



Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter (Hinges of History)

By Thomas Cahill

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In **Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea**, his fourth volume to explore “the hinges of history,” Thomas Cahill escorts the reader on another entertaining—and historically unassailable—journey through the landmarks of art and bloodshed that defined Greek culture nearly three millennia ago.

In the city-states of Athens and Sparta and throughout the Greek islands, honors could be won in making love and war, and lives were rife with contradictions. By developing the alphabet, the Greeks empowered the reader, demystified experience, and opened the way for civil discussion and experimentation—yet they kept slaves. The glorious verses of the Iliad recount a conflict in which rage and outrage spur men to action and suggest that their “bellicose society of gleaming metals and rattling weapons” is not so very distant from more recent campaigns of “shock and awe.” And, centuries before Zorba, Greece was a land where music, dance, and freely flowing wine were essential to the high life. Granting equal time to the sacred and the profane, Cahill rivets our attention to the legacies of an ancient and enduring worldview.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Dukakis makes an oddly fine match for this learned, accessible and occasionally glib survey of early Greek culture and its contributions to Western civilization. While her gruff Boston accent may seem like a strange match for a historical work, it suits this text, which moves fluidly between quoting Sappho on one page and referring to the gods as keeping something "on the QT" on another. Indeed, Cahill's project aims not merely to explain the Greeks, but to enliven them. In an effort to take them off their crumbling pedestals and make a modern audience appreciate them as a complex people struggling to comprehend and improve their world, he quotes passages from well-known Greek works and writes comfortably and unassumingly in a colloquial, contemporary style. Perhaps this is why Dukakis fits right in. As an actress, she has more than enough skill to carry listeners through a lengthy excerpt from the Iliad, but she can also project a no-nonsense demeanor that makes the reader feel like she's sitting you down and telling you how it was. The result is a vivid, tangible look at who the Greeks were and what they have come to mean.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School--Cahill has set himself a daunting task in *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea*, in which he seeks to make the ancient Greeks accessible to a modern audience. Yet he succeeds. The author examines ancient Greek civilization through a number of specific roles that underpinned that society, such as the warrior, the politician, and the philosopher. He delves into their development and shows how they exemplified and perpetuated the different aspects of behavior and thought that defined their times. The use of specific types with whom readers can relate makes for an effective means of bridging the gap between their civilization and ours. With this common ground established, Cahill can show exactly how ancient Greece has influenced western civilization today, such as in the approach to the military and in the creation of the system by which we organize our knowledge and methods of learning. Scholars of the subject might quibble with certain of the author's pronouncements, and he seems to have an overly dismissive attitude toward the civilization of ancient Rome. Yet there can be no gainsaying the fact that Cahill has succeeded in his goal; by the end of the book, readers can thoroughly understand why the ancient Greeks matter to us today.--*Ted Westervelt, Library of Congress, Washington, DC*

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From [Booklist](#)

This is Cahill's fourth volume in his Hinges of History series, and three more are planned. He begins with a discussion of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and how these two epic poems relate to the history of Greece. He then focuses on such themes as the Greek alphabet, literature, and political system, and its playwrights, philosophers, and artists. A final chapter examines the effects that Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions had on each other. "Despite its exceedingly Jewish roots, Christianity became a player in the Greco-Roman world, a world shaped by Greek culture and Roman power," he says. He points out that Greek, not Hebrew, became the language of Christianity, that its sacred writings--which came to be known as the New Testament--were written in Greek, and that the gospel was preached throughout the ancient world in the Greek tongue. Like his other books, this one is a moving history of an ancient culture. *George Cohen*
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