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Cities of Blood; Kingdom of the Dead

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It was Dorling Kindersley who pioneered the idea of the information book as finger buffet: appetising colour photographs, served with spicy bite-sized paragraphs of text on a lovingly arranged double page platter. Now they've returned to history as a meal you can get your teeth into, and they've dished it up with style. Ultimately, it's probably Simon Schama the magnificent that we ought to thank for this long overdue return to the healthy eating of a continuous text in generous chapters, but these two titles are the work of someone only lately recruited to the ranks of presenters of the TV history series. Peter Ackroyd's recent history of London was, of course, drawn from his own book and, as the author of acclaimed novels and non-fiction works, including biographies of Dickens and Blake, he comes with credentials that must be difficult to match in the writing of history for children. He is also supported by a formidable credit list of editors, managers, researchers, consultants and designers. They have done him proud, garnishing the pages around his text with photographs, reconstructions and maps that are informative and atmospheric at turns; and providing nearly all the necessary incidentals - timeline, glossary and index, although (as ever) no further reading or surfing.

These two books, in the series of four, describe the ancient civilisations of Egypt (**Kingdom of the Dead**) and South America (**Cities of Blood**) and, whether or not the author did his own research, their content is the kind of raw meat of human experience - political power, violence, religion, the nature of civilisation - for which Ackroyd's appetite is well known. He gives us stories that not only reflect historical scholarship but are told with immediacy and passion. They are books that older children and adults can gorge on.

Running Order:

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