

frowned upon" (p. 158; cf. p. 263). Here Caffrey depicts Benedict as an innovator struggling against repression, but to do so creates an overly dramatic intellectual history. Most good anthropology theorizes as well as describes. And Caffrey herself indicates that Boas early approved the new directions that Benedict explored (p. 156). Finally, in a book that exhaustively footnotes its sources, Caffrey makes large claims, on apparently slim evidence, for the influence of feminist writings on Benedict's thought. Benedict's last great undertaking, the Research on Contemporary Cultures project, is described as explicitly feminist in spirit and organization. Yet to make this case, Caffrey must insert the writings of feminist Ellen Key into her narrative (pp. 346-347), as if they represented Benedict's own philosophy, even though Benedict's acquaintance with Key's work is only vaguely documented (p. 85). Ironically, Caffrey concludes her book with a celebration of this cooperative, egalitarian research organization, though she had earlier celebrated Benedict as a lone scientific discoverer.

In general, Caffrey's work has the plodding thoroughness of a doctoral dissertation. She summarizes enormous amounts of material from a number of disciplines. Her reviews of trends and ideas that influenced Benedict are revealing, and they explore

themes in intellectual history overlooked by Benedict's other biographers. But, like her discussions of the history of anthropology, Caffrey's summaries are sometimes simplistic and, like her reviews of feminist thought, mechanically inserted into the narrative. Ruth Benedict taught that every culture has the vices of its virtues, and the same might be said of biography.

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Ancient Mesopotamia

The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000-2000 B.C. HANS J. NISSEN. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988. xiv, 215 pp., illus. \$34.95. Translated from the German edition (Darmstadt, 1983) by Elizabeth Lutzeier with Kenneth J. Northcott.

The greatest achievement of ancient Near Eastern civilization, in the view of Hans J. Nissen, was the creation and elaboration of universally valid forms of political organization. In *The Early History of the Ancient Near East*, Nissen traces the development of those forms of organization from the first permanent settlements in the area to the establish-

ment of regional states under dynasties centered at the southern Mesopotamian cities of Akkad (about 2334 to 2154 B.C.) and Ur (about 2112 to 2004 B.C.).

The book opens with an introductory chapter, "Sources and problems," that includes a provocative discussion of the respective characters of archeological and written sources. Ancient Near Eastern political developments are then treated according to phase: the time of settlement (roughly 9000 to 6000 B.C.), the evolution of isolated settlements into towns (6000 to 3200 B.C.), the periods of early high civilization (3200 to 2800 B.C.), rival city-states (2800 to 2350 B.C.), and the first territorial states (2350 to 2000 B.C.). There are a short conclusion, headed "Prospects," and a bibliography organized chapter by chapter.

Without any doubt, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East* is an original and coherent synthesis of 7000 years of political evolution, but it is also idiosyncratic. As Nissen admits in his preface, the book is one of several possible historical reconstructions. As such, it is not primarily for a general audience. It can be most effectively used by those with some background in the archeological and textual sources for the area and time periods in question and the ability to evaluate Nissen's arguments and interpretations, which provide a balance to the stock

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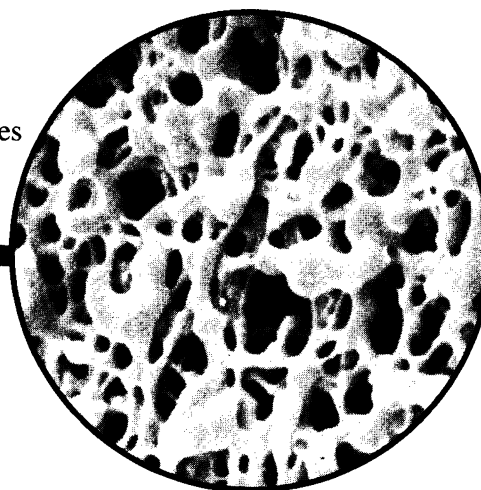
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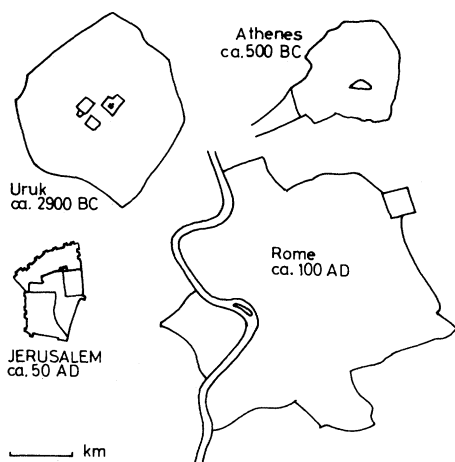
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"Comparisons of the sizes of some major cities of antiquity." [From *The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000-2000 B.C.*]

descriptions repeated over and over in standard texts.

Ancient Near Eastern history is based on fragmentary archeological remains and (after about 3200 B.C.) on written sources that either cannot be read—for example, the Uruk archaic texts, the world's earliest written documents—or are in languages, such as Sumerian and Akkadian, that not infrequently are poorly understood. Evidence is seldom conclusive and differences in the interpretation of data are legitimate. As is inevitable, I and other archeologists might take issue with Nissen's emphases and specific interpretations, but I do not want to focus on differences here. I want instead to point out what I think is Nissen's most interesting and significant contribution, that is, his rich description of "Early High Civil-

ization" or early complex, urban society in southern Mesopotamia, as known from Warka (ancient Uruk). The richness of Nissen's description is due largely to his long involvement in work at Warka, his excavations at the site and survey of the area around it, as well as his analysis of the Uruk archaic texts. Using material remains and information drawn from the texts, Nissen presents a reconstruction of the economic, social, and political organization of Uruk in the late fourth and early third millennia B.C. He quite correctly challenges certain commonly accepted descriptions of early Mesopotamian society, for example, the description of the society as temple-dominated and the characterization of its leadership as theocratic. He argues that such interpretations are based, at least in part, on unverifiable and misleading descriptions of architectural remains as "temples" and on later concepts, such as the "temple city," projected backward onto earlier periods.

In his account of the period of rival city-states, Nissen follows up his description of early complex society and discusses the concept of the "temple city" in detail. The concept, namely that the city, together with its inhabitants and lands, was the property of the city god, was reconstructed, in large part, from the late Early Dynastic texts from Tello (ancient Girsu). Nissen suggests that the "temple city" was, in fact, a political development of that particular time period. It was, he argues, a state ideology formulated by particularist interests, intent on maintaining the independence of city-states in the face of attempts under way in the mid-third millennium B.C. to centralize the cities of southern Mesopotamia. The concept is thus,

in Nissen's view, inappropriate for earlier periods.

Parenthetically, in his description of Early High Civilization, Nissen provides a useful discussion of the origin of writing in the need for the administrative control of increasingly complex economic activities. In the following chapter he discusses subsequent refinements of the writing system. He neglects, however, to include in his bibliography perhaps the best description and discussion of the development of the Mesopotamian writing system, M.W. Green's "The construction and implementation of the cuneiform writing system" (*Visible Language* 15, 345-72 [1981]).

Two points regarding the general usefulness of *The Early History of the Ancient Near East* need to be emphasized. Though revised, it is not significantly updated from the German original. Archeological remains, reports on which have been published since the German edition was presumably completed and that are relevant to political organization, are not included. The book lacks, for example, references to Ubaid sites such as Tell Abada, an almost completely excavated village in the upper Diyala River valley, whose remains provide evidence for social hierarchies, or Tell Ouelli in southern Mesopotamia, a site that has pushed back the chronology of settlement on the floodplain and provided important data on the subsistence base of its Ubaid period inhabitants.

The second point concerns the translation, which is literal and inelegant. Potential readers should be aware that a knowledge of German is helpful in working through parts of the text.

In sum, Nissen has provided us with a creative and challenging overview of political evolution in an area of the world commonly referred to as the "cradle of civilization." *The Early History of the Ancient Near East* is a volume that his colleagues, whether in anthropology, history, or ancient Near Eastern studies, can profitably mine for its wealth of ideas.

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Books Received

Activation Analysis with Charged Particles. C. Vandecasteele. Horwood, Chichester, U.K., and Halsted (Wiley), New York, 1988. 171 pp., illus. \$49.95. Ellis Horwood Series in Analytical Chemistry.

Aging and the Skin. Arthur K. Balin and Albert M. Kligman, Eds. Raven, New York, 1988. xx, 372 pp., illus. \$75.

Algebraic Probability Theory. Imre Z. Ruzsa and Gábor J. Székely. Wiley, New York, 1988. xii, 251 pp., \$69.95. Wiley Series in Probability and Mathematical Statistics.

Late Uruk Period ca. 3100	Jamdet Nasr Period ca. 3000	Early Dyn. III Period ca. 2400	Ur III Period ca. 2000	Meaning
				SAG 'Head'
				NINDA 'Bread'
				KU 'to eat'
				AB 'Cow'
				APIN 'Plow'
				KI 'Place'
				'10' resp '6'
				'1'

"Development of some signs of the Babylonian cuneiform script." [From *The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000-2000 B.C.*]