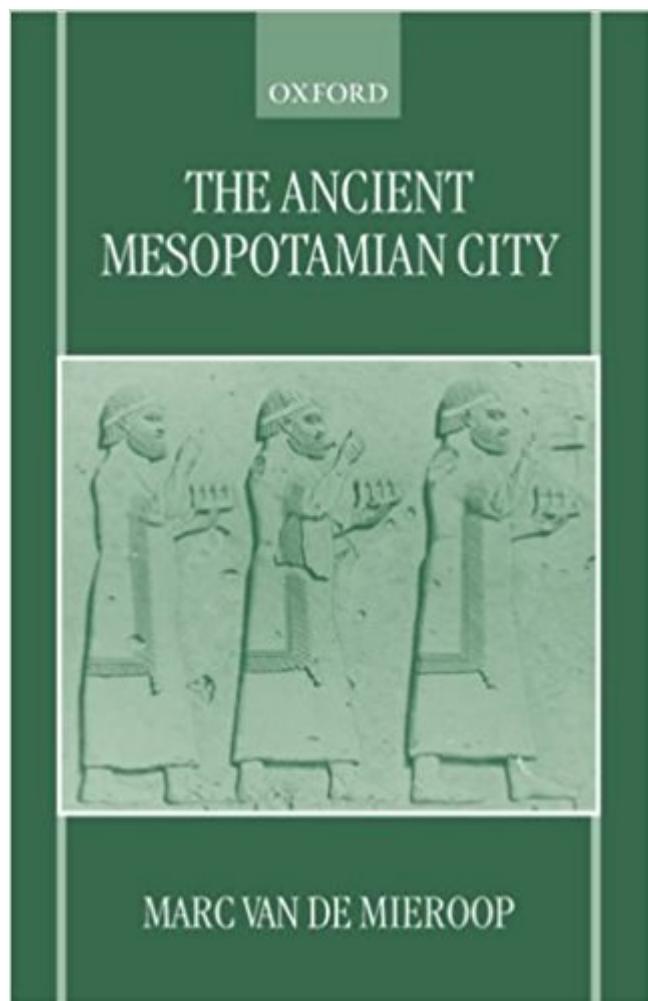


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The Ancient Mesopotamian City



Synopsis

Urban history starts in ancient Mesopotamia. In this volume Marc Van de Mieroop examines the evolution of the very earliest cities which, for millennia, inspired the rest of the ancient world. The author argues that the city determined every aspect of Mesopotamian civilization, and the political and social structure, economy, literature, and arts of Mesopotamian culture cannot be understood without acknowledging their urban background.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

‘offers a starting point to the cities of Mesopotamia for both the lay reader and the undergraduate student.’ E.J. Owens, *The Classical Review*, 2000. ‘Van de Mieroop’s thoroughgoing treatment of the subject can be read to advantage by every kind of ancient historian ... a splendid work of synthesis.’ A R George, *Bulletin of the SOAS* 62:3 1999. ‘His comparison and contrast of southern versus northern cities and planned versus unplanned cities gives a sense of the complexity, and his intelligent analysis of the multiple loci of social power offers insights into the contradictions ... frequent references to archaeological material are well integrated. This book deserves a wide audience.’ Anthony Sinclair, *Antiquity* This work is the survey of a city in Mesopotamian history by an author who has studied Old Babylonian Ur with distinction and it is a welcome addition to our understanding of Mesopotamian society, economics and politics. The book is attractive and well illustrated. - Daniel Snell - *Bibliotheca Orientalis* LV No 5/6 Sept-Dec 1988

Marc Van De Mieroop is at Columbia University.

In this book, Professor Van De Mieroop looks at the Mesopotamian city, from earliest Sumer to the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Included in this work are chapters covering everything politics, organization of neighborhoods (districts might be a better word), clans, economics, and more. The author's grasp of the subject is obviously profound, and any student of Mesopotamia can gather a great deal of information from this book. On the downside, though, the book was obviously written for an academic audience, rather than for general readers. This means that the book is often dry and verbose. However, that said, it is a fascinating work, one with a great deal to offer anyone interested in the Mesopotamian city.

A concise and well written overview of urban life in early Mesopotamia. These cities are of great interest as the first cities in human history. Van De Mieroop attempts a comprehensive survey including their origins, physical layout, political organization, economies, and social structure. As he points out, the evidence is fragmentary, based on a combination of surviving texts and archaeological findings, and drawn from a period of several millenia. Van De Mieroop is quite careful to point out limitations of the evidence and distinguishes carefully between what can be known with reasonable certainty and his own, generally plausible, reconstructions. Despite the considerable length of period covered, for example, Van De Mieroop argues for considerable continuity allowing some generalizations. Van De Mieroop opens with the origins of cities in Southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia) due to a confluence of different biogeographic regions fostering significant exchange. He departs from traditional accounts that see Mesopotamian cities as governed by "top down" theocracies and autocracies to something more resembling they way we think about Greek Poleis with a variety of regimes, many involving substantial civic participation and governance. Van De Mieroop's Mesopotamian cities are highly cosmopolitan commercial centers, the centers of regional economies and often involved in inter-regional trade. They exhibit a strong degree of cultural continuity over the period covered. Written well and each chapter concludes with a nice bibliographic section pointing to further reading.

This book is a long overdue survey of the urban experience in the first literate society. This work goes beyond the 'origin of cities', to tell us how they worked, and what really went on! Informative and accessible, I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in ancient history.

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