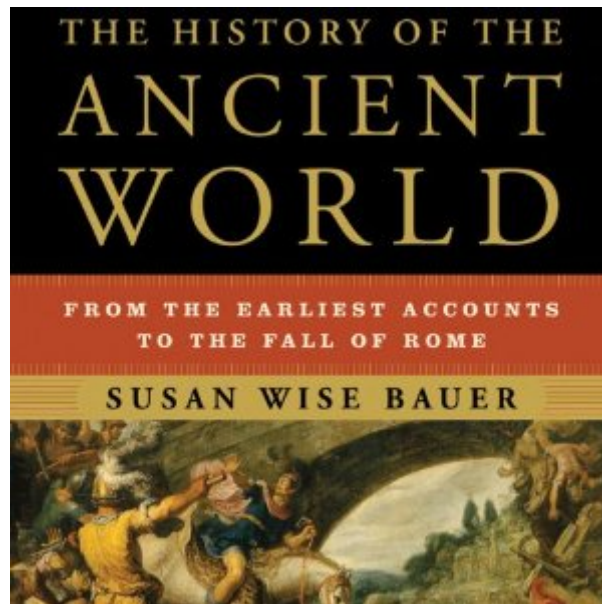


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The History Of The Ancient World: From The Earliest Accounts To The Fall Of Rome



Synopsis

A lively and engaging narrative history showing the common threads in the cultures that gave birth to our own. This is the first volume in a bold new series that tells the stories of all peoples, connecting historical events from Europe to the Middle East to the far coast of China, while still giving weight to the characteristics of each country. Susan Wise Bauer provides both sweeping scope and vivid attention to the individual lives that give flesh to abstract assertions about human history. This narrative history employs the methods of "history from beneath" - literature, epic traditions, private letters, and accounts - to connect kings and leaders with the lives of those they ruled. The result is an engrossing tapestry of human behavior from which we may draw conclusions about the direction of world events and the causes behind them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While this is a very readable and fascinating history of the early ancient world, it is the footnotes that make this so enjoyable. Ms. Bauer lets her personality and wit shine, unlike most historians who cloak their humanness in dry academic language. To give a taste of what I mean: Page 269: We learn the etymology of the word "Nimrod" from a king's name in Gen. 10:10 to a term for a failed and ineffectual person via Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd. Page 308: Describing the seduction of an ancient Indian Queen Mother... "When she was a young girl another wise man cornered her on a boat.... and "prevailed over" her, after promising her that she would still be a virgin afterwards, a useful pick-up line unfortunately available only to magicians. (The queen mother also adds, apropos of nothing, "Till then my body had emitted a revolting odor of fish, but the sage dispelled it and

endowed me with a fragrance that I now have- a detail which we should perhaps leave unexplored.)"Page 246: A long footnote begins "You might wonder why" and then gives a very complicated genealogy of King Tut's family. It then adds."Or you may not have wondered at all."I hope this gives a flavor of this unique and comprehensive history. I love overviews which I can then follow up in depth with the events that interest me the most.

Following up on the success of her children's homeschool history series, Susan Wise Bauer offers this large-scale (750 pages) introduction to ancient history for adults. Bauer, a "print historian" for whom the written record is paramount, tells the story of five ancient civilizations - Egypt, Mesopotamia/the Middle East, Greece/Rome, India, and China - that have left us the most extensive written records. Her narrative focuses entirely on political history: kingdoms, empires, and their rulers; this writer will have no truck with artists, poets, philosophers, architects, or mathematicians; much less with archaeology, anthropology, sociology, or any other of the numerous disciplines that have revolutionized the study of history in the last 50 years. Rulers and Empires is her only story, but she tells it well; the book is a pleasant read, and the author deserves full credit both for the huge effort involved in producing such a volume, and for the accuracy (the undoubted product of years of sleepless nights spent digesting hundreds of primary reference works) of her narrative. I liked the book, and enjoyed reading it. But it is very limited. There is a kind of imbalance, and tunnel-vision, that becomes more apparent the more one reflects on it. This is a book that has no fewer than eight index entries on Merodach-baladan, an obscure 8th century BC king of Babylon, but not one word on Euclid, and only two sentences on the Parthenon! To sum up, Bauer's volume, while competently written, perversely omits nearly all of the artistic and intellectual achievements of the ancient world, that alone make that world truly great and worthy of study.

If political history is the narrative of political (and so often military) events and leaders, this is certainly a political history. It has got the advantage of presenting not only Mesopotamia and Egypt plus Greece and Rome, but also China and India, showing the progress of each part of the Ancient World in parallel. It is concise, interesting and highly readable. Of course, the author's approach implies choosing a somehow narrow scope: no social or economic history is included, although some religious flavour is, for she masterly uses the myths of each civilization as clues to understand its politics. Taking that into account, I would recommend also to read (as a complement to this book) "The History of Government. Volume I. Ancient Monarchies and Empires" by S.E. Finer, "Life after Death. A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion" by Alan F. Segal and "Gem in the Lotus. The

Seeding of Indian Civilisation" by Abraham Eraly, to mention but a few.

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