

enlivens the chapter on the birth of that institution in 508 BC, and leaves no doubt about the contrasting grimness of life in Sparta and the despotism of the Persian kings or of an emperor such as Nero.

Lane Fox has a deft way of showing how intimate the connections were between Greece and Rome, and yet how starkly different the two could be. In 166 BC, for instance, Rome was embarked on a period of intense Hellenization following its triumph over Macedon the previous year. But when famous Greek flute players and dancers were brought to Rome, the audience soon tired of their performance, and “they were told to liven it up by starting a mock battle.” Boxes climbed onstage. The Greek historian Poly-

bios, who was likely present, “could not even bring himself to describe it for his serious Greek readership.”

In compressing the events of a thousand years into roughly 600 pages, Lane Fox reduces some of the

most compelling personalities of the ancient world to ciphers—an unfortunate shortcoming in a history billed as “epic.” Alcibiades, the glamorous Athenian general who led the expedition to Sicily that was to prove so disastrous for Athens in the Peloponnesian War, is here only a dim presence, as is Catiline, the upper-class demagogue who led a coup against the Roman Senate in 63 BC. Other figures, however, are finely sketched; the portrait of Cicero is about as clear-eyed and generous as one could wish.

The Classical World is old-fashioned narrative history at its finest, though Lane Fox occasionally comes off as a bit crusty. In his brief discussion of Sappho, the preeminent Greek poet of erotic desire, Lane Fox blushing marvels at her lesbianism—“she really desires these ladies”—before changing tack and deeming her a “poetess of flowers.” (Perhaps it’s his horticulturalist’s eye, not old-fogeyism, that’s to blame: He writes a

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weekly gardening column for *The Financial Times*.)

Throughout this dense yet leisurely telling, the author comes across as urbane, genial, and a tad snifty: in short, the consummate don. His occasional aperçus could just as well be delivered over a glass of port at high table as between the covers of his book. After extolling the talents of the typical Greek aristocrat—raised to speak eloquently in public, ride, play music, and compose verses—Lane Fox remarks drily, “He was accomplished in ways in which his modern critics tend not to be.” One can imagine the appreciative chortles of a tableful of Old Etonians and Harrovians.

—Amanda Kolson Hurley

Fighting Over Money

FROM THE LATE COLONIAL ERA until the establishment of the Federal Reserve System in the early 20th century, conflicts over America’s money supply shaped the country’s history. Those taxes in the American colonies on stamps, tea, and the like may

THE MONEY MEN:
Capitalism,
Democracy, and the
Hundred Years’ War
Over the
American Dollar.

By H. W. Brands.
Norton. 239 pp. \$23.95

have tipped the scale in favor of rebellion, but the Revolutionary War’s main economic causes were volatile interest rates and Britain’s restrictions on what could be used as money in the colonies. The monetary chaos that emerged during the American Revolution and the severe deflation that followed it drove the movement for a new constitution. And contentious political battles in the 18th and 19th centuries over the Bank of the United States, championed by capitalists who desired the stability of a central bank, were obviously related to monetary policy.

Control of the money supply meant control of the price level and interest rates, a situation that pitted Americans against each other: Consumers and lenders benefited when the price level fell and were hurt when it rose, while, for producers and borrowers, the inverse was true. Likewise, high interest rates (adjusted for inflation) aided

lenders; low rates helped borrowers. Little wonder, then, that money was a political hot potato until 1913, when the Federal Reserve Act bureaucratized and thereby largely depoliticized monetary policy, ending a roughly century-long money war and shifting politicians' attention to taxes.

H. W. Brands, author of some 20 books and a history professor at the University of Texas, Austin, relates the history of that war through the lives of five fairly familiar figures: Alexander Hamilton (1757?–1804), America's first treasury secretary and founder of the country's first central bank; Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844), the financier who served as president of the second Bank of the United States until Andrew Jackson succeeded in killing it; Jay Cooke (1821–1905), who mobilized the Northern masses to buy the bonds that partially financed the Civil War; railroad magnate and financial speculator Jay Gould (1836–92); and investment banking titan J. P. Morgan (1837–1913).

Nothing of such practical and widespread use as money is so misunderstood, and *The Money Men* does little to educate readers about money and finance. The discussion of restrictions on colonial bills of credit is garbled, for instance, as are explanations of early banking and securities markets. Brands's grasp of finance improves as his narrative advances chronologically, but one might say of him what he writes of Andrew Jackson, that he "knew next to nothing about banks, a little more about money, and a great deal about democracy."

It is in the political arena where Brands shines. His biographer's knowledge of the policies, rhetoric, and backroom shenanigans of important players such as Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, and Theodore Roosevelt brings his account to life. He has a knack for keeping his yarn moving while generously peppering it with interesting and occasionally telling anecdotes and quotations, as when he dramatically describes William Jennings Bryan's famous "cross of gold" speech, which cemented Bryan's 1896 presidential nomination, writing that "the audience absorbed the rhythms of Bryan's voice."

And he has a sharp, observant eye for the big picture, noting, for example, that "the Civil War began as a revolt by Southern democrats and ended as a revolution by Northern capitalists."

Overall, Brands's account of American history as a series of monetary struggles is a fruitful interpretation well worth a reader's dollars.

—Robert E. Wright

Painting the Truth

DURING WORLD WAR I, photographers and cameramen commissioned by the U.S. military produced more than 35,000 still photographs for the files of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

This work, largely done by the newly established Army Signal Corps Photographic Section, was intended to provide military intelligence, a historical record, and educational and propaganda materials. At the same time, a much smaller and less-remembered image production project was under way: The AEF commissioned eight prominent illustrators as captains to produce a "historical record" of what became known as the Great War.

In *Portrait of War*, historian Peter Krass takes his readers from the artists' initial enthusiasm when they signed up to the beginning of the Allies' occupation of Germany. The men met numerous difficulties as they sought to reach the frontlines and capture scenes of war: fears about their own safety, military stonewalling and physical roadblocks, and a desperately frustrating lack of transport. Like the military's official photographers, the artists reported to the War Department and to the Committee on Public Information, the government agency that packaged the war for American consumption. They struggled to reconcile Washington's expectations (drawings of "action" and heroism that would appeal to the press and the public) with what they felt moved

PORTRAIT OF WAR:

The U.S. Army's First Combat Artists and the Doughboys' Experience in WWI.

By Peter Krass. Wiley. 342 pp. \$30