Ancient/Classical History:
http://ancienthistory.miningco.com/

Page by: N.S. Gill

Review by:
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At first glance, The Mining Company's Ancient/Classical History web site may seem to contain more breadth than depth, but the sheer diversity of the site is stimulating enough. The purpose of the site, declares N.S. Gill, the site's webmaster, is to "shake the dust out of history by making it lively, relevant, and entertaining." Gill succeeds in this goal. The site is interdisciplinary and multi-media in every sense. An analysis of esoteric subjects, such as Gill's essay exploring the hexasigimally-based Babylonian mathematical system, is juxtaposed with Wilson Bertram's review of Sid Meier's popular computer simulation game *Civilization II*. Static read-only page formats, such as Clyde Winter's essay tracing African influence on Olmec writing, mix freely with interactive online activities, such as Serge Rosmorduc's web page which allows a user to type her/his name phonetically and see what it would look like when written in Ptolmaic hieroglyphs. Text and graphics intertwine: a user can click on a linked picture of a Greek scroll fragment in an essay about Homer and call up a detailed catalogue about the fragment, including its date, content, and material components. Gill skillfully mixes the high and the low, the traditional and the cutting-edge, and word and image to create a fascinating, if at times dizzying, information environment.

The Mining Company is a computer search engine and directory that "mines" the material on the World Wide Web and makes it available to computer browsers. The Mining Company's directory, where Gill's Ancient/Classical History site can be found (under the category News/Issues), is specifically created by and maintained by The Mining Company's webmasters or "guides". Gill's brief biography traces her interest in ancient history back to a fourth grade teacher who inspired her students by teaching about ancient Egypt not only through conventional history lessons, but by creatively extending the historical concepts into geography, spelling, literature, and art lessons as well. As an undergraduate, Gill studied Classics at The University of Chicago and The University of Minnesota, and continued with Latin in graduate school at the University Minnesota. Before finishing her graduate degree, Gill decided "to chuck it all to become a homeschooling parent and freelance writer". Perhaps it is this varied background that has enabled Gill to succeed in creating an absorbing and entertaining site where both scholar and lay person can find informative little gems.

The site's homepage is divided into three main segments. The first main

segment, on the left side of the homepage, consists of a vertical menu with 28 linked subjects broken into three sets, each arranged alphabetically. The first set features the names of the "most sought-after" figures from antiquity: Alexander, Caesar, Cleopatra, Socrates, and Jesus, along with Gill's "personal, but popular favorites"-- Hercules and Homer. The second set represents "the major geographic areas people look for on this site": Egypt, Near East, Asia, Greece, and Rome. The third set lists permanent special interest topics such as Calendars, Daily Life, Economics, Weapons/War, and Women.

The second main segment dominates the middle of the homepage and is also subdivided into three sections. The top middle section, called "In the Spotlight," features essays and forum threads that are updated on a weekly basis. The topics range from Boudicca and the differences between the Roman and Celtic view of rape to the Homeric Question and oral formulaic poetry.

Beneath "In the Spotlight" is a section called "Essentials" that focuses on broad categories such as "Mythology" (an index of gods, goddesses, and mythology from around the world), "Primary Texts" (containing the writing of philosophers, poets, and historians in English translation), and "Reader Book Reviews" (where readers share their opinions on ancient history and historical fiction).

Below "Essentials," at the bottom center of the page, are "Sponsored Links" such as "Sotheby's auction, appraisal, restoration, history".

The third and last main segment of the homepage, found to the far right, is called "Related Sites" and includes links to sites dealing with historical reenactments, medieval history, and women's history.

The content, style, and quality of The Mining Company's [Ancient/Classical History](#) web site can vary greatly. For example, clicking into the Ancient MesoAmerican link (found in the "Subject Library" link to the left) will take the user to a page of links containing such items as a long and elaborate text-heavy history of Mexico or a graphics-intense virtual tour through Mayan ruins in the Yucatan peninsula. Clicking into the Economics subject link, the user can find a table depicting a comparative chronology of money (from cows in 9000 BC to metal coins in 14 AD) or a detailed study of the relationship between the origin of writing and the specialized economy of Mesopotamia. Clicking into the Games and Contests subject link can take the user to a page filled with Latin cryptograms and riddles or a page where the user can download a computerized version of the Egyptian board game Hounds and Jackals. Approximately 1600 links can be found in Net Links alone, not counting the links within the links that lead outside the [Ancient/Classical History](#) site.

With its intricate and seemingly endless passageways, The Mining Company's [Ancient/Classical History](#) site is not unlike the multicursal Minoan labyrinth; and like the labrys from which the labyrinth takes its name, such a structure can be double-edged. A user can uncover unexpected treasures among the multitude of links, sites, and pages, or became hopelessly disoriented and lost in this endless environment of data. However, for those with taste for exploration, this informative and entertaining site is well worth entering.

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Lynn Gelfand is a doctoral student in Folklore at Indiana University. Her research interests include folkloric genres in computer-mediated environments, the technologies behind reading and writing, and the intersecting points between games and narratives.

Bibliography

- [Ancient/Classical History](#) (review)
- [Haunted Worlds: Narrative, Ritual, and Carnival in Gothic Role-Playing Games](#) (article)