

The book takes us through the main areas where our corporeal nature is at its most obvious – sport, sex, sickness, childbirth, death – and also into less obvious topics such as the ways in which (especially Roman) rulers embodied their dynastic power in the ‘body politic’. The final chapter looks at the way Christianity altered the ancient view of bodily life, producing ascetics whose powers of bodily control would make Milo of Croton look small. This is not a book for the squeamish and Vout does not mince her words when describing bodily functions, although she spares us many of the more eye-watering details of ancient medical practice. She gives us a grown-up and honest account of what it must have been like to live in ancient times, where bodies did what bodies do and people were flesh and blood rather than the stuffed shirts found in later reception. Vout’s bodies have sex, they defecate, they grow old and die. She shows us in fascinating and compelling detail how the ancient ability to show ugliness is itself a massive step forward in self-understanding, and these images are often deeply moving: the Munich ‘Drunken Old Woman’ (figure 86) ‘has a certain nobility’ but is very much a detailed study of abandonment (‘in her inebriation... she clings for grim death to the wine jar’). The piece is evidence of a new realism at work in Greek art from the 3rd century BCE onwards and ‘it reminds us that not all Greek art was flawless’ (p. 184). Vout’s range of reference – drawing on literature, philosophy, art, archaeology, and graffiti from a good thousand years of the ancient past – is astonishing and lucidly set out. Some of it may be questionable as history (can we really use Juvenal as evidence of Messalina’s night-time prostitution?) but it is all part of the evidence showing us how ancient people saw their messy selves and their (often even messier) past.

Vout’s style is wonderfully racy and her book is a pleasure to read: Hercules is a ‘lean, mean, fighting machine’ (p. 127) and ‘when not showing him in action or taking a breather, sculptors also showed him pissing’ (p. 135), ‘[athletes] reasons for exercising starkers will always elude us’ (p. 139), Phaedo ‘takes one look at Socrates’ thick neck and assumes him to be a thickly through and through’ (p. 71). The book is beautifully endowed with 178 plates (many in colour) embedded in the text. These are not merely illustrative: the plates are as much a part of the argument as the words which accompany them, giving us a first-hand glimpse of what these Greeks and Romans thought the world looked like as well as showing us (say) the lengths to which they went to honour their dead or the frankness of their depictions of bodily life. See, for instance, the statue clearly showing a breast cancer found in Smyrna (figure 98), the pot showing the javelin-thrower with his genitals tied up ready for exercise (figure 65) or the plaque from Ostia showing a baby being born (figure 43: a scene worthy of *Call the Midwife*). Vout also uses more recent artistic evidence to cast light on the way in which the classical past has been interpreted and revalued over the last two thousand years – look for instance at Waterhouse’s stunning 1885 *Saint Eulalia* (figure 170) – and pointing us towards a better way of reading the paintings with her eye for detail and her ability to show the thinking behind the brush-strokes. There are also some surprising images: figure 63 shows us the Prussian strongman Eugen Sandow, commenting that he ‘looks rather deflated as he adds a fig leaf to his Hercules act’ (p. 134); this whole section (pp. 125–137) on the Herculean ‘strongman’ is a model of intelligent reading of the ancient world through its modern reception.

A book like this is the fruit of many years of research and nobody could have done it better than Vout. Behind the simple, user-friendly style lurks a massive library of meticulous scholarship which Vout manages to disguise in what is a footnote-free publication. The references for each section of the book are listed in the 43 pages of

‘Further Reading’, although it would have been helpful if she had also given us an alphabetical full list of all the works consulted or recommended. The book has an excellent index, it is meticulously proof-read and lavishly produced and is excellent value for money.

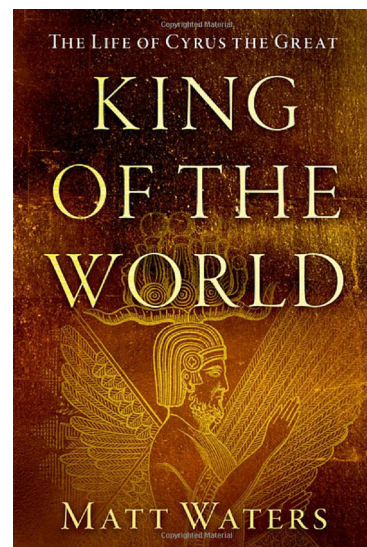
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King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great

Waters (M.) Pp, xvi + 255, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £21.99, US\$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-092717-2.

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It is clear, from what we read of Cyrus the Great in the *Histories* of Herodotus and in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, that his life and reign warrant the full-dress biographical treatment – Philip Freeman’s biographies of Alexander and Caesar come to mind as possible models. Matt Waters’ life of Cyrus has the right title for a book that would be appropriately epic; but I must admit to being a bit surprised at the rather slim volume sent for my review. Waters’ Preface, however, makes clear what Cyrus’ biographer is up against in writing a life that would be properly historical.

Cyrus is indeed as worthy of a full-blown biography as Alexander or Caesar; but ‘Cyrus the individual remains elusive’, Waters warns us, ‘as he has left no surviving testimony beyond a handful of royal inscriptions’ (viii). But then he makes clear that his life of Cyrus the Great will make the most of the sources we have. That epic title, for instance, is attributable to one of those inscriptions; Waters neatly dates, translates, and contextualises the inscription, and so begins writing the Life by foregrounding how it can be written.

The first chapter begins with the well-known Cyrus Cylinder, the source, or site, of that afore-mentioned inscription. The chapter’s epigraph affirms both Cyrus’ status and ancestry. Waters then fills in the historical background using ‘a broad range of documentary, archaeological, and art historical evidence’ (3). That evidence is often fragmentary and enigmatic; and so a coherent and cogent interpretation of it is not easy to come up with. Waters deploys his considerable knowledge and experience in deciphering source materials and surveying the various modern commentators. We get a sense of the most advanced methodologies and sensibilities, as Waters teases out the meanings of the sources for

the 'New Achaemenid History' that has since the 1980s sought to 'loosen the so-called tyranny of Greece over early Persian history' (7). The stories of Herodotus are not strictly historical, but he was writing what would become disciplined history; there are many other indigenous sources that the historian of Persia must consider, but 'ancient Middle Eastern studies remains a discipline with firm roots in Western academia' (8).

Waters has been engaged in these studies for over 30 years and has written several books; this one is meant to be introductory, and intended for a general audience. This means that he has a great deal of detailed historical background to cover in a clear and efficient manner; but this he does, with the pertinent names and dates, terms and trends. The background has breadth and depth, and holds up in spite of the acknowledged fragmentary state of the sources and debated interpretations of what they tell us. Waters folds into his account of the background some telling readings of selected sources, illuminated by photographs or drawings. We hear from Herodotus or Xenophon where they can shed some light on what is attested in these other sources. Again, we can see not just what can be known but also how it may be learned.

If the first chapter sets the stage for the appearance of Cyrus, it is in the second chapter that he makes his appearance; and if in the first chapter the unreliability of the Greek literary sources sends us to the indigenous archaeological sources, here the paucity of those sources sends us back to Herodotus and Xenophon, as well as to Ctesias, the subject of one of Waters' earlier books. As Herodotus himself might have observed, the stories about Cyrus might not be strictly accurate, but that they were in circulation is historically significant. Waters interprets the historical narratives as purposefully and persuasively as he deciphers the archaeological inscriptions; here the latter inform the former, as Waters accounts for the world of which Cyrus was the King.

Subsequent chapters take up the conquests and governance of Cyrus, his sense of history and history's sense of him. Waters sustains his narrative account of the life and times of Cyrus by maintaining its balance of literary and scientific analysis. One of Cyrus' most significant conquests was of the kingdom of Lydia in western Anatolia, and of its king, the famously wealthy Croesus. 'There is a rich narrative tradition in Greek sources' about Croesus, but 'no documentary evidence from Lydia itself ... to supplement this narrative' (72). Herodotus' account 'contains much of interest to the historian, but even more to the literary specialist: the account reads as more legendary than factual. That does not mean, however, that it is entirely fabricated' (72). So, he reads Herodotus, and as the reading proceeds, we hear also of 'Ashurbanipal's inscriptions,' 'archaeological finds at Ephesus and elsewhere in western Turkey,' and 'a fragmentary passage in the Nabonidus Chronicle' (72-4). In the end, though we can't know for sure what became of Croesus, we know that his capital city of Sardis was sacked; 'and in this case the archaeological record, including radiocarbon analysis, corroborates the textual sources' (77).

The organisation of the chapters holds up despite each one's arriving, at several points, at what had been discussed in a previous chapter or what will be discussed in a subsequent one. The recurring discussion of the Cyrus Cylinder, for example, adduces the factual and interpretive evidence pertinent to that chapter's narrative. The Cylinder, of course, is associated with Cyrus' most famous conquest, that of Babylonia. It shows that the more of the world Cyrus came to rule, the more his rule took on the attributes of other kings and kingdoms. Waters maintains his focus on Cyrus by means of an extended and detailed description of the archaeological site of his capital at Pasargadae. Here his admiration

of and reliance upon the work of the archaeologist David Stronach (to whom the book is dedicated) is most obvious. The contrast between this archaeological exposition and the narrative paraphrases of the more literary sources suggests that it may be of more interest to Classics teachers than learners; but those teachers could probably find ways to make use of it.

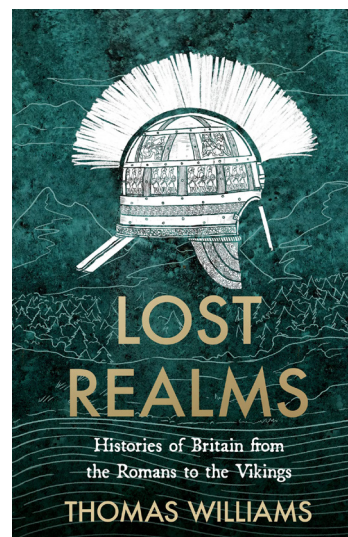
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Lost Realms: Histories of Britain from the Romans to the Vikings

Williams (T.) Pp. 413, map. London: William Collins, 2022. Cased, £25.00. ISBN: 978-008171964

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The end of the Roman occupation traditionally marked the beginning of the 'Dark Ages' in Britain, but this book goes a long way to dispelling the long-held myth that we have poor visibility of the next few centuries in Britain's history.

The book approaches the history of this period through a geographical approach, by focusing on nine different areas of Britain and trying to reconstruct what these regions and regional powers looked like before the Viking age, and after the end of the Roman occupation of Britain. This

makes the narrative far more manageable to negotiate for the average reader, and far more compelling for the more informed audience. The division of chapters leads the reader elegantly to the conclusion that this period was not experienced uniformly across Britain.

The strength of the book comes from the analysis of the material evidence and the relevant written sources, and the author is able to discuss the limitations of the evidence in building a comprehensive understanding of the different cultural identities of the time. The use of archaeological evidence, combined with an examination of the ancient landscape, allows the author to provide an insight into the people and communities of the time.

Even though there are some unanswered questions as to the day-to-day lives of the communities during this period, the book is still a very satisfying read. While this is certainly an interesting book, which deals expertly with parts of the so-called 'Dark Ages' in Britain, it belongs far more in a History classroom library, rather than a Latin and Classics one.

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