

Among the Funniest Books Ever Written - *Route 66 AD*

Route 66 AD: On the Trail of the Ancient Roman Tourists

by Tony Perrottet

Reviewed by Shannon Roy, Continuing Education Coordinator

The Roman Empire may get mixed reviews, but there is no doubt that it did establish relative peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean area for many years. This circumstance allowed the creation of the first tourist industry. The author of *Route 66 AD* is a world traveler who stumbled across an ancient guidebook and decided it would be fun to use it. He set out to rediscover the ancient tourist sites, armed with ancient guidebooks and ancient maps and accompanied by his young and contemporary, but definitely pregnant, girlfriend. The two of them traveled through Italy, Greece, Turkey (Troy) and Egypt. The result is a very funny travel adventure, though not one that will make an armchair traveler eager to embark on a similar tour.

This is basically a one-joke book, but the joke is a moveable feast. Ancient Roman tourists were delighted, enchanted, uncomfortable, outraged, xenophobic and exhausted in very much the same ways as modern Americans. The complaints are almost identical, though the Roman rhapsodies are somewhat more poetic.

Route 66 AD is actually a fairly easy book to pan. Serious scholars of the ancient world have let out howls of rage. One of them called it "A Bat-Belfry of Errors." I find it hard to believe that Perrottet ever intended it to be taken very seriously, since even I, an eclectic history student, could feel repeated tugs on the leg. I do wish they would stop slapping Dewey numbers on perfectly hilarious fiction.

If serious scholars have disagreements with some of the material, serious feminists will undoubtedly want to part the author's hair with a rock. The obvious way to imitate history is to go slumming and the results are all very entertaining and full of colorful characters and hilarious dilemmas, but you don't have to take a pregnant woman with you. However, since few pregnant women really understand what they are getting into, and since Perrottet frankly admits that he totally failed to grasp the reality of his changing lifestyle, maybe there is some excuse for him. The lady married him, after all.

The fact remains that the book is very funny. Perrottet takes the most beaten paths and makes them unusual, entertaining and occasionally quite moving. Travel books like this one serve two purposes. They are enjoyable to read. And if you really can't travel, they make you feel that you have missed a lot of discomfort, danger and overcrowding and that you are probably better off with free videos from your public library.

