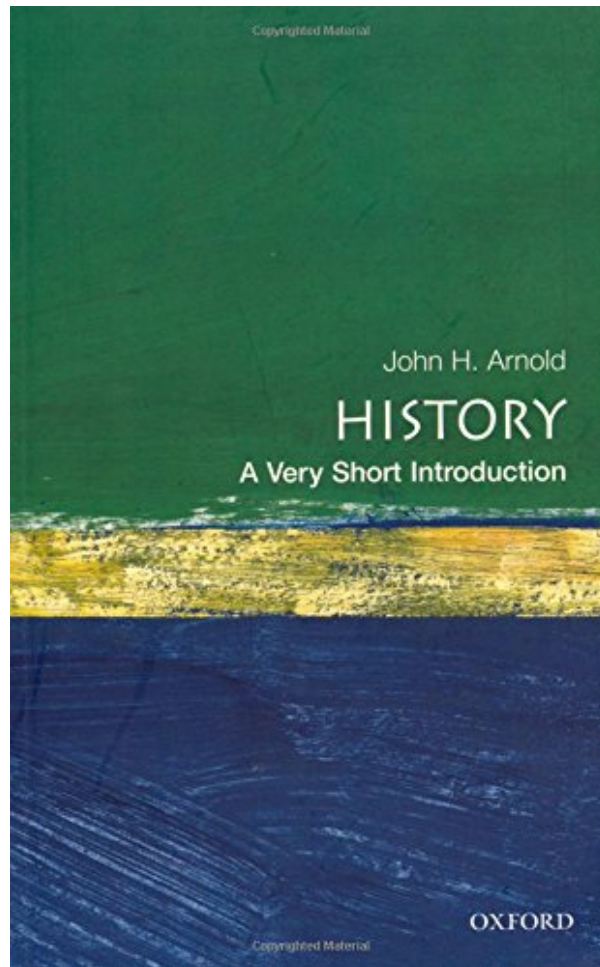


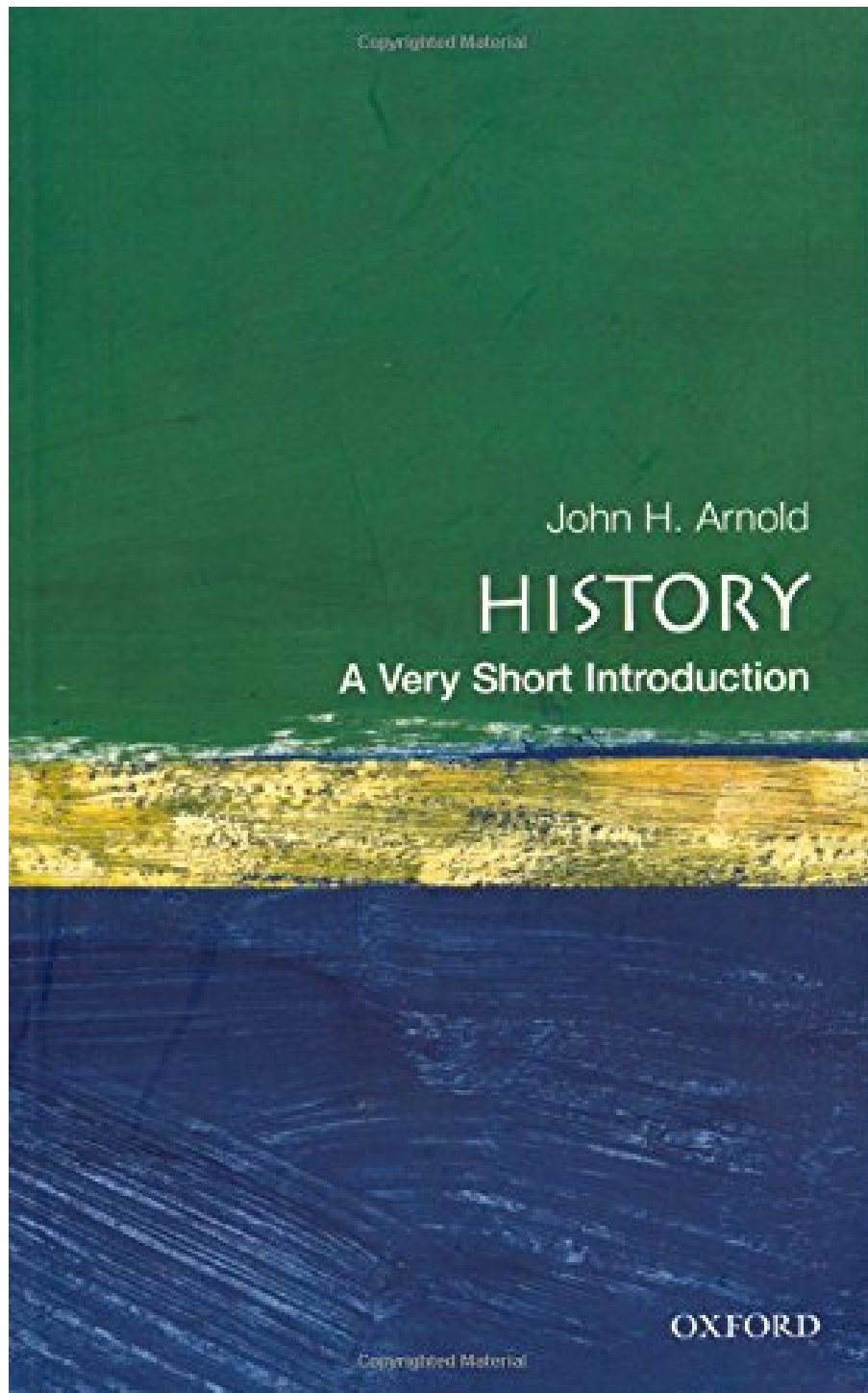
HISTORY: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

BY JOHN H. ARNOLD



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Review

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There are many stories we can tell about the past, and we are not, perhaps, as free as we might imagine in our choice of which stories to tell, or where those stories end. John Arnold's addition to Oxford's popular Very Short Introductions series is a stimulating essay about how people study and understand history. The book begins by inviting us to think about various questions provoked by our investigation of history, and then explores the ways in which these questions have been answered in the past. Such key concepts as causation, interpretation, and periodization are introduced by way of concrete examples of how historians work, thus giving the reader a sense of the excitement implicit in discovering the past--and ourselves.

The aim throughout *History: A Very Short Introduction* is to discuss theories of history in a general, pithy, and accessible manner, rather than delve into specific periods. This is a book that will appeal to all students and general readers with an interest in history or historiography.

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Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

- Sales Rank: #49279 in Books
- Published on: 2000-06-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 4.40" h x .60" w x 6.90" l, .26 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 136 pages

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68 of 70 people found the following review helpful.

Few pages, many ideas, enlightening-even for a history grad

By malfeischylde

What is contained in the pages of this text far surpasses its size, and its worth cannot be adequately represented by its low cost. I found that, using this book as part of my preparations for school, as a required reading, that it surprised me. Although I had read other books in the series before, and both enjoyed and profited from the time spent engaged in such, I must admit that I felt a certain amount of disdain for the idea of reading a book with the title -A Very Short Introduction-. After all, had I not just recently graduated with a degree in history? Did I need to be told what history was? Apparently I did, because the "history of history"

contained in its few pages enlightened me as to where what I do came from. It breaks down the most fascinating evolution of theory from Thucydides to today, from each fracture and faction formed along the way, to the theories that resulted in the eventual outcome. Today, history is broken into many smaller disciplines, and if you are thinking about pursuing history in college, or just like to study it from the armchair, this book will open your eyes and entertain your mind...for two to three hours...but leave you with information that will give you an idea of just how deep the rabbit hole truly goes into the depths of time. The examples the author uses to illustrate his points are interesting (although they tended to focus on his own research area of Medieval history), and, altogether the prose was neat and the style fluid and conversational - a combination I very much enjoy!

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Well don introduction to history as a discipline.

By Galadriel

Efficient well-written overview of how historians evaluate and use various types of historical evidence. It is a very good iintroduction to the discipline of history.

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A Short History of History

By Peter Reeve

Arnold takes 'historiography' to be the process of writing history, and 'history' to be the result of that process, i.e. to be a set of true stories about the past. If you enjoy reading history, then you should read at least something about historiography, to help you evaluate and interpret what you read. This short introduction to the subject is probably as good a place as any to start and for many readers will be as much historiography as they think they need.

Major figures such as Thucydides and von Ranke are discussed and central issues in the philosophy of history, such as the extent to which people of other times were essentially different from us, are introduced. Arnold presents a wide range of opinions on these various topics, but has a bias toward the politically correct.

His style is readable, if sometimes clumsy. The British spellings and usages may annoy some American readers. But overall this little book succeeds admirably in its task and contains a wealth of information and opinion. It is recommended for anyone wanting to get beyond the 'true stories' to what history really is.

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