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Helen Of Troy: The Story Behind The Most Beautiful Woman In The World



Synopsis

For 3,000 years, the woman known as Helen of Troy has been both the ideal symbol of beauty and a reminder of the terrible power beauty can wield. In her search for the identity behind this mythic figure, acclaimed historian Bettany Hughes uses Homer's account of Helen's life to frame her own investigation. Tracing the cultural impact that Helen has had on both the ancient world and Western civilization, Hughes explores Helen's role and representations in literature and in art throughout the ages. This is a masterly work of historical inquiry about one of the world's most famous women. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

File Size: 3711 KB

Print Length: 528 pages

Publisher: Vintage (May 28, 2009)

Publication Date: June 3, 2009

Sold by: Amazon Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B000SEK3I2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #457,297 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #24

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Customer Reviews

I love antiquities. Helen of Troy is clearly a five. The book is a detailed and provocative study, or was it a journey, of one of mankind's most celebrated, revered, and demonized women. Her biography is a fascinating read. She is an icon, not just of sex-appeal, but also for personal growth and development. She lived through many roles; from being the victim of a kidnapping and sex assault by the legendary Theseus, into a Spartan queen, then a Trojan princess, and back again

into her role as queen and ruler of Sparta, always ascending into positions of power, wealth, and respect. I have two take-aways from the book. First, is the intention to read it again. Second, is the timeline of Helen's life story. She is from prehistory. Assuming that the Trojan War(s) took place between 1275 and 1250 BCE, author Bettany Hughes postulates that Helen's birth was around 1300 BC. Her life preceded the development of the alphabet used by Homer to record her story, by about 500 years.

Extremely well done, sheds a lot of light on the TRUE story of Helen, as opposed to the impossible, mercurial and "war starting" woman painted by Homer. (When have men ever needed an excuse to start wars, and how did Helen fall victim to Homer's black balling?) Love the history, love the research, love Ms Hughes' fascination and reverence for the subject. It is time we all start learning the truth about Helen of Troy, this well written and engaging book is a fantastic place to start

I first ran across Bettany Hughes via a BBC program on the Romans in Britain. This book covers a lot more than the simple story of Helen of Troy (Sparta?) through ancient history. It follows her path through generations up to the current day. A bit pedantic in some spots but overall quite informative.

This is a wonderful work of history, well-conceived and beautifully written. Ms. Hughes deftly mixes classical history/mythology with contemporary historical research about Aegean Bronze Age culture. She weaves the two together to sequentially tell the 'story' of Helen in a way that respects the tentative nature of the truths of the tale while embedding it in the fascinating real historical context of 13th Century BCE Bronze Age Mycenaean culture. The writing is superb. Fascinating read.

Bettany Hughes has become one of my favorite writers. (She also wrote a wonderful book on Socrates.) This book gives fascinating information surrounding the story of Helen of Troy, the history and the literature that we have as resources, the places that Helen is supposed to have visited...if you read it immediately after reading The Iliad you will enjoy it even more.

The story behind the most beautiful woman in the world as told by Ms Hughes is lengthy, complicated and fascinating in some sections but in others requires more stamina than I posed so just skimmed those sections, but the historically "accurate" & archeological findings sections I did find fascinating.

excellent book

Wonderful book - I expected just a history, which I got in abundance....SO well research. What I didn't expect was the idea of how the sense of "woman" has been shaped by this Helen gal. I didn't know she was the center of a type of worship, that she was such an influence on so much of later historic treatment of women. I hadn't considered her huge influence - why the fight over her? Was she that compelling? She must have been (I'm now convinced by the author) as there isn't any real description of how she looked...I LOVED the idea that some faceless woman was so compelling, unforgettable that her strength and courage helped change history, or what we believe of it. Have given it to several friends since, male and female, and all have appreciated and enjoyed it.

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