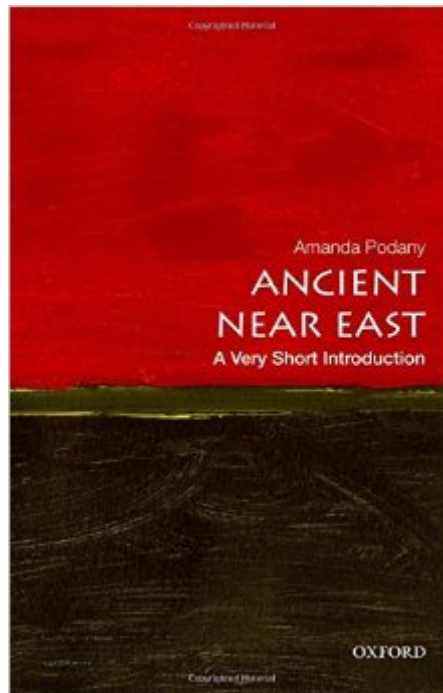


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The Ancient Near East: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

The ancient Near East is known as the "cradle of civilization"--and for good reason. Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia were home to an extraordinarily rich and successful culture. Indeed, it was a time and place of earth-shaking changes for humankind: the beginnings of writing and law, kingship and bureaucracy, diplomacy and state-sponsored warfare, mathematics and literature. This Very Short Introduction offers a fascinating account of this momentous time in human history. The three thousand years covered here--from around 3500 BCE, with the founding of the first Mesopotamian cities, to the conquest of the Near East by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE--represent a period of incredible innovation, from the invention of the wheel and the plow, to early achievements in astronomy, law, and diplomacy. As historian Amanda Podany explores this era, she overturns the popular image of the ancient world as a primitive, violent place. We discover that women had many rights and freedoms: they could own property, run businesses, and represent themselves in court. Diplomats traveled between the capital cities of major powers ensuring peace and friendship between the kings. Scribes and scholars studied the stars and could predict eclipses and the movements of the planets. Every chapter introduces the reader to a particular moment in ancient Near Eastern history, illuminating such aspects as trade, religion, diplomacy, law, warfare, kingship, and agriculture. Each discussion focuses on evidence provided in two or three cuneiform texts from that time. These documents, the cities in which they were found, the people and gods named in them, the events they recount or reflect, all provide vivid testimony of the era in which they were written. About the Series: Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

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Customer Reviews

This is a solid introduction and survey of the current state of archeological and historical knowledge concerning Near Eastern/Middle Eastern history and culture from prehistory to just short of the beginning of classical history. The book starts with the early development of Sumerian city states - when the term for king was not being used - and the early start of writing - when writing was essentially a "memory aid" - through successive eras of the 700 year "Uruk period" (circa 3600 BC to 2900 BC), the early dynastic period, the Akkadian Empire (2334 BC - 2194 BC), the Third Dynasty of Ur, the early Babylonian period, the early Assyrian period - when Assyria was treated like a bumptious upstart by the Hittite king - the Late Bronze Age - including its collapse - the neo-Assyrian Empire (973 BC - 612) - when the bumptious upstart became the sole remaining player of the Game of Kings - and the neo-Babylonian Empire (612 BC - 539 BC) - which was in turn brought low by the Medes. Along the way, the author shares insight into cultural and technological developments including the development of writing and the institutions of kingship and empire. Language moves from eastern Sumerian to central Sumerian (Akkadian) to western Sumerian (Amorite) as new people emerged and/or the locus of power shifted. The author touches on the literature of Sumeria, including Gilgamesh, the flood story of Utnapishtim, and Enlil's "Tablet of Destiny." I want to share the last because it is interesting and was touched on in Mark S. Smith's "

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