

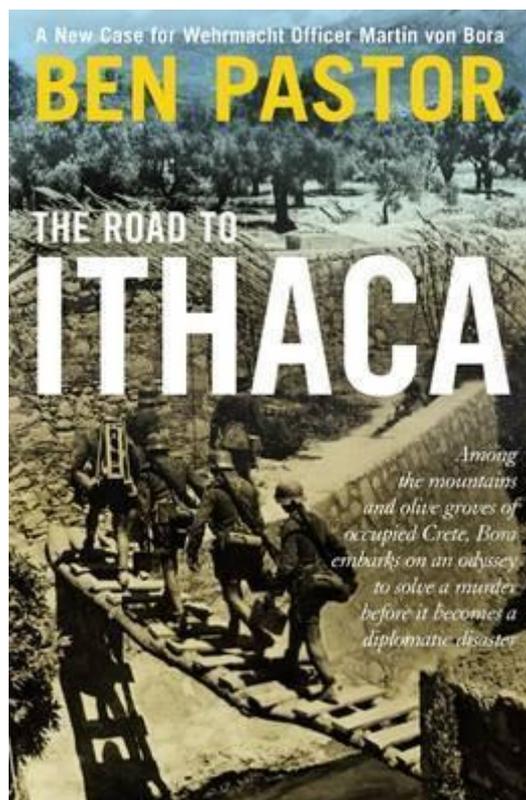


The Road To Ithaca

By Ben Pastor

by Giles Morgan

May 8, 2017



Wehrmacht officer Martin Bora has been set an unusual task. It is May 1941 and Bora is performing diplomatic duties in Moscow three weeks before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. He is understandably surprised when he is instructed by his superiors to travel by plane to Crete to secure sixty bottles of choice Cretan wine. Arriving in the city of Heraklion in the wake of the German invasion Bora is greeted by Major Emil Busch who informs him that alongside his mission to bring back thirty bottles of Dafni and thirty bottles of Mandilaria he has also been tasked with the investigation of the brutal murder of a Red Cross representative.

The victim was a scholar and academic called Dr Professor Alois Villiger, a Swiss national who was an expert in Germanic ancestry and a personal friend of leading Nazi Heinrich Himmler.

The most obvious suspects for the murder of Villiger and four of his employees in his villa at Ampelokastro close to Heraklion are a platoon of German paratroopers.

Witnesses place them in the area close to the time of the murder and hostility to the invaders is high amongst the Greek population. But Bora soon finds that he is dealing with a far murkier and complex situation that challenges this seemingly straightforward version of events. Setting off into the interior of Crete carrying a copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in his rucksack Bora searches for the truth behind the murders. Author Ben Pastor frames his investigation as a kind of personal odyssey of discovery with freedom fighters, shepherds and peasants acting as parallels to such Homeric creations as the cyclops and the sirens.

This is the fifth in the Martin Bora series and as ever author Ben Pastor weaves a complex and interesting story that appears to be highly researched and convincingly detailed. Writing a series based upon a Wehrmacht officer might not seem an obvious way to win the sympathies of readers but Pastor seems very often concerned with looking beneath surface appearances and received certainties into the chaos and fog of war. Bora in many ways is something of an outsider in Hitler's Germany coming from an aristocratic background and whilst being personally patriotic was banned in his youth by his stepfather from reading *Mein Kampf*.

He is presented as having the potential to develop as a kind of Claus von Stauffenberg character, who ultimately plotted to kill Hitler. Written with a poetic eye for its evocative Cretan setting, *The Road to Ithaca* is a cleverly plotted, grittily realised and coolly observed tale that challenges calcified clichés about the nature of heroism and villainy in wartime.

The Road To Ithaca

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Bitter Lemon Press, £8.99, 9781908524805