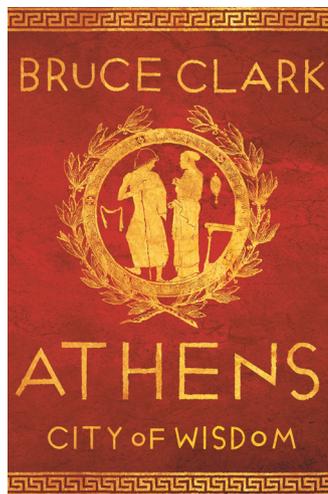


Athens, City of Wisdom

Clark (B.), Pp. 614, maps, colour pls. London: Head of Zeus, 2021. Cased, £9.99. ISBN: 9781788548144.

Dr. Jessica Dixon

Woldingham School, Surrey, UK
Email: j.e.dixon@hotmail.co.uk



Athens, City of Wisdom by Bruce Clark charts the history of Athens from its mythological founding to the present day. It will be of particular interest for classicists who want to expand their knowledge beyond the classical history of Athens. Clark deals skilfully and faithfully with several thousand years of at times very complicated history, but the ease of his prose makes it a joy to read. There are times where you might feel that the narrative is oversimplified. However, this is inevitable if a

work of this magnitude is to keep to one volume and so the oversimplification can be forgiven.

Clark is a journalist who lived in Athens for four years in the 1980s and has visited regularly since. His love for and interest in the city is clear as he brings together the history of Athens. Each chapter starts with a list of the contents that will be covered which helps to navigate the book and makes it easy to dip in and out for later reference. Clark acknowledges many of his sources in the main body of the book but also gives extensive notes on the sources for each chapter at the end, including which of the ancient texts he translated himself and which of his modern sources he has known personally. He refers to conflicts within the sources, such as the discrepancies over the extent of the massacre in Athens when Sulla entered the city during the First Mithridatic War in 86 BC (p. 181). He also refers to archaeological projects and the topography of the history he retells, for example imagining standing on the eastern side of Salamis in 480 BC to watch Athens burn and the wreckage of the sea battle in the bay below (p. 55).

The first half of the book (chapters 1 to 9) charts the 'classical' or pagan history of Athens, from the first reliably dated event in Athenian history, the attempted coup of Cylon in 632 BC, to the end of paganism in the 6th century AD. These chapters chart the key narratives and events from this period, varying from giving the history of individuals such as Pericles and Alcibiades to an overview of events such as the Persian War and the Roman conquest of Greece. These chapters are therefore a good recommendation for any student of Ancient History or Classical Civilisation who wants an overview of the period. Clark also makes thoughtful comparison between ancient and modern events, for example linking the position of NATO in 1990 after the fall of communism to the

position of the Athenian empire after the defeat of Persia and the need to justify taking tribute from its allies (p. 75).

The next few chapters (10 to 12) are a dizzying whizz through the centuries of the Dark and Middle Ages, with 1000 years of history covered in about 50 pages. This long and often brutal period is tied together through the history and occupation of the Acropolis as a key defensive position, culminating in the destruction of the Parthenon by the Venetian army in 1687. Chapters 13 to 15 explore the history of Athens under the Ottoman Empire and Greece's emergence as an independent nation. Alongside the political history of this period, Clark also examines the history of European efforts to control the antiquities of Athens, including Elgin's acquisition of the Parthenon marbles, and the creative inspiration poets such as Byron found in the city.

In the final quarter of the book (chapters 16 to 21), the woes and miseries of Athens continue during the World Wars of the 20th Century down to the financial crisis in the early 2000s. In these chapters Clark focuses on the human history of Athens, including the humanitarian crisis following the influx of refugees to Athens after World War One and the attempts of successive governments to improve the city with varying levels of success. In the final chapter, Clark looks to the future of Athens and how it will overcome the pressures it faces following the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, and the aftermath of the pandemic, as well as how it will tackle climate change.

This is an extensive history of Athens which brings the city to life. Clark has woven together over 2000 years of history, drawing attention to the echoes of history that can be seen throughout this period. It must have been a labour of love for its author, but, despite being a weighty tome, it is not a labour for the reader.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000617

Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece

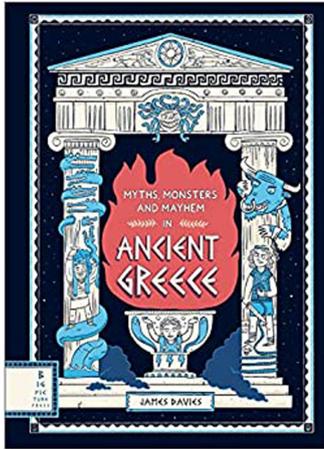
Davies (J.) Pp. 61, colour ill, colour map. London: Big Picture Press, 2021. Cased. £14.99. ISBN: 978-1-78741-641

Alan Clague

Retired Teacher and Exam Board Classics Subject Officer, UK
claguea@yahoo.co.uk

This might seem a disingenuous way to start a review but I don't think I can improve on these extracts from the blurb on the back cover: 'This striking comic book collection is the perfect introduction to the world of the gods – containing six tales full of love, loss, greed, envy and bravery. Bursting with detail and humour, James Davies' retelling of the Greek myths will delight readers of all ages.'

The stories are told in comic-strip format with all sorts of grotesque characters, amusingly drawn. The main stories are of Pandora's Box, Theseus and the Minotaur, Perseus and Medusa,



Orpheus and Eurydice, the Trojan Horse and the Labours of Heracles, each told in six pages. Interspersed are pages illustrating the main gods, heroes, heroines and mythical creatures (the deadlier the better!).

What made this book so compelling for me (as someone who is familiar with the myths) was the casual humour. Here are some examples. When Kronos heard that one of his children would overthrow him 'So, naturally, he started to eat them'. That 'naturally' is very

clever! One of the young Athenians in the queue to be fed to the Minotaur cries out 'But I've got a note from my mum'. When Perseus gets out of the box (his first words are 'I need a wee') and is out fishing with Diktys, he asks 'What sort of fish is this?' to which the fisherman (in pirate mode for some bizarre reason) replies 'Argh, that'd be a sandal, lad'. Orpheus' comment on entering Tartarus is 'I'm just visiting. Love what you've done with the place'. And there's a note pinned to the Wooden Horse: 'Dear Paris, we give up. Sorry about all that war. Here's horse for you – it's a Greek tradition – honest. See you soon, (signed) Odysseus'.

This really is a book for everyone, from primary school children to the most gnarled of old gnarled Classicists. It's the ideal present.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000472

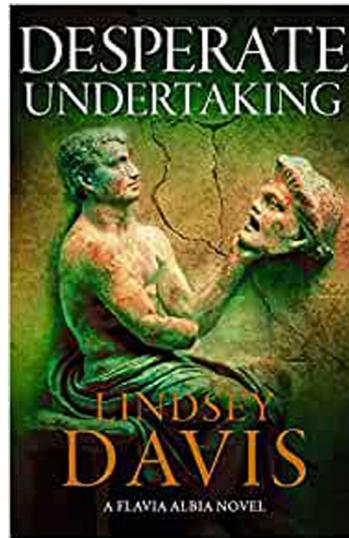
Desperate Undertaking

Davis (L.) pp. xii+402. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022. Cased, £20. ISBN: 978-1-259-35468-3

J. M. Lashly

Former Head of Classics, Shrewsbury High School, UK
jolashly@gmail.com

Firstly, I should say that I very much enjoyed this book. Several years ago, I read the Falco stories, but I had missed the more recent ones involving Flavia Albia, so I was interested to see if the 'new' character held up. She did. The story is set in AD 89 when Rome is under the rule of Tacitus' hated emperor, Domitian, and Flavia Albia is caught up in the investigation of several gruesome, myth-related murders associated with a troupe of actors known to her adopted parents, Marcus Didius Falco and the senator's daughter, Helena Justina. Davis is experienced in complex plots and, as in all good detective stories, clues are scattered from page one, although I had not completely guessed who the perpetrator was until Flavia Albia did, and I am an old hand at Marple and Poirot stories! The action happens largely in the Campus Martius of Rome and in the numerous theatres, public spaces and racetracks there – a handy map is



provided to allow the reader to plot the course of the action, and there is plenty of background information about the various structures, which are well integrated into the story, rather than clumsily inserted as they sometimes can be. Flavia Albia is British by birth, and her reaction to Roman architecture, and indeed culture, is that of an outsider (as we are), so the careful descriptions and explanations are welcome, as well as providing much needed relief from the horror of the case. I wondered at first whether there was too

much gore (so careful do teachers now have to be of their charges), but, on reflection, no needless detail is given and those that have knowledge of the myths will be well aware of the detail anyway. There is also plenty for ancient theatre buffs to enjoy; references to Plautus' *Rudens* and the construction (or lack of) in Roman comedies is discussed by some of the minor characters, which does rather bring the whole thing to life. We sometimes forget that the Romans and Greeks that we study in class were real people, who had everyday problems and who would have had views about the entertainment they were offered; but this may not be the sort of criticism we see in the textbooks. These plays are seen from the viewpoint of the actors who took part in them, and actors are often the best critics of a playwright's work since literary excellence does not always work in practice on the stage. I definitely think this would be a good addition to a school library – Year 7 and above, perhaps: it has made me scour my bookshelves to find copies of the Falco investigations.

doi: 10.1017/S205863102200023X

A Thing of Beauty. Travels in Mythical and Modern Greece

Fiennes (P.) Pp. 292, map. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021. Cased, £18.99. ISBN: 978-0-86154-061-7.

Hilary Meyrick-Long

Latin Teacher, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Austin, Texas, USA
hmeyrick-long@sasaustin.org

Peter Fiennes, aspiring ornithologist, potamologist, and zoologist, is a man on a mission to find Pandora's Hope. In a world suffering from the results of man's greed and apparent determination to destroy the environment, in a time of global crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Fiennes travels around Greece in search of the relevance of Greek myths to today's world.