

The Shortest History of Greece

Heneage (J.) Pp. 242, ills, maps. Exeter: Old Street Publishing, 2021. Cased, £12.99. ISBN: 9781910400869.

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Heneage's *The Shortest History of Greece* claims 'Read in a day. Remember for a lifetime.' It certainly delivers on its promise of being a short fly-through Greek history, though reading in a day will be reader-specific. At fewer than 250 pages, Heneage takes the reader on a whistle-stop tour of Greece, from the Homeric Age to modern day. Of course, one shouldn't expect depth from a book of this nature – breadth is definitely the name of the game here and it is done very well.

Split into four parts, the book takes a chronological journey. The first part deals with 'beginnings' to 1453 and the fall of Constantinople; the next covers up to 1830 and the Battle of Navarino. The penultimate part continues to 1949 and the civil war, whilst the final one ends the narrative in the present day.

Due to its short length, the book naturally covers events in a succinct manner. It is an excellent refresher of history for those who have already studied it or a gentle primer for those new to Greek history. It certainly wouldn't be out of place amongst a classroom collection of further reading. The writing is easy to read, though with a few challenging words that students may need to look up. Nevertheless, I can see keen Year 9 students picking this up. The layout is attractive – the lines are nicely spaced so as to be accessible to most readers; the sections are kept short, allowing one to dip in and out as one pleases; and good use is made of pictures and maps. My only quibble would be that these would have benefited from being in colour but of course that would impact on the cost and layout of the book. I particularly enjoyed the frequent asides placed in grey boxes. Here, Heneage adds further detail, biography, and stories on key people, events, and ideas that might not fully fit in within the main narrative. These are excellent for sparking curiosity and I can see them being a good jumping-off point for further research. The book ends with a short list of 18 suggested books for further reading, arranged in

chronological order, perfect for those whose interest has been piqued by the section they have read.

In all, I would highly recommend this book to teachers, students, and those generally interested in a short and sweet run through vast swathes of Greek history.

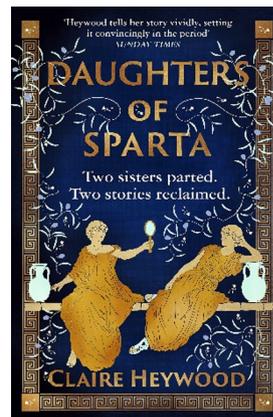
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Daughters of Sparta

Heywood (C.) Pp. 336, map. London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 2021. Cased, £16.99. ISBN: 978-1-529-34993-1

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Claire Heywood's debut novel is an inspired addition to the growing genre of literature which retells the Greek myths from a more feminist perspective. The novel charts the lives of two women- Klytemnestra and Helen - from their early childhood, through to the events with which they are most famously associated – Helen's liaison with Paris and subsequent flight to Troy and Klytemnestra's murderous relationship with her husband.

As a teacher who has the wonderful job of teaching Classics to groups of teenaged students, it is always refreshing to think about a character from a different perspective. Heywood's Helen is vividly drawn and I was struck by how she managed to create someone who evokes both sympathy and frustration in equal measure. Helen's decision to abscond with Paris is foregrounded by an exploration of the effects of Helen's childhood, where her mother is distant, and the difficulties of childbirth. From a modern perspective, it seems that Heywood is encouraging us to view Helen as perhaps suffering from some form of post-natal depression. What I liked though, was the fact that she does not seek to absolve Helen from blame. Helen is portrayed as rather self-absorbed and naïve and it was very enjoyable reading something which asks the reader to view events through the eyes of such a complex character.

My favourite part of this novel was the portrayal of Klytemnestra. She is a character who is rather unsympathetically dealt with by the ancient authors and the version presented by Heywood is of a woman pushed into terrible actions through no real fault of her own. Knowing how the story has to end does not ruin this novel. In