



BOOK NOTES

Ancient Mesopotamia at the dawn of civilisation: the evolution of an urban landscape by *Guillermo Algaze*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, USA, 2008, 230 pp. ISBN 978-0226-0137-70. The alluvial lowlands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southern Mesopotamia are widely known as the 'cradle of civilization' owing to the scale of the processes of urbanization that took place in the area by the second half of the fourth millennium BC. Algaze draws on the work of modern economic geographers to explore how the unique river-based ecology and geography of the Tigris-Euphrates alluvium affected the development of urban civilization in southern Mesopotamia. He argues that these natural conditions granted southern polities significant competitive advantages over their landlocked rivals elsewhere in south-west Asia, most importantly the ability to easily transport commodities. In due course, this resulted in increased trade and economic activity and higher population densities in the south than were possible elsewhere. As southern polities grew in scale and complexity throughout the fourth millennium, revolutionary new forms of labour organization and record keeping were created, and it is these socially created innovations that ultimately account for why fully developed city-states emerged earlier in southern Mesopotamia than elsewhere in the world.

The cities of Pamphylia by *John Grainger*, Oxbow Books, Oxford, UK, 2009, 255 pp. ISBN 978-1842-1733-43. Pamphylia, in modern Turkey, was a Greek country from the early Iron Age until the Middle Ages. It had nine cities that can be described as more or less Greek, and this book is an investigation of their history. This was a land at the margins of other great empires – Hellenistic, Roman, Arab and Byzantine – and is still off the beaten track, though Aspendos, Perge and Phaselis are all visited for their archaeology. Only one ancient source, Strabo, discusses the area at any length, and Grainger therefore has to bring together a wide variety of exiguous and fragmentary sources to tell the cities' story. His focus is not only regional – he is interested in the impact of outside forces on a particular civic culture. He considers the processes of city foundation,

settlement, urbanization and evolution, and the cities' mutual relations. Coastal piracy drew Pamphylia into the Roman Empire, and finally, in the seventh century AD, the Arabs destroyed the cities in their wars with the Byzantine Empire.

The history of early medieval towns of north and central Italy: the contributions of archaeological evidence by *Giacomo Gonella*, British Archaeological Reports, Oxford, UK, 2008, 84 pp. ISBN 978-1407-3026-83. This study records research on the early medieval town in Italy. It concentrates on central and northern Italy between the fourth and eleventh centuries. These geographical and temporal limits were selected on the basis of political, economic and social conditions that emanated from a succession of earlier events. Developments up to the precursors of the city-states are considered.

Prato: architecture, piety, and political identity in a Tuscan city-state by *Alick McLean*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA, 2008, 250 pp. ISBN 978-0300-1371-49. The historical development of one city republic, Prato in Tuscany, is recounted from the eleventh century to the end of the fourteenth century. This story of Prato's origins, construction, and demise considers the planning, art, architecture, politics, faith, and daily life of Prato and its citizens, showing how major historical events and trends in the Italian Middle Ages were experienced within the architecture and streetscapes of this particular place. It is supported by a rich array of photography, plans, and maps. Together they provide a clear picture of what differentiates Italy's medieval communes from its ancient cities: the interest in economic growth rather than exclusively centralized military and administrative hegemony. This history of urban form in Prato shows how the commune sought to fashion a democratic version of urban life, one based primarily on rational, systematic and legislative order, rather than religious belief and private interests, and it examines what happened to that experiment.