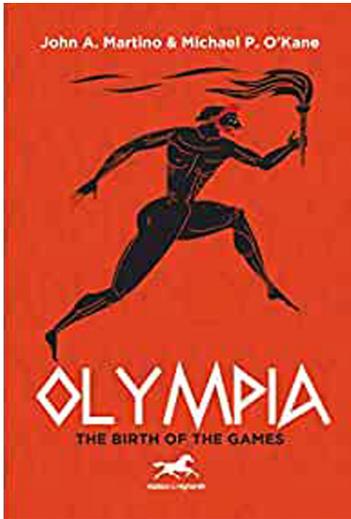


Olympia: The Birth of the Games

Martino (J.A.), O’Kane (M.P.) pp. 266. Las Vegas, NV: Histria Books, 2021. Cased, US\$29.99. ISBN: 978-1-59211-096-4

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I assumed that a book with the title *Olympia: The Birth of the Games* would be another of those volumes targeted primarily at students of, say, GCSE Classical Civilisation. But, no: it is a novel. Written by two academics (they like their frontal adverbial clauses!), it tells the story of the young peace-loving priest Pelops who witnesses the vividly-described horrors of war between rival Greek cities, gets involved in machinations between Sparta and Carthage, pursues and rescues his kidnapped girlfriend Hippodamia,

recovers from being poisoned by his father and in the end triumphs in the horse race at the first Olympiad. Quite a set of experiences!

The authors’ interests certainly contribute to the more belligerent aspects of the narrative. (*inter alia* Michael O’Kane is ‘a keen student of the art of boxing’ and John Martino is a disabled veteran of the Australian Defence Force who wrote his PhD on martial violence. He is also ‘an avid archer’ and an ‘Alfa Romeo enthusiast’. The latter was probably of minimal assistance in writing this book!)

In the course of the story, we meet some well-known characters from the ancient world. Queen Dido is on the throne of Carthage, Homer pops up from time to time, Tantalus is Pelops’ father and the chief priest of Olympia, Menander is a Spartan spy, Lycurgus is the son of a Spartan king, and Rameses (who sadly becomes Ramses at one point) is an Egyptian prince. Saul and Goliath have minor roles to play. Ares (when not being Aries) rules the early chapters.

The narrative is vivid and strong (quite gory in places) but sometimes the language seems rather stilted and the dialogue unrealistic. The authors are very determined that people should not just speak: in the course of a typical couple of pages we find ‘cried’, ‘shouted’, ‘asked’, ‘snarled’, ‘added’, ‘declared’, ‘exploded’, ‘snorted’, ‘announced’, ‘stammered’ and ‘barked’.

There is a preface by the President of the Olympism for Humanity Alliance who sees this book as ‘a source of inspiration and a platform for the imagination, hope and global action’. We’ll see!

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Aristophanes: Frogs

Meineck (P.) (ed., trans) Pp. viii + 170. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2021. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 9781-647920067

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Having taught Greek theatre in some guise or another since starting my teaching career in 2011, I was interested to read Meineck’s edition of the *Frogs* to see if it offered anything new from those I have read before. While I do not pretend to have read a multitude of different translations of the *Frogs*, I was not disappointed with this version and feel it does offer a different approach to others available.

To begin with the more common points, the introduction contains all a student or teacher would need to fully understand the play. Firstly, the reader is provided with a clear and concise historical and cultural background to the play spread over 15 pages. This also includes sub-divided information on all the conventions of Old Comedy including festivals, the theatre building, masks, costumes, props, music and staging. Secondly, Meineck provides the reader with a 36-page character information list. While this goes beyond what is needed for A Level, with my teaching hat on I found this to be a really useful resource for students of all abilities in my classes for three reasons; firstly, it provided them with clear general information on who the character was; secondly, their wider cultural significance such as their use in other literature and art; and finally, analysis of their role in the play, including some specific scene analysis.

With regards to the presentation of the translation there are several features that were useful; firstly, the translator has opted for footnotes as opposed to endnotes or regular pages of sidenotes. While this will be down to the reader’s personal preference, I felt that this approach allowed for a greater flow to the reading of the play, as the reader can still make quick reference to any additional support needed without having to flick to the back of the book or get distracted by lengthy pages of analysis on every other page. The footnotes themselves are relatively concise, and when combined with the introduction and character list information, contain all that is needed to understand the text.

Looking at the translation itself, the vast majority stays true to existing editions of the play and is accessible to readers of all abilities. I think there is one clear difference in this edition compared to others – what Meineck has done with the chorus. In his own words he has ‘chosen a more radical method than perhaps other translators ... that is, to capture the essence of the idea of parody and transpose the ancient lyrics onto contemporary popular music’. To give an

example, the musical duel between the frogs and Dionysus is done to the rhythm and rhyme of *Highway to Hell* by AC/DC with the frogs throughout singing 'he's on a causeway to hell!' I found this to be a refreshing modern take which I agree with the translator is fully in the spirit of Aristophanes. I must admit that, being in my mid-30s, a few of the artists used were before my time and required a quick music search for reference; however, I did find that this approach helped to breathe greater life into the text and went a little way to capturing what it might have been like for the ancient audience. Again, with my teaching hat on I have used this as a way of helping my own students capture the mood of the play and asked them to devise their own songs as a way of understanding the play.

While there is a requirement for students to use the prescribed set text translations, I certainly feel that there are elements of this edition that would make it a worthwhile purchase for a department. Additionally, for those not teaching the play who would like to start their exploration into Greek comedy, or for those more seasoned readers looking for an interesting take on the work of Aristophanes, this is a worthwhile read.

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Roman Britain Puzzles

Morgan (J.). Pp. x+89, ills. Independently published, 2021. Paper, £5.99. ISBN: 9798613354061

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Have you been studying Roman Britain with your classes? Are you looking for something for the end of term? Or for extension? Then this is the book for you! Julian Morgan's book of *Roman Britain Puzzles* has something for everyone, from word searches (quite hard in some cases) to various forms of sudoku, code breaking, anagrams, quizzes on Roman roads in Britain (some research required here maybe), crosswords and more. The variety is astonishing and there is something for all levels of knowledge, ability and even interest; and don't worry –

the answers are in the back, but don't tell the students! This book might look slim, but it is packed with information and should interest even the most reluctant student as it deals not only with the Romans but with what you can see around you in Britain today. There are some quizzes on inscriptions that might require a bit of help for those without Latin, but there is an epigraphy appendix provided at the back of the book as well. Epigraphy got me interested in studying Latin many, many years ago and – who knows? – it might just grab some of our modern students. A few of the crosswords are quite hard; good for half-term homework perhaps or for extending keen

students, but overall, what comes across is the deep interest and knowledge shown by the author of this book and at £5.99 it is well worth the money for any school.

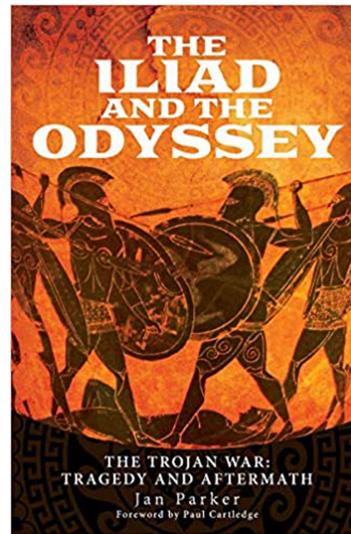
doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000502

The Iliad and the Odyssey: The Trojan War: Tragedy and Aftermath

Parker (J.) pp. 272. Pen and Sword Military, 2021. £25.00. ISBN: 978-1526779939

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Homer's surviving epics about the Trojan War and its aftermath, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are canonical works in European literature. Jan Parker's new book gives a comprehensive overview of the plots with discussion of the heroic values within them, illustrated with relevant and illuminating pictures of the Trojan War taken from pottery. She uses her own translations throughout the book to support her range of points.

In her introduction to the *Iliad*, she summarises the archaeological evidence for the history behind the

Trojan war myth, before launching her overall argument that the poet both celebrates and problematises the value of *kleos* (glorious reputation). Emphasising the performative context of individual rhapsodes adding their own interpretations, she uses the repeated authorial interjections of 'fool' to argue that the characters' inability to understand *moira* (fate) renders them tragic victims of it, most notably Hector.

For each book of the *Iliad*, Parker provides a summary with her overall interpretation, which is frequently compelling. Her interpretation of book 5 as 'cinematic' in Diomedes' *aristeia* (spectacular killing spree) supports her view of the poem as ambivalent about war, balanced as it is by her summary of book 6 and her interpretation of it as civilian-focused. Developing this argument, she highlights similes in book 11, such as the comparison of Ajax to a donkey, as exemplars of Homer's dual perspective on peace and war. Most notably, the author lays bare the extent of Achilles' guilt for the irresponsibility of Patroklos' death, surely reminiscent of Aeneas' feelings at Pallas' death in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but leaves it to the reader to make this comparison. Parker herself does make comparisons but leaves room for readers to reach their