to respond.

She's rather harsh with it I think. I don't think Budiansky's history is any less accurate just because he is writing to an audience wider than us nerdy historians. It's just a lot less technical. I'm sure she misses all the footnotes and endnotes that we tend to live for, but I think that his narrative style gives his subject life and makes it a lot more fun to read than most history that is written for historians.

I think this book is a great introduction into the world of Elizabethan politics and espionage. Budiansky's work should not be compared to one such as Conyers Read's (still a great historian if a bit outdated), for they have completely different audiences for which they are writing. That said, perhaps Jardine was trying to say as much when she cited "Shakespeare in Love", but I think that's an unfair comparison... Budiansky takes FAR fewer liberties with fact.

So, if you are a non-historian, a casual reader, or if you're looking for a book for your undergraduate students, I recommend this book. If you are a history junky, and/or trying to find an authoritative work on Walsingham for graduate studies, you'll probably only want to use this book as a quick summary (it's an easy/fast read) of the career of Mr. Secretary Walsingham, if at all. There are certainly more authoritative books out there, but few as entertaining to read. And shouldn't history be fun to read?

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Entertaining History of Walsingham

By HMS Warspite

Stephen Budiansky's "Her Majesty's Spymaster" is a very readable popular history of Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I's personal secretary and informal chief of intelligence. Written in a breathless novelistic style, Budiansky captures the atmospherics and endless intrigues of the Tudor period in a way designed to capture the interest of the average person without background in the era. He succeeds in making the religious struggles and dynastic wars of this distant period accessible to the modern reader.

Walsingham was unusual in his time in that he served in a high position in government without having come from the nobility. His rise from what would now be termed a middle class upbringing was based on education, talent, and good service. Walsingham turned out to be a superbly capable spymaster who could get and keep secrets and protect the fortunes of his Queen and country. Walsingham was especially effective in managing the English rivalry with France, including the dangerous problem of the status of Mary Queen of Scots, and the running conflict with Spain.

Budiansky is less than effective in making the case that Walsingham gave birth to modern espionage. Walsingham learned his craft from his mentor and predecessor, Lord Burghley, and his success was due less to inventing new methods of espionage than to making fewer mistakes than his contemporaries in executing already widely-known tactics and techniques.

This book is recommended to the casual reader looking for an introduction to the intrigues of the Elizabethan period. The close student of the history of the period will find no information that has not been covered in more detail elsewhere.

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