

Poems by *Mike Alexander*

City Life

If asked to relocate,
you could set up shop
in the city or Ur,

teach yourself
to read & write
cuneiform,

apply to work
for bureaucrats
housed in the sky,

match jars
of jasmine oil
to a bill of lading,

ignore the roar
of restless camels
at night,

drink grain
with gods
on holy days,

follow weekly
installments
of Gilgamesh,

blame nomadic
tribes for cutbacks
at the temple,

covet new
metals, Cretan
axe-heads, saffron,

sleepwalk the long
shadows of
sandstone giants,

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an abacus your palm
pilot, a clay tablet
your laptop,

the sky
turning above you
your cable,

a hundred thousand
stars, & nothing
to watch.

Gordium

We knew his greatness
 lived more in his sword
 than in expertise
 — what could we say?

His legions on either
 leg of our harbor let
 neither legend nor fact
 travel inward or out.

So when Alexander said,
 surrender up your mysteries,
 this, we said, Lord, is our
 holiest of treasures.

We told him
 an ox-yoke our first king
 knotted in a strap of hide
 held our city's luck

We bade him
 undo the knot, knowing
 in our antiquity,
 it could not be undone.

It was all of one piece,
 wound taut unto itself
 All ages had confirmed
 its integral adhesion.

We challenged, then
 stepped back, expectant,
 together we chanted
 a tuneless lyric.

*All that is atom,
 or water, or fire,
 All that is twine is tied
 into the knot.*

He stood & studied

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the puzzle we'd presented him,
 & we knew he'd
 soon kneel down to begin.

Other men had
worked their fingers into its
 strands & counter-strands
 for hours, or days.

 Not Alexander.
 His philosophic pose
unsheathed into
 an arc of light;

his sword, his hideous—
 his sun-forged sword!
One stroke & the known world
 dropped to the floor

 like a serpent, slain.
 He stepped over
the several pieces &
 left us to our ruins.

What could we then say,
 when, as old men,
we saw a murderous new
word in the face of a new man?

Mike Alexander works in Trust Services for a major bank. He also is an associate editor for lyric poetry review, and a moderator for the on-line sonnet workshop at Sonnet Central, & coordinator of a weekly all poetry open mic in Houston. His work has appeared in several small journals, including *Texas Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Link*, *Curbside Review*, & *Edge City Review*.