Chloe Roberta Sadler, "Entry on: The Thieves of Ostia (The Roman Mysteries, 1) by Caroline Lawrence", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/553. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Caroline Lawrence

The Thieves of Ostia (The Roman Mysteries, 1)

United Kingdom (2001)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Cerberus Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Roman Empire

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Thieves of Ostia (The Roman Mysteries, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, other according to Translations
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Caroline Lawrence, *The Thieves of Ostia*. London: Orion Children's Books/Dolphin, New York, NY: Puffin Books, 2001, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781842550793
Awards	2009 – Lawrence won the Classical Association Prize for a significant contribution to the understanding of Classics.
Genre	Historical fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (9–12)
Author of the Entry	Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, crs.sadler@icloud.com
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Caroline Lawrence (Author)

Born in England, Lawrence grew up in the United States of America and studied Classics at Berkeley. She won a Marshall Scholarship to Cambridge and went on to study Classical art and Archaeology at Newnham College Cambridge. Lawrence studied for her MA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London and went on to teach Latin, French and art at a primary school in London.

Lawrence published *The Thieves of Ostia*, the first instalment in the *Roman Mysteries Series* in 2001. Lawrence has also worked on University of Reading's educational website *Romans Revealed*, which presents stories about Roman Britain related to archaeological finds.

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Additional information

Adaptations	*Roman Mysteries*, BBC United Kingdom, 2007 & 2008.
Translation	Dutch: *Flavia en de dieven van Ostia*, trans. Gerbrand Bakker, Amsterdam: Piramide, 2001, 143 pp. Spanish: *Ladrones en el Foro*, trans. Atalaire, Barcelona: Salamandra, 2002, 185 pp. Chinese (traditional): □□□□□□□ [Aositiya de qie zei], trans. Wei Yuru, Taibei Shi, 2003, 221 pp. Japanese: □□□□□□□ : □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ [Osutia monogatari : Kodai roma no nazotoki adobencha], trans. Minako Taguri, PHP, 2003, 215 pp. Finnish: *Ostian koirat*, trans. Pekka Tuomisto, Helsinki: WSOY, 2003, 217 pp. Italian: *I ladri di Ostia*, trans. Giancarlo Carlotti, Casale Monferrato: Pieme Junior, 2004, 154 pp. Czech: *Lupiči z Ostie : záhady ze starověkého Říma*, trans. Hana Petráková, Praha: Albatros, 2006, 144 pp. Slovenian: *Tatovi iz Ostije*, trans. Maja Ropret, Ljubljana: Grlica, 2007, 166 pp. German: *Die Diebe Von Ostia*, trans. Dagmar Weischer, München: Cbj, 2008, 188 pp. French: *Du Sang Sur la Via Appia*, trans. Amélie Sarn, Toulouse: Milan jeunesse, 2010, 224 pp.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Sequels: • *The Secrets of Vesuvius* • *The Pirates of Pompeii*

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- *The Assassins of Rome*
- *The Dolphins of Laurentum*
- *The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina*
- *The Enemies of Jupiter*
- *The Gladiators from Capua*
- *The Colossus of Rhodes*
- *The Fugitive from Corinth*
- *The Sirens of Surrentum*
- *The Charioteer of Delphi*
- *The Slave-girl from Jerusalem*
- *The Beggar of Volubilis*
- *The Scribes from Alexandria*
- *The Prophet from Ephesus*
- *The Man from Pomegranate Street*

Mini-Mysteries:

- *Bread and Circuses*
- *Trimalchio's Feast and other mini mysteries*
- *The Legionary from Londinium and other mini-mysteries*

Companion Books:

- *The First Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Second Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Roman Mysteries Treasury*
- *From Ostia to Alexandria with Flavia Gemina: Travels with Flavia Gemina*

Summary

In this, the first book in Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* series we meet Flavia Gemini, the central character of the series. She is the daughter of a merchant sailor whose mother died in childbirth. Flavia has discovered that someone is killing the dogs in Ostia, and she is determined to find out who is responsible.

We are soon introduced to the three other important characters in the *Roman Mysteries* series, Lupus, Nubia and Jonathan. Jonathan lives next door with his father, who is a doctor, and sister. Jonathan is a Jew who believes in Jesus and he and his family are shunned for practising a forbidden religion. Lupus is an orphan, who lives on the streets before being accepted into Jonathan's family. At some point before the

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beginning of the series, someone cut out his tongue. He is very sensitive about what happened to him and will not let anyone know what happened. Nubia is a slave girl from Africa. Feeling sorry for Nubia when she sees her in the market, Flavia uses her own money to purchase her from a slave trader. After some wrong turns and a few red herrings, the four friends discover that the person killing the dogs of Ostia is doing so to be able to steal without the guard dogs barking. The dog killer turns out to be the adopted son of a friend of Flavia's father, attempting to steal a large sum of money as he is poor. What he is unaware of is that the man who has adopted him was intending to leave his fortune to him.

Analysis

As the first in the *Roman Mysteries* series, *The Thieves of Ostia* serves as an introduction not just to the central characters of the series, but to life in ancient times. Lawrence gives no specific dates to her series, but as we find out, Jonathan is an early Christian, which requires a setting in the first century CE or later.

Lawrence's book reads somewhat like a fact book about Roman life, with a story running alongside. Nearly every page has some small piece of information about how Roman society functions. Lawrence takes time to explain many aspects of Roman life which differ from those with which her readers will be familiar, for example seating arrangements at meals. Lawrence does so by having Jonathan and Flavia explain aspects of Roman life to Nubia and Lupus, this allows Lawrence to places these facts in the narrative without disrupting the flow of the prose or the plot.

Thanks to how the facts about Roman life are littered throughout the book, there is always something new to learn on each page. These facts are not usually necessary to the advancement of the plot, suggesting that Lawrence is not simply trying to tell an exciting story but to educate her readers as well. Lawrence delves into a variety of topics including the kind of food Romans ate, how they used wax tablets to write, and how they buried their dead. Lawrence also includes maps of the houses of Flavia and Jonathan, giving a visual anchor for the explanations of how Roman houses are organised. Lawrence also spends some time explaining the structure of Roman society by explaining the slave trade and citizenship.

Though the book has undertones of Christian propaganda, the overall

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	experience of the book is one of learning. This feeling of Christian propaganda comes across in the tangents that both Jonathan and his father go on at various points, to talk about the saving power of the Christian faith. The attitude with which Lawrence discusses the new faith, and the narrative of the book, make Christianity sound superior to the ancient faith, as though Christianity has only good points; there is no counter argument to this viewpoint. Even for children without any special interest in ancient history, the story is engaging and entertaining. However, for children with an interest in ancient history and ancient life, Lawrence's book might be especially interesting for them as they can learn about ancient life whilst trying to solve the mystery along with the children.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Cerberus Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Roman Empire
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Boys Child, children Christianity Family Friendship Girls Orphans Social class

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