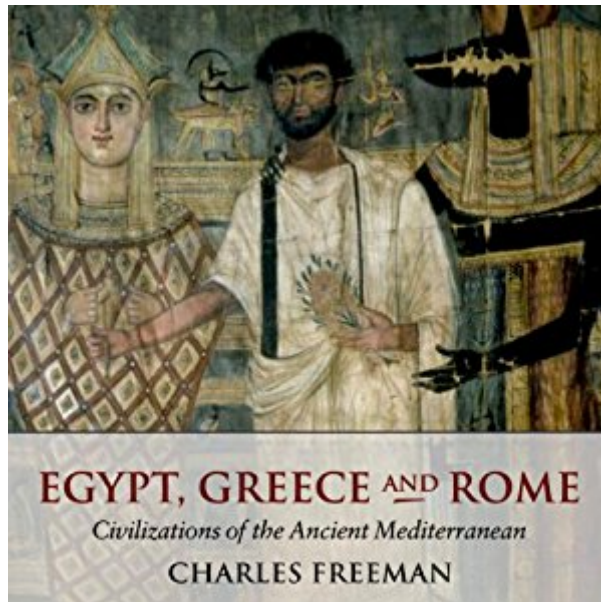


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Egypt, Greece, And Rome: Civilizations Of The Ancient Mediterranean



Synopsis

Long sources of mystery, imagination, and inspiration, the myths and history of the ancient Mediterranean have given rise to artistic, religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions that span the centuries. In this unique and comprehensive introduction to the region's three major civilizations, Egypt, Greece, and Rome draws a fascinating picture of the deep links between the cultures across the Mediterranean and explores the ways in which these civilizations continue to be influential to this day. Beginning with the emergence of the earliest Egyptian civilization around 3500 BC, Charles Freeman follows the history of the Mediterranean over a span of four millennia to AD 600, beyond the fall of the Roman empire in the west to the emergence of the Byzantine empire in the east. In addition to the three great civilizations, the peoples of the Ancient Near East and other lesser-known cultures such as the Etruscans, Celts, Persians, and Phoenicians are explored. The author examines the art, architecture, philosophy, literature, and religious practices of each culture, set against its social, political, and economic background. More than an overview of the primary political or military events, Egypt, Greece, and Rome pays particular attention to the actual lives of both the everyday person and the aristocracy: Here is history brought to life. Especially striking are the readable and stimulating profiles of key individuals throughout the ancient world, covering persons from Homer to Horace, the Pharaoh Akhenaten to the emperor Augustus, Alexander the Great to Julius Caesar, Jesus to Justinian, and Aristotle to Augustine. Generously illustrated in both color and black-and-white, and drawing on the most up-to-date scholarship, Egypt, Greece, and Rome is a superb introduction for anyone seeking a better understanding of the civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean and their legacy to the West.

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Customer Reviews

Over the last few years I have gotten interested in the sources of the ideas of our current world. For instance, when reading about Jefferson, Adams and people that founded the US I find they are fluent in Latin and Greek and read the classics extensively. I have read the Histories, the Peloponnesian Wars, much of Plutarch and survey books I could find and though I found the stories interesting I have been groping for some context. I felt like one of the blind men and the elephant, only apprehending the little piece I was in contact with and not having any idea what a whole elephant is like. I came across this book by looking through ... (this very place) and it looked like it would give me an overall structure. The book succeeded beyond my expectations. Starting with Egypt and ending with the Byzantine Empire it covers the myriad civilizations around the Mediterranean during that period. It puts Solon and Dracon into their context. It explains how the Etruscians related to the Greek civilization, and then to Roman. It discusses the Phoenecians, the Latins, the Gauls, the Celts and all the various people that interacted with the Romans as their empire expanded and then the Germans, Huns and other that became important as their empire declined. Much of what we know about the ancient world is relatively new because excavations are ongoing and techniques are improving. Besides that our thinking about the ancient world is evolving as well. This book tries to understand the period it covers not just from the point of view of the wealthy, literate folks that wrote the classics, but from the point of view of craftsmen, farmers and slaves as well. This is definitely the book I had been looking for to get me started learning about the influence the past has had on the present. I may not know yet what the elephant of ancient history smells like because I have not been that close, but I have a pretty good idea what it looks like thanks to this book.

This is a great book to get an integrated view of the ancient world. I looked at many different books before reading this one, having previously devoured a number of more specialized books about the ancient world over the years, but wanting something more in the way of an overall perspective and context. This book is great for that. I was mainly interested in the sections covering pre-Classical Period Greece, from 1500 down to the Golden Age (about 500 BC), but the other areas of coverage are superb also. Freeman also has an especially nice touch and fluency with the Greek history, and I wasn't surprised to find a separate book on Greek history by him next to this one on the bookshelf. There were also several gaps in my historical knowledge that this book plugged. For example, his section on the Etruscans, which I only had very fragmentary and superficial knowledge of, was also excellent. The book benefits from much recent scholarship, and the author points out in the

introduction that one of the main differences between a modern book on ancient history and older ones is the degree to which ancient civilizations like Greece can be placed much more securely in the context of their times, showing them not as isolated cultural entities, but as arising from the interplay of much more cosmopolitan influences as they interacted with, and were influenced by, their contacts, peaceable or otherwise, with neighboring or competing cultures. This is another one of the great scholarly strengths of the book. I also found the author's deft touch and writing style a big plus, and although by necessity this is not a short book, it rarely got tedious or boring. That is notable by itself in a work of this size and nature. Overall, it counts as the best overall book on the history of the ancient world, and one of the most consistently interesting history books, I've ever read.

Many histories of this period respond to the lack of known detail about what happened by spending all their time droning on about social history. I wanted an narrative introduction to Greek and Roman history and this is it. The addition of Egypt is a welcome bonus. If you don't know your Marathon from your Issus, your Pompey from Ptolomy then this is the book for you. It serves as the ideal jumping off point to examine the particular areas that really spark your interest.

If you are constantly confused by this period of history, this is the book for you. It puts into context, the whole shape of the era. It makes you realise that someone like Cleopatra is closer to our time than the beginnings of Egyptian history. I have read the whole book through and it is a superb narrative. This is no mean feat, for if you where to write a history of the United States from Columbus to the present, it would be close to a third of the time that he covers. You can start to see the relationship between the writers of the period and the politicians. You can begin to way each period is interlocked with the next. But more than that, you can look up any period and be given a succint description to help you through. My only regret was that this book was not published years earlier. I cannot recommend a book more highly.

This history is very useful to see both ancient Egypt and the Classical tradition separately and in tandem, making a fine study of the bridge between civilizations. Like acorns under a great oak tree, Greece and Rome resolve their beginnings in the field spawned by Egypt. This is a very usefully done work with excellent references and makes a good tool for the branching out into more specialized areas, without losing a picture of the whole.

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