Very Short Introductions online

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Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction
Karen Radner

Assyria was one of the most influential kingdoms of the Ancient Near East. Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction 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 present-day 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. After a brief introduction the book explores the geography and the history of Ancient Assyria. It continues by examining the lives not only of some of its key rulers, but also the lives of some typical citizens, and slaves too, are selected. In this way the culture and diverse ways of life of those who lived in the empire are vividly brought to life.

The Ancient Near East: A Very Short Introduction
Amanda H. Podany

The Ancient Near East: A Very Short Introduction describes a momentous time in human history and explains why the ancient Near East is known as the ‘cradle of civilization’. 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. The three thousand years of this era — 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 to early achievements in astronomy, law, and diplomacy.
The Anglo-Saxon Age: A Very Short Introduction
John Blair

The Anglo-Saxon Age: A Very Short Introduction covers the era from the emergence of the earliest English settlements around the year ad 450 to the Norman victory in 1066 providing a brief introduction to the political, social, religious, and cultural history of Anglo-Saxon Britain. The Anglo-Saxon age lasted for 600 years. This period encompassed an age that shaped England’s landscape and culture in profound and long-lasting ways. Anglo-Saxon Britain was a fragmented, non-urban, warrior society: a multi-ethnic community. This gradually changed over time as the early medieval cultures united to give shape to the Britain that was to come.

Babylonia: A Very Short Introduction
Trevor Bryce

Babylonia: A Very Short Introduction takes us on a journey of more than 2,000 years across the history and civilization of ancient Babylonia, from the emergence of its chief city, Babylon, as a village on the Euphrates in the 3rd millennium bc through phases of triumph, decline, and resurgence until its royal capital faded into obscurity in the Roman imperial era. Exploring key historical events as well as the day-to-day life of an ancient Babylonian—including the great Hammurabic, Kassite, and Nebuchadnezzar’s Neo-Babylonian empires as well as the periods of Persian and Macedonian rule under Alexander the Great—it provides a comprehensive guide to one of history’s most profound civilizations.

The Celts: A Very Short Introduction
Barry Cunliffe

The Celts: A Very Short Introduction seeks to reveal the true nature of the Celts. Were they savage and bloodthirsty, or civilized and peaceable? The Celts have long been a subject of enormous fascination, speculation, and misunderstanding. From the ancient Romans to the present day, their real character has been obscured by a tangled web of preconceived ideas and stereotypes. This VSI aims to show what the Celts were really like, exploring subjects such as trade, migration, and the evolution of Celtic traditions. Along the way, it exposes how society’s needs have shaped our visions of the Celts, and examines such colourful characters as St Patrick, Cú Chulainn, and Boudica.
The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction examines this topic by bringing together issues of colonialism, cultural exchange, economic exploitation, and the relationship between past and present. Crusading fervour gripped Europe for over 200 years, creating one of the most extraordinary, vivid episodes in world history. The legacy of the ideas and imagery of the Crusades has resonated through the centuries, inspiring Hollywood movies and great works of literature. Despite their powerful hold on our imaginations, our knowledge of them remains obscure and distorted by time. Were the Crusaders motivated by spiritual rewards, or by greed? Were the Crusades an experiment in European colonialism, or a manifestation of religious love? How were they organized and founded?

Druids: A Very Short Introduction
Barry Cunliffe

The Druids: A Very Short Introduction sets out to answer the questions: Who were the Druids? What do we know about them? Do they still exist today? The Druids first came into focus in Western Europe — Gaul, Britain, and Ireland — in the 2nd century bc. This VSI examines the origins of the Druids and the evidence for their beliefs and practices, asking what can and cannot be known about them. It considers why the nature of the Druid caste changed quite dramatically over time, and how successive generations have interpreted the phenomenon in very different ways.

Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction
Paul Langford

Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction spans the period from the aftermath of the Revolution of 1688 to Pitt the Younger's defeat in his attempts at parliamentary reform and considers the growing security and maturity of the British polity and the development of an industrial economy. Britain overcame challenges by foreign powers, and military setbacks to find itself in a strong imperial and mercantile position by 1789. Although the social problems of economic change and the failure to reform the political system remained issues, the rising middle class and the ruling aristocracy worked together to provide stability.
The First World War: A Very Short Introduction

Michael Howard

The First World War: A Very Short Introduction is a concise history of the ‘Great War’, focusing on why it happened, how it was fought, and why it had the consequences it did. It examines the state of Europe in 1914 and the outbreak of war; the onset of attrition and crisis; the role of the USA; the collapse of Russia; and the weakening and eventual surrender of the Central Powers. It also investigates the historical controversies surrounding the causes and conduct of war, and describes how peace was ultimately made and the potent legacy of resentment left to Germany.

The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction

William Doyle

The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction shows that we are still living with the consequences of the French Revolution and explores its legacy in the form of rationality in public affairs, responsible government, decimalization, and the ideology of human rights. There are many familiar images of the French Revolution, garnered from Dickens, Baroness Orczy, and Tolstoy, and long-lasting legends such as ‘let them eat cake’ and the tricolour. How did the revolution happen? Why did the revolutionaries quarrel with the king, the church and the rest of Europe? Why did this produce Terror? The revolution destroyed the age-old cultural, institutional, and social structures in France and beyond. In what ways did the ambitions of the French Revolution fail?

Late Antiquity: A Very Short Introduction

Gillian Clark

Late Antiquity: A Very Short Introduction debates the concept of and the events that took place in late antiquity. Was late antiquity a period of decline or transformation, conflict or interaction? Late antiquity was the period (c. 300—c.800) during which barbarian invasions defeated the Roman Empire in Western Europe by the 5th century and Arab invasions ended Roman rule over the eastern and southern Mediterranean coasts by the 7th century. It was a time of cultural clashes, political restructurings, geographical controversies, and competing religions. Late antiquity is discussed in relation to Byzantium and the Fall of Rome, and the relationship between late antiquity and the modern world is considered.
Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction
Quentin Skinner

Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction considers the life and impact of the Florentine Renaissance humanist, diplomat, historian, and political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli. Machiavelli taught that political leaders must be prepared to do evil so that good may come of it, and his name has been a byword ever since for duplicity and immorality. This VSI considers whether his sinister reputation is deserved, focusing on his three major political works, The Prince, the Discourses, and The Florentine Histories. This new edition discusses how Machiavelli developed his neo-classical political theory through engaging in continual dialogue with the ancient Roman moralists and historians, especially Cicero and Livy.

Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction
Nicholas Vincent

Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction outlines the context and history of one of the most famous constitutional texts in world history. Magna Carta's origins in the troubled reign of King John are examined, and the significance of the role Magna Carta played thereafter as a symbol of the subject's right to protection against the absolute authority of the sovereign is explored. How and why is Magna Carta still significant today, and what is its importance in relation to issues of law and politics, and also to human rights? This VSI includes a full English translation of the 1215 Magna Carta.

Medieval Britain: A Very Short Introduction
John Gillingham and Ralph A. Griffiths

Medieval Britain: A Very Short Introduction covers the establishment of the Anglo-Norman monarchy in the early Middle Ages, through to England's failure to dominate the British Isles and France in the later Middle Ages. Out of the turbulence gradually came stronger senses of identity in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Yet this was an age, too, of growing definition of Englishness and of a distinctive English cultural tradition. What impact did the Norman Conquest have on life in the British Isles? What did medieval Britain look like? Where did people live? How did they earn a living?
The Mexican Revolution defined the socio-political experience of 20th-century life in Mexico. Its subsequent legacy has provoked debate between those who interpret the ongoing myth of the Revolution and those who adopt the more middle-of-the-road reality of the regime after 1940. The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction addresses the causes of the upheaval, outlines the armed conflict between 1910 and 1920, explains how a durable regime was consolidated in the 1920s, and sums up the social reforms of the Revolution, culminating in the radical 1930s. The conflict is placed alongside other ‘great’ revolutions, and Mexico is compared with the Latin American countries that avoided violent upheaval.

The Middle Ages: A Very Short Introduction

The Middle Ages: A Very Short Introduction explores the variety, change, dynamism, and sheer complexity of the period of European history between 500 and 1500 and the impact that this period has had on the modern day world. From the provinces of the Roman Empire, which became barbarian kingdoms after c.450–650, to the northern and eastern regions, which were increasingly integrated into Europe, this volume describes the emergence of a truly global system of communication, conquest, and trade. The Middle Ages also considers the challenges of life in Europe at that time—at all levels of society—by looking at the various facets of kinship and family, agriculture and trade, and groups and individuals.

Modern France: A Very Short Introduction

Modern France: A Very Short Introduction argues that modern France, as both a world stage and a global crossroads, is an essential actor in the development of contemporary culture. Indeed, French is the only language other than English spoken on five continents, and more people still visit France than anywhere else in the world. French fashion continues to dominate haute couture and, at the same time, French people are at the forefront of international ‘style’, which was as true in the first half of the twentieth century as it is today.
This tension between ‘Frenchness’ as both particular and transnational remains one of the most compelling qualities of the culture.

Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction
Christopher Goto-Jones

Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction aims to explode the myths and explore the reality of modern Japan by considering its history, economy, politics, and culture. Japan is arguably today’s most successful industrial economy, combining almost unprecedented affluence with social stability and apparent harmony. Japanese goods and cultural products are consumed all over the world, ranging from animated movies and computer games all the way through to cars, semiconductors, and management techniques. In many ways, Japan is an icon of the modern world, and yet it remains something of an enigma to many.

The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction
Mike Rapport

The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction provides a brief outline of these conflicts, introducing the tactics, strategies, and weaponry of the time. What were the origins of the wars? In what ways and means were the wars fought? What are the political and social legacies of the wars today? The Napoleonic Wars have an important place in the history of Europe, leaving their mark on European and world societies in a variety of ways. In many European countries they provided the stimulus for radical social and political change — particularly in Spain, Germany, and Italy — and are frequently viewed in these countries as the starting point of their modern histories.

Nazi Germany: A Very Short Introduction
Jane Caplan

The Nazi regime dominated European history for twelve years between 1933 and 1945, and left a legacy that still echoes today. Nazi Germany: A Very Short Introduction provides a highly relevant reminder of the fragility of democratic institutions, and the ways in which a mass political movement, the exploitation of popular fears, and frail political opposition can lead to the imposition of dictatorship. After considering the emergence and popular appeal of the Nazi party, it examines the relationships between belief, consent, and terror
in securing the regime, alongside the crucial role played by Hitler. Arguing that war and conquest were intrinsic to National Socialism, this VSI shows how genocide became its ultimate goal, and concludes with a discussion of the place of Nazi Germany in history and public memory.