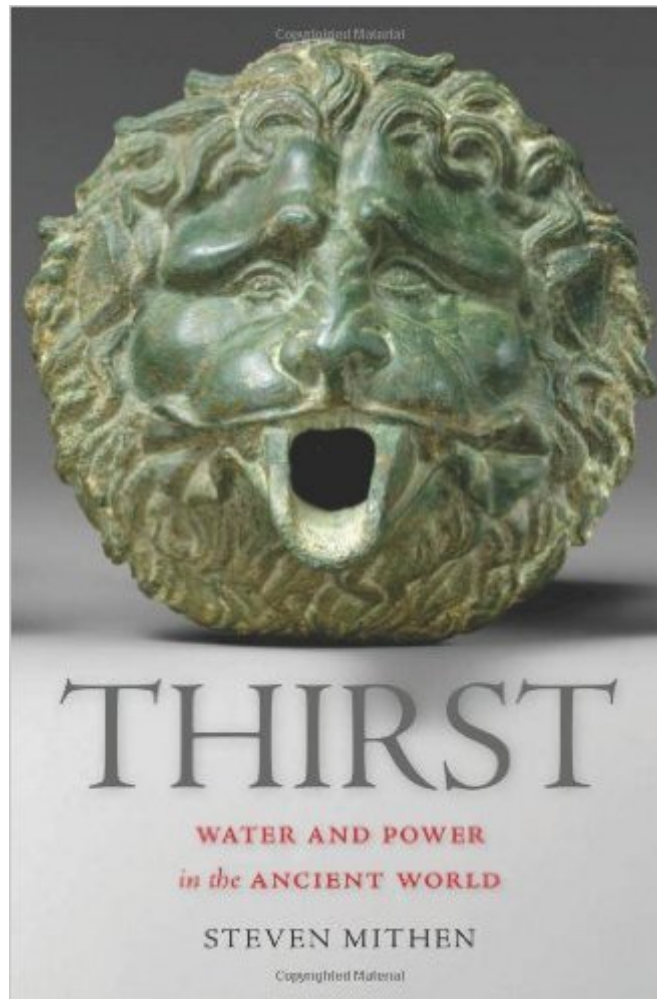


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Thirst: Water And Power In The Ancient World



Synopsis

Water is an endangered resource, imperiled by population growth, mega-urbanization, and climate change. Scientists project that by 2050, freshwater shortages will affect 75 percent of the global population. Steven Mithen puts our current crisis in historical context by exploring 10,000 years of humankind's management of water. *Thirst* offers cautionary tales of civilizations defeated by the challenges of water control, as well as inspirational stories about how technological ingenuity has sustained communities in hostile environments. As in his acclaimed, genre-defying *After the Ice* and *The Singing Neanderthals*, Mithen blends archaeology, current science, and ancient literature to give us a rich new picture of how our ancestors lived. Since the Neolithic Revolution, people have recognized water as a commodity and source of economic power and have manipulated its flow. History abounds with examples of ambitious water management projects and hydraulic engineering—from the Sumerians, whose mastery of canal building and irrigation led to their status as the first civilization, to the Nabataeans, who created a watery paradise in the desert city of Petra, to the Khmer, who built a massive inland sea at Angkor, visible from space. As we search for modern solutions to today's water crises, from the American Southwest to China, Mithen also looks for lessons in the past. He suggests that we follow one of the most unheeded pieces of advice to come down from ancient times. In the words of Li Bing, whose waterworks have irrigated the Sichuan Basin since 256 bc, "Work with nature, not against it."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What does water mean for civilization? How important role does water take in creating culture? Steven Mithen quests for the evidence to the remains of ancient cities in the world. Water management was both critical and pervasive throughout the ancient world. People endeavored in controlling water not only for irrigating cultivated land and preventing flood but also securing water for drinking and bathing spiritually and physically. Water has long been a source of mechanical power. They even used water as a weapon and remained as such through history and into the present day. Water solidly incorporated into the ideologies and mythologies of the ancient world. Resultantly, water related motifs appear frequently in the iconography of the ancient world. The sight, the sound, the touches and the feelings of water was valued and of great importance in the past. The scale of ancient hydraulic engineering implies the existence of enormous power. Power lay in controlling access to water. There was a multiplicity in the relation between water and power. Some societies saw economical power in water, while others felt religious importance. Canals facilitating trade has always been, and still be, a social change driver. Taxation and/or warfare provided the fund to build new water controlling systems, which became a visual demonstration of their power. What makes Steven Mithen feel gloomy is the fact all of the ancient civilizations has been succumbed to climate change. Those regions, where they showed technical ingenuity and achievement in managing the ancient water supply, now faces the severe water crisis. The thirsting desire of our forebears have ravaged their environments, and went far beyond a balance between environmental sustainability and economic growth.

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