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Ancient Mediterranean Civilization in a Global Context

The presenter is co-author of a textbook for college-level world history classes first published in 1997 and revised for a second edition in 2001. Written by six university professors with a wide spread of regional and chronological areas of expertise (several also had considerable experience of designing and teaching world history courses), the intention was to take a cutting-edge approach to "global history"—a term that implies fair and equal attention to all parts of the planet—and to combine a wide spectrum of expertise with a unified conception, by having the author team meet frequently to hammer out a design and read and comment upon each other's work.

The long and checkered history of this project is instructive, pointing up many important issues relating to the production of textbooks and the role of Classics and Classicists amidst the evolving historical conceptions and concerns of our time. These include the following, which will be illustrated by revealing examples:

~ *The challenges of collaboration on team-authored textbooks.* The process of creating this book was frequently uncomfortable and contentious, at the same time that it was highly stimulating.

~ *The process of structuring content and selecting themes and emphases.* Given the vast scope of global history and the fact that the global history course, a relatively new phenomenon, has yet to develop a standard conceptual paradigm for organization and content (as has been done for the western civilization course), the co-authors were confronted with the challenge—and opportunity—of a virtual *tabula rasa*.

~ *The constricted space given to coverage of antiquity as compared to more recent historical periods.* Six chapters out of a total of thirty-five were given to the period from 3500 BCE to 300 CE around the globe. This compression dictated that the chapters on the ancient world each feature from two to six discrete societies, posing the challenge of finding themes and narrative structures that gave the diverse materials coherence and instructive power. In this construct, Greece and Rome were covered in about half of two chapters, with emphasis given to the interactions of Greece and Persia and a comparison of the Roman and Chinese empires.

~ *The unreasonable requests made by editors and reviewers who don't understand the nature and limitations of our evidence for the distant past.* I was frequently forced to explain why, for example, I couldn't give an exact date for the origin of iron metallurgy in western Asia or the composition of the **Bhagavad-Gita**.

~ *The role of the classical civilizations—and scholars whose expertise is in the "western" field of Classics—in textbooks with a truly global perspective.* While we need to be careful not to claim any special "privileges" for the civilizations we teach, we are the custodians of a particularly rich and varied treasury of materials. We can know more about the life experiences and cultures of people in the ancient Mediterranean societies

than in other parts of the world, and thus have an unparalleled opportunity to bring the ancient world to life.

~ Finally, how participation on such a project profoundly impacts one's perspectives on, and approaches to investigating and teaching, the classical civilizations.