

Overview of the Edit:

[AUTHOR], with *[book title]*, you've created an obviously well-researched and appropriately epic entry into the historic fiction genre, placing it with such franchises as *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*, *Black Sails*, and *DaVinci's Demons*. However, while your passion for the material and your dedication to your research is evident, it's my feeling that at this point you only have the framework of your story. There's still a lot of detail that needs to be added, as well as honing to the overall focus of the story, which shifts from being a period police procedural, to a historic fantasy, to a war epic, and also a treasure hunt. Also, the spot illustrations that take up a significant part of the manuscript often feel tangential or out of place with the period, can interrupt the flow of the story, and sometimes point out weaknesses within the text, specifically the relative lack of lush descriptions of people and places that are key to these kinds of stories. (There may also be legal ramifications from the illos that I will discuss further in a later section.)

Within the manuscript itself, I've marked several spots that I think could use expansion and embellishment, as well as pointing out specific spelling errors and grammar oversights. In the sections that follow here, I'll discuss the more global concerns that came up during my review.

Structure:

As I mentioned at the outset, your interest in this material and the amount of research you've put into the story is evident throughout the manuscript, and that's great. But, it's the desire to share that research that often gets in the way of telling a compelling fictional narrative. Too often the manuscript gets bogged down in long sections of exposition delivered by a single character, and there's at least one character, Cynisca, whose sole role in the story seems to be to deliver such exposition. If these sections were balanced out with equally long action sequences, then it might be easier to overlook the parts where things get talky, but as many of the key action scenes only last a handful of pages and are bracketed by exposition or talking-head scenes that can go on for twice as many pages, the manuscript comes across as more of a historical treatise than an entertaining piece of fiction. Ultimately, this story should be about the characters, their choices, and the consequences of those actions, all set against a historical backdrop. As it is now, your desire to share what you've learned about this period is overshadowing everything else.

This is not to say that you need to cut the historical context or necessary background information. However, it all needs to be better integrated into the overall text. My suggestion would be to look at the work of authors such as Tom Clancy, who can go on for pages about the technical details of the hardware in his stories, but clearly isolates those sections from the rest of the narrative. This kind of writing will also save characters from having to deliver paragraphs of exposition, which can read as unnatural in dialogue.

Instead that information can be included in documentary-like passages that are woven throughout the story. But note that this writing style will require a delicate balance, as you don't want to cut away too often or for too long.

While you are quite good at providing the historical details that underlie the story, you often miss adding detail to other parts of the story, such as scene settings. Stories like this rely on the author to create a full and rich picture for readers, encouraging them to develop the same passion for a particular period that you have. But too often you start a scene with a quick list of which characters are present, an idea of where a couple of them are within a particular space, and perhaps a clinical description of the space itself (so many feet wide, so many feet high, x number of columns). Additional details may be revealed as they're needed as the scene progresses, but by that point, it's kind of too late. You should try to front-load that kind of description at the start of a scene, and be sure to locate each and every cast member within the space. This will give the reader all that he or she will need to get a picture of where they are and make sense of the character blocking as they move within the space. And there were a few times that you seemed to be relying on a picture or illustration to handle the description for you, but pictures should only serve to enhance a description, not do all the heavy lifting. Again, you're the one with the passion about and interest in this period; use these opportunities to get the reader excited as well and see the wonder that you already admire.

In a similar vein, a significant amount of action seems to happen "off-screen," and is then related to the reader (and the cast) by one of the characters. Many of these moments would work far better "on-screen," so that the reader doesn't feel left out and can be aware of events that the heroes won't discover the full truth about until later. Additionally, reporting the action rather than showing it not only makes the story less rich and engaging, it can also have the effect of making important events seem trivial, as readers could assume that if they weren't important enough for you to include in the main text, then they aren't worth knowing about. Again, the goal with historical fiction is to paint as complete and as lush a picture as possible. It's your job to make that era come alive and share your passion with the reader.

Pacing:

As mentioned earlier, the manuscript feels very dialogue and exposition heavy, and the major action sequences are too short and lack the blood-and-guts details that readers are most likely going to want. While the historical context and detail contained within the exposition is needed for the most part, a better balance needs to be struck with the action scenes so that the story can become more evenly weighted between the two.

Time is a very loose and confusing concept within the story. There are several points where a lot is made to happen within an unrealistic amount of time, while in others,

longer periods of time is shown to have passed, but we're given no idea as to what occurred between what happened last and what's going on now. It may be beneficial for you to write out a separate timeline for the whole of the story and refer to it as you work on the revision. Be sure to include what happens in those "in between times" so that you can properly summarize them and immediately integrate any direct consequences into subsequent events. And try intercutting concurrent scenes a bit more, so that the passage of time within each plotline feels more natural.

Also the manuscript seems to be devoid of distinct chapter breaks, and many of the sections feel like they should be further divided so as to separate one scene from the next. I've marked a couple of spots where it feels like some type of break is needed, but I encourage you to review the whole of the manuscript and find a way to break things up in a way that best suits the story.

Characters:

As I mentioned earlier, the manuscript is missing a lot of the descriptive content it needs in order to paint a full and complete picture of this era, and that includes character descriptions. For the most part, each character is presented as a name only, as if it's assumed that readers will know exactly what this person looked like. Again, some of the spot illustrations are clearly intended to give some context about a particular form of dress or the like, but these don't make up for not knowing whether a character is blond or brunet, tall or short, muscular or pudgy, bearded or clean-shaven, and in a few rare cases, male or female.

Also several of the characters in the story have multiple names and/or titles that they are called by throughout the story (for example, Hannibal is an instructor, a companion, the Carthaginian, and the son of Hamilcar Barga). With as many characters as this story has, switching between these names as often as you do can make things confusing at several points. This can be compounded even further when multiple characters share the same designation (such as "the Spartan"). I would suggest only doing this kind of switching with main characters like Xiphos and Hannibal, and only refer to the lesser characters by their given name. Additionally, clear distinctions with characters such as Ptolemy the king and his son, Ptolemy the Younger, or Scipio the Elder/the Younger need to be made. It could be pretty easy to mix those folks up.

Be careful that characters don't become defined by a specific role in the story. For example, Cynisca provides a lot of the manuscript's exposition, which could lead a reader to wonder whether that's the only reason she's in the story. Similarly, Arsinoe is often seen carrying scrolls for Cynisca to refer to during her recitations, which is odd considering Arsinoe is the princess and Cynisca is the lady-in-waiting. While Cynisca can still have the knowledge, expected hierarchies probably should be maintained.

Characters are complex creatures, and while a cast this large will certainly have some necessary stereotypes, the ones shouldering the bulk of the action should have many layers to them and be able to fill a number of functions within the story.

Tone:

Like most pieces of historical fiction, *[book title]* is a blend of genres. It has to be, as the reader will be drawn in and given necessary context by whatever genre has been applied to the period setting you've chosen. However, unlike other stories of its kind, *[book title]* seems to be a blend of a handful of genres rather than a couple. At the beginning, it reads like a police procedural, then it becomes a political thriller. Some treasure hunt aspects come into play not long thereafter, along with events normally seen in big military epics. And also there's magic, which seems to come and go as it's needed. Once you add in the period setting and the description and context that requires, the manuscript becomes very unfocused tonally, meaning it may have trouble finding an audience, as it seems to be trying to please too many of them.

The search for the Narmer artifacts and the Egyptian civil war read as the most compatible elements, and based on the subtitle of this work, they are the ones that will carry over into subsequent stories. My suggestion would be to focus on them, as well as the court intrigue, since that can feed the civil war plotline, and drop the procedural undertone that permeates the opening of the manuscript. Not only does it feel period inappropriate, but it is written out about a third of the way into the manuscript when you simply state who was behind Qibo's murder. But most important is that the story needs to strike a consistent tone and focus, and right now it isn't.

As for the magic used in the story, I've noted several moments in the manuscript when the rules of magic in this world are undefined or inconsistent. Again, I would suggest taking some time to write out all the rules that magic and qi powers need to follow, as well as how these powers were acquired and how they fit into overall society. Also, I'd suggest thinking about multiple systems of magic, like for instance the Egyptians can use qi manipulation and elemental magics as taught to them by Qibo, while the Romans and Greeks could use prayer and bargaining with the gods for their powers. But whatever you decide, any and all systems of magic need to have strict rules, otherwise their use will come across as a deus ex machina that you use whenever your characters are in a tough spot or they need to do something flashy. Also make sure that if you are going to use magic in the story that it is used throughout the story. Much of the big battle scenes in the middle of the book use no magic at all, and that absence only emphasizes the perception of magic as a writer's device rather than a unique aspect of your fictional retelling of these events.

On a related note, you've introduced a number of Eastern concepts and terms to a world that they have not traditionally been associated with. I'm unsure if this is a twist on established history that you've introduced or an aspect to this period that is not generally known, but either way not enough context is given within the story for typical readers to understand how Chinese philosophy and qi "magic" have become a part of Egyptian culture. This relationship needs to be further expanded and explained in your rewrite.

But one of the largest tonal issues in the manuscript was how often contemporary words, phrases, or concepts are applied to the period setting. While of course you want to create a world that the reader can understand, they are coming to this material because they're looking for something unlike the modern world. So they will expect it to be as accurate a reflection of its historical setting as possible. However, having the characters use contemporary historical and archaeological terms to refer to past events and objects—like Hellenistic, Bronze Age, the Punic War, New Carthage, feet instead of cubits and miles instead of leagues, and even the term BC itself—as well as the frequent uses of contemporary slang and phraseology—using words like "ok" or phrases like "getting in his face" or "kicking ass"—do nothing to set the "period mood," and make those moments when you are period accurate read more like a history book rather than a fictional narrative. This will mean making some words, "mystifying" some concepts, and using a lot of archaic terms for which you'll need to provide contextual clues, but your readers will appreciate these efforts to make this period as accurate and believable as possible.

Grammar:

You clearly know your grammar, as I only marked a handful of spelling and grammar corrections; all pretty normal when reviewing a manuscript for the first time. So, great job there! The only note I would make here is that you often write out long sections of exposition and dialogue in a series of short, one or two sentence paragraphs that are connected by continue quotes. While this practice is grammatically correct, it can be extremely difficult to follow over multiple pages, particularly when it's broken up further by an illustration. It would be better to go with a longer, self-contained paragraph.

Other:

Note that there are two major plot points that are not resolved, much less advanced, by the end of the novel: the war Ptolemy the Elder begins with Qin, and the motives behind Qibo's murder. While we do learn who murdered Qibo (though not in the best way) and it can be inferred that he was killed to get the seventh scroll of his book, this should be made clearer in the manuscript itself. And as for the war with the nation of Qin, Ptolemy declares it on page 23, there are a couple of meetings with Qin's ambassador, and then

the war, or the potential for it, is never brought up again. If this is a major element, then the plot thread needs to be more adequately developed and ultimately resolved.

In regards to the illustrations, since many of them only apply to a single, one-off mention in the manuscript and do little to enhance or supplement the story, I have recommended that a large portion be deleted. That said, several of the maps are indeed helpful in following the characters' various travels. But instead of pulling a lot of maps, several of which only show one necessary location along with a number of others that have already been covered or ones that don't apply to the story at all, I would suggest hiring someone to draw one or more maps that specifically show the locations visited in the story. Though I realize this is an investment, in the long run I think it will serve the story far better.

If there are images beyond the maps that you feel are important, I think the best way to present them is in an appendix at the back of the book. This way they are still part of the manuscript for readers to refer to, but they won't interrupt the story at the wrong moment. This appendix can also serve as an appropriate place to describe some bits of information that people of the period would most likely know but the reader may not, such as the languages in use by the characters and the various scrolls they discuss.

But most important, while you do correctly attribute all of the images to Wikipedia and the uploader of each image, it's very possible that none of them have been licensed for commercial use. Additionally, Wikipedia itself warns that it makes no claims as to the accuracy of the images that have been uploaded, or that the uploader is the copyright holder. In fact, the illustration you use for a siege engine has an artist credit that is different from the name of the image uploader. Since acquiring all the necessary permissions to use these Wikipedia images could be not only time-consuming, but also potentially fruitless, my honest suggestion is that you yourself source any and all images that you want to use and either have new art created or go to a service like Getty images and pay the appropriate licensing fee. That is really the only way to assure that you have a clear right to use the images, which any publisher will require you to have, and you'll also keep the book from getting mired up in any complicated and damaging legal hassles.

I do feel that you have the beginnings of a really entertaining story, [AUTHOR], but as I said from the start, there's still a lot of work to be done, in my opinion. A lot of layers, particularly description and expansion of scenes, need to be added, and you need to focus the tone of the book so that it speaks directly to the audience you're trying to bring to it. Also, you need to better the balance between the vast amount of the research you've done for the book and the fictional narrative you're trying to weave.