



# The Shaping of Western Civilization, Volume I: From Antiquity to the Mid-Eighteenth Century: 1

By Michael Burger

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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.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

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).

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