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“Ancient Near East.”

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scholarly theories regarding the identity of the rabbis' intended targets. Unlike those who have identified the *ammei ha'arets* with specific sects or groups known from antiquity (identifications for which there exists no substantial evidence), Levine proposes that the rabbis are merely lashing out at the large segment of the Jewish population of Palestine that was uninterested, unsympathetic, and/or downright hostile to early rabbinic incursions into traditional Jewish communal institutions and practices. Over time, Levine suggests, there was a marked improvement in relations between the two sides, which is detectable in later strata of the rabbinic corpus. Levine's brief excursus serves as a useful encapsulation of the literature on the topic and alerts the reader to a few pertinent archaeological discoveries as well. His willingness to treat rabbinic accounts as, generally speaking, historically reliable and sufficient and his assumption that the rabbis were significant communal authorities in the earliest centuries of their movement does, however, set him at odds with much contemporary scholarship on this period.

COHEN's brief treatment of the topic represents a more critical and appropriately cautious approach than Levine's study. Cohen notes that while many of the traditions about the *ammei ha'arets* are attributed to Palestinian rabbis, the largest and most vicious body of such traditions is found exclusively in the Babylonian Talmud—a fact that raises serious doubt about these traditions' authenticity. In addition, Cohen observes that there is no evidence of mass outreach or educational initiatives on the part of the early rabbis, and a good deal of counter-evidence suggests that winning the mass of Jews over to their worldview and practices was not a goal of the small rabbinic coterie in Palestine in the early centuries of this era. Thus, in Cohen's view, insofar as *am ha'arets* refers to the great majority of Jews in antiquity, the general attitude of the earliest generations of rabbis toward them appears to be one of disdainful disinterest.

The only book-length study on the *ammei ha'arets* in English is OPPENHEIMER. While the book is extremely helpful as a thorough compendium of rabbinic references to the *ammei ha'arets*, it is by no means adequate as social history. After a brief review of prior scholarship and a general summary of the uses and history of the term *am ha'arets*, Oppenheimer turns to an extended discussion of tithes and ritual purity—the conceptual contexts within which the earliest rabbinic traditions about the *ammei ha'arets* appear. He then delineates a distinction between two kinds of *ammei ha'arets*: those who were not careful about performance of the commandments (*am ha'arets le-mitsvot*) and those who did not engage in rabbinic Torah study (*am ha'arets le-Torah*). Much of the remainder of the study is devoted to proposals regarding relations between the *ammei ha'arets* and the pre-rabbinic and rabbinic circles of sages. The book ends with a brief survey of "Galilean" versus "Judean" traditions and a consideration of the significance of the *am ha'arets* material with respect to Samaritanism and nascent Christianity. Absent from this rabbinically learned study is any awareness of the great variety and vitality that characterized non-rabbinic Judaism in these centuries or a recognition that the rabbis were the minority newcomers (sectarians?) to the Jewish landscape of the day. Hence, Oppenheimer (even more than Levine) confers upon

rabbinic dicta the status of historical truth and presumes throughout his analysis the legal and ethical normativity of all things rabbinic. This rather considerable shortcoming severely limits the usefulness of this study to that of an erudite compilation of primary material.

Finally, two older journal articles are worthy of mention. NICHOLSON's survey of the uses of the term *am ha'arets* in the Bible aptly concludes that the term's meaning changes so much from one biblical context to another that equating it with a fixed content is utterly inappropriate. ZEITLIN's far more dated piece is significant as an early scholarly attempt to consider rabbinic and non-rabbinic sources in dialog with each other. Today, Zeitlin's article serves merely as an interesting example of previous theories about the *ammei ha'arets*, virtually all of which have been summarily discredited by later critical inquiry.

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Amoraim *see* Rabbinic Biography: Talmudic

Ancient Near East

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The ancient Near East is not easily synthesized into a single cogent literary, historical, social, or economic study without either oversimplifying or creating unwieldy tomes. The subject is vast and requires the command of numerous languages and disciplines. The regions that make up the ancient Near East are equally vast, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, Iran, and Canaan, to which some scholars would add the Aegean. Consequently, few works are able to bring together the expertise required for an intelligent comprehensive survey. With the rare exceptions noted here, the reader will benefit most by consulting works that limit their focus of study to one or two of the major regions.

ALDRED surveys the culture of ancient Egypt for the uninitiated in a readable and interesting manner. Moving chronologically from predynastic Egypt to the arrival of Alexander, he places in historical context the lives of pharaohs and commoners, taking periodic glances at their beliefs, art and architecture, and agriculturally based lives. Rich in photographic images, the work serves as an excellent introduction to the fundamental aspects of Egyptian culture. One of the work's greatest assets is its opening chapter on the loss and recovery of pagan Egypt, which outlines the discoveries and advances that aided in the Western realization of the character of ancient Egypt. The work moves beyond providing a mere historical skeleton of ancient Egypt by including in its final chapter extended discussions of Egyptian social groups, such as officers, military units, scribes, artisans, and peasants. Aldred includes a select bibliography for further research.

BOTTÉRO's essays highlight the living legacy of Mesopotamian "ways of thinking, analyzing, and organizing the universe." Bottéro sees here the first glimpses of what would become "Western" philosophy and science. An important contribution of this work is its discussion of the field of Assyriology. Bottéro is also noteworthy for his detailed description of the invention of writing and the eventual decipherment of cuneiform script. The book's approach is thematic and aims throughout to bring us closer to our cultural progenitors. Topics discussed include the divinatory sciences, the institution of divine kingship, law, sexuality, the religious system, the mythology of death, and "intelligence and the technical function of power." This work is distinguished by its thorough treatment of the intellectual history of ancient Mesopotamia.

GORDON and RENDSBURG offer one of the few surveys of biblical Israel as seen through the lens of the larger Mediterranean world. The work covers the patriarchal period, the Amarna Age, the importance of Ugaritic texts for shedding light on the Hebrew Bible, the development of the tribal league, monarchic and divided Israel, Mesopotamian invasions, and the eventual restoration of Jerusalem under Persian rule. The authors pay special attention throughout to the literary aspects of the Near Eastern texts in question and how they elucidate various aspects of the Hebrew Bible and its writ-

ers. One of the most important contributions of this work is its inclusion of Homeric literature for purposes of comparison with biblical and Near Eastern, especially Ugaritic, writings. Full of original insights, this work is immensely readable.

HALLO and SIMPSON outline the "political and cultural development of pre-classical antiquity," by which they intend primarily Mesopotamia and Egypt. The work covers the history of ancient Mesopotamia from the dawn of civilization to the conquest of Babylonia by the Persians in the sixth century B.C.E. Their treatment of Egyptian history covers the period from the appearance of writing, around 3000 B.C.E., to the conquest by Alexander in 322 B.C.E. The authors place emphasis on the political history of the two superpowers of the ancient world, while considering also the culturally, socially, and economically influential forces that shaped the respective entities. The resources that inform this work are more textual than archaeological. The book provides copious dynastic lists, photographs, and maps. Throughout the work there are demonstrations to be found of the authors' belief in the "underlying unity of the 'Ancient Near East.'"

KRAMER's unique study of the people credited with the invention of writing and a host of other cultural achievements has done much to put the great Sumerian culture on the map. While focusing on the various aspects of Sumerian culture, Kramer pays special attention to how the Sumerians contributed to the progress of world civilization. Among other things, the work discusses schools, international affairs, historiography, law, justice, social reform, agriculture and horticulture, cosmology and cosmogony, ethics, medicine, literature, and kingship. Kramer takes pains to point out many biblical parallels, though many of them are somewhat strained. Photographs, sketches, and maps assist the reader, as do an abundance of translations. While the book is in need of an update, it remains a classic first introduction to the Sumerians.

KUHRT's work is magisterial and exhaustive, providing informative background essays on various aspects of the greater Near East as well as countless maps and diagrams. While primarily a historical and, hence, chronological outline of rulers and events, the volumes also provide rich archaeological documentation for the periods in question. Filled with original insights into the many historical problems, the treatment is evenhanded and extraordinarily, even incredibly, readable. Kuhrt covers the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt especially well, providing an excellent historical context for understanding the rise of biblical Israel. Her placement of biblical Israel within the larger Levant is indicative of a mastery of the historical context and is especially useful since it removes the Israelites and the Hebrew Bible from an isolation that all too often marks scholarship on the subject. Kuhrt's work highlights the continuities and interactions between periods and peoples of the ancient Near East.

OPPENHEIM offers a masterful, though dense, treatment of ancient Mesopotamia. The author's pessimism concerning the ability to reconstruct accurately ancient Mesopotamian culture is evident in the title and in the author's famous essay "Why a 'Mesopotamian Religion' Should Not be Written." Paradoxically, however, the work contributes so much to our understanding on the subject that it has yet to be rivaled. Oppenheim surveys the social and economic fabric, scribal

activity and the various types of written sources, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, crafts, and the divinatory arts, as well as the differences between Babylonian and Assyrian cultures. He also offers an analysis of Mesopotamian psychology.

SASSON brings together the world's most prominent ancient Near East scholars for contributions on the subjects of their particular expertise. The encyclopedic format of the volumes allows readers ready access to up-to-date information on the most important aspects of ancient Near Eastern history and culture. Unique to these volumes is the extensive treatment of mid-Euphrates and Syrian sites such as Mari, Emar, Alalakh, and Ebla. The volumes include bibliographic references and indexes, and are divided into thematic units on the ancient Near East in Western thought, the environment, population, social institutions, history and culture, economy and trade, technology and artistic production, religion and science, language, writing and literature, and visual and performing arts.

The collection of essays edited by SHAFER touches upon the most fascinating aspects of ancient Egyptian religion, including in-depth analyses of Egyptian concepts of the divine, the gods, divine kingship, cosmogonies, and cosmology. It also delves more deeply than most treatments into such related subjects as concepts of order and misfortune, piety, decorum and morality, magic and divination, and experientiality. A host of well-known scholars are brought on board to tackle these issues, and the result is a readable exploration of the most salient aspects of Egyptian religion. While it is not meant to be exhaustive, the work serves as an excellent foray into the subject. Highly spiced with photographs, it also offers a useful bibliography.

SILVERMAN gathers 13 Egyptologists to explore the chief elements of ancient Egyptian culture. Space is devoted to all the major topics, including kingship, religion, pyramids and temples, the solar cult, gods and goddesses, beliefs and rituals, hieroglyphs, engineering, and astronomy. This collection of scholarly essays represents the latest thinking on these and other issues relating to ancient Egypt. Though useful and interesting as an introduction to ancient Egypt, the tome's hefty size makes it a cumbersome textbook.

SNELL's unparalleled work provides as exhaustive a history of the social and economic forces that influenced the lives of kings and commoners from Egypt to Anatolia as the non-technical reader could possibly desire. Unique to this work is Snell's effort to broaden the context of the ancient Near East by devoting discussion to comparisons with China, Etruria, India, and Greece. The book moves chronologically, pausing every five centuries or so to consider synchronic comparisons. The epilogue contains a useful review of previous social and economic studies of the ancient Near East, and the bibliography and footnotes are copious. Snell covers everything from trade and money to animal management and demography and focuses on the everyday life of the ancients. Bringing to bear a vast array of archaeological and textual evidence, he achieves a thoroughly intelligent restoration of the cultures of Western Asia.

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See also Canaanites; History: Biblical Israel

Angels and Demons

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The word "angel" is derived from *angelos*, the Greek term adopted to translate the Hebrew appellation *malakh* (messenger). As it originally appeared in Scripture, *malakh* could indicate any messenger whether human or heavenly, bearing good tidings or ill. Within a relatively short time, however, the term came to designate, more or less exclusively, the heavenly creatures acting in the service of (an increasingly transcendent) God.

A significant portion of the speculative lore surrounding angels is concerned with the origins and activities of the "fallen" angels—typically known as "demons." Derived (and freely adapted) from the Greek *daimon*, the classification of demon has variously been applied to destructive or malicious spirits (*mazzikin*); Babylonian sprites (*shedim*); the "evil inclination" (*yetzer hara*); and, of course, the fallen angels (commonly traced to the *Nephilim* of Genesis 6:4). Certain angelic figures, such as Satan and the Angel of Death, are viewed as ambiguously possessing both celestial and diabolical qualities.

Names, descriptions, and taxonomic designations for virtually innumerable angels and demons are readily found in a wide variety of scriptural, pseudepigraphic, rabbinic, and mystical texts. Accordingly, there exists an extensive array of tex-