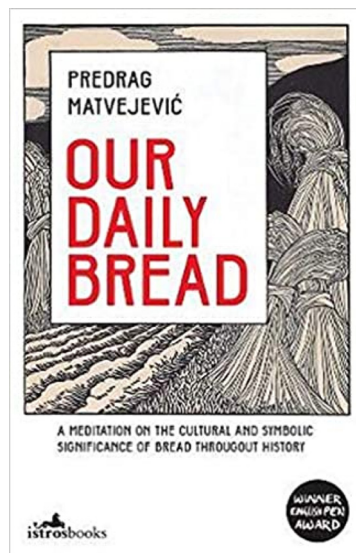


Our Daily Bread. A Meditation on the Cultural and Symbolic Significance of Bread throughout History

Matvejević (P.). Pp. 166, ills. London: Istros Books, 2020. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 9781912545094 <http://istrosbooks.com/products/books/our-daily-bread-110/>

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Reading this book brought me a great deal of joy, and I found much to savour both as a Classicist and as a keen home baker. Matvejević takes you on bumpy journey across the places and historical periods that are linked to the history and significance of bread, and the constant hopping through time, languages and geography makes it a real page turner.

As the book title reveals, this is a meditation, and you are invited to see the history of bread from the nuanced perspective of the author.

Readers should not expect an exhaustive and factual approach, but rather a personal picture with its roots in Europe and the Mediterranean. The life experiences of the author are the motor of the narrative, and thorough scholarship is shared in a very accessible way. Overall, the book is a treasure trove of anecdotes and scientific and literary information, as well as of a very substantial number of etymological facts and curiosities. Avid philologists may find that they are being deprived of information because quotes are often presented either directly in translation and/or transliteration without the original text, with just a few exceptions to this. The same may apply to those looking for references, as sources cannot be traced easily. However, the lack of footnotes and bibliographical information is part of the allure of a book that is best enjoyed with feet up and away from the desk – ideally with a fresh loaf of bread! And regarding bread, that is one of the highlights of the book: there is much to learn about the traditions behind modern bread-making techniques, and the encyclopaedic amount of information about seeds, cultivation, manufacture and consumption is truly enlightening. The relationship which different religions and ideologies have had with bread over time is presented beautifully intertwined with the history of agriculture and breadmaking. Matvejević finishes the book with a personal reflection on modern-day food culture and supply security, and it asks interesting questions about the future of our societies in relation to food.

The physical book itself is very pleasantly designed, and the spare but relevant illustrations are well chosen and informative. I cannot comment on the fidelity of the translation because I do not speak Croatian, but the resulting text is in itself a literary achievement and makes for very pleasant reading. Equally, I cannot possibly vouch for the exact accuracy of quotes, references and dates, but even at times when the focus is not on presenting accurate historical data, a *se non è vero è ben trovato* makes it all fall into place. This is a must-read for anyone interested in anthropology in general and the history of food in particular.

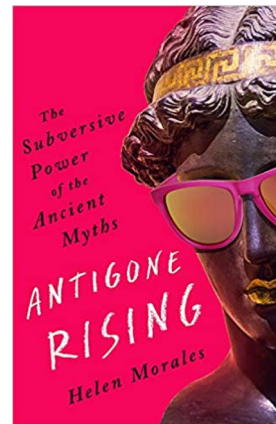
doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000167

Antigone rising. The Subversive Power of the Ancient Myths

Morales (H.). Pp. xviii + 204. New York: Bold Type Books, 2020. Cased, US\$26, CA\$33. ISBN: 978-1-56858-935-0

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I wanted to review this book because the idea of myths being resonant in our increasingly complex modern society is a hot topic and, as a teacher, I try to encourage students who have so many choices laid before them, to study ancient literature. Myths are perhaps the answer as they express truths (unpleasant ones in many cases) and Morales' new book addresses this issue in a practical and accessible way, in a book that would grace the shelves of any school library or Classics (or English) department. Firstly, why

myth? This is a common question in papers dealing with Greek tragedy. Why did the tragedians use myths set way back in history rather than using contemporary stories to illustrate their moral point? Well, firstly, after Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus* of 492 BCE was banned for causing distress to the audience in Athens so soon after the event, tragedies retelling the story of wars tended to focus on Athenian victories; Aeschylus' *Persae* of 472 BCE fortunately fell into this category. Secondly, there is a tendency among some audience members to concentrate too closely on whether actors are portraying contemporary characters well enough or whether minor details are correct ('That type of car wasn't sold until 1993 and this scene is set in 1990'). So, myths provide a distance between our reality and the 'truth' that those myths are telling us so that the audience, listener or reader can focus on the bigger truth as told by the myth. In her preface, Morales turns to this question, asking why in 2016 *Antigone in Ferguson* was staged in response to the killing of 18 year-old Michael Brown Jr. by police there in 2014, and she

concludes that by performing stories ‘at one remove’ it avoids ‘risking the crassness of dramatising the specific events of a young man’s death’. It also allows characters to be what Ralph Ellison called ‘enlarged’ and give those characters ‘possibilities [that] transcended the limitations that society placed upon them’ (Patrice Rankine). It is the courage and endurance of Antigone, rather than her rather sad end, that remains with those who study the play – they see her, says Morales, as a Malala Yousafi or Greta Thunberg, the lonely figure who stands against the world. Interestingly, that is not how Antigone herself would have been viewed in the ancient world. I remember Professor Hugh Bowden of King’s College London delivering a session at school entitled ‘Why Antigone was wrong, and Jason was right’. The students were outraged of course, but the Greeks would most likely have had less sympathy for a young woman who spoke out of turn and who acted outside what was acceptable for a citizen. This is why ancient myths are still resonant – they produce reactions because they challenge our worldview by presenting larger than life characters in larger than life situations. Of course, Antigone is not the only female heroine in this book: there are the Amazons as portrayed in *Wonder Woman*, representations of whom are often cited by the sort of men who belong to the Red Pill groups discussed by Donna Zuckerberg in ‘Not All Dead White Men’ as being to blame for all the supposed challenges to the male ego in the 21st century. Morales also discusses *Lysistrata* and the various versions inspired by it from Tony Harrison (*A Common Chorus* 1992) to Germaine Greer (*Lysistrata – The Sex Strike* 1999) and most recently Spike Lee’s *Chi-Raq* (2015). Purists may bristle at the changes made, but art only survives by being flexible enough to sustain such off-shoots, and myths are nothing if not flexible. Of course, fictional characters are not the only ones included in this book; for example, Morales discusses how Hippocrates and his views have been used to promote diets, but quite rightly states that Hippocrates himself would not have endorsed the modern diet culture. Gluttony (I am writing this on Boxing Day) is mostly disapproved of as a sign of extravagance, but being fat, or at least well-covered, would have been a sign of richness and prosperity, whereas being thin would suggest poverty and possibly weakness. Body-shape and the view taken of it varies according to culture and time – think of those plump Rubens ladies – and we should always be careful to take a step back when using examples from other cultures whether geographically or temporally distant. Morales specifically says that what annoys her in this case is that Hippocrates’ writings are being misappropriated ‘by the diet industry to promote misery and sickness’. Using myths or ancient exemplars is not always helpful. Other discussions centre around the way that ancient women were controlled in relation to dress codes, and the Oppian Laws of the late 3rd century BCE are cited along with Pentheus (*Bacchae*). I particularly enjoyed the pointed comment about politicians avowing family values only to be brought down by a sex scandal in this section. Clearly Ovid gets an in-depth discussion; and the topics of #MeToo and trans-rights feature prominently in the final chapters where there is a different take on the transformations. We should all be aware that the metamorphoses into animals and plants teach us that we should connect with all elements of our planet, seeing all of these as integral to the well-being of us all and this, if done properly, would eradicate sexual assault. A noble aim. There are some moving quotes from young people who, having been introduced to myths, realise that this is not a modern issue – the stories of Caenis/Caeneus, Teiresias and the possibly lesser-known Iphis and Ianthe are movingly told

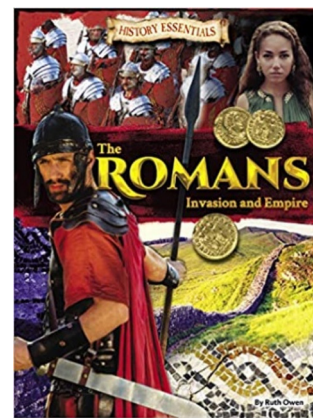
and make a fitting conclusion to this book. It is sometimes an uncomfortable read but one which would be a welcome addition to a school or departmental library.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000179

The Romans: Invasion and Empire

Owen (R.). Pp. 32, colour ills, colour map.
Tunbridge Wells: Ruby Tuesday Books, 2019.
Paper, £8.99. ISBN: 978-1-78856-037-5.

James Watson



This slender volume forms part of a ‘History Essentials’ series of books which the publisher’s website reveals is intended for children in Key Stage 2; other titles cover ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the Stone and Bronze Ages and the Vikings. The subtitle of this volume on the Romans is ‘Invasion and Empire’, and although much of the book focuses on the wider empire – and especially Roman Britain – there are sections which discuss other aspects of

Roman civilisation too.

Each double-page spread in the book covers a particular topic that is brought to life by a combination of text and illustrations. Most of the illustrations in this colourful book are photographs, although some pages feature drawn reconstructions. The first topic discussed is the AD 43 invasion of Britain, but then the following double-page steps back to consider ‘Who were the Romans?’ The next several topics deal with various aspects of Roman civilisation – the empire, the army, domestic life, food, features of the city of Rome, and gladiators. Thereafter the focus shifts back to Roman Britain, with a general section on ‘the Romans in Britain’ followed by ones exploring Boudica’s revolt, baths (with a focus on Bath itself) and Hadrian’s Wall.

There are, unfortunately, some features of the book which could cause confusion, and there are also occasional errors. The map which begins the book (p. 2), for example, is stated to show ‘the Roman Empire at the beginning of the 2nd century AD’ but includes Hadrian’s Wall (not begun until AD 122); the labelling of the map is also inconsistent, with areas of the empire shown as ‘Britannia’, ‘Gaul (Modern-day France)’ and ‘Modern-day Spain’. Later in the book one reads of ‘England’ (p. 4) and ‘Wales’ (p. 20); whilst these terms may be meaningful to younger modern readers, it might perhaps have been worth clarifying that these names did not come into use until after the Roman period. We read that ‘*Insulae* had no running water or toilets’ (p. 12), but the accompanying – and otherwise excellent – reconstruction drawing of such an apartment block that illustrates that double page seems to include an individual making use of a wooden *latrina* (p. 13). The same double page suggests that