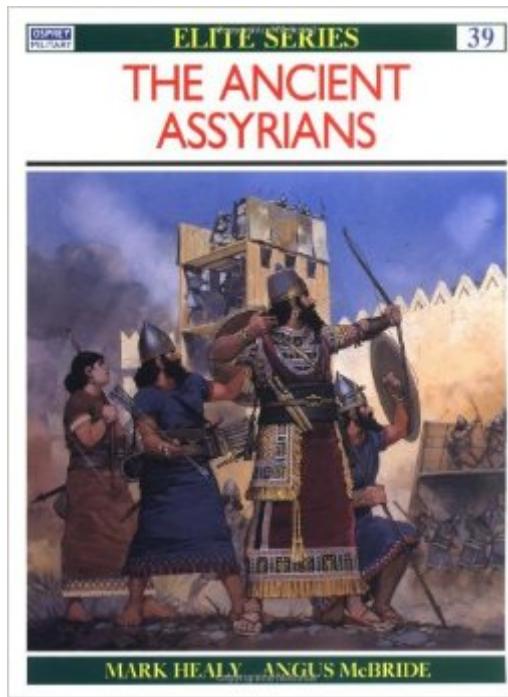


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The Ancient Assyrians (Elite)



Synopsis

For the greater part of the period from the end of the 10th century to the 7th century BC, the Ancient Near East was dominated by the dynamic military power of Assyria. At the zenith of its rule Assyria could lay claim to an empire that stretched from Egypt in the west to the borders of Iran in the east and encompassed for the first time in history, within the realm of a single imperial domain, the whole of the 'Fertile Crescent'. Mark Healy, covers the history of the Assyrians from their ancient beginnings to the eventual fall of the city of Nineveh.

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Customer Reviews

This is another good introductory volume from Osprey, despite its age (first published in 1991). There are however a few glitches and I will start with these before moving on to the book's more numerous qualities. First of all, the title is a bit misleading. The book is centred on the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and more particularly on its last 150 years (from BC 745 to the fall of Nineveh on BC 612), rather than on the whole history of Assyria, which begins in circa BC 1800. The previous periods are dealt with in three pages which are intended to provide background. Second, the book lacks both a table of contents, which is not much of a problem, but also a bibliography. The latter is more problematic, if only because books in this collection are meant as illustrated introduction to a topic. One could expect them to provide the means for interesting readers to learn more about the topic that they cover, as more recent Osprey publications seem to do systematically nowadays. There is a second - more specific - reason to regret this absence and this has to do with the topic itself.

Given its location (in northern Irak), archaeology and excavations have not exactly been a priority over the last two or three decades. Apart from some publications which tend to cover middle-eastern civilizations more generally, and a few others which cover very specific aspects of the Ancient civilizations of Irak (religion, for instance), there are very few recent publications that are centred on the Assyrians themselves, and ever fewer on the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Having mentioned this, and as far as I can make out, the overview provided by this book seems to be complete and a good one.

Most people have heard the word "Assyrians," but most equally have no idea when their culture flourished, or where. The "when" is between 2,900 years and 2,600 years ago, more or less -- after the Babylonians and before the Achaemenid Persians -- and the "where" is in what used to be called the "Fertile Crescent," up the broad shallow valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from the Arabian Gulf and on to the northeastern Mediterranean coast. In fact, most English-speakers probably have heard of the Assyrians only via the Old Testament, which is hardly an unbiased source. I first learned about them in an undergraduate course many years ago that was meant to provide background to the pre-Classical world that most of us are more likely to be interested in, and I always felt a bit sorry for them. Assyrian history has a few "great" kings, in the sense of being successful empire-builders, people like Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon and Sennacherib, but none of them are especially sympathetic. Assyria became an imperial power as a matter of survival, Mesopotamia being essentially broad and flat with few natural boundaries and being crowded at that time with highly competitive ethnic groups. She responded to depredations by her neighbors by doing them one better, but the empire was always mostly a matter of military occupation and suppression and not much cultural expansion, and when the empire collapsed rather suddenly after a mere three centuries, no one mourned her at all. The volumes so far in Osprey's "Elite" series appear to be much like the longstanding "Men-at-Arms" series, only more so. They're thicker, with extended text, more color plates, and many more photos, maps, and diagrams. ("Elite" seems a misnomer when you're considering an entire culture, but that's just marketing).

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