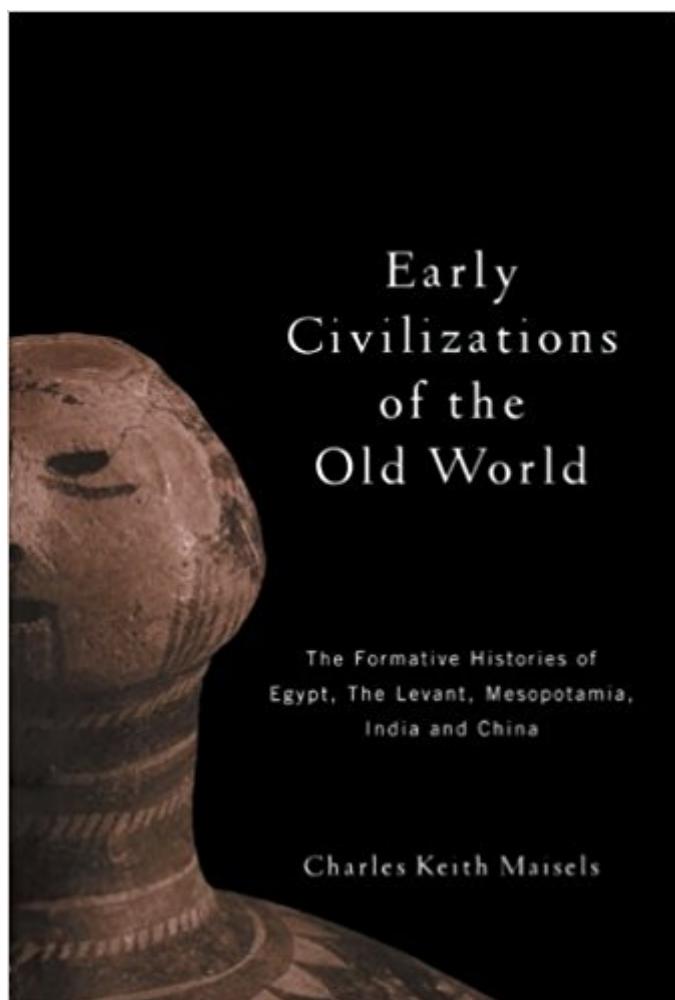


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Early Civilizations Of The Old World: The Formative Histories Of Egypt, The Levant, Mesopotamia, India And China



Synopsis

In this new paperback edition of Early Civilizations of the Old World, Charles Keith Maisels traces the development of some of the earliest and key civilizations in history. In each case the ecological and economic background to growth, geographical factors, cross-cultural intersection and the rise of urbanism are examined, explaining how particular forms of social structure and cultural interaction developed from before the Neolithic period to the time of the first civilizations in each area. This volume challenges the traditional assumption of a band-tribe-chiefdom-state sequence and instead demonstrates that large complex societies can flourish without social classes and the state, as dramatically shown by the Indus civilization. Such features as the use of Childe's urban revolution theory as a means of comparison for each emerging civilization and the discussion of the emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline, make Early Civilizations of the Old World a valuable, innovative and stimulating work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Very few people have the necessary scholarship, courage and clarity of thought to range over such a dispersed and diverse ground as is covered in this book ... The author's ideas merit careful study'
- British Archaeology

I don't know much about Dr/Prof? Maisels except that he's an academic at Bristol. However, this is a man who clearly knows his stuff. What this book appears to be is a set of lecture notes, put together in book form, aimed at students and intended to answer whether Gordon Childe's criteria

for defining civilisation are right. Luckily, Maisels is an extremely clear writer who has a lot of good ideas. The book allows you to see inside the head of someone who has studied the development of near eastern civilisation for some years. He has a good grasp of varied topics, including geology and basic economics, and this helps his analysis. What he aims to do in the book is to go back to the very earliest farming communities and then trace forward, through details of key archaeological sites, to the beginnings of civilisation for Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China (the classic 'Old World' civilisations). What the book won't do is really answer what, ultimately, were the causes of civilisation. In fact, the book has a stream of consciousness feel about it as if he is writing on autopilot, getting everything down that he hasn't explicitly said in earlier works of his and dealing piecemeal with individual agreements and disagreements with other archaeologists. This is frustrating as it doesn't end up feeling like an argument - rather as a man having an argument. But perhaps my major criticism is that this is a man who likes his words too much. He uses them to describe things at length when a series of carefully put together diagrams and drawings would have done better. The illustrations in the book appear largely to have been cribbed from other works and are not always edited to suit the text. Also, the detailed arguments are not really put in context as he expects readers to find much information elsewhere. It makes the book look more like the work of a man who has a lot to say but doesn't care if anyone can read it. To me that is the book's fundamental weakness.

Really boring read, but great information on the civilizations covered. His whole book is based off of V. Gordon Child's work.

I feel attracted by the comparative scope of this book. After reading it, I come to the conclusion that it was written by a scholar for other scholars, because of two features: i) excellent content, showing the state of the art, and offering its own very interesting synthesis on the matter, combined with; ii) extremely arid form, which full and deadly boring detail of archeological sites. Both thing are truth, therefore I have rated the book as 3 , because its content deserves 5 stars but because of its dryness only 1. Therefore, if you are extremely interested in the subject, buy for your illustration, not to enjoy the reading.

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