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Empires of Antiquities is a history of the rediscovery of civilizations of the ancient Near East in the imperial order that evolved between the outbreak of the First World War and the 1950s. It explores the ways in which Near Eastern antiquity was redefined and experienced, becoming the subject of new regulation, new modes of knowledge, and international and local politics. A series of globally publicized spectacular archaeological discoveries in Iraq, Egypt, and Palestine, which the book follows, made antiquity visible, palpable and accessible as never before. The new uses of antiquity and its relations to modernity were inseparable from the emergence of the post-war world order, imperial collaboration and collisions, and national aspirations. *Empires of Antiquities* uniquely combines a history of the internationalization of a new “regime of archaeology” under the oversight of the League of Nations and its web of institutions, a history of British passions for Near Eastern antiquity, on-the-ground colonial mechanisms and nationalist claims on the past. It points to the centrality of the mandate system, particularly mandates classified A, in Mesopotamia/Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan, formerly governed by the Ottoman Empire, and of Egypt, in a new culture of antiquity. Drawing on an unusually wide range of archives in several countries, as well as on visual and material evidence, the book weaves together imperial, international, and local histories of institutions, people, ideas and objects and offers an entirely new interpretation of the history of archaeological discovery and its connections to empires and modernity.

Jacket images: Front jacket: Puabi of Ur (Tell al-Muqayyar), Iraq, a reconstruction, Courtesy, Mary Evans Gallery
Flap: Puabi’s jewellery in situ, Ur, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

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*Modernity and the
Rediscovery of the Ancient
Near East, 1914–1950*

BILLIE
MELMAN



Billie Melman is Professor of History and Henri Glasberg Chair in European Studies at Tel Aviv University. She is a cultural historian of Britain and has written extensively on colonialism and orientalism, on uses of the British and imperial past, on memory and on gender.



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