

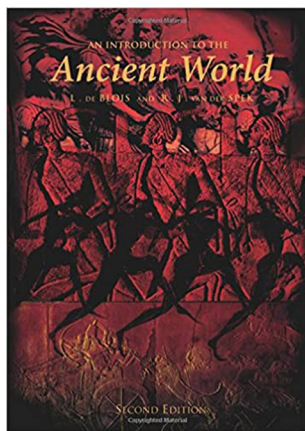
## Book Reviews

### 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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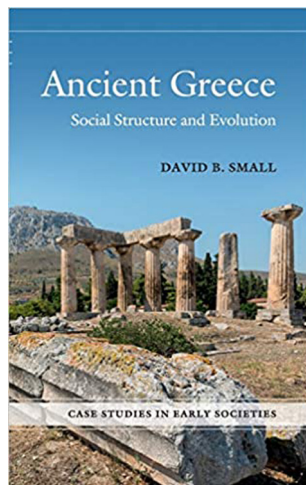
### Ancient Greece: Social Structure and Evolution.

Small, (D.B.), Pp xvi + 270, ills. Cambridge  
University Press, 2019. Paper, £26.99.  
ISBN: 978-0-521-71926-1

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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



as an articulation of complex networks of interaction.

Small draws widely upon archaeological research on prehistoric and historical Greece and highlights the role of feasting as a context for interaction, transformation and the solidification of social structures. This is, however, not really a book about feasting in Greece (for such a study, with particular emphasis on the classical period, see Floris van den Eijnde, Josine Blok and Rolf Strootman (eds), *Feasting and Polis Institutions*, not referred to by Small), but one which

makes reference to feasting as an node of social interaction.

The book opens with a survey of the ecology of the Greek world (chapter 2) and then moves on (chapter 3) to a terse exploration of the possibility of hierarchical relationships between households during the Neolithic period in Greece (6800-2900 BC). Chapter 4 interprets the evidence for communication, defence and exchange as an indication of increasing social complexity in Greece during the Early Bronze Age (3200-2200 BC); Small suggests a shift in feasting gatherings from small to larger groups. Chapters 5 and 6 survey the indications of cultural complexity in the form of palace centres, towns and rural peak sanctuaries in Crete, the Cyclades and mainland Greece during the second millennium BC: cult facilities including banqueting halls are indicative of the significance of shared feasting. Small argues also that the emergence of an Aegean way of life gave rise to the development of complex commemorative administrative institutions. The collapse of the Palace cultures at the beginning of the first millennium (chapter 7) is treated as the impetus for dynamic re-organisation over the course of the eighth century BC. This gives rise to the institutions of a 'Brave New World', that of Greece of the archaic and later periods (chapter 8). Small champions the view of the classical *polis* as a 'stateless' institution with an 'underdeveloped political community' with 'weak arrangement of social contexts within the community' but rightly flags the controversy of this view (p. 171). The top-down approach of chapter 9 emphasises institutional continuity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods of Greek history and suggests that it was used by territorial rulers to 'control the direction of much of the Greek world'; recent scholarship, such as the work of John Ma (*Antiochus III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*) offers a more nuanced assessment of the complexity of Hellenistic institutions. Chapter 10 brings us back in time to the Cretan Iron Age (1100-700 BC), where Small emphasises the distinctive aspects (and heterogeneity) of Cretan institutions and practices in that period.

Much of the underlying narrative that runs through this book is familiar and the volume draws upon a wealth of well-known material. Small revisits the notion of social complexity in each substantive chapter and his conclusion (chapter 11) highlights the unevenness of structural change across space and time. Chapter 12 briefly compares the characteristics of Greek organisation with those of the Classic Mayan period (AD 250-900); this chapter certainly enriched this reviewer's knowledge of the institutions of the latter civilisation, but I lack the expertise to assess how far it progresses the modern understanding of that culture.

The book's main contribution is to offer an interesting overarching perspective on how it might be possible to analyse the Greek world in a way that cuts across conventional chronological param-

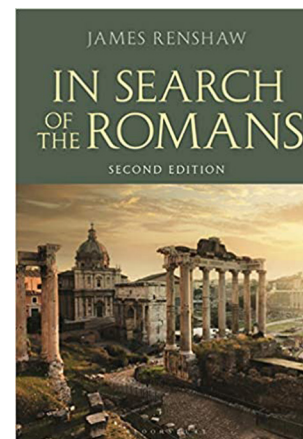
eters. This volume could be suitable a volume for undergraduates (who may find its introduction to the prehistoric periods of use and its general direction interesting), graduate students and scholars of ancient Greek history and archaeology.

doi:10.1017/S2058631020000616

## In Search of the Romans (second edition)

Renshaw (J.). Pp. 450, b/w & colour ills, colour maps. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020 (first published 2012). Paper, £19.99. ISBN: 978147429916

Alan Clague



This stimulating book will, it seems to me, attract two distinct clienteles – the school student at GCSE or equivalent level and the more general reader looking for an overview of Roman history and culture (in its widest sense).

For the former group, James Renshaw has concentrated on the topics that tend to reoccur at intervals on GCSE specifications for Classical Civilisation and the Roman Civilisation option of the Latin examinations of both OCR and Eduqas, often expanding on and attractively illustrating the information in the *Cambridge Latin Course* and other coursebooks. These include such perennial favourites as the Roman Army, Entertainment and Leisure (with the section on the amphitheatre being particularly well illustrated and satisfyingly gory), Religion and Pompeii. There are plentiful suggestions for further reading of both ancient and modern sources, although I think students would need considerable guidance on how best to access many of these and which are most valuable. Each section has a 'Review and Reflect' box. Some of the questions therein are straightforward GCSE-style questions (e.g. 'In what ways can Roman chariot racing be compared with modern sporting events?') whilst others will cause a more than slight flutter of hesitation (e.g. 'How do the attitudes to workers in Roman times differ from those held in different parts of the world today?'). The book itself is supported by its own website with links to sources, quizzes, extra illustrations etc.

The more general reader will find a comprehensive survey of Roman history from its earliest beginnings to the abdication of the last emperor in the west in 476 CE, in over 130 pages. There are reassuring caveats about the unreliability or limited range of sources at various times. There then follows a chapter on the running of the Empire, with its administrative structure explained and some of the problems identified (Boudica, Judaea in the 60s CE). There are also well-presented sections on Architecture and Transport. Other topics discussed *passim* include the position of women in Roman society, education,