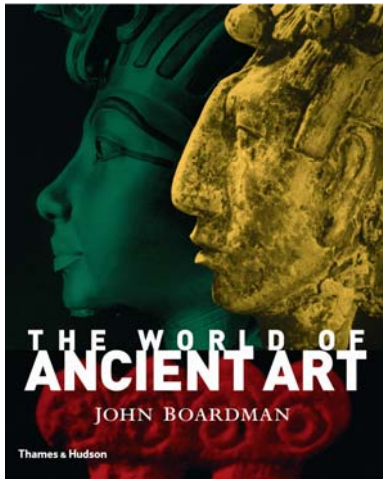


**The World of Ancient Art** / John Boardman.--New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, dist. by W. W. Norton, July 2006.--406 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-500-23827-8: \$65.00.



John Boardman, retired professor of classical archaeology and art, Oxford University, "tells the story" of ancient art well. He notes that his approach, similar to Arnold Toynbee's emphasis on the importance of environmental factors, considers three "zones": northern, temperate, and tropical.

The strength of the book is in its forty-page section, "The Common Record," in which Boardman compares temperate-zone "urban" cultures in both Old and New Worlds, including China, India, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Greece, Persia, Rome, Central America, and Peru. Although not noted in the table of contents, the chapter is subdivided into useful sections under the headings "Cities, Architecture, and Cemeteries," "Functions and Applications," "Representational Arts," "Materials and Techniques" and "Artists." One of the two indexes is by place, and twelve maps form an appendix.

Unfortunately, a global map differentiating those three geographical divisions is lacking.

The rest of the book has individual chapters for each culture, along with what the author calls "interfaces," or information that links one culture to other cultures. While the publisher's blurb says the book comprehensively covers the "full range of ancient art produced across the globe," the coverage is uneven. For example, anyone interested in Paleolithic through Neolithic art will surely be disappointed by that chapter's brevity and the chapters on Native North America, Africa, and Australasia seem like afterthoughts.

Art librarians may have difficulty determining the audience for this title. Because it includes neither footnote or endnote citations, its use in academic and museum libraries is greatly diminished. A bibliography, arranged by country, is present, but it is not ordered in any discernable manner. The book includes a wealth of illustrations. Of the more than 700 images, only 90 are in color. For the most part, the images are small and clear. Since we have become accustomed to seeing art books with large, sharp, beautifully reproduced color images, this book looks dated. The captions are informative, but when crowded onto plate pages with small illustrations, one can end up reading the wrong captions.

Still, Boardman's international approach is appreciated for its overview, and this book does have merit. It was selected by the Discovery Channel Book Club, the History Book Club, and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Clearly, librarians will need to weigh the stated advantages and disadvantages in making a purchase decision.

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