

A Letter from the Editor of the Book Reviews

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As I take over the position of Book Review Editor for the *AJA*, I am pleased to recognize that the journal's book review section is flourishing. After several key changes made by previous Book Review Editors and Editors-in-Chief to accommodate the digital era, the journal has greatly increased the utility and visibility of book reviews. Since 2010, all book reviews have been open access on *AJA Online* (www.ajaonline.org) under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license. Other changes include the listing of all reviews and all books available for review in the quarterly *AJA e-Updates*. As I talk with colleagues, it seems that many view these shifts very favorably. They also regard the journal's careful scholarship, balanced analysis, and first-rate presentation as reasons that *AJA* book reviews have maintained their quality and importance as the pressures driving journals to adopt digital formats have increased.

Archaeology journals inhabit different niches, and readers can detect this by consulting book reviews as well as scholarly articles. To gain an understanding of exactly where the *AJA* stands, I surveyed reviews published in several "peer" journals from 2011 to 2015 (the last five full years available at the time of writing).¹ As can be seen in table 1, the *AJA* occupies a distinct "middle ground" in the balance it strikes between articles and book reviews. The highest percentages belong to journals covering the classical world. The *JRA* and *JHS* earmark on average slightly less than half of their pages to book reviews; the *JRS* allocates more than one-third. Like the *AJA*, *AmerAnt* and *Latin American Antiquity* cover large geographical regions, but they emphasize book reviews to a much smaller degree, at 3 and 4% on average. *Antiquity*, the broadest of all the peer journals I consulted, appears most similar to the *AJA* in the emphasis it places on book reviews. Its standard reviews of books together with the regular "New Book Chronicle" feature average about 14% of the space in the journal.

Every journal must decide for itself where the proper balance between articles containing new scholarship and reviews addressing previous publications lies. While the *AJA* allots less space to book reviews than do some peer journals whose purview is classical antiquity, it is nonetheless on par with another archaeology journal with broad geographical coverage. Other figures

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¹The journals chosen included three in the field of classical studies and classical archaeology (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* [*JHS*], *Journal of Roman Archaeology* [*JRA*], and *Journal of Roman Studies* [*JRS*]); two published by the Archaeological Institute of America's sister institution, the Society for American Archaeology (*American Antiquity* [*AmerAnt*] and *Latin American Antiquity*); and one that covers archaeology worldwide (*Antiquity*). I measured the number of pages in each section of the peer journals, since all of them publish reviews in print as well as online; for the *AJA*, I used the proportion 1:5, the approximate manuscript-page ratio the journal allocates to book reviews in comparison with articles.

TABLE 1. Length of book review section in comparison with the length of the rest of the journal, 2011–2015, showing both average percentage and range.

Journal	Average (%)	Range (%)
<i>JRA</i>	48	45–51
<i>JHS</i>	46	42–51
<i>JRS</i>	36	31–40
<i>AJA</i>	20	20
<i>Antiquity</i>	14	12–15
<i>AmerAnt</i>	4	2–6
<i>Latin American Antiquity</i>	3	1–5

document the healthy state of the book review section. During the last five years, the *AJA* published an average of 82 book reviews per year. In the same period, it received an average of 294 books per year. As Book Review Editor, I will endeavor to maintain the position of the journal in all these respects, which I regard as both respectable and responsible.

Book reviews can perform many important functions, including drawing attention to important new work, responding to arguments proposed by authors, debating hypotheses and conclusions, and setting the record straight. The role of the Book Review Editor combines several responsibilities. It is partly reactive, conditioned by the books that arrive in the (real or virtual) in-box each day. But it is also active, a chance to determine which of the many books is sent for review and who is solicited to review them. My policy in these respects will be to seek established experts in the field to evaluate the most significant and novel aspects of current scholarship, and to assist them as they report on this material to *AJA* readers.

Guidelines for book reviews will remain largely unchanged. Reviewers will be instructed to provide a judicious and balanced assessment of new publications, explaining their strengths and weaknesses and eschewing the prosaic cataloguing of contents or minor quibbling with authorial or editorial style. Each book reviewer will be allotted about 1,000 words, although additional space will be afforded to lengthy, multiauthored, or multivolume works. Readers and reviewers will now benefit from two new features. The *AJA* will include, if reviewers desire, a link to the table of contents of reviewed books. Additionally, reviews published online may include up to two illustrations, as long as they meet all of the journal's copyright guidelines.

The geographical and chronological focus of the *AJA* has been defined as “the art and archaeology of ancient Europe and the Mediterranean world, including the Near East and Egypt, from prehistoric to Late Antique times.” The journal receives many books that fit within these parameters, but the book review section can additionally serve to draw attention to books beyond the normal geographical and chronological scope, if they promise to be significant to a broad swath of archaeologists. Publishers are therefore encouraged to send books in ancillary disciplines.

Readers and colleagues are encouraged to share their opinions of *AJA* book reviews via the comments feature that appears on *AJA* Online at the end of each review. Any interested reviewer who has completed a Ph.D. may submit a curriculum vitae specifying geographic, methodological, temporal, or thematic fields of expertise to the Book Review Editor at the address below. Anyone wishing to request a book, recommend a reviewer, or comment on issues of policy is also welcome to contact me.

It is a pleasure to record my gratitude to my predecessors, Derek Counts and Elisabetta Cova, and to Kevin Garstki, their assistant. Their well-organized system and wise advice have enabled me to transition into this position with ease. For encouragement to undertake the role, I thank the Editor-in-Chief, Jane B. Carter. I have also appreciated the assistance of Madeleine J. Donachie and Vanessa Lord, who have helped me understand many details from the perspective of the journal. My chair, Sara Forsdyke, and the entire staff of the Department of Classical Studies of the University of Michigan deserve deep thanks for facilitating numerous logistical aspects of this position, most of which would be inconceivable without their assistance.

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