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Michael Burger

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History
are like to divide up the
past into tidy periods. The
book is useful in making the
grandstanding chapters pos-
sible. ¶ Yet, as these chap-
ters suggest, no period is cut
off from those that precede and follow it.
¶ Instead, to reflect on the story occasional-
ly is to reflect on the fact that history, or at least this
history, is a story of unintended, unintended consequences.
¶ To take one example of many: the theologians who wrote
their arguments to defend the definition did not see Greek
philosophers' influence on their own assumptions that correct
Christianity was similar correct doctrine. ¶ And at the Greek end
of this development, those eager Greeks who listened entranced to
"Christians" could not have imagined that the values they were
celebrating would shape a religion dedicated to honoring the other
christ. ¶ Despite their unimpaired best intentions, people in the
past did not create their world according to some plan they did not
see and think entirely to change their own or that of their
predecessors. Instead, they lived in an accidental world. And so
do we. ¶ The biggest historical division not by the living is that
between the past and the present. In a fundamental sense the
past is dead, we are alive. ¶ The past is an alien world in
constant view. ¶ Ancient gods inhabited their status.
Twentieth-century nations were made up of people who were
supposed to know what had happened, not impartially
discover what happened. ¶ The ownership of human
beings was publicly available, whether to provide
the labor for democracy, Colonial America or
the labor to produce sugar (the Early Mod-
ern Caribbean). ¶ Despite contin-
gent experience of slavery as
open opportunity
for women, such
opportunities were
often emerged without be-
nefit of a human conscience. ¶
But if the story will there is right, our
current expect our own time to be free of its
past, even its remote past. ¶ I hope that this
book sheds some light on change and contin-
ity between that past and the West's present,
a light to illuminate their best.

Michael Burger

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Michael Burger : The Shaping of Western Civilization, Volume I: From Antiquity to the Mid-Eighteenth Century before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Shaping of Western Civilization, Volume I: From Antiquity to the Mid-Eighteenth Century:

Michael Burger's goal in this inexpensive overview is to provide a brief, historical narrative of Western civilization. Not only does its length and price separate this text from the competition, but its no-frills, uncluttered format and well-written, one-authored approach make it a valuable asset for every history student. The Shaping of Western Civilization: From Antiquity to the Mid-Eighteenth Century begins with the ancient Near East and ends with the mid-eighteenth

century. Unlike other textbooks that pile on dates and facts, *Shaping* is a more coherent and interpretive presentation. Burger's skills as writer and synthesizer will enable students to obtain the background required to ask meaningful questions of primary sources. In addition to suggestions for further reading, this overview includes over 40 images and 14 maps.

I had become increasingly disillusioned with Western Civ textbooks in general, largely on the grounds that they present a unified, uncontroversial narrative, which is not at all how historians actually understand the past. The *Shaping of Western Civilization* is entirely different, in that, by highlighting puzzles and debates, it actually shows students what historians do. I am also pleased with the low-cost production, as I teach at a campus with many students of modest means. If and when I teach Western Civ again, I will almost certainly assign this text. (William H. Campbell, University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg) At last, an introductory text that takes the power of ideas seriously. Judicious and insightful, this book will treat students to the breadth and riches of Western civilization. (Gerry Bowler, University of Manitoba) Instructors of a Western Civilization curriculum can nowadays choose from any number of textbooks, most of which are, in all honesty, perfectly good. But I know of no other textbook in English that I would recommend to undergraduates, graduate students, and colleagues as a thought-provoking read on its own merits. Burger's survey covers all of the expected factual bases, but it also challenges readers to reflect on the process of history-making itself, models enquiry for them, and calls attention to the structuring limitations on our pursuit of historical knowledge: evidence never speaks of its own accord, different questions require different levels of resolution, similarities among cultures serve to heighten the contrasts, past and present ways of looking at the world may be incommensurable, historians must beware of moralizing and all this just in the first chapter! This is a book for those instructors who believe that the goal of teaching history is not to impart knowledge but to provoke their students to a certain way of thinking. (Oren Falk, Cornell University) This textbook [...] is absolutely amazing. I have taught Western Civ several times and used a different book each time, all of them flawed: too expensive, providing far too much detail, not aligning with my own version of the course. This book, however, has it all. It is inexpensive, provides the perfect balance of detail and analysis, and aligns uncannily well with my lectures (to the point that my students must think I cribbed a few of them directly from the book). On top of that, it is extremely readable. Burger manages to unfold the history of Western civilization by immersing his reader in the problems faced by the people of the eras he discusses, and showing how their solutions to those problems changed across time, building on or departing from the solutions of their ancestors. The book manages to present a beautifully cohesive synthesis of events, all the while raising important questions and challenges in the mind of the reader. In sum, it is the perfect textbook - one that I will be sticking with for years to come. (Kristin Pinyan, Rutgers University-Newark) About the Author Michael Burger is an historian of medieval Europe and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Auburn University at Montgomery. He is the author of *Bishops, Clerks, and Diocesan Governance in Thirteenth-Century England: Reward and Punishment* (2014) and *The Shaping of Western Civilization* (2013).