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Amsterdam: A Brief Life Of The City



Synopsis

A magnet for trade and travellers from all over the world, stylish, cosmopolitan Amsterdam is a city of dreams and nightmares, of grand civic architecture and legendary beauty, but also of civil wars, bloody religious purges, and the tragedy of Anne Frank. In this fascinating examination of the city's soul, part history, part travel guide, Geert Mak imaginatively recreates the lives of the early Amsterdammers, and traces Amsterdam's progress from waterlogged settlement to a major financial centre and thriving modern metropolis

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Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful book about one of my favourite cities. It is written in a storytelling form by the author who is passionate enough about the city to know how to share it with the reader. My husband and I are not crazy about history books but we "devoured" this one. Couldn't put it down! We are looking forward to reading his other books.

It is always difficult to write a biography of a city, certainly of one with as rich a history as Amsterdam has. But Mak tells a wonderful story of a fascinating city, successfully explaining Amsterdam's modern-day character through centuries-old stories. In this 350-page book, Mak treats

each segment of the city's history evenly, spending equal time on its founding, its rise, its stagnation, and its reemergence. But what makes this book such a page-turner is Mak's success at bringing past citizens to life through his recounting of old stories. Mak has clearly done a great deal of research into city and state archives. Through vivid writing, Mak introduces the reader to city founders, prisoners, flower traders, rich merchants, and current politicians. A wonderful read and a terrific introductory piece prior to visiting. An excellent companion book for the traveler is "A Murder in Amsterdam," by Ian Buruma, which recounts how problematic and conflicted Amsterdam's historical liberal and tolerant society has been since 9/11.

I was looking for a book on Amsterdam's history, and had heard of Mak's popularity in the Netherlands, so I decided to give this book a go. I'm very glad I did. The book is a great history - well told, easy to read, and full of little details and anecdotes to bring the story of this city to life.

Despite more recent releases about Amsterdam, Geert Mak's book remains the standard. Authoritative, detailed and always interesting, Mak explains the reasons why Amsterdam differs from all other European capitals. The treatment of early Amsterdam and the Golden Age are especially fascinating, with the insights into Rembrandt's life a real highlight for me.

This is a very readable history of Amsterdam and a must read if you are planning to visit there. It is very well written and caused me to exclaim, tsk and laugh aloud in public several times. Mak has a talent for conveying the history in ways that completely engage the reader. I can promise you will learn things about the history and culture of Amsterdam and Europe you didn't know and you will enjoy every minute of it.

Mak is able to weave together history and contemporary sights with the clear and engaging style of a journalist. I read it while I was in Amsterdam, and it was more interesting than a guidebook, for sure. I ended up getting his "In Europe," after I got home and found the same blend.

This book reminds me of an outstanding history teacher who maintains the interest of his students with a series of fascinating and relevant anecdotes. I enjoyed reading it and I feel that I now have a much better appreciation of this city. I highly recommend it to anyone planning a visit to Amsterdam.

An enjoyable introduction to Dutch history, in particular of their largest city, Amsterdam. Covers from

early Germanic history up through the modern day, and provides interesting insights into how Dutch culture influenced the development of the city. The history is interspersed with realia from the time being discussed (similar to Simon Schama, although not quite as scholarly). Overall, an enjoyable read.

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