

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.

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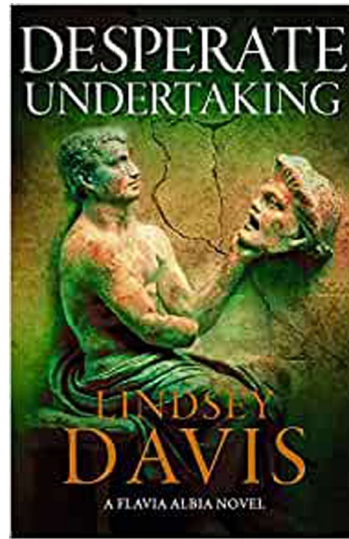
## Desperate Undertaking

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

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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.

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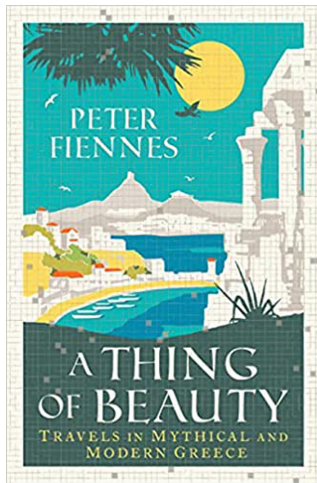
## A Thing of Beauty. Travels in Mythical and Modern Greece

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

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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.



I found *A Thing of Beauty* interesting and enjoyable on so many levels. As I am a Philhellene, former Hellenic archaeologist, and current teacher of Latin, Greek, and Classical Civilisation, this book filled a void that my enforced absence from Greece created. I admired the author's ability to weave numerous different threads into his narrative. For example, not only does Fiennes tell us a lot, as we might expect, about Greece's distant past, namely the archaeological sites, Greek history, and mythology,

but we also learn about Lord Byron and his association with Greece, Schliemann and his excavations, Stuart and Revett and their controversial attitude towards antiquities, modern novelists Henry Miller, Roger Lancelyn Green, and Mary Renault, and Pausanias, the author of the ultimate and ancient tour guide. The many deep layers of this book are compelling and informing and so cleverly woven together in a way that reminded me strongly of Lawrence Durrell's book *Spirit of Place*, but in language much more accessible to a contemporary reader.

I enjoyed the way that Fiennes retold the myths as part of his narrative about each archaeological site he visited. For example, mentioning Sisyphus, Bellerophon, Pegasus, Glauke, and Jason in association with Corinth, and Zeus and Prometheus at Sicyon. As a teacher, I could imagine reading this book with my students in conjunction with Powerpoints showing the archaeological remains, and artists' impressions of the buildings, topography and geography of the sites. I thought my students would enjoy the retellings of the myths in this context, being able to picture them in the environment in which they played out.

Also, with my teacher hat on, I thought that this book would make a wonderful interdisciplinary study between a Classics class and a science or social studies class that was studying the environment. In addition to his lyrical and accurate descriptions of Greece's beauty, Fiennes also describes the sad truth of beaches covered with plastic bags and water bottles, dead dogs littering roadsides, and the pollution on the sacred way from Athens to Eleusis. We may be living in the sixth Age of Man, the Age of Plastic or Lithium as the author suggests, but it was heartening to read about the activists Fiennes met on his travels who are trying to save Greece's outstanding places of natural beauty, the WWF and the the Dancing Women of Vrissoules to name a couple.

In conclusion, I'd like to mention Fiennes' quietly sardonic sense of humour which I found an integral feature of his book. Why does Greece have an inexhaustible supply of old ladies dressed in black dresses not in the more commonly seen lounge gear? How is it that the author can eat so much Greek salad and never grow weary of it? Such humour, although welcome, lightened the tone of the much more serious message we need to hear. If, as Fiennes quotes more than once from John Keats, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever',

should we not, in countries as beautiful and culturally important as Greece, lay aside our greed and hubris and do everything we can to protect it?

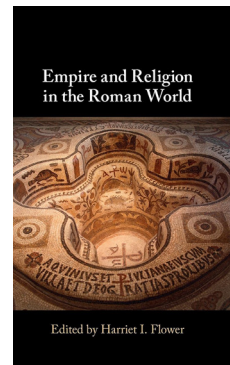
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## Empire and Religion in the Roman World

Flower (H.I.) (ed.) Pp. xiv + 217, ills, maps.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.  
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This book was an absolute pleasure to read, and for any students or teachers who are interested in learning more about more niche topics within the realms of religion within the Roman world, or the nature of power in particular circumstances, it is an absolute must read. The 11 contributions cover a wide range of topics within the themes of 'Empire' and 'Religion' to create an excellent collection that intrigues readers, and to present different perspectives on more liminal geographies and time periods.

It is perhaps within the classroom that it has a more limited use. There is perhaps little relevance to teachers who are teaching Latin, Ancient History and Classical Civilisation as there is little or tangential material that would be covered in curricula for Key Stage 3, or for public examinations in Key Stages 4 and 5. Therefore, as a teaching resource, it is not a must have, but should certainly be a port of call for students looking to further their knowledge of the Roman world as a whole. Furthermore, the timescale that the book covers stretches far into Late Antiquity, which again limits its usefulness in direct Latin, Ancient History and Classical Civilisation teaching in most cases. Nonetheless, for those students wanting to learn more about the connections that existed across the Roman world and across disciplines, this is an important read. This volume is perhaps most suited to the students who are looking to study Classics, Theology or any related subject at university, and want to explore issues and ideas from different perspectives. For such students, this book is written in an accessible and enjoyable way, and provides a level of academic challenge to stretch them beyond the curriculum.

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