

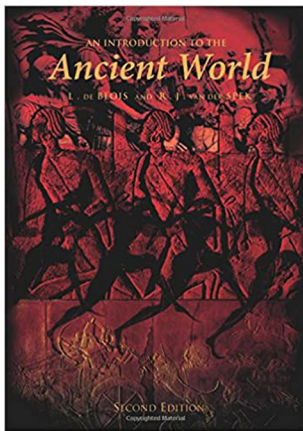
Book Reviews

An Introduction to the Ancient World

de Blois, (L.) and van der Spe (R.V.) (Third Edition).
Pp. xx + 402, ills, maps. Abingdon, Oxon:
Routledge 2019. Cased £110 (Paper, £32.99).
ISBN: 978-1-138-50456-1

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This book offers a survey of the ancient near east, the Greek world and the Roman world. Its chronological span is huge, starting with Old Kingdom Egypt (2600-2150 BC) and finishing with the end of the Roman Empire in the West in the fifth century AD. Inasmuch as it is possible to survey such an immense chronological span in just over 400 pages, the coverage of this concise book is thorough and balanced.

The authors outline three criteria for the topics included in the volume: to describe 'phenomena of general historical interest'; to discuss 'issues that had impact on later history'; to place topics in a 'continuous historical context' (p. xxi). The book introduces ancient history as 'the cradle of European and Islamic civilisations' and the ancient Mediterranean as the point of origin of modern western culture (p. 1). Apparently, then, this is narrative history at its most orthodox. But there is room for brief reflection in the authors' Introduction, which encourages the study of ancient history as 'a wonderful opportunity for comparative research' while emphasising that the discipline of ancient history has changed over the past 20 years (pp. 1-2). Indeed, some perennial themes (e.g. class in terms of property ownership, the economy, political structures) are revisited thoughtfully at different points in the book. It is unfortunate, however, that imperialism, one of the cornerstones of ancient Mediterranean and modern western civilisation, receives little extended treatment beyond the narrative description of territorial conquest.

Useful features of the book include the maps which are pertinent to its wide range of themes and the black-and-white illustrations. Selected topics are discussed in detail within text-boxes: some of these outline very conventional themes (e.g. the Spartan constitution; the reforms of Solon and Cleisthenes); but the most interesting of them are those on the ancient economy in the Near East and Rome (pp. 68-9, 156-8) which offer surveys of historiography and theory from Adam Smith and Karl Marx to Douglass North.

One weakness of the survey is that a hasty reader will come away with no impression of the sources for ancient history: for instance, the sections on classical Greece give little sense of the significance of inscriptions to our understanding of that period. Some of the figures, however, offer useful illustrations of ancient sources which might at least be a starting point for discussion: on p. 239 there is a depiction of the inscribed tag requesting that its runaway slave (or dog) be returned to its owner (*CIL* XV 7193, now on display in G69 of the British Museum).

The book is made very easy to use by the detailed table of contents at the beginning of the book (the relevant sections of which are repeated at the start of each of the 16 substantive chapters) and the indices. The bibliographies at the end are far shorter than those in the previous two editions (this was a decision made on the grounds of the authors' opinion (p. xxii) that 'students hardly use' them). Its short list of websites relevant to the ancient world is useful but does nothing to encourage a critical approach to them (p. 383; the description of academia.edu as a 'Websites [sic] on Which Scholars Announce and Upload their Publications', however, skates over the fact that contributors to that particular website include those whose engagement with the study of antiquity might consist of just a course-unit or two of an undergraduate degree).

While it is not a work of reference, the unrivalled coverage and general reliability of this book makes it a useful one-stop shop to a general reader or anyone starting to study the ancient world especially Ancient History at GCSE or A-Level. However, it does not foster the kind of critical approach that is desirable at the level of higher education.

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Ancient Greece: Social Structure and Evolution.

Small, (D.B.), Pp xvi + 270, ills. Cambridge
University Press, 2019. Paper, £26.99.
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The subject of this book is social structure and its development in Greece in the period stretching from the Neolithic to the Roman Empire. Small's approach draws upon the results of Complexity Theory to think about long-term change: this is an approach which views societies as open systems in which connections between different groups give rise to complex forms of interaction; the theory produces an analytical framework which proposes that societies transition between periods of structured organisation and chaotic change. In this way it offers a productive way of rethinking the notion of evolutionary change and the development of institutions