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# WESTERN CIVILIZATION

*Images and Interpretations / Third edition*

EDITED BY DENNIS SHERMAN



# WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Images and Interpretations

THIRD EDITION / VOLUME I: TO 1700

*edited by* **Dennis Sherman**

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**WESTERN CIVILIZATION**  
**Images and Interpretations**  
**Volume I: To 1700**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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To Pat, Joe, Darryl, Vera, and Raymond

*In time choice, change, and obligation merge;  
How quietly we listen to ourselves.*

# Preface

In the third edition of this book, some important changes have been made. Above all, a large number of primary, visual, and secondary sources on women's history have been added. These sources, focusing on women's experiences and on the roles women played in a variety of historical developments, reflect the growing importance of women's history. A number of other new sources have been added throughout the book. Most of these are on social history, an area of increasing interest and concern. The final chapter has been extensively revised to reflect changing perceptions of the past two decades. Otherwise the structure, approach, and length of this book remain as in the first two editions.

This book provides a broad introduction to the sources historians use, the kind of interpretations historians make, and the evolution of Western civilization over the past six thousand years. A large selection of documents, photographs, and maps is presented along with introductions, commentaries, and questions designed to place each selection in a meaningful context and facilitate an understanding of its historical significance. The selections and accompanying notes should also provide insights into how historians work and some of the problems they face.

A brief look at the task facing historians of Western civilization will supply a background to what will be covered in this book. To discover what people thought and did and to organize this into a chronological record of the human past, historians must search for evidence—for the sources of history. Most sources are written materials, ranging from gov-

ernment records to gravestone inscriptions, memoirs, and poetry. Other sources include paintings, photographs, sculpture, buildings, maps, pottery, and oral traditions. In searching for sources, historians usually have something in mind—some tentative goals or conclusions that guide their search. Thus, in the process of working with sources, historians must decide which ones to emphasize. What historians ultimately write is a synthesis of the questions posed, the sources used, and their own ideas.

Historians of Western civilization consider their subject to be what is today Europe, along with those offshoots of Europe that have become established in various parts of the world. As they look back into the past, they focus on the origins of today's Western civilization in the Mediterranean basin, a cultural region that includes parts of North Africa and the Near East as well as Europe itself.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

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The basic organization of this book is chronological, beginning with the origins of Western civilization in the ancient Near East and gradually moving up to the present. From time to time this chronological approach is modified and certain important developments such as the Renaissance or totalitarianism are pulled out of the chapter covering their period of occurrence and are discussed separately. All the chapters, however, are organized the same way. Each chapter is broken into sections consisting of the following features:

Each chapter opens with a **chapter introduction**, in which the period of history and the general topics to be dealt with in the chapter are described. The introduction provides a brief sketch of some of the most important developments, but no effort is made to cover the period. Instead, the purpose is to introduce the topics, issues, and questions that the sources in the chapter focus on, and to place these sources in the historical context of Western civilization.

The introduction is followed by a **time line**, showing the relevant dates, people, events, and developments of the period, to provide a historical context for the selections in the chapter. In addition, a time line at the beginning of each of the six parts in the book puts the developments covered in each chapter into a broader perspective.

The chapter time line is followed by the **primary sources**. These are documents written by individuals involved in the matter under investigation. Historians consider these documents their main building blocks for learning about and interpreting the past. They are pieces of evidence that show what people thought, how they acted, and what they accomplished. At the same time historians must criticize these sources both externally—to attempt to uncover forgeries and errors—and internally—

to find the authors' motives, inconsistencies within the documents, and different meanings of words and phrases.

Each document is preceded by a **headnote**. The headnote provides some information on the nature of the source, places it in a specific historical context, and indicates its particular focus.

The headnotes end with suggestions of **points to consider**. These points are not simply facts to be searched for in the selection. Rather, they are designed to stimulate analytical thought about the selections and to indicate some of the uses of each source.

The primary sources are followed by visual sources, including maps, and then by **secondary sources**.

Secondary sources are documents written by scholars about the time in question. Usually, they are interpretations of what occurred based on examination of numerous primary documents and other sources. They reflect choices the authors have made and their own particular understandings of what has happened. Often there are important differences of opinion among scholars about how to understand significant historical developments. Secondary sources should therefore be read with these questions in mind: What sort of evidence does the author use? Does the author's argument make sense? What political or ideological preferences are revealed in the author's interpretation? How might one argue against the interpretation presented by the author? At times the distinction between primary and secondary documents becomes blurred, as when the author is a contemporary of the events he or she is interpreting. If a document by that author is read as an interpretation of what occurred, it would be a secondary source. As evidence for the assumptions and attitudes of the author's times, however, the document would be a primary source.

Like the primary documents, all the secondary documents are preceded by headnotes and suggestions for points to consider.

**Visual sources** are paintings, drawings, sculpture, ceramics, photographs, buildings, monuments, coins, and so forth, that can provide valuable historical insights or information. Although they often include characteristics of secondary documents, they are usually most valuable when used in the same way as primary documents. In this book their purpose is not merely to supplement the documents or provide examples of the great pieces of art throughout history. It is to show how these visual materials can be used as sources of history and to provide insights difficult to gain solely through written documents. To this end, each visual source is accompanied by a relatively extensive interpretive description. Care should be taken in viewing these sources and using these descriptions. By their very nature, visual sources usually have a less clear meaning than written documents. Scholars differ greatly over how sources such as paintings, ceramics, and coins should be interpreted. Therefore, the descriptions accompanying the visual sources are open to debate. They are



designed to show how it is possible for historians to use visual materials as sources of history—as unwritten evidence for what people thought and did in the past.

**Maps** often combine elements of primary documents, secondary documents, and visual sources. However, here they are usually used to help establish relationships, such as the connections between geographical factors and political developments, thereby enabling us to interpret what occurred differently than we could have if we had relied on written sources alone. As is the case with visual sources, each map is accompanied by an interpretive description. These descriptions indicate some of the ways maps might be used by historians.

Each chapter ends with **chapter questions**. These are designed to draw major themes of the chapter together in a challenging way. Answers to these questions require some analytical thought and the use of several of the selections in the chapter.

Since a book of this size can only sample what is available and outline what has occurred, this book is truly an introduction to Western civilization and its sources. Indeed, it is my hope that the materials presented here will reveal the range of sources that can be used to deepen our understanding of Western civilization and serve as a jumping-off point for further exploration into history and the historian's discipline.

McGraw-Hill and I would like to thank Karl K. Barbir, Siena College; Paul B. Goodwin, Jr., University of Connecticut; Charles H. Haws, Old Dominion University; T. Ronald Melton, Brewton-Parker College; Molly K. Ransbury, Eckerd College; Joyce E. Salisbury, University of Wisconsin—Green Bay; and E. Phillip Thompke, Tidewater Community College for their many helpful comments and suggestions in reviewing this text.

*Dennis Sherman*

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