

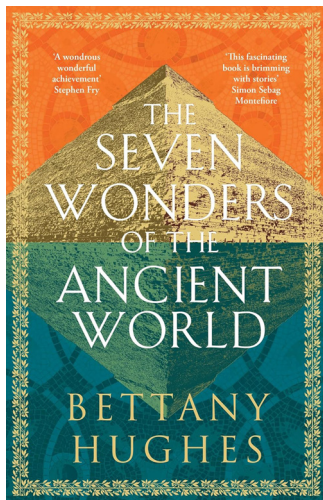
Book Review

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

Hughes (B.) Pp. xxxvi + 380, colour pls. London: Orion Publishing Group, 2024. Cased, £25.00. ISBN: 9781474610322.

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Amongst the blurbs on the cover of this book Lucy Worsley describes Bettany Hughes as 'the eighth wonder of the world'. This seems a little hyperbolic and I think I'm more inclined to side with Stephen Fry when he cites Hughes' 'boundless enthusiasm, clarity and learning combined with a matchless gift for storytelling'.

In her lengthy Preface Hughes attempts to explain why there are wonders, why seven and why the (agreed) seven. Did you know that 'each and every one of us is the direct descendant

of either a pharaoh who ordered the construction of the pyramids, or a worker who built them'? Perhaps that is why we think these places and these objects matter.

The seven are treated in chronological order of construction: the Giza Pyramid, the Hanging Gardens, the temple of Artemis, the statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Mausoleum, the Colossus of Rhodes and the Pharos at Alexandria, with a postscript covering the Great Library at Alexandria (as a sort of reserve!).

As well as a basic description of each based on the surviving evidence (where it exists) Hughes has visited the sites and often adds some anecdotal material, sometimes amusing and sometimes more profound, of her experiences in these places.

For each Wonder she takes the opportunity to discuss the difficulties and triumphs of the construction, the history of that time (there is a very comprehensive Timeline at the beginning of the book), the physical and philosophical environment surrounding the iconic item and the eventual fate over the centuries.

Hughes finishes with some thoughts on other possible Wonders from the ancient world that at the moment are in the second division, as it were: the Colosseum, Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China and, as she points out 'gargantuan ancient structures are being uncovered in Crete, Saudi Arabia, Armenia and China *et alia*'.

There are extensive notes on each chapter (which show the depth of research undertaken) and a very full Bibliography.

This is a splendid book, highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the ancient world.

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