

GSCE candidate. This book could certainly be put in the hands of a student who is interested in words, the sort of student who may well continue with Latin after GCSE, but I am not convinced it would be effective if used on a whole-class basis.

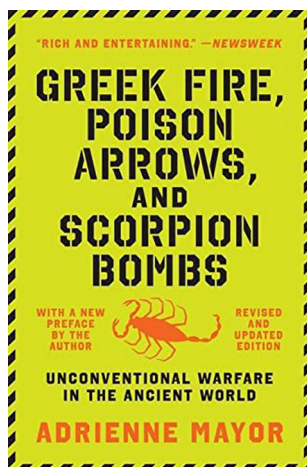
doi: 10.1017/S2058631023000223

Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs

Mayor (A.) Pp. xxx + 384, ills, maps, colour pls.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022.
Paper, £14.99, US\$19.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-21108-4

Alan Clague

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



'Lucullus's army faced a panoply of bioterrors, from poison arrows, stinging bees, savage bears and scorpion bombs to unquenchable burning mud.' This one sentence gives a strong flavour of the content of Adrienne Mayor's revised and updated book. The author starts by bringing out vividly the contrast between our image of ancient warfare (brave soldiers with swords and shields against opponents similarly clad, in such battles as Thermopylae, Marathon and Cannae) and the 'unethical' ways in which through the centuries army leaders have

undermined the Geneva Convention and its (usually unwritten) predecessors.

Greek and Roman mythology is full of examples of the devious use of weapons armed with toxins (think of Heracles, Odysseus, Achilles and Philoctetes) and this might have inspired 'real' people to copy some of the ingenious methods of killing found in the mythology.

The author's main aims are to detail the many varieties of unpleasant ways to defeat an opponent and to show that modern scientific developments and archaeology are able to support the sometimes unlikely claims made by the ancient historians and biographers (not only of Greece and Rome but also of India and China and elsewhere). Chapter 1 gives many examples of devious practices employed by the characters of Greek mythology and will be of particular interest to Classicists.

The chapter headings give an indication of the sorts of material covered: Arrows of Doom; Poison Waters, Deadly Vapors; A Casket of Plague in the Temple of Babylon; Animal Allies (think of elephants and watch out for pigs on fire!); Infernal Fire (starting with Medea and ending with napalm in Vietnam).

Despite the sometimes grisly contents, I found this book fascinating. There seems to be no end to the ability of men (and just

occasionally women) to find inhumane ways to treat other men (and women).

I imagine it might have an appeal to those students who are devotees of online war games but is probably an unlikely purchase for a school library.

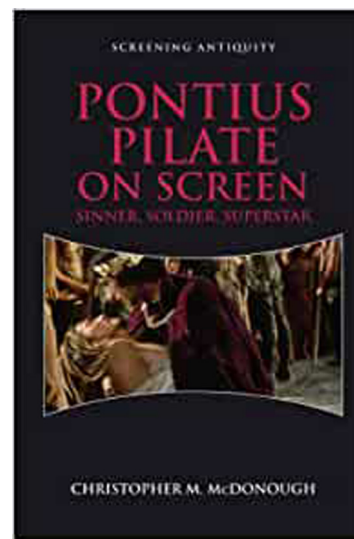
doi: 10.1017/S2058631023000144

Pontius Pilate on Screen: Soldier, Sinner, Superstar

McDonough (C.) Pp 296, ills. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022. Cased, £90. ISBN: 978-1-474-44684.

Alexander Lucie-Smith

Saint Peter's Church, Hove, UK
ppsaintpeters@gmail.com



As every theologian knows, the Gospels are not works of history, but they drop clues about history which can be pieced together, though, as with every reconstruction, the way the shards of mosaic are put together will produce sometimes quite radically different pictures. No one embodies this better than Pontius Pilate, who, in the retelling of the Gospels in film, emerges as a widely differing character. As Christopher McDonough points out, the Pontius Pilate we construct tells us more about ourselves and our own

times than about the Pilate of history.

Considering that he is the most famous Roman governor of all time, very little is known about Pilate. He was the prefect of Judaea, and we know the dates of his time in office, but there is only one inscription that has come to light that gives his name, found in 1961 in Caesarea. Josephus, Philo and Tacitus mention him (the latter calls him the 'procurator', but prefect is more accurate, in keeping with the inscription), but there are immense lacunae that simply cannot be filled. In fact, if he had not had his encounter with Jesus, Pontius Pilate would have been a mere footnote of history, a nonentity. Instead, because of that encounter, he is, in the words of our author's subtitle, 'sinner, soldier, superstar'.

The tendency to fill in the gaps and satisfy the human appetite for a story is seen even more clearly in the treatment of Pilate's wife. McDonough admits that Pilate was probably married, for most Romans of his class were, but that is as far as history takes us. Saint Matthew devotes one verse to the lady: 'And while [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have