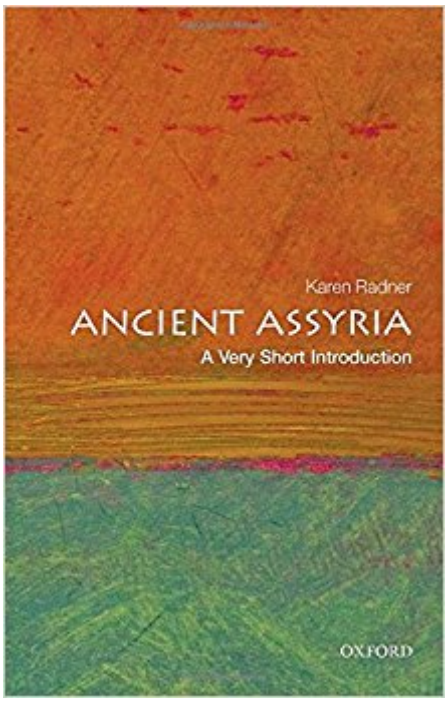
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Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



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Synopsis

Assyria was one of the most influential kingdoms of the Ancient Near East. In this Very Short Introduction, Karen Radner sketches the history of Assyria from city state to empire, from the early 2nd millennium BC to the end of the 7th century BC. Since the archaeological rediscovery of Assyria in the mid-19th century, its cities have been excavated extensively in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Israel, with further sites in Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan providing important information. The Assyrian Empire was one of the most geographically vast, socially diverse, multicultural, and multi-ethnic states of the early first millennium BC. Using archaeological records, Radner provides insights into the lives of the inhabitants of the kingdom, highlighting the diversity of human experiences in the Assyrian Empire.ABOUT THE SERIES:The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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Customer Reviews

"An incredibly succinct and valuable introduction to ancient Assyria. . . I highly recommend this book." - Ancient History Encyclopedia

Karen Radner is a Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History at University College London. Her research concentrates on the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Her books include State Correspondence in the

Ancient World: From New Kingdom Egypt to the Roman Empire (OUP 2014) and, edited with E. Robson, The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture (OUP 2011).

This is my first Very Short Introduction by Oxford and I couudn’t be more pleased. As for this book I found it to be a clear and concise introduction to Ancient Assyria. As most books devoted to Assyria are expensive and generally meant for the more seasoned Mesopotamian reader or historian, this small but insightful book fills the gap much needed in between. Another thing I found endlessly helpful and appealing was the occasional pictures contained throughout the book. The only critique I have is how expensive this book is compared to the others in the series. Other than that, I recommend this book to anyone with interest in Assyria. You won’t be disappointed.

This short book is very well written and is an excellent introduction to the world of Ancient Assyria. It is written for a general audience. Having a little background is always helpful, but not necessary.

This book brought this lost culture to life in a way that was fascinating and even contemporaneous in an odd way. I thin anyone interested in the Fertile Crescent cultures would greatly enjoy this.

Good book. Occasionally it was a bit hard to follow as it jumps around a rather large chunk of history. I’d recommend reading "The Ancient Near East, A VSI" first.

Great overview

Received promptly. Very pleased.

Very informative

Years ago I somehow acquired the idea that the Assyrians were a fierce and brutal warrior society whose military had conquered much of the ancient Near East that lay between the kingdoms of Ur and the mighty Hittite Empire of Anatolia. This idea was reinforced when I visited such museums as the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Oriental Institute in Chicago and the British Museum in London and viewed the awesome reliefs and monumental winged Lammasu, an Asssyrian protective deity usually depicted with the body of a lion or ox, the head of a human and the wings of a raptor, that once adorned the palaces of Assyrian

kings like Ashurnasirpal II.Recently, though, Oxford Press sent me a review copy of a small book by Karen Radner entitled "Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction" and I finally had a chance to explore this culture in greater depth. What I discovered was the Assyrians had a very sophisticated culture, enjoying fine wines, a fresh water supply, indoor toilets and a well-functioning sewage system. Sounds rather Roman doesn't it? But the Assyrian culture was founded in the 3rd millenium BCE although it didn't reach its apex until the 1st millenium BCE.I learned the Assyrians enacted consumer protection for the buyers of their goods and even offered extended warranties although we usually don't think of these extending to the sales of human beings (slave sales were subject to a 100-day guarantee against epilepsy and mental instability!)They were rather protective of some of their inventions, though. Assyrians invented the foldable parasol but its use was restricted to royalty on pain of death!The Assyrians were not all that brutal in the conduct of warfare either, although they were highly skilled in the use of chariots and clearly embraced nuanced deployments of chariot, cavalry, archers, slingers and infantry. The Assyrians were more interested in obtaining human resources from their conquered lands than in wholesale slaughter. Skilled craftsman and educated scholars would be sorted out and relocated to the Assyrian heartland, initially centered on the religious capital of Assur. Although slaves were sometimes taken, most conquered laborers were often relocated to areas needing colonization."It has been calculated on the basis of references in the royal inscriptions that 4,400,000 + or - 900,000 people were relocated from the mid-9th to the mid-7th century BC, of which 85% were settled in central Assyria - a gigantic number, especially in a world whose population was a small fraction of today's. For all of these people resettlement was meant to provide a better future while at the same time benefitting the empire. Of course, their relocation was at the same time an effective way of minimizing the risk of rebellion against the central authority."These conquered colonists were well provisioned and reliefs depict them without fetters. An 8th century BCE letter from an official to King Tilgath-pileser III, details the provisions allocated to a group of settlers from western Syria:"As for the Arameans about whom the king my lord has written to me: 'Prepare them for their journey!' I shall give them their food supplies, clothes, a waterskin, a pair of shoes and oil. I do not have my donkeys yet, but once they are available, I will dispatch my convoy."Once the new colonists reached their destination, the king provided further support:"As for the Arameans about whom the king my lord has said: 'They are to have wives!' We found numerous suitable women but their fathers refuse to give them in marriage, claiming: 'We will not consent unless they can pay the bride price.' Let them be paid so that the Arameans can get married."Obviously the king wanted the colony to be a successful community of thriving families.Although the above passage makes women appear to be chattel this was not

necessarily the case, either. Assyrian women were allowed to engage in business and I read that if the male head-of-household ended up fathering a child with a slave, the husband could not choose to adopt the child without his wife's consent. So women obviously had some rights.From the text, it appeared average Assyrians were primarily monogamous although traders gone from home for extended periods sometimes took a secondary wife in one of the cities along their trade route. However, such secondary wives never took precedent over the first wife.Knowledge was revered in Assyria, so much so that by the 9th century BCE Assyrian King Assurbanipal II is depicted in reliefs in the North Palace in Nineveh with a writing stylus tucked into his belt, instead of the more usual knife. The Assyrian's great library was already in existence in the 13th century BCE, almost a thousand years before the Great Library of Alexandria. Radner tells us that when King Tukulti-Nimurta I sacked Babylon in the 13th century BCE, he records that he brought back library tablets to add to his holdings. Scholars estimate that the library collection probably extended all the way back to the 14th century BCE under the reign of King Assur-Uballit I.So obviously I found Radner's little tome brimming with information punctuated by actual quotations from translated cuneiform tablets of the period. She also included some black-and-white images, diagrams of excavated structures, maps, a timeline, a recommended reading list and index. I must admit I struggled a bit with Assyrian names and the fact that Assyrian archaeological sites like Nimrud had a totally different name in antiquity (ancient Kalhu). I would have also preferred a more linear organization of material about the administration and achievements of specific rulers, but, I still found the book to be a welcome addition to my resource library.Although this is the first book of this series I have ever seen here in the states, Oxford produces a number of them on a variety of topics. They kindly sent me another one on Roman Britain that I look forward to reading as well.

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