

Book Title: Zarafa

Author: Michael Allin

Publisher's Name: Bantam Dell Pub Group

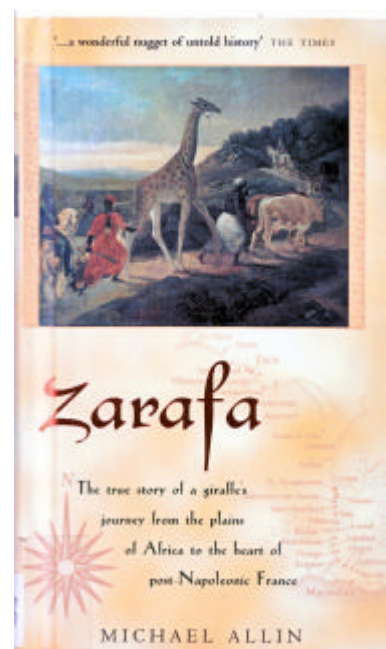
ISBN: 0-7472-6209-8

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Category/Genre: Non-Fiction / History (hardcover)

Reviewed by: Adrian McGlinchey

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Zarafa

PEOPLE OFTEN REMARK about how much they hated History during their school-days... how boring it was, and how it seemed to be just a dreary collection of facts that no one cares about these days. Yet, in our heart of hearts, many of us feel a need to know where we and our forebears came from and what influences made us what we are today. Historical-based fiction helps to explore these issues in a way that never seemed possible when we were confronted by pedantic teachers and their textbooks. By helping us get into the hearts and minds of the characters who had first-hand experience of a particular era, the author breathes life into history and makes it more accessible to us.

I see the story of Zarafa as an allegory that entertains as well as informs. Zarafa, the object of Michael Allin's poetic fascination, turns out to have more historical connections than he initially realised. This is why, in pursuing his mythical vision of a giraffe that possesses almost magical properties, Allin also embarks on a journey through time and history. The book is as much a journey into history as it is about the journey of a giraffe captured in the highlands of Ethiopia and taken to Paris, France.

Allin has taken an interesting and refreshing approach to looking at history and, for me personally, this made the experience more enjoyable than reading some dry and dusty historical treatise. Having said this, however; the book meanders through a vast terrain of diverse historical sources, to the point that one wonders where all this is heading. Even Zarafa the giraffe doesn't show up until half way through the book. This was off-putting for many readers in our discussion group, who found "Zarafa" [the book] to be 'very busy' if not too confusing. Having a passion for historical investigation myself, I appreciate Mr. Allin's ideas and his original presentation, and yet, for many readers, he did not quite 'pull it off'.

RATINGS LEGEND

★
(APPALLING)

★★
(MEDIocre)

★★★
(GOOD)

★★★★
(EXCELLENT)

★★★★★
(PURE GENIUS)

RATING (out of 5):

★★★

... A complex maze of historical curiosities...

Short on analysis, but quite engaging for those who care to ponder the machinations of famous people of the Enlightenment era.

Adrian McGlinchey

20 February 2009