



Cities

John Reader

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Cities is a fascinating exploration of the nature of the city and city life, of its structures, development and inhabitants.

From the ruins of the earliest cities to the present, Reader explores how cities coalesce, develop and thrive, how they can decline and die, how they remake themselves. He investigates their parasitic relationship with the countryside around them, the webs of trade and immigration they rely upon to survive, how they feed and water themselves and dispose of their wastes. It is a sweeping exploration of what the city is and has been, fit to stand alongside Lewis Mumford's 1962 classic *The City in History*.

Cities Details

Date : Published September 1st 2005 by Vintage (first published 2004)

ISBN : 9780099284260

Author : John Reader

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Geography, Cities, Anthropology, Urban, Science

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From Reader Review Cities for online ebook

Valerie says

This book is not really a history of the city, though it does start with an examination of some of the world's first cities. Instead, each chapter is basically a stand-alone, sometimes loosely organized examination of a particular theme of city formation or life. The book is dense at points, but the author has a talent for making things like the problems of sanitation in medieval London fascinating.

Fiona says

I only read a few chapters of this book. What I read was interesting but I didn't think I could ever complete reading this book. I was interested in this subject matter but apparently only on the surface.

This book is about cities of the world. How they were formed, why, and how they declined.

I discovered that the first world city was Catal Huyuk which was founded some 9000 years ago in what is now southern Turkey.

I found the life of the Sumerians fascinating. They lived 4000 years ago in Mesopotamia. Archeologists have discovered writings on tablets about Sumerian life. Their lives were similar to ours except for the technology. There was one tablet from a father to son about how disappointed he was for his son to be loitering in the streets. They also found a math word problem that was worked in the schools. They knew of Pythagorean equation before Pythagorus was even born.

It took me a couple years to read the 4 chapters and I barely touched the meat of this book so I knew I would never finish it.

Vysloczil says

John Read is a good storyteller, but not a scholar of cities. The book is nice to read, but does not display academic rigor. One example: when he puts forward that Sumerian farmers might have obtained yields as high as 76(!) times (an incredibly high amount) the weight of seed sown, the interested reader of course immediately jumps to the back to check where that number comes from, only to find the source being a documentary called "Mesopotamia", which supposedly was aired on Channel4 in 2001.

In general I find his way of referencing not very compelling.

He doesn't even mention the groundbreaking (academic)-classics from Paul Bairoch and Jan de Vries from the 1980's.

It is a light read, helps refreshing some bits of history. Overall I enjoyed it and would recommend anyone who is interested in cities and their history to pick it up (since there are not many books out there on that topic)!

s says

<http://verspaetet.blogspot.de/2012/05...>

Shrita says

It's fine so far, but a bit general. Interesting cities, but I dislike his use of '6,000 years ago, 4,000 years ago, etc' instead of real dates. I can't believe I'm saying this, but I wish it were more academic (!).

Yeah...not going to finish this book. next.

Justin Covey says

This book lacks any kind of central thesis or overarching structure, and that's okay. Not every subject calls for a Silent Spring style polemic and I found John Readers amiable, tangent following style engrossing. Of course he's only able to pull this off because no matter what unexpected turn he takes the subject remains engrossing and informative. Almost every page of this book I learned something fascinating and new, and more than anything else that's what I'm looking for in non-fiction.

Alper says

T

Michael says

good review of trash in London in the 1700s ... but there are other good qualities of the book as well. part of the city reading.

AskHistorians says

A social history of the development of cities - particularly good chapters on the Renaissance and Mexico City stick in my mind.

Max says

John Reader's *Cities* is more of a collection of essays about different aspects of urbanism than it is a coherent statement about the city in history. The fact that you don't, by any means, need to read this one cover to cover from front to back to get into it was a pleasant surprise. Things learned: the economic centrality of small-scale urban gardening in Cuba due to trade embargos, Nairobi is sinking because it was built on a river bed, Stockholm's utopically planned suburbs have actually offered more collectivity than its inhabitants have desired....

Reader's text is interesting and, while its heavy on the data and statistics, it's extremely readable. But, it is most pointedly *NOT* a history of "the city" (as some amazon reviewers were quick to point out and completely miss the point of the book). True, Reader starts in Mesopotamia, dabbles a bit in greece and rome and then moves on to more modern stories about cities, but each chapter or essay in the book remains a discrete statement about aspects of urbanism studied in different contexts: urban food economies, urban housing, migration into cities, the relationship between the urban and the rural, city planning, cities, contagation and disease, etc. And this approach underlies well one of Reader's main points: that the city is an ancient and integral part of human habitation, that it is by no means a "new" formation, and that we should not see our booming metropolises of today as some sort of apex of the development of urbanism.

Artzi Hiltunen says

Great Analysis.

A book I like to return to again and again.

A great source of useful information.

Mike says

Interesting, but not very cohesive.

Michelle says

Scarcely have I read a more fact-filled book. Fact fact fact fact. Fact.

That said, I did persevere the many weeks it took of bedside reading to get through *Cities*. The major themes of the book (disease, environmentalism, sprawl) were interesting in a "how'd they do that" kind of way, and were conveyed by someone clearly passionate about the subject. I was wishing for a more conversational style and impassioned appeal (picked it up in the first place because hey, I like cities too), instead got a fairly balanced look at both the beneficial and consumptive aspects of city life through the ages.

Although, I did wonder why everything, even modern day area, was expressed as ha. Huh?

