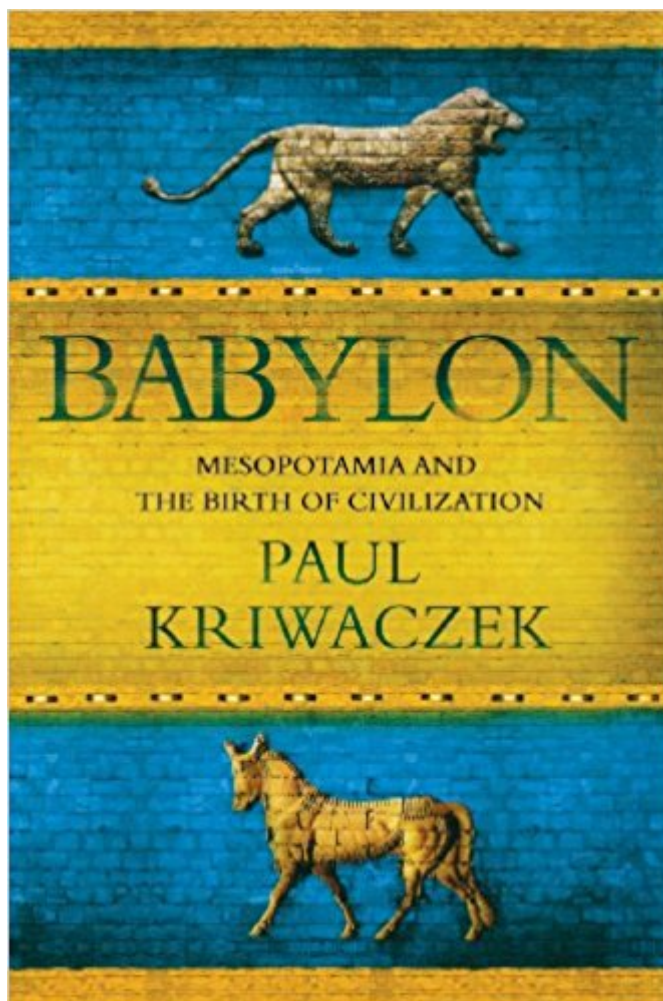


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# Babylon: Mesopotamia And The Birth Of Civilization



## Synopsis

Civilization was born eight thousand years ago, between the floodplains of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, when migrants from the surrounding mountains and deserts began to create increasingly sophisticated urban societies. In the cities that they built, half of human history took place. In *Babylon*, Paul Kriwaczek tells the story of Mesopotamia from the earliest settlements seven thousand years ago to the eclipse of Babylon in the sixth century BCE. Bringing the people of this land to life in vibrant detail, the author chronicles the rise and fall of power during this period and explores the political and social systems, as well as the technical and cultural innovations, which made this land extraordinary. At the heart of this book is the story of Babylon, which rose to prominence under the Amorite king Hammurabi from about 1800 BCE. Even as Babylon's fortunes waxed and waned, it never lost its allure as the ancient world's greatest city. Engaging and compelling, *Babylon* reveals the splendor of the ancient world that laid the foundation for civilization itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• The lively mixture of topicality, politics, history, myth and culture in this anecdote is typical of *Babylon* at its best. • The Independent (UK) • Historical detail gives authority to this tale of human misery and military magnificence. • The Times (UK) • Eloquent and consistently thought-provoking account of ancient Mesopotamia. • Scotland on Sunday • An outstanding survey of a civilization that endured against great odds but has now essentially vanished. • Booklist (starred) on *Yiddish Civilisation* • A landmark book. • Library Journal on *In Search*

of Zarathustra • Lively and fast-paced. • Publishers Weekly on In Search of Zarathustra

PAUL KRIWACZEK was born in Vienna. He travelled extensively in Asia and Africa before developing a career in broadcasting and journalism. In 1970, he joined the BBC full-time and wrote, produced, and directed for twenty-five years. He also served as head of Central Asian Affairs at the BBC World Service. He is the author of *Yiddish Civilisation: The Rise and Fall of a Forgotten Nation*, which was shortlisted for the Jewish Quarterly Wingate Literary Award, as well as *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas that Changed the World*.

This has proven to be a fun read. The author takes us back to the dawning of civilization and provides many interesting insights into how the innovation of writing may have come about and what the first urban cities or towns may have been like. This is history as I wish it had been taught when I was a youth. I can recommend this book as a fun source of information about our earliest roots; reading it is not a heavy lift. The author's style is breezy.

If you are interested in a thorough history of Mesopotamia and Babylon, this is the book for you. Easy to read and thought-provoking. Everything is here--the culture, history, and well, everything you want to know and all is dated. I have the hard-copy (paperback) version, with photos and maps. I can't recommend it enough!

One of the best books that I have read in Mesopotamia's history. It is very well researched and based on more recent discoveries extending to the 2010s. Insightful depiction of that great culture and its many contributions to all human civilization that extended over 2500 years. The lessons learned, the arts invented, the culture created, medicine, and science definitely influenced all subsequent civilizations. It is delightful to read.

I purchased this book on a whim when writing a team paper on ancient civilizations. I never read the book for that paper, but I have been poring through it since at every opportunity. The writing keeps the reader well-engaged and the story flows smoothly. This is no dry textbook; it is definitely a history \*story\*, taking us from imaging Saddam Hussein pompously pretending to be a Babylonian to the first temple risen in Eridu, Kriwaczek uses verbal imagery to paint the scene so that you feel like you are watching it all. This book is an excellent resource for its subject for anyone looking to learn more about Mesopotamia and the great ebbing and flowing and rising and falling of the cultures who

called it home.

Much of the book was dry and hard to digest. It was excellent. I don't think this was the author's fault, though. It is subject matter. The author had a writing style I really liked. He had both philosophical and psychological insight. Additionally, the book filled so many gaps in my knowledge of ancient history that I lost count. He did rush through the latter part, the part on Assyria, and I thank God that he did. The character of Assyria does not fit with the over-all character of millennia of Mesopotamian history. Overall, the story of Sumer, really over half the text of the book, was fascinating, as was the story of Babylon. If you are looking for a book with lots of tales of titillating battles and military strategy, then this is definitely not the book for you. There is very little of that. This book deals with archeological discoveries, some of them quite revealing and quite amazing, and with the philosophical and politically strategic patterns in history prior to the "Story of the Greeks and Persians." It discusses ancient Mesopotamian Law and sense of Justice, sociology and religious philosophy. It discusses what we know about these and more importantly, how we know. It correlates the study to modern times, to Biblical Times and to relevant similar times throughout history. One review of a book I read about Ancient Macedonia criticized that author's lack of "insight," because the reviewer did not feel that the author delved deeply enough into the underlying thought patterns of the time. No one would ever make such a charge against the author of this work. One such example is his analysis of the origins of modern day monotheism and religious misogyny that was partially borne in Assyria, and how, with the changing view of what the role of God was and what his relationship to humans is, it was inevitable (that discussion, the best part of the book, begins on page 225 if you are truly interested).

This book provides an appealing mix of overviews and detailed information that provide both perspective and insights. There is also some fairly well supported conjecture on the evolution (or even "sea-star changes") in norms for governance, religious beliefs and societal norms (such as the status of women). This spans the time period from early Sumerian culture to the end of the last (and greatest) Assyrian Empire. The text provides lessons in societal aspirations as affected by natural forces (drought, etc.) and the balance of power (inadvertent elimination of a vital buffer state Elam that lead to disastrous invasions). The quality of presentation is almost consistently good; the sprinkling of intellectual nuggets is unpredictable, but pleasing. It is sadly relevant in helping one to anticipate the magnitude of a new wave of chaotic disaster in the Iraq of 2014.

Excellent written, fascinating read. Can't speak for the validity of the text, but the writing has a way of drawing you in and making you see the way these ancient people must have lived. Sheds light on the earliest days of civilization. Definitely worth the read. After this I started reading *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of Our Ancestors* by Nicholas Wade, which as a kind of fun thematic continuity to this one (birth of humanity vs. birth of civilization, with different approaches to the subject).

I wanted a well rounded introduction and I got it in this book! Many of the topics I haven't even thought about since being a school boy like rise of cities and writing. I would recommend this book to anyone wanting an intro to the history of the area.

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