

both throughout the chapter. In addition, there is excellent use of the animal kingdom and the depiction of Helen as a lion cub, nurtured in the fold as a member of the family, yet growing up to become violent, dangerous and destructive is striking (p. 46) and perhaps echoes the damage which the members of the house of Atreus will continue to do to one another, even after the events of *Agamemnon*.

Hall's chapter focuses on a wide-ranging issue of the *Oresteia* and as a starting point to the volume, this seems apt. However, the volume poses several excellent and interesting chapters which merely focus on a specific aspect. For example, Sommerstein directs his attention to what was ultimately the cause of all Agamemnon's suffering and ultimately, his death. Focusing on Agamemnon's ritual sacrifice of his youngest daughter, Iphigenia, he asks whether he ever had a choice in the matter. This is a chapter which complements those which precede it on the overall narrative of the *Oresteia*, while also allowing the reader to focus on an individual aspect. Individual themes continue throughout the volume with *nostos* examined by Alex Garvie, who again reaches out to examine the theme of homecomings, both happy and otherwise in Aeschylus' other plays as well as examples from the *Odyssey*. The volume also contains several excellent chapters on wealth and injustice and the aftermath of warfare. The Aftermath of Warfare chapter, written by Isabelle Torrance, is a difficult chapter due to the subject matter, with slavery and rape both covered throughout. Torrance addresses these issues as part of the wider impact of the Trojan War and skillfully uses modern plays and novels to examine the reception which the issue of warfare in *Agamemnon* has received. Throughout the chapter, Torrance asks the reader to consider the cost of the actions of Agamemnon and the impact they have on both him and his family, but also those who also partake in the sacking of Troy. This is skillfully broken down into sections which cover; the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia, the enslavement and subsequent murder of Cassandra and finally, *Agamemnon* viewed through the more modern lens of the works of Seamus Heaney and Colm Tobin.

The final chapter of the volume continues and rounds off the theme of the reception of *Agamemnon* and the *Oresteia* in modern works but on this occasion, it focuses on the concept of obtaining revenge for the murder of a loved one. This final chapter focuses on modern plays as its corpus of choice, only examining those published after 2005. It is fascinating to see the impact of the entire saga played out in modern stage plays and the examples used are

from various countries and contexts. The *Molara*, a play which sets the events of *Agamemnon* against the backdrop of apartheid South Africa. Written in 2008, it recounts the traditional tale of Aeschylus' play but with a nod to the history and tradition of South Africa. Klytemnestra recounts the murder of Agamemnon before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This commission was legally established in 1994 to establish the truth of past atrocities under the apartheid regime. This gives a very emotive and present feel to the narrative. In addition, the chorus on the *Molara* consists of Xhosa women who dance and sing traditional songs which are then translated for the audience. This chapter, more than any other, reveals the enduring legacy and universality of Aeschylus' original composition. Thousands of years after the original, the story is still seen as strongly pertinent in different cultural contexts, and this, more than anything else, is what Stuttard's fine volume reflects.

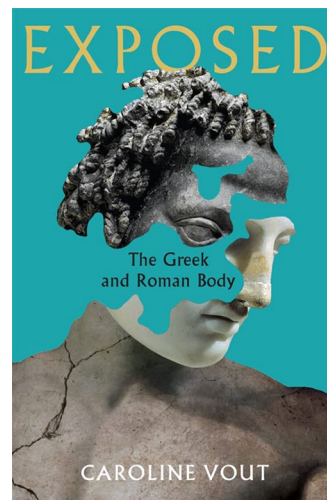
doi: 10.1017/S2058631023000521

## Exposed: the Greek and Roman Body

Vout (C.) Pp. 423, b/w & colour ill. London: Profile Books, 2022. Cased, £25. ISBN: 9781788162906.

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This superb book should be in every school or college library. The human body is the focus for an account of how people thought and behaved in the ancient world from the Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages and beyond. Brilliantly written and lavishly illustrated, it is also the nearest thing to a classical page-turner you will read this year, and is both a window into the past and a mirror in which we see ourselves all too faithfully reflected.

The argument of this book is timely, delivering cogent body blows against the absurd 'supremacist' readings of the ancient world – readings which elevated the Apollo Belvedere to the status of a white paradigm and dealt in absurd binary accounts of race, colour and gender which the ancients themselves did not share. (How Roman, for example, was the corpse of a serving imperial soldier who was born in Palmyra and died on the banks of the Tyne?). At the same time Vout pulls no punches where the ancients were obviously men behaving badly. She calls out the institutional sexism, racism, genocide and enslavement of conquered peoples, while (equally) seeing the humanity of these conflicted embodied people. The book is refreshingly light on theory, preferring to let the ancient sources speak for themselves rather than make them part of a preconceived pattern.

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.

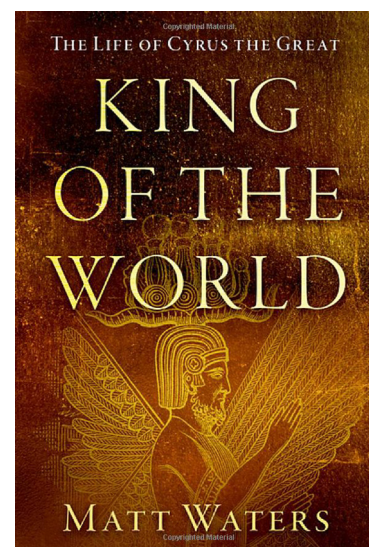
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## King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great

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