

Advance Praise for

BEFORE AND AFTER BABEL

"Spanning three millennia and a cornucopia of languages, Marc Van De Mieroop's magisterial study offers a compelling account of 'the Babylonian cosmopolis' and the vernacular languages and literatures that succeeded it, still in dialogue with the older cuneiform system. Grounded in a wealth of scholarship and crystallized through a host of vivid examples, *Before and after Babel* will fascinate anyone interested in the history of writing, the politics of language and of translation, and the creative responses of local cultures to the dominating pressures of empire."

—**DAVID DAMROSCH**, Harvard University

"In fluent and lively prose, Van De Mieroop studies a strikingly wide range of examples to illuminate the complex relationships between dominant and local languages and scripts, offering fresh, insightful, provocative perspectives even on examples like the biblical Tower of Babel story and the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic that have been discussed many times over. This is a volume that should energize scholarship on the ancient Near East—on the importance of language and script as major windows on cultures and politics—for years to come."

—**PETER MACHINIST**, Harvard University

“The Lord confused the language of all the earth,” so the Tower of Babel story in the Hebrew Bible’s book of Genesis tells us to explain why the world’s people communicate in countless languages while previously they all spoke only one. This book argues that the biblical confusion really happened in the ancient Near East, not in speech, however, but in writing. It examines the millennia-long history of writing in the region and shows a radical change from the third and second millennia to the first millennium BC.

Before “Babel” any intellectual who wrote did so as a participant in a cosmopolitan tradition with its roots in Babylonia, its language, and its cuneiform script. After “Babel” scribes from all over the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, used a profusion of vernacular languages and scripts to express themselves. Yet they did so in dialogue with the Babylonian cuneiform tradition still maintained by the successive Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires that controlled their world, oftentimes as acts of resistance, aware of cosmopolitan ideas and motifs but subverting them. In order to frame the rich intellectual history of this region in the ancient past *Before and after Babel* describes and analyzes the Babylonian cosmopolitan system, how ancient Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and other vernacular systems interacted with it in multiple and intricate ways, and the consequences of these interactions.

MARC VAN DE MIEROOP

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His previous books include *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, *Philosophy before the Greeks*, and, as coauthor, *World in the Making: A Global History*.