



Desert: Nature and Culture (Earth)

Roslynn D. Haynes

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Desert takes a fresh look at one of the most significant natural aspects of our planet, as both a geographical feature and a cultural entity. It examines and often overturns our common notions about deserts, from the fear of desolation and death of thirst on the one hand, to the attraction of the exotic, adventure and freedom on the other.

The book considers the immense geographical diversity of deserts from the Sahara to Antarctica, and describes how plants and animals have adapted to these hostile environments in intriguing and often bizarre ways. Diverse races have also inhabited deserts and evolved unique lifestyles and cultures in response to their environments. Desert also asks why all three of the world's great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, originated in the deserts of the Middle East, and traces the continuing connections between the minimal materialism of desert existence and the pursuit of a spiritual dimension.

Deserts have also long exerted an allure on the West, leading to the impetus for exploration, the fascination with travellers' tales and the fashion for Orientalism in art, architecture and dress. Desert also reviews the significance of desolate landscapes in literature and film and looks at artists' responses to the desert, from seeing it as empty space, devoid of interest or perspective, to devising new visual techniques through which to 'see' it.

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