

of Sparta (more democratic perhaps than the Athenian commentators liked us to think, with some interesting anecdotes about 'tremblers' who had allegedly shown cowardice in battle and the *homoioi* or Spartiates, whose fathers were also part of this elite group and who had to serve in the army until the age of 60 to retain citizenship) and the Spartan lifestyle, including the dining clubs and the rather egalitarian requirement to donate equal rations of barley, cheese, figs, olive oil and wine produced on their own estates. This would have provided an enormous amount of food which is now believed to have gone towards feeding the boys who were being trained or even to the helots to ensure they had enough food to do their tasks. The relative abstemiousness of the Spartans in comparison to the Athenian *symposia* is illuminating. There is also a chapter on raising a Spartiate, the *paideia* (sometimes called *agogē*) and one on Spartan women who, in general, seemed to have a better time than Athenian women. Helots have a chapter to themselves and Bayliss debunks some of the accepted stories about the treatment of these people who it has long been believed, from Thucydides, gave the Spartans serious headaches. The final chapter deals with modern reception of the Spartans; particularly sad is the fact that, following the Nazification of the Spartan legacy in 1930s Germany, it was not until the last two decades of the twentieth century that Sparta became a mainstream subject again. This is an excellent and informative book, as are most of the books in this series, and it would be very useful as an introduction to the topic of Sparta which is popular in Classical Civilisation curricula and syllabuses.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631023000491

## The Fasces. A History of Ancient Rome's Most Dangerous Political Symbol

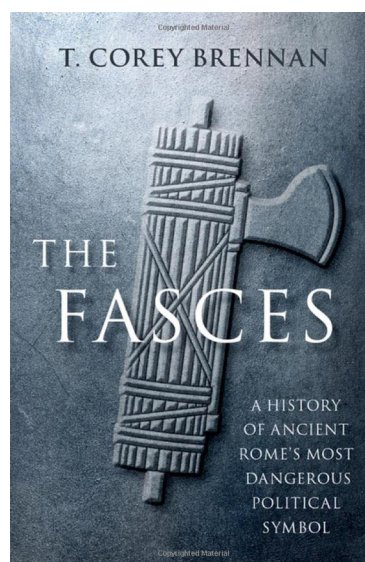
Brennan (T.C.) Pp. xii + 291, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Cased, £22.99, US\$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-764488-1.

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Rutgers University Professor of Classics, T. Corey Brennan, takes his readers on an interesting historical journey from ancient Rome through the modern era in an in-depth history of one of Rome's most enduring symbols of its power, the fasces. The fasces is a bundle of rods with an axe bound together by a leather cord. It was a visual reminder of the state's power to inflict both corporal punishment and capital punishment; thus inspiring respect and awe for the authority of the state and of its representatives.

The first seven chapters serve to provide a detailed account of the history and role of the fasces in ancient Rome. Brennan provides detailed references to classical authors in order to illustrate both the customs surrounding the use of the fasces and the psychological effect it had on those of different social standing in ancient Roman society. Brennan masterfully strings together various anecdotes from ancient Rome to give a full account of the lictor's role and the power of that ancient symbol – the fasces.



The second half of the book details the reception and use of the fasces as a symbol from the Middle Ages through its use in the United States to its use in fascist Italy and up until today. This half of the work is particularly interesting when one considers how symbols can be co-opted and reimagined in different cultural and societal milieu. In a recently independent United States, the framers of that new republic adopted a great deal of ancient Greek and Roman symbols. Thus, one comes to take for granted the presence of two fasces on either side of the Speaker's chair in the chamber of the House of Representatives in the US Capitol. However, this symbol comes to take on a particularly negative connotation when it was adopted as a symbol of fascist Italy by Benito Mussolini – thus inspiring the term *fascist*. In recent times, the symbol has been coopted once again by white nationalist groups and by members of fringe right-wing extremist groups. As an American, this made for a particularly interesting read in light of the recent Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia or the January 6<sup>th</sup> attacks on the US Capitol.

This work is certainly of interest to any serious student of ancient Roman history or the reception of ancient Roman symbology in the modern world. It might be too dense and scholarly to use in a wholesale manner in the secondary school classroom, but excerpts could certainly help to inform classroom discussions or a lesson on Roman symbols or governmental authority. It is definitely a valuable work and its relevance in modern political discourse only helps to highlight the value of understanding the history of this ancient symbol.

doi: 10.1017/S205863102300048X

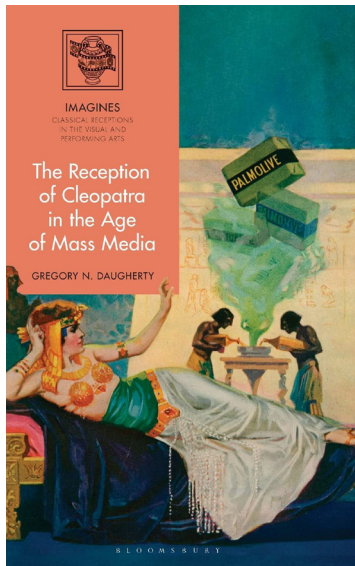
## The Reception of Cleopatra in the Age of Mass Media

Daugherty (G.N.) Pp. xii + 233, ill. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-350-34072-5.

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This book provides a comprehensive and painstakingly researched study of Cleopatra's influence on popular culture from the early twentieth century to the present. Daugherty's book delves into a wide



range of media forms, such as movies, literature, comics, television, music, and advertising, to demonstrate how the popular image of Cleopatra attracted and reached a large public audience.

The book features an in-depth coverage of Cleopatra's modern reception, tracing the evolution of Cleopatra's image in media, making connections between broader cultural and economic trends. As the book progresses Daugherty's analysis encompasses modern television, novels, music and video games, emphasising the

contemporary shift toward historical authenticity in Cleopatra's portrayal.

Daugherty's exploration of various media forms offers students a deeper understanding of the cultural and economic factors that have influenced Cleopatra's representation. For students interested in Classics and Ancient History, this book serves as a bridge between ancient civilisations and modern interpretations. The first chapter, which examines the impact of Roman literature on Cleopatra's portrayal in Europe, provides important historical context. By tracing Cleopatra's reception throughout different periods, students can observe how societal norms, gender roles, and racial identities influenced her image over time. Daugherty skilfully navigates the historical and contemporary perspectives on Cleopatra, highlighting her enduring legacy.

Daugherty's meticulous research, extensive endnotes, and inclusion of visual materials, such as film stills and advertisements, offer students opportunities for further exploration and critical analysis. The endnotes provide references to additional sources on Cleopatra's presence in popular culture, allowing students to expand their understanding of the topic. The illustrations aid in exemplifying the transformations of Cleopatra's image and help students connect the text with tangible examples from various media forms.

Furthermore, the book's emphasis on Cleopatra's portrayal as a symbol of empowerment, sexuality, and racial ambiguity opens up discussions on broader themes such as gender, race, and identity. From this, students can engage in meaningful conversations about the representation of women in media, the influence of historical context on popular culture, and the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes. The language in the book is accessible and appropriate to those pupils in the senior phase of secondary school.

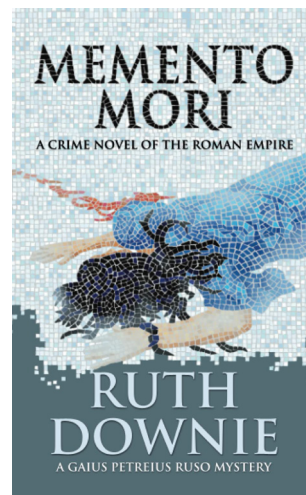
This volume serves as a valuable resource for high school students embarking on research, essays, or presentations. The detailed bibliographies at the end of the book provide guidance for further exploration into specific topics, enabling students to delve deeper into areas of personal interest. Its interdisciplinary approach, engaging writing style, and extensive references make it a useful tool for expanding knowledge and fostering critical thinking.

## Memento Mori: A Crime Novel of the Roman Empire

Downie (R.) Pp. 473, Grampus Press, 2018. Paper, £11.99. ISBN: 978-1-9164694-7-1

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Author Ruth Downie has been penning her *Medicus* series of Roman crime novels for a number of years, and I am astonished that they have not come onto my radar before I was given the opportunity of reviewing *Memento Mori*, number eight in the series. These books feature former legionary doctor Gaius Petreius Ruso and his British wife Tilla. This book is a delightful romp through 2nd century Roman Britain, and I now fully intend to begin at the start of the series. This book could certainly be read as a stand alone novel, but I found the characters interesting and well

written, and would like to hear more about their stories.

Fans of Lindsey Davis' *Falco* series will undoubtedly enjoy this book. The main protagonist, Ruso, finds himself cast into a murder mystery when his best friend is accused of murdering his wife. What entails is Ruso and family having to decamp from an isolated spot in northern Britain to Aquae Sulis (modern-day Bath). Downie does a great job of creating a vivid and engaging picture of the historical city, and much of the action takes place at the bath house and Temple of Sulis Minerva; places that a modern reader may well have visited. The level of historical detail is ideal, in depth enough to grip the reader, clearly well researched, but not labouring the point; this is, after all, a crime novel rather than a piece of factual history. The storyline is compelling and well crafted, with interesting twists and turns in the plot. This is an ideal holiday read, with short chapters, which will keep you engaged long past bedtime as you will want to know what happens next.

The characters are likeable and amusing and I enjoyed seeing the story unfold from the viewpoints of the two main characters. Downie faces the eternal problem of writers of light-hearted Roman fiction; how to tackle the issue of slavery, which was obviously endemic. This is perhaps the only unsatisfactory element of the book, as the relationship between master and slave appears rather benign. However, the book is not seeking to advance any particular agenda and should be enjoyed for what it is, a well-written crime novel with a highly visual historical setting. There is plenty of action, a pacy story, engaging characters and a good sprinkling of humour. I enjoyed this book immensely.

doi: 10.1017/S205863102300051X

doi: 10.1017/S205863102300034X