

## BOOK REVIEW

*Egypt, Greece, & Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean, Third Edition.* By CHARLES FREEMAN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 759. Softcover, \$65.00. ISBN 0199651922.

As an increasing number of universities shift their pedagogical focus toward broad, thematic courses (e.g. Ancient Mediterranean Material Culture), there is a growing need for omnibus textbooks that cover multiple civilizations in detail.<sup>1</sup> Since its first publication in 1996, Freeman's *Egypt, Greece, & Rome* has masterfully filled this niche by providing a comprehensive historical overview of the Mediterranean and its surrounding regions. Now in its third edition, the text has been substantially revised in order to appeal to the general reader and incorporate recent archaeological discoveries.

Covering a staggering span of time, from the rise of Sumer ca. 5000 bce to the Islamic invasions of the seventh century ce, the book is organized chronologically into 36 chapters with nine interludes. These interludes allow the author to expound upon topics of interest that would ordinarily detract from the flow of the principal narrative, such as "The Amarna Letters" (Interlude 1), "Sappho and Lyric Poetry" (Interlude 2) and "The Romans as Builders" (Interlude 9). As a result, Freeman's account is more than a chronological march through antiquity. It is instead a socio-cultural history that acquaints readers with the seminal achievements of western civilization in artistic, scientific and technological spheres.

Turning to the content of the chapters themselves, Chapter 1 is a general introduction, Chapter 2 discusses the Near Eastern civilizations (Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Hittites) and Chapters 3–5, as well as Interlude 1, focus on Egypt. In Chapter 6, Freeman returns to the Near East to cover the Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Israelites, Phoenicians and Persians. Chapters 7–20 and Interludes 2–5 detail the Minoan, Mycenaean and Greek

<sup>1</sup> Similar textbooks include: Gates, Charles. 2011. *Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, second edition. London: Routledge; Mathisen, Ralph W. 2014. *Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations*, second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

civilizations, while the Romans, and to a lesser extent, the Etruscan and early Christian peoples, are the subjects of Chapters 21–34 and Interludes 6–9.

The book draws to a close with the emergence of the Byzantine Empire in Chapter 35 and Chapter 36 explores the diachronic legacy of the ancient western world. Useful appendices follow the primary text. The “What to Read Next” section provides an up-to-date bibliography of recommended books that are organized according to subject matter (e.g. Egypt, Greece, Late Antiquity/Byzantium, Legacy), the ‘Date Chart’ is a timeline in the form of a horizontal bar graph that indicates the lifespan of each civilization covered in the book and the ‘List of Events’ is a chronological list of historical events organized by civilization (e.g. The Etruscans, Rome). The final section, ‘Acknowledgment of Sources,’ contains brief descriptions and source citations for each of the plates, figures and maps.

Freeman is to be commended for the scope and detail of the work. Of particular note is that he draws attention to marginalized groups of antiquity. For example, Freeman remarks that “. . . the voices of the vast majority of the Greek and Roman populations and their subjects have vanished unheard. . . any assessment of the position of these disenfranchised groups has to be decoded from the texts that survive” (6). Nevertheless, he ensures that women and slaves, among other groups, are discussed in as much detail as archaeological and literary evidence allows. Despite the comprehensive nature of the book, the reader must be alerted to the absence of notes in the text. While this omission poses no obstacle for the student or general reader, it can prove frustrating for the scholar. Furthermore, as a textbook, it might be made more user-friendly if the chapters were grouped under geographical headings.

Overall, the work is beautifully illustrated and written in clear and clever prose. Freeman writes with the authority not only of a historian, but also an archaeologist (he excavated at Knidos when he was 20-years-old, page 3) and a traveler who has trod the well-worn paths of our ancient forebears.<sup>2</sup> His rigorous approach ensures that the book will continue to be an authoritative survey of the history and culture of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions.

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<sup>2</sup> Freeman is a Historical Consultant to the Blue Guide series of travel guidebooks, and has contributed *Sites of Antiquity: From Ancient Egypt to the Fall of Rome, 50 Sites that Explain the Classical World* (2009) to the series.