

convincingly argue that Alexander's eventual success was down to effective use of the efficient Macedonian military machine bequeathed by Philip.

Rowson finishes with a brief summary concerning Alexander's Asian conquests. Although this is compressed, Rowson still commendably lays out the relevant archaeological debates, such as whether Persepolis was burned accidentally or intentionally. The chapter thus proves a fitting climax to the book.

Aside from archaeology and novels, one might suggest Rowson could acknowledge, if not engage with, the leading modern scholars more explicitly. For example, he uses Miltiades Hatzopoulos' argument that Philip organised Macedonian regional government; this is somewhat different to the view of Robin Lane Fox concerning the family clans in Macedonia, and comparison of the two perspectives would be interesting.

Furthermore, some may say Rowson should be more critical of evidence in primary literary sources. For example, he quotes Valerius Maximus as evidence that Philip II was generous with money, without acknowledging that the source is secondary and based on unverified evidence. Similarly, he uses Plutarch's memorable story of how Alexander tamed Bucephalus the horse, without questioning how an inexperienced teenager could accomplish such a deed.

The addenda to the book are very useful; Rowson includes maps which the reader finds oneself looking back at continually, whilst the images of wall paintings and archaeological remains help the reader to picture the scenes described by Rowson, contributing to the readability of the book. A glossary of key words also renders the book a useful reference point.

Since the book is so readable, it would be stimulating reading for sixth form students taking the Alexander module as part of the Ancient History A Level. Additionally, Rowson's (less-than-flattering) analysis of the evidence for Demosthenes could stimulate discussion in any sixth form class studying the *Democracy and the Athenians* option for Classical Civilisation A level. For teachers, the book is a timely and informative reminder of the enduring appeal of Alexander as a historical figure, well worth a read.

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## Oh My Gods

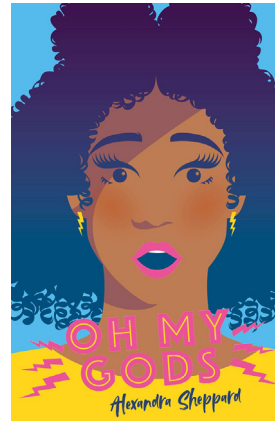
Sheppard (A). Scholastic 2019. pp. 352. Paper, £7.41. ISBN: 978-1407188737

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*Oh My Gods* follows Helen, Zeus' teenage daughter as she navigates a new school, new family, new home... and her very first kiss, all while trying to conceal a very big secret; her family are really gods.

Helen has been living with her Jamaican grandmother since her mother died, but now she has moved to London to live with her father Zeus and his unusual family. Zeus is either too interested in what Helen is up to, insisting on Sunday study sessions, or totally absent spending every moment with his 'lady friend'. The house is



rarely empty though, as her incredibly beautiful and annoying older sister Aphrodite has a room upstairs and Eros (agony aunt) and Apollo (musician) are always in and out.

There are two key rules they all have to live by or the council of the gods could recall them to Olympus or, worse, remove their immortality: One: 'gods must not reveal their immortal identity for any reason'; Two: 'gods must not use their powers to interfere with the fate of mortals for any reason'.

Zeus has an extra rule, too: no mortals in the house. This means Helen can never have a sleepover with her new friends and is destined to be the school weirdo. With Apollo and Aphrodite both seeking fame and money, the family is on thin ice, and to add fuel to the fire, Helen's new boyfriend is not as benevolent or mortal as he seems.

The strengths of this book are in its supportive female friendships and how it deals with teenage emotions and desires. It successfully blends Jamaican, Greek and British cultural elements and handles a deceased parent sensitively and beautifully.

Unfortunately, the plot may fail to engage many readers as the points of drama are being able to throw a cool house party and having a first kiss; that is, until near the very end, when the family are put on trial for breaking the rules - which is when the novel is at its best. The characters of the gods feel two-dimensional to any reader familiar with Greek mythology, and the teenage characters do at times feel like stereotypical teen caricatures.

While it does offer a different take on Greek gods that may draw some readers to Classics, it is more teen flick than meaningful modern reception, and young people interested in Greek mythology may be put off by the premise.

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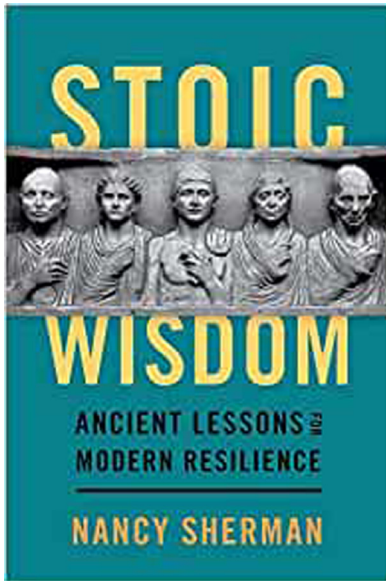
## Stoic Wisdom. Ancient Lessons for Modern Resilience

Sherman (N.) Pp. x + 294, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Cased, £18.99. ISBN: 978-0-19-750183-2

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While philosophy has long been one strand in the study of the classical world, not everyone clicks with Plato or Aristotle. Stoicism provides a more practical approach to the question of how to live the good life, but it has tended to be regarded as the poor relation. However, it has been staging a comeback over the last few years. Ryan Holiday's *Daily Stoic* podcasts have had over 100 million



downloads and his books have been bestsellers in the US charts. Nearer home, some students at the University of Cambridge have founded the Aurelius Society to meet and discuss this pursuit of *arete* and promote personal resilience and altruism.

Nancy Sherman is an academic at Georgetown University in Washington. Initially an ancient philosopher, more recently she has undertaken research training in psychoanalysis and focused on ethics. She is interested in applying her

knowledge to modern life and has worked with the military for several decades. She has considered Stoic ethics and post-traumatic stress, with a focus on Stoic methods for achieving calm. As well as publishing numerous academic articles she has written newspaper articles and blogged on modern Stoicism. She is thus an excellent guide to showing how Stoicism can teach grit, resilience and the importance of close relationships.

This book arises out of some graduate seminars at Georgetown in the autumn of 2019 which were closely based on ancient texts. Her ideas were refined in a series of university seminars and lectures in the US and Europe, and a BBC World Service discussion (*Calm in the Chaos: The Story of the Stoics*). Her thoughts were brought to fruition while writing this book during lockdown, where she put the teachings of Stoicism on resilience to the test. Her updating and reworking of the Stoic approach to life has been based on experience, and is not just an exposition of the Stoic texts of classical writers such as Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

She divides the book into nine 'Lessons', a separate section of notes (including references to the sources) and a bibliography. The first two lessons describe the background ('The Great Stoic Revival' and 'Who were the Stoics?') and analyse the reasons for the current surge in interest in Stoicism. After this, Sherman discusses key areas such as 'Finding Calm', 'Managing Your Emotions', and 'Stoic Grit and Resilience'. Throughout she strikes a balance between the ancient world and the modern. Both areas are wide-ranging and thought-provoking. Examples of the former are Seneca's treatment of the madness of Hercules (*Hercules furens*) or the tears of Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*. Modern examples range from a case study of an aerial attack in Kosovo in 1995 that went wrong, the character of Donald Trump, an account of the death of her mother in a nursing home, the alt-right movement's appropriation of the classical tradition, and Black Lives Matter. She analyses these as all part of a single continuum, relating modern ideas and events back to classical parallels and interpreting them within a modern Stoical context. Her viewpoint and modern examples are all from a U.S. perspective.

Sherman has an engaging writing style. Her sentences are short and pithy. The register is conversational, colloquial even. She is good at conjuring memorable images. These all help conceal the intellectual heavy lifting that has gone into this work. She uses her knowledge of the classical world to give perspective

to modern concerns in a way that grabs the attention of readers and makes them think for themselves. She makes good use of the black and white illustrations which are all of good quality and reproduced clearly.

The book is an excellent example of how the classical world continues to have relevance to issues we face in our own time. She is keen to suggest the benefits that may be gained from an approach to life informed by Stoic ideas. While aware that there are limits, she sets out how we might build a healthy modern Stoicism, one that can help us face the things that we cannot change, developing the resilience that seems to be lacking in many modern lives.

I enjoyed reading this book. The arrangement by lessons and the style of writing meant that it was a pleasure to pick up and read. I would recommend it for a school library as a way of enriching students' experience of the classical world. Even better would be to encourage your A Level students, whether linguists, historians or Classical Civilisation students, to read it and discuss it, as an interesting introduction to classical philosophy in action. I am sure there will be some who will be encouraged to consider continuing with their classical studies at degree level after reading this.

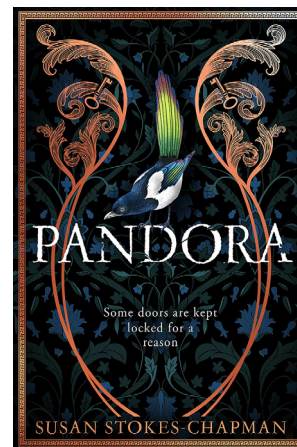
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## Pandora

Stokes-Chapman (S.) Pp. 408. London: Harvill Secker, 2022. Cased, £14.99. ISBN: 978-1-787-30288-4.

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This book had been on my list for a while as it combines two areas of particular interest for me: Georgian Britain and Greek mythology. Whilst I have thoroughly enjoyed many of the current forays into feminist retellings of various Greek stories, Stokes-Chapman has written a thoroughly entertaining and cleverly conceived story, which is different from many other attempts at Classical Reception for a popular audience.

The novel tells the story of the eponymous Pandora, a young woman who, having been orphaned at a young age, has been brought up by her not-so-kindly uncle. Dora is a well-constructed character, who constantly pushes boundaries and who displays ambition and bravery throughout the story. The other lead character is a young antiquarian named Edward Lawrence and, between them, they unravel a mystery relating to a strange Greek artefact which has come in to Dora's uncle's possession.