braggadocio, started to discover coins and curiously Greek-influenced Buddhist figures somewhere in the vicinity of Bagram Airport. These artefacts set him on a search for the fabled city of Alexander. Aided, abetted, and often hindered by a wide cast of characters, Masson amassed huge amounts of materials that, taken by the East India Company, were largely sold off or lost until the British Museum finally gained control of the collection. Richardson takes time also to follow the perspective of 'the second Alexander' Alexander Burnes, the Scottish explorer and diplomat as it coincided and connected with Charles Masson. Richardson also writes from the perspective of Claude Wade, the spymaster who blackmailed Masson into informing the East India Company about the business of the Afghan court of Dost Mohammad Khan.

But this book is essentially about Masson - a story of his love for Afghanistan, his dealings with its rulers and the iniquitous actions of the East India Company.The story illustrates the origins of Afghanistan's conflict with Britain - the incompetence, stupidity and greed of the British and how the excitement of acquisition blended with an ephemeral interest in explanation and the early logic of archaeology. One might even argue that to an extent Richardson has fallen into Masson's own fault - writing a 'condemnation of British imperialism, the East India Company and the invasion of Afghanistan' (p.184) over the elucidation of Masson's discoveries.

It is, however, a masterful and very readable narrative that weaves countless sources together, garnered from across the world, and intertwines them with ruthlessly attested fancy and speculation. Richardson is a writer who consistently twists the reader with anxiety by making ominous pronouncements: 'then, at the last minute, Masson made one of the greatest mistakes of his life' and despite the ferociously academic sourcing, Richardson often uses a TV journalistic voice '… like many other stories about Charles Masson, it may not be entirely true.'

Nonetheless, it is quite impossible not to love Edmund Richardson by the end of this book and the curators of the British Museum just as much. The latter for their painstaking and methodical collection of Charles Masson's work and Richardson for a masterly renaissance of Masson's reputation and character and for the insight and compassion that made him weep for the dead explorer in a London library nearly 200 years later and all his efforts to bring to life 'despite the best efforts of almost everyone involved' and the author's own cancer, the 'true story' of Charles Masson.

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The Toga and Roman Identity

Rothe (U.) Pp x + 241, ills. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Paper, £28.99 (Cased, £90). ISBN: 978-1-350-19441-0.

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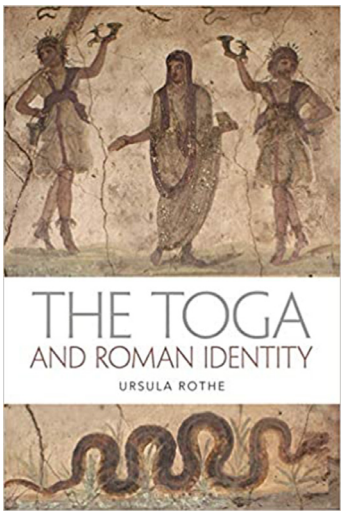
In her Acknowledgments (pp.viii-ix), Rothe states that she wrote this book out of frustration, as there was no comprehensive study on the social or cultural importance of the toga. As someone who



has shared that frustration, I can say with certainty that this book not only fills this gap in classical scholarship, but also comprehensively rebuts the claim that togas were of fringe importance to Romans and their neighbours.

Rothe does not shy away from breadth; her study encompasses the earliest literary and physical examples of togas, and runs all the way through to late antiquity, and while most of the evidence is either Roman or Italian, there is also a chapter on the perception of the toga in the provinces. In those periods where we have the most evidence, the late Republic and early Principate, Rothe also breaks down her study into certain cultural themes, which are manhood, social status, and politics. Undoubtedly this book has set the standard for any future scholarship on the topic simply with the number of references that Rothe draws upon throughout. Additionally, the clear demarcation of topics and time periods into chapters will allow readers to answer specific queries.

The book is a fine example of an interdisciplinary approach to classical questions. Rothe draws upon very many ancient writers, not only those who directly describe togas, but also those who employ clothing as a metaphor, or use standards of dress to characterise people and their actions. Rothe uses these references to demonstrate and prove her assertion that the toga was not just an icon of Roman civilisation, but a cultural touchstone at all social strata, over many centuries. As usual, the best written evidence applies to the elites of the late Republic and early Principate, which makes Rothe's chapter on politics particularly convincing (p.101ff.). As the written evidence becomes more allusive, Rothe's interpretations can be wilful, such as her assertion that Martial and Juvenal provide good evidence of the financial burden of the toga (p.91 ff.), despite having previously dismissed as comic exaggeration Juvenal's assertion that the toga was not worn in provincial cities (p.85).

Rothe brings in as much physical evidence as possible, while acknowledging the absence of textiles in the archaeological record as a significant hindrance. The key benefit of prioritising material culture alongside literature is that Rothe is able to write with authority on the non-elites, who are understudied in this area. Rothe mostly analyses funerary and public monuments, and coinage, and writes convincingly when extrapolating from evidence which is by nature abstruse. Especially striking is the section on certain members of the Roman 'middle-class' who were entitled but chose not to wear the toga in monumental depictions, possibly to emphasise their status as skilled artisans (pp.96–99). Rothe argues that this action paradoxically exposes the significance of the garment they eschewed, as its absence is as much of a statement as its inclusion.

Rothe's commendable integration of a wide variety of ancient sources is the strength of this work, but the practice of embedding some quotations, almost always in English alone, and otherwise simply referring to others makes the reader reliant on Rothe's interpretations. This is one of the greatest failings of the book, as it does not facilitate critical engagement with Rothe's conclusions, many of which are certainly interpretative, without giving the full

grounding of the ancient source in either English or the original. The book makes fulsome use of end-notes to direct the reader on, but beyond this there is no bibliography of ancient sources, and as a reader I often wondered if Rothe's work would be more useful as a sourcebook, or at least accompanied by one.

Conversely, Rothe often includes Latin and Greek words or phrases in the body of her work, which she does not routinely translate, beyond a glossary of clothing-specific phrases (pp.163–164). This is not unusual in classical scholarship, but given the topic of social history is not restricted to classical linguists, it would be an easy and inclusive improvement (and even this Classics teacher had to check πορφυρεος φοινικοπαρυφος –purple with a crimson border (p.79)). Less excusable is the untranslated German. These issues are not consequential, though it does bring one to question who the intended audience is.

This book is a goldmine of information. In each and every chapter there are many intriguing and memorable morsels, such as the 1000+ hours required to make an imperial-style toga (p.24), or the diagram of how to put it on (p.27), or the vices exposed by emperors when either under- or overdressing (pp.114–115), or that to wear a black toga was a form of political protest (p.105). Certainly, these could add colour and interest to Classics lessons at all levels, and as a teacher I feel better armed to answer queries about togas which emerge, quite randomly, in lessons. The book also works as a frame through which to study fundamental aspects of Roman civilisation; topics such as citizenship, manhood, and politics are recurring themes in classical study, and this book provides a nuanced and novel perspective on those issues. That said, the topic is niche enough that it will never be essential reading for any secondary school student; chapters could be given as extension. The book as a whole should have a broad appeal to classicists, and so could be recommended ahead of a university application, and indeed for teachers seeking a fresh take on many aspects of Roman cultural history.

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Ariadne

Saint (J.) Pp. 400, Wildfire, Hardback. £14.99.
ISBN: 978-1472273864

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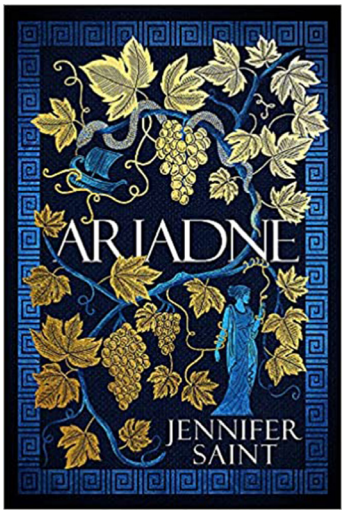
In the author's own words, this is the story of Theseus and the Minotaur told by the women who 'made it happen', namely the eponymous Ariadne, but also her sister Phaedra, who each contribute chapters told from their own perspectives. Arriving as it does amid a flurry of novels in recent years which have attempted to reimagine ancient myths through the eyes of female characters, it seems almost impossible to come to this book without expectations based not only on the versions of the classical myths which have come down to us from childhood stories and ancient sources, but also from the modern retellings it now sits among. In her debut novel, Saint has proved more than a match for the task and produced a work which has been diligently



researched, curated and crafted, as well as being utterly compelling and surprising from beginning to end.

The novel begins in familiar territory by outlining the story of how the Minotaur came to exist, as told by his older sister Ariadne; although we are used to seeing these two figures in the same myth, it is refreshing to explore their relationship in a new light, and it is this exposure of overlooked relationships between characters which makes this retelling so effective. This is especially true when Ariadne and her sister Phaedra are separated and for the remainder of the novel we have chapters from both women, a structure which allows us to spend time with a character from mythology about whom we perhaps know less and which draws us into a complex and moving sisterly relationship. By the end, Saint leaves the reader with little choice but to marvel at these two incredible women, one usually mentioned only as the girl with the ball of thread and the other famed for being the most immoral of stepmothers: in her version, both characters are fully fleshed out and their grit and tenacity in the face of extraordinary trials come to the fore.

Although very much secondary characters in this novel, the portrayals of Theseus and Dionysus are no less impressive. Theseus' treatment of Ariadne is well-known from classical mythology, but Saint writes the episode in such a way that it somehow manages to be shocking nevertheless, and the sense of outrage and disbelief she generates in response to Theseus' behaviour is one of the standout features of the book. Dionysus is kept at the perfect distance from the reader to make him at the same time relatable and inaccessible: just as you start to view him on the same level as Ariadne, the illusion is broken, the power and otherness of his divine status re-emerges, and the effect is startling. There are also elements in the presentation of these characters which have an almost cinematic quality: the motif of Ariadne's movements across her dancing-floor would not be out of place in *Game of Thrones*, with Daedalus taking on the role of the ageing mentor, almost as if Ariadne is a superhero in training.

In terms of its relevance to the classroom, there are some fantastic and often helpfully self-contained passages of description which would make useful resources, particularly for those studying Classical Civilisation. The first part of the novel includes rich and vibrant descriptions of the Minoan palace, and later there is a poetic portrait of Dionysus with his ship and crew; one chapter gives an extensive and detailed account of the Panathenaea festival and we also see a vivid imagining of the rites involved in the Dionysian Mysteries. Fundamentally, though, this novel is a real pleasure to read and should be read for that purpose: it would make a welcome addition to any school library and Classics department lending collection, and it will be devoured by enthusiastic GCSE and A level students who can't get enough of the classical world.

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