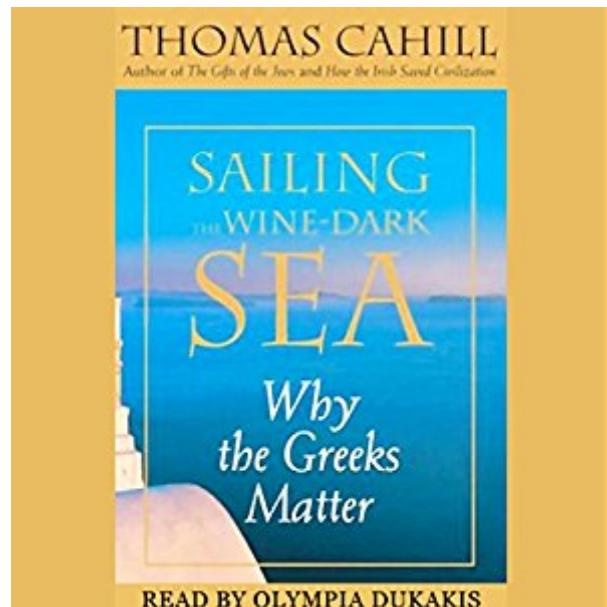


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Sailing The Wine-Dark Sea: Why The Greeks Matter



Synopsis

In the fourth volume of the acclaimed *Hinges of History* series, Thomas Cahill brings his characteristic wit and style to a fascinating tour of ancient Greece. The Greeks invented everything from Western warfare to mystical prayer, from logic to statecraft. Many of their achievements, particularly in art and philosophy, are widely celebrated; other important innovations and accomplishments, however, are unknown or underappreciated. In *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea*, Thomas Cahill explores the legacy, good and bad, of the ancient Greeks. From the origins of Greek culture in the migrations of armed Indo-European tribes into Attica and the Peloponnesian peninsula, to the formation of the city-states, to the birth of Western literature, poetry, drama, philosophy, art, and architecture, Cahill makes the distant past relevant to the present. Greek society is one of the two primeval influences on the Western world: While Jews gave us our value system, the Greeks set the foundation and framework for our intellectual lives. They are responsible for our vocabulary, our logic, and our entire system of categorization. They provided the intellectual tools we bring to bear on problems in philosophy, mathematics, medicine, physics, and the other sciences. Their modes of thinking, considered in classical times to be the pinnacle of human achievement, are largely responsible for the shape that the Christian religion took. But, as Cahill points out, the Greeks left a less appealing bequest as well. They created Western militarism and, in making the warrior the ultimate ideal, perpetrated the assumption that only males could be entrusted with the duties of citizenship. The consequences of their exclusion of women from the political sphere and the social segregation of the sexes continue to reverberate today. Full of surprising, often controversial, insights, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea* is a remarkable intellectual adventureâ "conducted by the most companionable guide imaginable. Cahillâ ™s knowledge of his sources is so intimate that he has made his own fresh translations of the Greek lyric poets for this volume. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a Greek-American, a college professor who has taught a course on the ancient Greeks (Hellenes), and something of a fan of Thomas Cahill, I was very excited to see his latest book on the rise of the Western Liberal Tradition, "Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter." Perhaps because my expectations were so high, I was a little disappointed. It is a worthy volume in his "Hinges of History" series, but it is not without some problems. But let us be honest, Cahill is a humanist and speaks of ancient Hellas from the perspective of the humanities in general rather than history or political science and that may be the problem here. Much of his historical narrative is episodic and misses some vital points. For instance, despite his title, "Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea," he fails to emphasize the importance of the sea to Greek life or mention the battle of Salamis, "Holy Salamis," which according to many historians, including Victor Davis Hanson, saved Western culture from the Iranian (Achaemenid Persian) onslaught. Cahill devotes a chapter to "The Warrior: How to Fight," but makes no mention of this vital battle or the importance of Hellenic warfare by use of the trireme. The battle is not even included in his brief Chronology (later battles, Plataea and Mycale, are mentioned). True, some have questioned the overall impact of Salamis, but to the Hellenes it was a victory sent by the gods. It is interesting that this subject is missing but other, rather obscure cultural elements such as a somewhat odd emphasis on Greek sexual preferences, are included. Still, this is a valuable volume that will be embraced by the general public. In this context, his discussion of Christianity's debt to the Greeks is quite accurate and illuminating.

This is a disappointing book. Its title suggests an intellectual adventure of the new, and its subtitle promises that it will be about why the Greeks are important to us -- in other words, what the ancient Greeks offered that is distinct to them and that made western civilization possible. This book does not deliver on the promises of its title. It is a rehash of standard scholarship delivered in language of the common man (common according to Cahill). As such it presents what amounts to a laundry-list of non-essentials that does not clearly differentiate the Greeks from other cultures, nor account for western civilization. For example, this list includes the following Greek "contributions" to the West: blood-lusting militarism, vowels, the subconscious yearning for community, unfettered discourse and

inquiry, homosexuality, pornography, orgiastic debauchery, slavery, democracy, political theatre, the idea of innate guilt, xenophobia, sexism, racism, imperialism, "help" inventing things like philosophy, science and history, the Socratic Method, the syllogism, transcendentalism and the divine, improvements in architecture and sculpture, pathos and yearning for an impossible ideal, pedophilia, reckless conceit, the idea of self-sacrifice for the common good. How can the reader determine what out of this hash made western civilization possible? In the spirit of cultural relativism, Cahill offers no guidance. Cahill's list of non-essentials ignores the most fundamental Greek contribution that made western civilization possible: the discovery and use of reason.

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