

The Great Wall - China against the World - 1000 BC-AD 2000  
by Julia Lovell. Atlantic Books London 2006.

Goods from the People's Republic of China are ubiquitous in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Mandarin is now an increasingly popular language option in our schools, the Chinese economy is booming, tourism to China is burgeoning, and yet the knowledge that most people have of that vast country and especially its history is fragmented at best and non-existent at worst.

The Great Wall, a wonderful sideways look at 3000 years of Chinese history comes as a boon to all those who want and need to gain a measure of understanding of the nation that is likely to be as dominant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the United States was in the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Julia Lovell starts, unsurprisingly, with the Great Wall itself, debunking the many myths that surround it - not least that it is the only man-made structure visible from the moon - and explaining its construction, the reasoning behind it, and the changing status of the Wall itself in the Chinese psyche.

The story of the Wall is the means by which Lovell traces Chinese history, and a dense and detailed history it is, sometimes almost overwhelmingly detailed. Nevertheless, Lovell writes engagingly and sees the reader through some of the more detailed passages with style.

Having read the book one is left with a sense of awe: about the Wall itself, naturally, but also about the Chinese, their achievements, their attitudes and the way they were so spectacularly ahead of the Europeans who, in modern times, seem to have viewed them with a mixture of fear and contempt. The Great Wall should be essential reading for any with an interest in history or global geo-politics and is an excellent contribution to our understanding of the history of one of the world's greatest nations.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh