

Learning to read a historical monograph is a valuable skill. The most important part of any monograph is going to be the introduction. This is where the author lays out the whole book. They tell you everything – what they are going to say, how they've organized their material, where they got their material, where they agree with other scholars and where they disagree. In just a few pages, other than the data and the story, is every crucial thing you need from a monograph. In just twenty or so paragraphs is everything you need to understand the book's intellectual and historical contribution to a subject.

Here are two books about Phoenix in the years after WWII. They have important things to say about the way that an important western city developed in those years. Phoenix is now America's fifth largest city. In 1940 it was not even in the top 100. Each author has important things to say about the consequences and causes of that growth.

In a sentence or two answer the following questions about each book's introduction:

What historical question does each author pose? Or what historical problem do they present?

Why do they say that their book matters? How do they answer the "so what" question?

Each author will begin at some point in their introduction start talking about other historians and other books. What do they say about each of those books?

This section is an important part of any introduction, this is the part where the author sums up the way that historians have talked about their subject so far. They are catching you up on the conversation. Which of the books/authors do Shermer and Needham say good things about? What criticisms do they make of other historians/interpretations.

What evidence does each author propose to examine? Why do they say this evidence is important?

What other questions to they promise to answer in the introduction?

What does the book argue? What is its thesis?