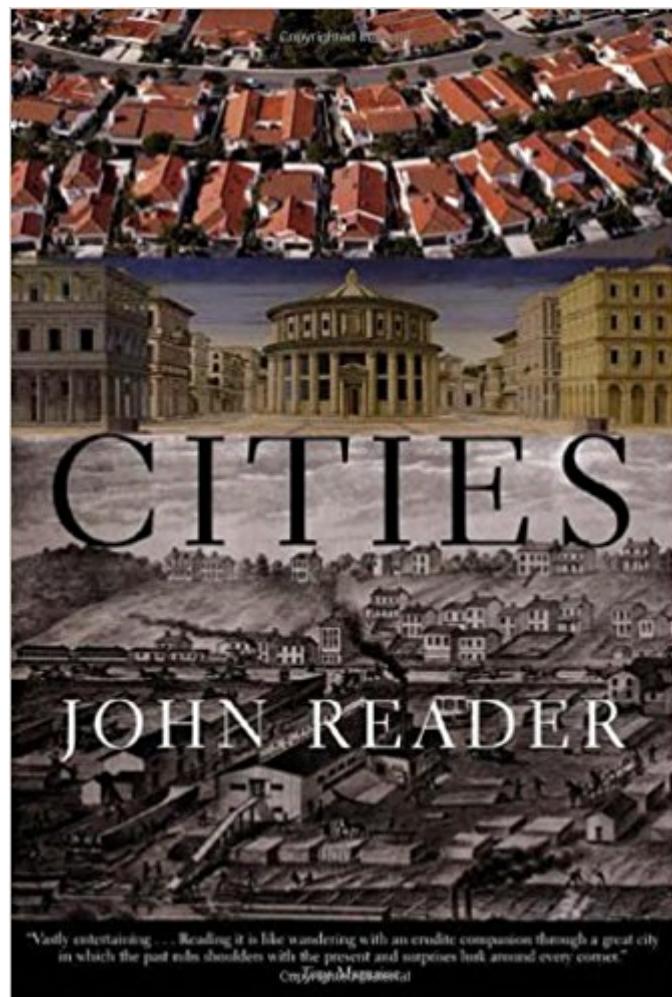


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# Cities



## Synopsis

In Cities, the acclaimed historian John Reader takes us on a journey of the city; from its earliest example in the Ancient Near East to today's teeming centers of compressed existence, such as Mumbai and Tokyo. Cities are home to half the planet's population and consume nearly three-quarters of its natural resources. For Reader, they are our most natural artifacts, the civic spirit of our collective ingenuity. He gives us the ecological and functional context of how cities evolved throughout human history; the connection between pottery making and childbirth in ancient Anatolia, plumbing and politics in ancient Rome, and revolution and street planning in nineteenth-century Paris. This illuminating study helps us to understand how urban centers thrive, decline, and rise again; and prepares us for the role cities will play in the future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A superb historical account of the places in which most of us either live or will live." - "Conde Nast Traveller" "Vastly entertaining." - "Time"

A magisterial exploration of the nature of the city from its beginnings to contemporary Cairo, the largest city the world has known. In his new book, an exploration of the city's functions and forms, John Reader grounds his work in broad-based research into the city's achievements and problems and makes extraordinary and thought-provoking connections as to the nature of cities, old and new. From the ruins of the earliest cities to the present, Reader explores how they develop and thrive,

how they can remake themselves, and how they can decline and die. He investigates their parasitic relationship with the countryside around them, the webs of trade and immigration they inhabit, how they feed and water themselves and dispose of their wastes. He focuses as much on Baron Haussman's creation of the Paris sewers as of his plans for the grand boulevards, on prostitution as on government, on human lives as on architecture, on markets as on cathedrals. In this sweeping exploration of what the city is and has been, *The Anatomy of the City* is fit to stand alongside Lewis Mumford's 1962 classic *The City in History*. "From the Hardcover edition.

Thanks.

This book is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the historical development of cities. It's was such an enjoyable read - I wish all texts could be this much fun.

After a dozen years, the humbly titled , *Cities*, remains an important contribution to urban studies and urban history. In fact,if a curious friend, scholarly or otherwise, were looking for a volume surveying the topic from the rise of urban civilization in Mesopotamia, China and India down to the fearfully massive 21st century mega-cities, then Reader's readable survey would be a fine place to begin. Although often overlooked by both the scholar and the common reader, *Cities* can fairly hold its own when compared to Mumford's *The City in History* or Peter Hall's *Cities in Civilization*. What distinguishes this volume from those earlier works, is the author's focus on the relationship of the city to the environment. As growing cities must feed themselves, provide for safe and ample water supplies and rid themselves of wastes, they may become rapacious and murderous on the one hand, or civilizing forces on the other. This is quite a story and what makes it compelling is Reader's ability to develop a coherent historical chronicle based on individual cities. You can read this book cover to cover or simply pick it up as a series of linked stories. Don't miss Reader on the logistics of feeding ancient Rome's million "welfare" residents, how 19th century London and Paris, in the nick of time, engineered their way out of monumental sewage crises, or how the Castro regime turned metropolitan Havana into a massive garden plot when Soviet aid evaporated. One may not agree with all the author's forceful judgements, but it is a pleasure to confront them.

When I picked up this book, *Cities* by John Reader, I wasn't sure what I was going to think of it. I mean, c'mon, its a book about cities. But, I was pleasantly surprised. It is engaging book and one that tells interesting stories.I really enjoyed the early portions of the book as it looks over the ancient

cities and discusses how they were formed. My historical knowledge of ancient cities is sorely lacking, so it was interesting to read how organized these cities were and the structure that made up these cities. The biggest complaint though that I had was that the story seemed to not quite know where to go from chapter to chapter. You begin by thinking the book would flow from ancient times and just progress to present time but it does not. It bounces back and forth from what goes into making up a city to plagues in a city to how to feed cities, etc. It often seemed disjointed. The story telling though is very good. The facts and figures are interesting (it was interesting to read of the difficulties to get food/grain into Rome 2000 years ago and that there were over 6 million individual loads taken from the shores to downtown Rome to be able to feed the Romans). I wish the organization was a bit better, but the book was enjoyable nonetheless.

With a subject as broad and diverse in its scope, and is as potentially weighty as humanities' urban complexes, one would think a book of the same name would cover over 500 pages and be detrimental to simple leisure browsing -- not so: Cities is a lively, engaging, and vigorous revelation of just how cities evolved, what made them thrive or decline, and how they transformed themselves to cultural centers over the centuries. Contrary to popular belief, cities actually fostered the growth of farming and hold a symbiotic and close relationship with the countryside and trade routes: John Reader's Cities provides a map of changes and the social, political and economic connections between cities and country around the world. The lively format the author John Reader created for Cities makes for an exceptional historical coverage which lends particularly well to leisure reading.

This book seems to be getting good reviews, and to be honest I am not completely sure why. Let me begin with the good. It is an easy read and the story told is interesting. However this is not particularly a history and there are parts of the book that left me wondering what the point was. On the positive side, Mr. Reader begins the book with a particularly fascinating account of early cities beginning in Turkey and going to Sumaria. From here though he gets lost. He devotes very little time to Greece and Rome and then seems to gloss through history. Some of what he relates, while interesting sheds little light on cities or their development. His chapter on Francesco deMarco Datini comes to mind first. It is an interesting story and I am sure he has something to do with the development of cities or lives in them, but I was left unsure what. Much could be told about the rise of Renaissance Italy and its city-states such as Florence, Venice, Genoa, and Milan. But little is offered. Then there is his attempt to make political points. Sometimes it is pro-free market, sometimes pro-environment, sometimes it seems he is off to fight a battle against poverty that while

maybe worthy, seems out of context. In fact at the end of many chapters he tries to bring in a modern point all too often. For example there is a chapter on the plague. It is interesting, but he never really explains how it was defeated in Europe. Instead we get some point on doctors and hospitals that seems to be a call for medical reform of some type. There is also a chapter on Hiroshima, which begins well enough and promises to hold interest. Questions like how did people live there after the bomb or how was the city rebuilt pop into my mind. From there he goes into a discussion of solar energy. What is the connection? What do we learn about the city in general or Hiroshima in specific? In short, this book wanders so much in such a short space I would give it only 1 star, but the stories, even though off-topic are interesting so I give this book three stars but suggest anybody really trying to learn history start somewhere else like say Alexandra Ritchie's book on Berlin.

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