

Cycles of Civilization in Northern Mesopotamia, 4400–2000 BC

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Abstract The intensification of fieldwork in northern Mesopotamia, the upper region of the Tigris-Euphrates basin, has revealed two cycles of expansion and reduction in social complexity between 4400 and 2000 BC. These cycles include developments in social inequality, political centralization, craft production and economic specialization, agropastoral land use, and urbanization. Contrary to earlier assessments, many of these developments proceeded independently from the polities in southern Mesopotamia, although not in isolation. This review considers recent data from excavations and surveys in northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey with particular attention to how they are used to construct models of early urban polities.

Keywords Mesopotamia · Complex society · Urbanism · Collapse

Introduction

Over a span of more than two millennia, northern Mesopotamia witnessed the emergence of urban complex society, its collapse and rebirth, and a further episode of collapse. This time span (c. 4400–2000 BC) has been studied intensively by archaeologists over the last two decades, largely because of twin push (the closure of Iraq to foreign archaeology) and pull (salvage campaigns in advance of dam projects) forces. As a result, what was once considered the periphery of early urbanism and state formation in southern Mesopotamia (modern southern Iraq) has emerged as a region of interest in its own right. In many ways we now have a superior understanding of major social developments in the north (e.g., urbanism,

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