



Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore

Bettany Hughes

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An illuminating, erudite, lively search for the real Helen of Troy—a chronicle that combines historical inquiry and storytelling élan—from one of Britain’s most widely acclaimed and popular historians.

As soon as men began to write, they made Helen of Troy their subject; for close to three thousand years she has been both the embodiment of absolute female beauty and a reminder of the terrible power that beauty can wield. Because of her double marriage to the Greek king Menelaus and the Trojan prince Paris, Helen was held responsible for an enduring enmity between East and West. For millennia she has been viewed as an exquisite agent of extermination. But who was she?

Helen exists in many guises: a matriarch from the Age of Heroes who ruled over one of the most fertile areas of the Mycenaean world; Helen of Sparta, the focus of a cult that conflated Helen the heroine with a pre-Greek fertility goddess; the home-wrecker of the *Iliad*; the bitch-whore of Greek tragedy; the pin-up of Romantic artists.

Focusing on the “real” Helen—a flesh-and-blood aristocrat from the Greek Bronze Age—Bettany Hughes reconstructs the context of life for this pre-historic princess. Through the eyes of a young Mycenaean woman, Hughes examines the physical, historical, and cultural traces that Helen has left on locations in Greece, North Africa, and Asia Minor. Vivid and compelling, this remarkable book brilliantly unpacks the facts and myths surrounding one of the most enigmatic and notorious figures of all time.

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