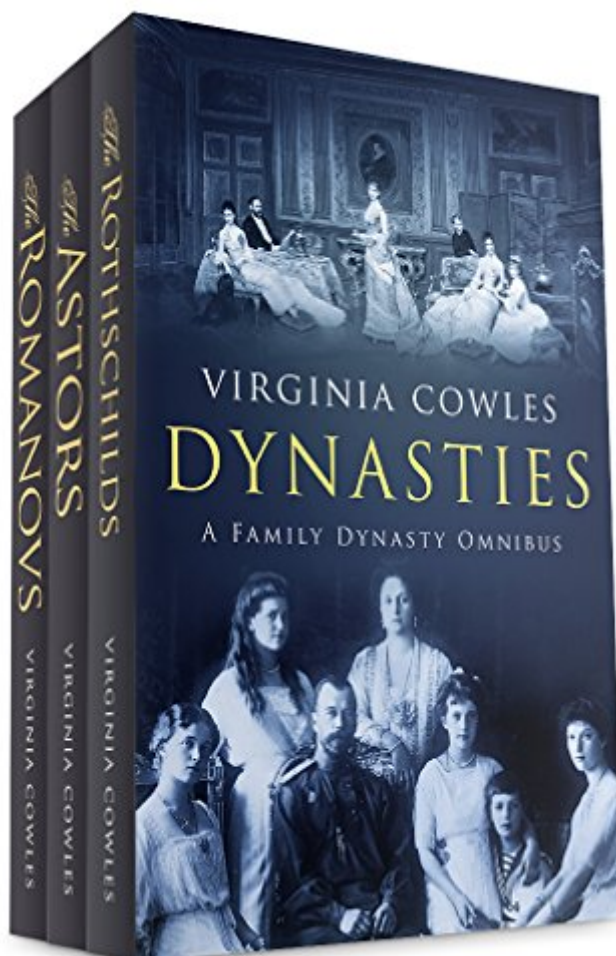


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Dynasties: A Family Dynasty Omnibus



Synopsis

Virginia Cowles's bestselling family dynasty novels are collected here together in this special edition. THE ROTHSCHILDS Perhaps no other name in history can so truly encapsulate the phrase "rags to riches" as Rothschild does. From their beginnings in a Frankfurt ghetto, the dazzlingly rich and downright extraordinary members of the Rothschild family were the force responsible for innovations in banking throughout the nineteenth century. Kings and princes, generals and businessmen, whether their move was political or economic, in a time of war or a time of peace, the controlling force behind them would be the Rothschild family. THE ASTORS When twenty-year-old John Jacob Astor arrived in Baltimore in 1783, his ambition was to live comfortably from the sale of musical instruments. At his death in 1848, he was the richest man in America • he ruled over an empire and had founded a dynasty. Today's generation of Astors, still wealthy, lead influential but less flamboyant lives than their predecessors • as modest businessmen, horse breeders, playboys, philanthropists, novelists. Through five generations, in all their splendour, in a richly anecdotal narrative interwoven with paintings, drawings, and photographs making vivid the people, their mansions, their rise to social prominence in the United States and in England, here then are The Astors. THE ROMANOVS For over 300 years, the Romanov family ruled over Russia. Its glittering Tsars and Tsarinas were autocratic despots, who between them embraced all the vices (and too few of the virtues) of absolute rulers until the February Revolution, when 18 family members were killed by the Bolsheviks and the remaining 47 exiled. From the nymphomaniac Catherine to the doomed Nicholas II, last of the Tsars, the Romanov name has become a byword for excess, avarice and cruelty, they have aroused intrigue and horror in equal measure. Praise for Virginia Cowles's "Recounted at great speed, and with splendid life, vigour and readability" • Antonia Fraser, Evening Standard Virginia Spencer Cowles OBE was a noted American journalist, biographer, and travel writer. During her long career, Cowles went from covering fashion, to covering the Spanish Civil War, the turbulent period in Europe leading up to World War II, and the entire war. After the war, she published a number of critically acclaimed biographies of historical figures.

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Customer Reviews

While this book doesn't provide a major compare and contrast summary, these overviews of three different family dynasties provide plenty of fodder for comparison. The Rothschild family, while certainly less influential than it was (or than conspiracy theorists imagine it still is), rose to power on some potentially ethically questionable transactions (essentially gambling with money entrusted to it) and still retains significant wealth and influence. Culturally, it left its great mark on the UK with the almost legendary Waddeson Bequest. The Astor dynasty of the United States rose with the financial dealings of the truly unpleasant and unethical John Jacob Astor, and then split into two separate lines, the American line which more or less terminated with the death of Mrs. Brooke Astor, but continues strong in the UK, although it hasn't yet produced another figure as prominent as Lady Nancy Astor. Finally, the Romanovs rose to power, maintained that power through ruthless bloodshed and ended (for all practical purposes of power and wealth) in a cellar. (It's also possible that the genetic dynasty ended many generations before, if Catherine the Great's heir was indeed fathered by somebody other than her Romanov husband.) Cowles does a good job of keeping the pace brisk but still with enough detail to give vivid impressions of individuals and times. Some characters are more colorful than others, though perhaps wisely, when it concerns the Astors and Rothschilds, she tends to describe those still living in the same generalized praise that a fashionable magazine might provide. By contrast, she ends the story of the Romanovs with their mass murder in the cellar, omitting any details of the few who did survive or of the futile hopes/legends that

Anastasia or Alexei somehow survived, or of the family being publicly rehabilitated and even sainted by the revived Russian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, there seem to be some errors of fact or editing. Though by no means a historian, I do know that the assassinated Chicago mayor was named "Cermack," not "Cernak," and these sorts of errors don't inspire confidence in the rest of Knowles' scholarship. Overall, however, this book is both interesting and entertaining.

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