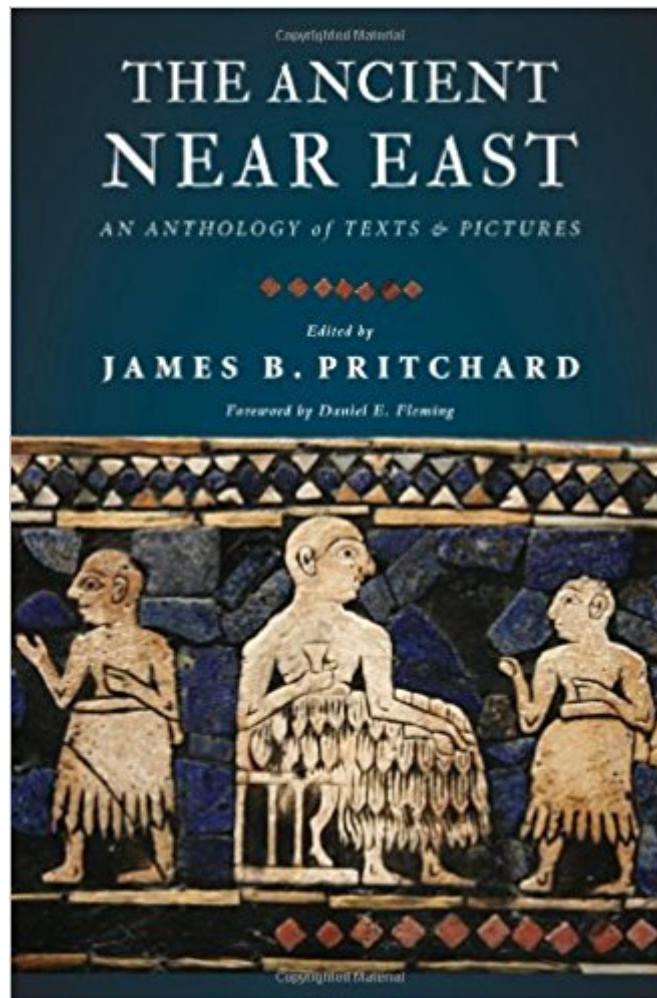




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# The Ancient Near East: An Anthology Of Texts And Pictures



## Synopsis

James Pritchard's classic anthologies of the ancient Near East have introduced generations of readers to texts essential for understanding the peoples and cultures of this important region. Now these two enduring works have been combined and integrated into one convenient and richly illustrated volume, with a new foreword that puts the translations in context. With more than 130 reading selections and 300 photographs of ancient art, architecture, and artifacts, this volume provides a stimulating introduction to some of the most significant and widely studied texts of the ancient Near East, including the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Creation Epic (Enuma elish), the Code of Hammurabi, and the Baal Cycle. For students of history, religion, the Bible, archaeology, and anthropology, this anthology provides a wealth of material for understanding the ancient Near East. Represents the diverse cultures and languages of the ancient Near East--Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Canaanite, and Aramaic--in a wide range of genres: Historical texts Legal texts and treaties Inscriptions Hymns Didactic and wisdom literature Oracles and prophecies Love poetry and other literary texts Letters New foreword puts the classic translations in context More than 300 photographs document ancient art, architecture, and artifacts related to the texts Fully indexed

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Pritchard enlisted some of the best scholars of his day to translate myths from Mesopotamia, novellas from Egypt, and calendars from Palestine. They provide an amazing backdrop to reread, and in some cases reinterpret, the Bible. Furthermore, the translations themselves are works of art.

. . . These translations have staying power. Not only do they convey the cultural environment of the biblical world but they do so with elegance and timeliness. The translators achieved an admirable balance of fidelity to the original compositions and imaginative creativity."--Books & Culture"While there are other collections of texts published more recently with some more current translations, there is no extant, modestly priced volume that includes both texts and pictures for the many cultures this one includes. . . . [T]his volume can serve well in personal, public, school, and small college libraries with its modest price and collected materials. It provides a wealth of material useful for understanding the ancient Near East."--Susan Tower Hollis, *American Reference Books Annual*"I recommend the new edition to all academic libraries in light of the quantity of primary source material. . . . [I]t would make an excellent classroom resource."--Tyler Mayfield, *Religious Studies Review*

"There is no other anthology on the ancient Near East with this breadth of geographical and linguistic coverage, or with this variety of genres, from the literary and historical to the legal, epistolary, and religious."--Francesca Rochberg, University of California, Berkeley

"The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures" (2011) is a terrific book for the purposes for which it is intended -- as a textbook, or for supplementary readings. In any case, as a companion to other sources of information. It could also serve as an introduction (but only that) to several ancient literatures. With the current (January 2013) discount, the paperback edition is a bargain. Putting together a collection of more recent translations to replace it would be far more expensive. However, it can't be considered as a stand-alone introduction to the world of the Hebrew Bible ("Old Testament"), as was the case with the full edition, back when it first appeared, sixty-some years ago. The volume is an abridged edition of the now-classic collection "Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament" (1950, corrected 1955; supplement / expanded edition 1969; commonly ANET) and its companion volume of "The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament" (1954; supplement / expanded edition 1969; commonly ANEP). A library reserve copy of ANET was essential reading for a seminar course on Mesopotamian mythology I took in the 1970s. Competent scholars have quoted its often felicitous translations for decades; some as recently as 2012 (albeit in a revision of work published in the 1980s). However, the present volume has been stripped of most headnotes, footnotes, and bibliographic information; which may leave a reader at a loss for where else to turn. This could have been handled better; several pages of new bibliography, put together by a few graduate students, could have enhanced

the volume significantly. And the same team could have proofread the index, which, despite being genuinely helpful, has some oversights and confusions; for example, Utnapishtim, the Noah-figure in the Epic of Gilgamesh, is for some reason described as a moon god (!), while the Sumerian moon god's alternate name of Nanna goes entirely undefined. However, what is included is still impressive. Although technically out of date, due both to new textual discoveries and to advances in knowledge of the ancient languages, the translations included were, as the new Foreword points out, the work of eminent scholars, most of which stood up well to the test of readability over the last half-century (and more). For readers whose main interest is the "Old Testament," it can be an unintimidating introductory sampler to a topic that still gives pause to some of the traditionally-oriented. (Those who are upset by the idea that God communicated with ancient Israel in terms that people at the time understood; let alone the notion that Scripture might be a human product....) The emphasis on material related to the Hebrew Bible in one way or another was partly abandoned in 1969; for example, in ANET marginal references to Biblical passages were not included in the substantial supplemental section. However, the translations of new material, and replacement translations, still fit into the old, Biblically-influenced, categories, which had probably helped give the book a wider readership during the 1950s and 1960s than it might otherwise have obtained. "The Ancient Near East" is not, however, a new abridgment made directly from the two collections. It is a re-set and re-ordered version of two previous selections, "The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures" (1958; also as "The Ancient Near East, Volume 1") and "The Ancient Near East, Volume 2: A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures" (1975). The latter was basically a cut-down version of the 1969 Supplement, which left some things hanging. For example, the fragments of the "The Myth of Zu" (now read 'Anzu') had been left out in 1958, but the new volume contained additional fragments of the story! Very confusing to someone without access to the full edition, or a teacher who could explain the situation. It is good to have this material back in print, and nice that it is now consolidated. Interestingly, the hardback edition is in the same price-range as is being asked for the out-of print full edition of ANET itself. (For me, this raises the question of why Princeton University Press has never issued a paperback version of the whole ANET, possibly broken down into a couple of fat volumes). Unfortunately, this new volume simply carries over some of the less-than-brilliant decisions made in producing the two earlier anthologies. The Egyptian material, often abridged in ANET, was truncated again for the anthology, and the cuts are still there. (Fortunately, most of the texts have had new translations in recent decades, notably in the three-volume "Literature of Ancient Egypt" by Miriam Lichtheim, and the third edition of "Ancient Egyptian Literature," by W.K. Simpson, et al.) As long as the book was being re-formatted, they

might have considered restoring the first three tablets of the Babylonian "Creation Epic" (otherwise Enuma Elish), which were cut out in 1958. Or included the (An)zu texts mentioned above. (Of course, more copies have come to light since 1969, again making the ANET version obsolete, but at least what is there would make more sense). However, the whole section of Akkadian (Assyrian and Babylonian) myths and epics also could have been dropped, making room for other things, given the excellent, and wider, coverage in Stephanie Dalley's "Myths from Mesopotamia" and Benjamin R. Foster's "Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature." For example, the Prologue and Epilogue could have been restored to the "Laws of Hammurabi." This would have helped clarify that Hammurabi's compilation was more of propaganda exercise than a working law book to be consulted by judges. Some sections were left out entirely. Beyond a single treaty, nothing of the Hittites' historical and legal texts is included. The Sumerians get a fair amount of attention. But neither of two major Sumerian Lamentations for cities found in ANET was included. As it happens, more recent translations of both, and of several others, are now available on line, from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, or ETCSL; but most readers would never know the genre existed, let alone whether it has any relation to the Biblical Book of Lamentations). And so forth. Still, if one figures in the various volumes of the "Writings from the Ancient World" series, issued by the Society of Biblical Literature (in some ways the most nearly comparable project), much of the missing material, and more, can be found elsewhere, in fairly up-to-date form; but at a much higher total price. [IMPORTANT ADDENDUM, August 2017: It recently came to my attention (while looking for something else entirely!) that the Internet Archive ([archive.org](http://archive.org)) has a copy of the complete third edition of ANET (i.e., the text, \*not\* the illustrations), which can be downloaded, free. In fact, it appears several times, under the title of one or another section of the book, but all the files appear to be complete copies. (In this complete third edition, the supplemental material is inserted where it properly belongs.) I have no knowledge of the copyright status of this, but having the whole book available free, even if it must be read on a screen, is very nice. [Unfortunately, the usually reliable PDF version of the book (others formats are available, too) was processed using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), so it is searchable. That sounds good, and is very convenient given the vast size of the volume, but the OCR from time to time messes up words. This is not a great problem when it is just the English vocabulary that is garbled (e.g., "greedy" for "greatly"), but it sometimes happens to ancient names and words. In such cases, only someone who already knows the material quite well is likely to be able to sort out the garble to find the correct reading. Even so, I recommend the PDF version, if you are interested: the headnotes are in the right size font, the footnotes are in the right places, and so on, which conversion into other formats often ignores or

mixes up.]

James Pritchard's *Ancient Near East* introduces readers to classic works (e.g. legal texts, hymns, myths, treaties, poetry and letters) of the region—such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Enuma elish, and the Epic of Gilgamesh—and in turn provides a clearer understanding of the cultures that existed in the ancient era. The problem is that many of the translations come from incomplete, damaged, or un-translatable sources, so many of the “translations” read as choppy, discontinuous stories making it extremely hard to follow. Also, if reading this book by yourself, it will be difficult to locate the texts in history without a scholar guiding you. That is, the selections may have a few sentences describing what you are about to read and why it was written, but it still remains difficult to discern the sociohistorical contexts. The book is very Bible-oriented in that it uses the writings from the Ancient Near East in order to draw Biblical parallels. Throughout the entire book, scriptural footnotes in the margins point to where the writings either have a word-for-word or similar parallel in the Old Testament. I read this book as part of a graduate level seminary course and certainly would not have picked it up any other way. The value this book has for Biblical students is to reveal the similarities between many of the Old Testament narratives and other Ancient Near East sources. For example, the lex talionis, or the concept of “an eye for an eye” is found in the Code of Hammurabi, and there are striking similarities between the Book of Genesis and The Memphite Theology of Creation. As of December 2014, both versions have a somewhat hefty asking price: the paperback version is just under \$30 and the hardcover is just over \$120 (both on Amazon).

It is worth more than a two if you are just after pictures, but am rating it two because if you are after any information on the texts or pictures, you will need to purchase the original volume and also 3rd edition. There is very little in the way of date and provenance for over half of the texts, which is something that I'd taken for granted would be in this work :/the sales blurb says it is a combination of previous works - it is an abbreviation!

Interesting read.

Excellent book for those interested in original documents to study ancient cultures! It would be a great addition for Biblical studies/scholarship. I teach at a community college and have used excerpts from this book for my Ancient Middle East classes. This book has a wide variety of

documents, songs, etc. from those time periods. I highly recommend it as a personal reference...though I would like to see it in ebook format to use in my classes.

The book is perfectly fine and brand new. However, it took way too long to ship. Over three weeks. Which is completely ridiculous.

Wish they would teach this in high school curriculum, this book is a truly great summary of historical western religious text. Topped off with beautiful photos, obviously well informed insights, and an extremely easy to understand layout

Very good Anthology of Ancient Literature. Some of the commentary reflects a theological bias - but otherwise, it is a very good collection. Benjamin Foster is a better translator.. my only critique is that it did not seem to include any of his translations.

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