



Cities of Splendour; Beneath the Earth

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Here are two titles in a new series, 'Landscapes of Legend', which presents myths and legends from a variety of cultures for 7-11 year olds. They focus on themes of universal significance - the urge to explain the natural world, and to celebrate the rise of powerful civilisations and faiths - and are vividly illustrated. Each of the tales is prefaced by a description of its historical or anthropological background.

Bevan has a storyteller's voice, which moves easily from the factual to the fabulous and shows clearly how each is rooted in the other. Mayo's illustrations pick up cultural idiosyncracies and work them into borders and dramatic scenes, while retaining an individual style which is colourful and vigorous, and scarcely contained by the double page spread. A lot of trouble has gone into a design which integrates colour photographs and illustration imaginatively. I like the spread on Mecca in **Cities of Splendour**, where Mayo's pilgrims wend their way through Bevan's text and photographs of the ka'ba and the Qur'an.

The tales in **Cities of Splendour** are less successfully tied in to the theme of the book than those in **Beneath the Earth**: the stories involving Muhammad and Buddha are more about the prophets than Mecca or Bodh Gaya. And sometimes the factual section carries more weight than the story, which may be no more than an anecdote. Nevertheless, both titles are attractive and fascinating introductions to different cultures and religions, historical and contemporary; and are supported by thoughtful glossaries.

Running Order:

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