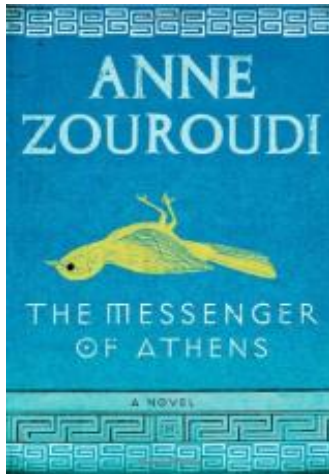


# The Messenger of Athens

by Anne Zouroudi

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## About the Book

Idyllic but remote, the Greek island of Thiminos seems untouched and untroubled by the modern world. So when the battered body of a young woman is discovered at the foot of a cliff, the local police --- governed more by archaic rules of honor than by the law --- are quick to close the case, dismissing her death as an accident.

Then a stranger arrives, uninvited, from Athens, announcing his intention to investigate further into the crime he believes has been committed. Refusing to accept the woman's death as an accident or suicide, Hermes Diaktoros sets out to uncover the truths that skulk beneath this small community's exterior.

Hermes's methods of investigation are unorthodox, and his message to the islanders is plain --- tell the truth or face the consequences. Before long, he's uncovering a tale of passion, corruption and murder that entangles many of the island's residents. But Hermes brings his own mystery into the web of dark secrets and lies --- and as he travels the rugged island landscape to investigate, questions and suspicions arise amongst the locals. Who has sent him to Thiminos, and on whose authority is he acting? And how does he know of dramas played out decades ago?

Rich in images of Greece's beautiful islands and evoking a life unknown to most outsiders, this wonderful novel leads the reader into a world where the myths of the past are not forgotten and forbidden passion still has dangerous consequences.

## Discussion Guide

1. From the sea, the island of Thiminos showed exactly what it was: rock, one huge rock, so undercut by the salt water of the southern Aegean it seemed to float free, rising and falling in the swell? (page 30). How important do you think the setting is to the novel's plot? In your opinion, are small communities like Thiminos more caring places to live than cities?
2. I expect you're surprised at my name: Hermes Messenger. My father's idea of humor. He was a classical scholar? (page 12). What clues does the author give to the identity of Hermes, the mysterious "Messenger of Athens"? What do you think is the significance of the references throughout the book to the myths of ancient Greece?
3. In what ways is the character of Aunt Sofia representative of the role and status of women on the island of Thiminos? Do you think her ending will be a happy one?
4. Men and women don't mix. Don't think the same way, don't want the same things? (page 209). To what extent do you think Lukas's view of the relationship between the sexes is mirrored in broader communities and cultures?
5. What do you think are Theo's most significant characteristics? Is his dissatisfaction with his life justified, or should he be grateful for what he has? To what extent is he a free man? And did you feel his punishment at the fat man's hands was appropriate?
6. Let me tell you about my husband. My man. I put up with it for years, his running around with every whore who'd drop their knickers for a wink and a smile. He wasn't fussy? (page 271). What differences between men's and women's attitudes to infidelity does the book show? Do you think those attitudes are shared in the wider world?
7. To what extent is **The Messenger of Athens** a love story? What do you make of the portrayals of love in the novel, especially the relationships between Irini and Andreas and Irini and Theo? Which has more value, love, or passion?
8. Seemingly the event that brings Hermes to Thiminos is Irini's death, but he has other tasks to accomplish while he is there. Thinking about his interactions with all the characters --- particularly Aunt Sofia and the Chief of Police --- what do you think is at the heart of Hermes's mission?
9. Had you anticipated who had murdered Irini, and were the identities of the murderers a shock? Did you find the women's violence inexcusable, or did it seem inevitable, given what you had been told of their lives?
10. Is **The Messenger of Athens** a crime novel? How do the fat man's "unorthodox" methods fit with your response?
11. **The Messenger of Athens** is the first in a series based on the Seven Deadly Sins. What sin is at the heart of the book? Do you think the Seven Deadly Sins have any contemporary relevance outside small, old-fashioned communities like Thiminos's?

## Author Bio

Anne Zouroudi was born in Lincolnshire in 1959 and grew up in England's industrial north, in the steel city of Sheffield,

South Yorkshire. After a number of years in a lucrative career --- which included time working on Wall Street, and in Denver, Co - she gave up an excellent job to live in the Greek islands. She married a Greek, and her son was born on the island of Rhodes.

"The truth is," she says, "I was a Shirley Valentine."

Anne's writer's eye records in fascinating detail the minutiae of the lives of the Greek people, and her mould-breaking crime novels bring Greece's timeless landscapes vividly to life. She regards her work as a labour of love. "Greece," she says, "is my spiritual home, the land that stole my heart and shows no sign of ever returning it."

Her first novel, THE MESSENGER OF ATHENS, was nominated for the Desmond Elliott Prize for Sparkling New Fiction, and ITV3's Crime Thriller Awards 2008.

Anne now lives in middle England, in the beautiful Peak District National Park. "It's pretty," she says. "But Greece still calls my name. At every opportunity, I'm there."

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