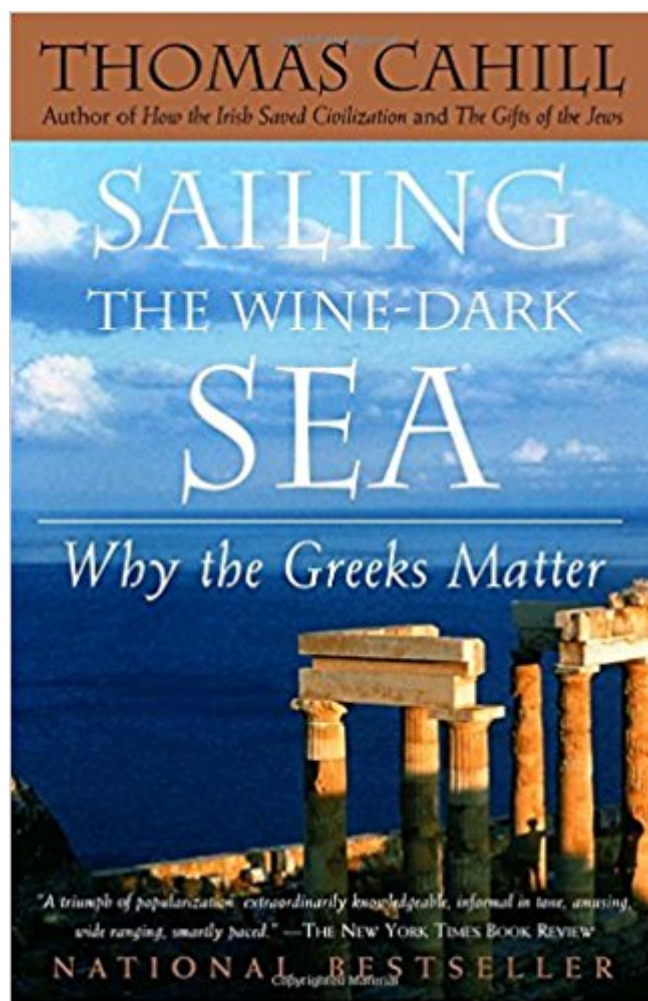


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# Sailing The Wine-Dark Sea: Why The Greeks Matter (Hinges Of History)



## Synopsis

In *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea*, his fourth volume to explore the hinges of history, Thomas Cahill escorts the reader on another entertaining and historically unassailable journey through the landmarks of art and bloodshed that defined Greek culture nearly three millennia ago. In the city-states of Athens and Sparta and throughout the Greek islands, honors could be won in making love and war, and lives were rife with contradictions. By developing the alphabet, the Greeks empowered the reader, demystified experience, and opened the way for civil discussion and experimentation yet they kept slaves. The glorious verses of the *Iliad* recount a conflict in which rage and outrage spur men to action and suggest that their bellicose society of gleaming metals and rattling weapons is not so very distant from more recent campaigns of shock and awe. And, centuries before Zorba, Greece was a land where music, dance, and freely flowing wine were essential to the high life. Granting equal time to the sacred and the profane, Cahill rivets our attention to the legacies of an ancient and enduring worldview.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dukakis makes an oddly fine match for this learned, accessible and occasionally glib survey of early Greek culture and its contributions to Western civilization. While her gruff Boston accent may seem like a strange match for a historical work, it suits this text, which moves fluidly between quoting Sappho on one page and referring to the gods as keeping something "on the QT" on another. Indeed, Cahill's project aims not merely to explain the Greeks, but to enliven them. In an effort to

take them off their crumbling pedestals and make a modern audience appreciate them as a complex people struggling to comprehend and improve their world, he quotes passages from well-known Greek works and writes comfortably and unassumingly in a colloquial, contemporary style. Perhaps this is why Dukakis fits right in. As an actress, she has more than enough skill to carry listeners through a lengthy excerpt from the Iliad, but she can also project a no-nonsense demeanor that makes the reader feel like she's sitting you down and telling you how it was. The result is a vivid, tangible look at who the Greeks were and what they have come to mean. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School--Cahill has set himself a daunting task in *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea*, in which he seeks to make the ancient Greeks accessible to a modern audience. Yet he succeeds. The author examines ancient Greek civilization through a number of specific roles that underpinned that society, such as the warrior, the politician, and the philosopher. He delves into their development and shows how they exemplified and perpetuated the different aspects of behavior and thought that defined their times. The use of specific types with whom readers can relate makes for an effective means of bridging the gap between their civilization and ours. With this common ground established, Cahill can show exactly how ancient Greece has influenced western civilization today, such as in the approach to the military and in the creation of the system by which we organize our knowledge and methods of learning. Scholars of the subject might quibble with certain of the author's pronouncements, and he seems to have an overly dismissive attitude toward the civilization of ancient Rome. Yet there can be no gainsaying the fact that Cahill has succeeded in his goal; by the end of the book, readers can thoroughly understand why the ancient Greeks matter to us today.--Ted Westervelt, Library of Congress, Washington, DC Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the volumes in Cahill's "hinges of history" series, about periods in Western history upon which our culture hinges. I read it along with the Iliad and the Odyssey, the plays of Euripedes, and a survey course about the Hittites and Myceneans. I think professional writers and teachers of Greek history might consider it a bit quick or facile, but as an accompaniment to the kind of non-professional immersion I have been doing, it is most useful. He brings in the relationship of the Myceneans and later Greeks to the influences surrounding the area, which were many and

powerful. The Greeks and Athenian democracy did not occur in a vacuum. In the last chapter he makes some observations about our intellectual inheritance in modern forms which are certainly provocative and worth considering. I highly recommend this book and the rest in the series.

I really don't care that this was a National Best seller. I found the level of writing in the book really oriented to a 5th grader. Additionally, the book felt very formulaic. I did not enjoy the casual language in a book that was supposed to be instructive on the significance of the Greek culture. I found the author's approach definitely aimed toward tween and teenaged boys--lots of references to orgies and (my personal favorite) the use of the word "schlong." There have to be better written and more entertaining books on why Greek culture matters. Not worth the time to read or the money spent to purchase.

Awesome and very readable for the initiated and scholar as well as the average joe or Judy. Now I'll read his other books in this series.

I started with "How the Irish Saved Civilization," loved it, and then went on to what I believe are the next two - Desire of the Everlasting Hills, and Gifts of the Jews. Each offered new spins on old topics that made each read fascinating. Not here. I guess Cahill likes poetry, because the Iliad and the Odyssey are the eyes through which he frames everything. And believe me, you're going to be reading a lot of the Iliad and the Odyssey. In fact, much of the page count of this book is consumed by long, long verbatim pastes of both - pages-long pastes of both. And then characterizations of both by other authors and poets, also pasted verbatim, consuming yet more page count. I guess the technique of copying and pasting huge chunks of another work into your own book could have been a plus had your own book said anything coherent, logical, or that followed some form of thematic narrative, like "we are like the Greeks because . . ." Or "the Greeks did this, did it well, and it survived to influence us." But good Lord, this book does nothing of the kind. Long stanzas of someone else's work, followed by gibberish supposedly making the grand point suggested by the title, but in the end sounding like Philosophy grad students taking "deeply" in a pub one night after a few drinks. This book is that bad. It is that incoherent. It is nonsense. Once I realized how bad it was, I read it anyway. It became entertainingly bad.

This book tells of the history of the Greeks, and it is impossible not to think of parallels to our own times. The Greeks indeed do "Matter", as the subtitle says, as they brought the world, and

especially the West, philosophy, drama, and the first democracy ever attempted in history. It began over 2000 years ago and we learn of The Iliad and The Odyssey, and its meanings for us today. The author writes in a friendly style for the reader. He wants to reach more than only people who are especially interested in history. Perhaps your interest is politics, or the arts, the origins of Western drama, the many Greek Gods that had an assortment of human failings, or the coming of Christianity. What you will see, overall, are the Origins of Western Civilization.

"Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea" is the latest installment (2003) of Thomas Cahill's hinges of history series, which began with the delightful and insightful "How the Irish Saved Civilization." In this volume, Cahill conducts a brief if highly readable survey of classical Greek civilization to highlight its subsequent impact on the culture of the West. As Cahill lays it out, classical Greek civilization had an enormous influence on how the West approaches art, philosophy, drama, and government. The Greek willingness to think, discuss, experiment, and investigate was the basis for remarkable innovation in heroic sculpture, democratic self-government, a framework for natural and individual philosophy, and the dramatic and comedic schools of theater. Along the way, Cahill provides some insightful vignettes into the Greek psyche. Inevitably, a single volume treatment on such a complex subject as classical Greek civilization must simplify a great deal. Also perhaps inevitably, this volume lacks some of the almost intimate emotional empathy that drove "How the Irish Saved Civilization" and to a lesser extent, the "Desire of the Everlasting Hills." Finally, Cahill could not resist making a few sour remarks attempting to link the Global War on Terrorism to the Peloponnesian War that caused the downfall of the great city-state of Athens. This volume is recommended to the reader already hooked on Cahill's hinges of history series, and those looking for a very readable survey on Greek civilization.

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