

a Roman's 'city house' was a *domus* and that he might also have a 'beautiful villa in the countryside' (p. 12), but also refers to what could certainly be features of urban dwellings as those of 'a Roman villa' (p. 13). Two seemingly contradictory statements are given on a single page (p. 22), where we read both that 'the Iceni lived peacefully under Roman rule' and that 'Boudica and her people had suffered years of Roman rule'. Those with knowledge of Latin might regret the sentence 'Roman soldiers fought with *pilums*' (p. 10), but more serious is the error contained in 'the Romans believed that a spirit called a *lares* protected their home' (p. 13) when a plural term is used as if it were singular. Two other erroneous statements claim that Augustus was Julius Caesar's nephew, rather than his great-nephew (p. 7), and that Vindolanda was a 'fort at Hadrian's Wall', rather than a fort that pre-dated and remained distinct from the Wall (p. 27).

Despite these issues, there are many positive features of this book. The range of topics covered is impressive, even if most have to be covered at a superficial level. The double page entitled 'The Roman Empire' discusses roads, the army, numerals and Latin as well as the geographical extent of Roman control and the idea that non-Romans could gain citizenship (pp. 8–9). 'Family life and homes' includes discussion of infant mortality and covers the lives of women as well as men and of poorer as well as richer Romans (pp. 12–13). Ancient evidence comes to the fore in the section on 'Boudica's revolt', with mention made of Cassius Dio, Tacitus, and archaeological evidence (p. 23). Drawing attention to surviving Roman evidence continues with discussion of the Vindolanda tablets (p. 27) and, especially, on the double page entitled 'Roman Bones' (pp. 28–29), where readers are introduced to the idea that a person's diet and even their life histories can be recovered from skeletal remains. The 'Lant Street girl' is discussed as an example, and we learn that she was born in the southern Mediterranean, moved to London at the age of nine or ten, and then died at the age of 14 (p. 29).

The book ends with a glossary of terms; the explanations given are generally helpful, although the description of a merchant as 'a person (usually from history) who buys and sells goods' seemed a little unclear (p. 31). The words included in the glossary appear in bold when used earlier in the book, which will help young readers to understand the book's content (provided they realise that they should look in the glossary for guidance). Many of the features of the Roman world discussed seem likely to appeal to the age range for which the book is intended: they can, for example, find out about war elephants (p. 5), Roman foodstuffs (pp. 14–15, with a flamingo, sea urchin and dormouse pictured!), and the Roman use of 'a sponge on a stick' when in the *latrina* (p. 17). Gladiators also receive their own double page which will interest young readers, although their parents might like to be aware of the gory detail included that 'a cut across a fighter's stomach could release their intestines onto the sand' (p. 18). It is impressive, however, that the book ensures that these lively aspects of Roman life appear alongside other, more-complicated issues, such as slavery, migration and Romanisation, that are presented in an accessible way.

Whilst it is a shame that certain aspects of the volume prevent it from being completely clear and fully accurate, this book nonetheless could serve as a fine introduction to the Roman world, and particularly to Roman Britain.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000180

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives

licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is unaltered and is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use or in order to create a derivative work.

## A Fatal Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. Murder in Ancient Rome

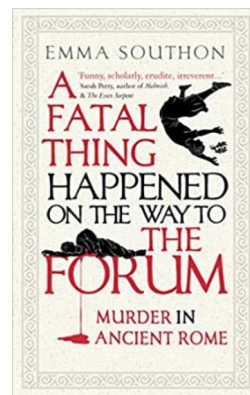
Southon (E.). Pp. xii + 339. London: Oneworld Publications, 2020. Cased, £16.99.

ISBN: 978-1-78607-837-7.

<https://oneworld-publications.com/a-fatal-thing-happened-on-the-way-to-the-forum-hb.html>

J M Lashly

Former Head of Classics, Shrewsbury High School  
jolahly@gmail.com



I had high hopes of this book; the topic was interesting, and the title well-chosen, and I enjoyed the introduction which was written in an informal and accessible way. This would be useful for a school library I was thinking, and I was amused by the occasionally colourful language in the early chapters. The premise of the book was engaging, and Emma Southon was good at bringing ancient events to life with modern references, but as I read on, I was increasingly concerned by sweeping statements and historical inaccuracies in a book which purported to be

explaining an aspect of ancient history. The book is divided sensibly into different occasions for murder: that between senators, murder in law, in the family, in marriage, murder by slaves, magic and famous murders which took place in and of the imperial families as well as murder used as judicial punishment; and to be fair there are plenty of examples, backed up by primary sources for all of these. However, the inaccuracies spoil it for me. In chapter 1, Murder on the Senate Floor, we are informed that Cicero 'had Catiline executed without trial'. There were undoubtedly executions without trial as a result of the Catilinarian conspiracy; Cicero's exile was as a result of them, but none of them was Catiline; he died fighting at the battle of Pistoria, and later in the chapter on magic Southon states, regarding Cato, that he 'got his way in 146 BCE [with the destruction of Carthage]'. There is no mention that he died in 149 BCE without ever knowing of the destruction of Carthage; then again that Tiberius (Murder in the Imperial House) sent 'guards to execute his ex-wife [Julia] ... on the day he became Princeps'. Tacitus tells us that Tiberius let her waste away reckoning that no one would notice as she was out of the public eye. Such inaccuracies spoil a book. Southon has gathered a large number of anecdotes on murder together and they are very entertaining but as I continued reading, I became less

amused by the demotic language used. This is not because I was shocked, but because it rather lost its impact. As there is plenty of shock value in the subject matter, the writing style does not need to be constantly 'shocking' too. I also found that there were a number of errors that could have been picked up in the proof-reading stage – Rome was founded in 753 BCE not 743 BCE and Piso's wife, implicated in the death of Germanicus, was Plancina, not Placina. These might seem like minor irritants but taken together with the

inaccuracies I found myself rushing to my bookcase every time a date or an event was discussed. This is a shame as I had really been looking forward to this slightly different take on Roman history. For this reason, I would not suggest this as a potential acquisition for a school library, although I would not say it is not worth having as long as you are prepared to fact-check.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000192