

**Athanasius Kircher's Theatre of the World**, by Joscelyn Godwin (304 pages, September 2009), is a special-collections librarian's



treasure. Subtitled “the life and work of the last man to search for universal knowledge,” this book examines the numerous woodcuts

and engravings that filled German Jesuit polymath and scholar Athanasius Kircher's (1602–1680) voluminous works on antiquities, natural history, music, technology, Hermeticism, and religion. Many of his illustrations—some 400 of which are included here—will be more familiar to modern readers than his books, which have rarely been translated from the Latin because his writing “abounds in superfluities, repetitions, and sermonizing,” as Godwin says. But Kircher was a pioneer archaeologist, geologist, sinologist, and Egyptologist, whose cabinet of curiosities at the Jesuit Roman College became the prototype for museum collections elsewhere. Godwin explains how Kircher's illustrations were produced and comments freely both on his uncritical assumptions and his appreciation for scientific accuracy. Inner Traditions. \$60.00. 978-1-59477-219-7.

**Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes**, by Tamim Ansary (390 pages, April 2009), offers Western-

ers a revelatory look at how Muslims view the scope and sweep of their historical narrative and how it intersects with our own Eurocentric timeline. Ansary is highly suited to weave these threads together; as an Afghan-American who grew up in Kabul but moved to the United States when he was 16, he knows both worlds well. And though he claims no distinction as a scholar, Ansary excels as a writer who can take you on a tour spanning 1,500 years from a perspective not covered in textbooks approved by the Texas State Board of Education—from Muhammad and the four Rightly Guided Khalifas, through the Sunni–Shi'a schism and the twin holocausts of the Crusades and the Mongol incursion, to colonialism, secular modernism, Wahhabism, and the ongoing crisis of Palestine. In the process, he analyzes and critiques both cultures, pointing out their excesses and where they have gone wrong. A bit disappointingly, he limits post-9/11 events to an “afterword” chapter, but perhaps he is saving that for a sequel. PublicAffairs. \$26.95. 978-1-58648-606-8.

**Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: The Battle of Guilford Courthouse**, by Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard (300 pages, February 2009), presents a complete picture of this decisive battle in the American Revolution. Although Lord Cornwallis's army fought admirably against two-to-one odds, the Americans under Nathaniel Greene dealt the British a crippling blow in this 1781 engagement near Greensboro, North Carolina, and paved the way for the surrender at Yorktown seven months later. University of North Carolina. \$30.00. 978-0-8078-3266-0.

**Meriwether Lewis**, by Thomas C. Danisi and John C. Jackson (424 pages, March 2009), focuses on the life of the great explorer before and after the Lewis and Clark

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expedition, especially his role as a naturalist and the 18 months he spent as governor of the Louisiana Territory. A central thesis of this meticulously documented book is Lewis's mysterious death 200 years ago on the Natchez Trace near Hohenwald, Tennessee. Was it murder or suicide? The authors argue that Lewis was suffering terribly from untreated malaria, a condition that, coupled with his well-known predisposition to depression and melancholy, prompted him to put an end to his suffering. Prometheus. \$28.98. 978-1-59102-702-7.

James E. Starrs and Kira Gale make the case for Lewis's murder in *The Death of Meriwether Lewis: A Historic Crime Scene Investigation* (371 pages, April 2009), which reprints the testimony of 13 expert witnesses at a "coroner's inquest" held in 1996 and organized by Starrs. Their verdict was that there was no definitive evidence either way, and they recommended an exhumation to see whether any remains could shed light on the case. Lewis's descendants had hoped to perform the exhumation by the bicentennial of his death in October 2009, but the National Park Service (which owns the land where Lewis is buried) has so far refused permission. Gale argues that Lewis was killed by an agent of James Wilkinson, his predecessor as governor, who felt that Lewis might thwart his plans for an invasion of Mexico in 1810. River Junction Press. \$16.95. 978-0-9649315-4-1.

**Resurrecting the Brother of Jesus**, edited by Ryan Byrne and Bernadette McNary-Zak (215 pages, July 2009), analyzes the popular reaction to the announcement in 2002 that a limestone ossuary that once contained the bones of James, the brother of Jesus, had come to light in Israel. The find was the subject of a controversial 2007 Discovery Channel documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, which linked the ossuary to the Talpiot Tomb discovered in 1980 south of the Old City of Jerusalem; however, the Israeli Antiquities Authority announced in 2003 that the inscription on the ossuary that

attributed the artifact to James was a modern forgery. The six essays in this book discuss the authenticity of the ossuary, its exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum, the role of relics in providing

religious affirmation, the inadequacy of a TV documentary to establish proof, the differential way academics treated the controversy, and the importance of context and stratigraphic excavations in determining an artifact's status. University of North Carolina. \$29.95. 978-8078-3298-1.

**Scott Joplin and the Age of Ragtime**, by Ray Argyle (221 pages, May 2009), celebrates the music of the Ragtime Era and its influence on popular culture from 1893 to 1917 in this informative overview. Much of the documentation is taken from contemporary newspapers, trade papers, and magazines that give the narrative an authentic flavor. Although Argyle summarizes the high points of Scott Joplin's life, readers should consult Edward A. Berlin's *King of Ragtime* (Oxford, 1994) for a definitive biography. McFarland. \$35.00. 978-0-7864-4376-5.

An excellent supplementary read is the chapter on ragtime dancing in Mark Knowles's *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances: Outrage at Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (262 pages, May 2009), which examines moral and medical objections to the waltz, ragtime "animal dances" (like the turkey trot and the bunny hug), the tango, and the Charleston, as well as the music and fashions that many people considered immoral. McFarland. \$39.95. 978-0-7864-3706-5. ❧

