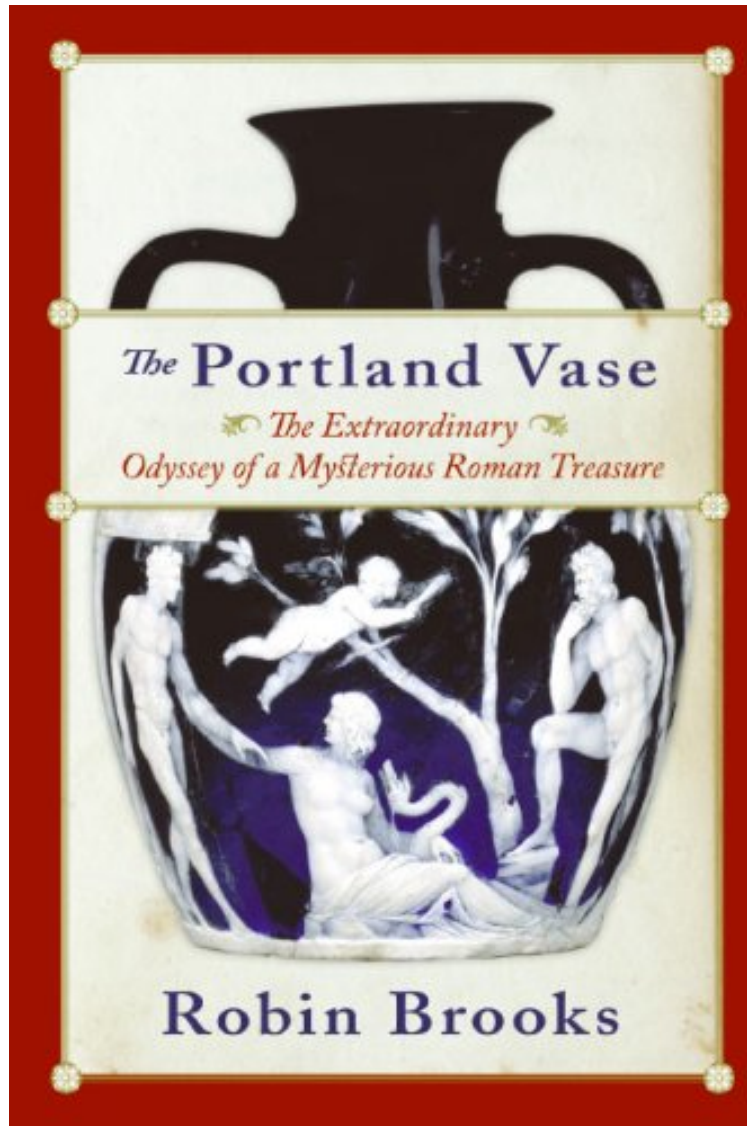


(Free) The Portland Vase: The Extraordinary Odyssey of a Mysterious Roman Treasure

The Portland Vase: The Extraordinary Odyssey of a Mysterious Roman Treasure

Robin Brooks

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Robin Brooks : The Portland Vase: The Extraordinary Odyssey of a Mysterious Roman Treasure before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Portland Vase: The Extraordinary Odyssey of a Mysterious Roman Treasure:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. great storyBy John E. MosleyI saw the Portland Vase in London many years ago and became intrigued by its history. It's amazing to think that this little vase might have once been owned by Caesar Augustus. The story is fascinating and the book tells it well. I thoroughly enjoyed it as a historical

mystery. 10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. The History of the Greatest Roman Glasswork By Rob Hardy Prospective buyers of the most expensive artworks are always told to examine the provenance of an object before buying. There are few works that can have the exclusive and eccentric list of owners as the Portland Vase has had. One of the most famous of ancient artworks, and now in the British Museum, it has fascinated historians, poets, mythologists, and potential owners ever since it came to light (probably by a grave robber in Rome) in 1582. In *The Portland Vase: The Extraordinary Odyssey of a Mysterious Roman Treasure* (HarperCollins), Robin Brooks has given a biography of a unique object, not only telling its history and about the lives of those who owned and held it, but also about the centuries of unresolved argument about what the figures on the vase mean. It is an intriguing story that weaves through much of European history. The vase itself is a little object, something less than ten inches tall. It is not pottery, like most ancient vases, but blue glass, decorated with white figures of classical male and female nudes. The argument about who they are includes Jupiter and Venus among the most frequently sighted, with Orpheus and Eurydice, Pluto, Castor and Pollux, and a host of others (including, anachronistically, the physician Galen). Once the vase left the family of Pope Urban VIII (sold to pay gambling debts) it belonged eventually to the successive Dukes of Portland. The fourth duke lent it to the British Museum, where it was smashed by a confused visitor in 1845. The 200 pieces and smaller shards were gathered up, and painstakingly glued together by the best restorer in the land. The vase is timeless, but repairs are temporary; it has been dismantled and re-repaired in 1949 and again forty years later. The vase's story, told here with eagerness and amusement, is one full of surprises and brushes with famous admirers like Wedgwood, Keats, and Blake. There are three sections to the book, consisting of "The Lip" (the prologue), "The Body" (consisting of nineteen "fragments" where most of the history is given) and "The Base" (consisting of an epilogue). There thus does not seem to be any missing chapter, and the base of the vase, a separate piece, is discussed at different points within the fragments. There is much to be learned here about inheritance practices, tourism, museum culture, and art markets. The sixth duke asked for the vase back in 1929, when world finances were crashing, so he could sell it. It was expected to fetch at least pound;50,000, but failed, and went back to the museum. The seventh duke offered it for sale to the museum in 1944, for a song, pound;5,000, and there it remains. As Brooks writes, "Presumably the vase will stay in the museum until civilization, or London, or both, come to an end." 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Mary L. Dewing I really enjoyed this non-fiction book. It is well written and it tells an astonishing tale.

For thousands of years an enigmatic and astonishingly beautiful piece of Roman art has captivated those who have come in contact with it. Made before the birth of Christ, the Portland Vase, as it is called, is renowned for both its beauty and its mystery. In *The Portland Vase*, Robin Brooks takes us on a vivid journey across Europe and through the centuries, as this delicate piece of glass, less than ten inches in height, passes through the hands of a stunning cast of characters, including the first Roman emperor, Augustus; a notorious tomb raider; a reckless cardinal; a princess with a nasty gambling habit; the ceramics genius Josiah Wedgwood; the secretive Duchess of Portland; and a host of politicians, dilettantes, and scam artists. Rich with passion, inspiration, jealousy, and endless speculation, the story of *The Portland Vase* spans more than two thousand years and remains one of the art world's greatest enigmas.

From Publishers Weekly The 9frac34;-inch glass vase, now housed in the British Museum, is a deep opaque blue, overlaid with white glass in which scenes of mythological figures are cut. It is renowned for its delicate beauty, but the meaning of its decorative scenes has not been ascertained and its origins remain mysterious. Brooks, a former actor who writes radio plays for the BBC, explores the theories and controversies surrounding the vase (shown in an eight-page bw photo insert) in a breezy anecdotal style, focusing on those who have owned the vase and the antiquarians who have studied it. Considered to be the work of a glassblower from ancient Rome (date uncertain), the intact vase was possibly discovered, although there is no real proof, in an ancient tomb outside Rome in 1582. The vase's first recorded owner was Cardinal del Monte of Italy; it then passed into the hands of the Barberini family for 150 years. Later owned by the Portland family, the vase was purchased by the British Museum (after many mishaps) in 1945. Although there is a wealth of interpretation concerning the sculpted scenes on the vase, no one judgment has been accepted. Brooks competently details the three restorations the vase has undergone (it was shattered by a vandal in 1845) and provides an overview of ongoing research. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Disinterred from a Roman tomb in 1582, the exquisite glass urn known as the Portland Vase was believed to be the repository of the ashes of Severus Alexander, an emperor murdered in 235. Now housed at the British Museum, it was smashed to smithereens by a vandal in 1845 and nearly re-smashed a century later by German bombs. Stories, of course, abound amid this chronology, and Brooks assembles them according to the types of people the vase has attracted: its owners and students of either its carved images or its physical craftsmanship. The vase's enigmatic cameo figures, of white glass annealed to an underlying layer of blue glass, have produced about 50 mythical or biographical interpretations. Brooks describes a few but is dismayed that most explanations are too contorted to convince him. He resorts to describing the urn's possessors, who gave it settings as varied as a papal palace and a straw-stuffed crate. Readers will find Brooks' fine biography as alluring as aesthetes

find the actual object. Gilbert Taylor Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved About the Author Robin Brooks is an actor and author living in England. He has written several plays for BBC Radio. This is his first book.