

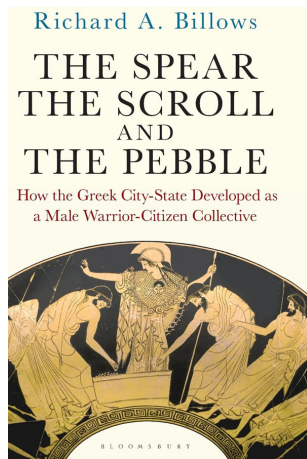
## Book Review

### The Spear, The Scroll and The Pebble. How the Greek City-State Developed as a Male Warrior-Citizen Collective

Billows (R.A.) Pp. 304. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Paper, £24.99.  
ISBN-13: 978-1350289208

Tim Adelani

Pimlico Academy, London, UK  
[TimAdelani@outlook.com](mailto:TimAdelani@outlook.com)



The aim of the book is to understand how Greek city-states developed their outlook and culture, with a focus on the military, political and literary development of male citizens in those city-states.

The first chapter tackles how the states of Homeric and Bronze Age Greece developed into the different city-states that we study today. There is important acknowledgement of how much variety the city-states presented, and that there was no immediate archetypal model, and of how

ancient historians referred to the people of a place, rather than the name of the city-state. The second chapter discusses the economic development in the Greek city-states, along with the relative specialisation of trade, manufacturing and services within city-states.

The Spear contrasts the heroism that is the mainstay of Homer to the group tactics of land and sea warfare that the city-states engaged in. There is particular focus on the communal nature of these methods, whereby every male citizen was needed in warfare because their livelihoods were at risk if every citizen was not engaged.

The Pebble focuses on the universal Greek male citizen entitlement to engage with politics through direct political decision-making, which was drawn from the engagement in martial affairs which was central to Greek life at the time. While the author discusses the Athenian system, he provides a wider insight into the Greek world by highlighting how not all Greek city-states were democracies styled after Athens, but had a variety of democratic systems. The book also effectively links this to literacy by emphasising that citizens needed to know how to play their part in the system, which meant that laws and other business were displayed in public places.

The Scroll discusses literacy and its importance in the development of the culture and outlook of the city-states, and how it links to both military and political engagement. The author suggests that the rate of literacy was much higher; however this seems to be contradicted by some of the primary sources that he discusses.

Overall, this book provides an interesting perspective on the nature of city-state development, and would be a worthy addition to any classroom library. While the book is perhaps slightly inaccessible for students below A level study, there are aspects of the book that practitioners can adapt for students in other Key Stages.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000011