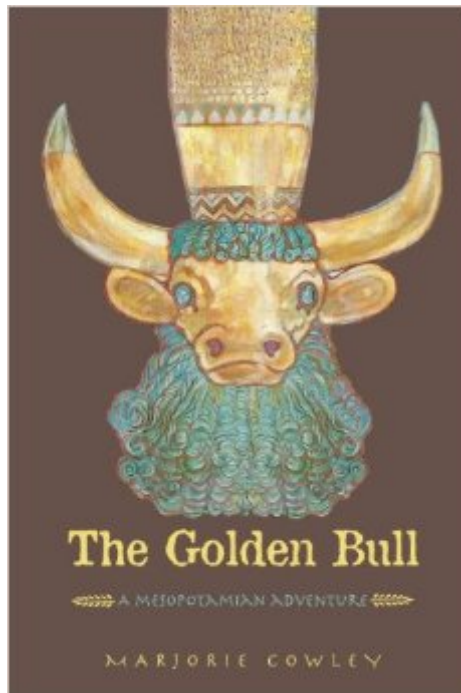


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The Golden Bull: A Mesopotamian Adventure



Synopsis

A brother and sister's search for a new life and new home . . . 5,000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia during a terrible drought, Jomar and Zefa's father must send his children away to the city of Ur because he can no longer feed them. At fourteen, Jomar is old enough to apprentice with Sidah, a master goldsmith for the temple of the moon god, but there is no place for Zefa in Sidah's household. Zefa, a talented but untrained musician, is forced to play her music and sing for alms on the streets of Ur. Marjorie Cowley vividly imagines the intrigues, and harsh struggle for survival in ancient Mesopotamia.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the best things about good historical fiction is its ability to draw us into other countries and other times that we may know little to nothing about. I will admit that I don't know much about ancient Mesopotamia (now Iraq) beyond what I learned when I took college "Western Civ" (as we called it back then) quite a few years ago. So I was delighted to travel to this exotic time through Marjorie Cowley's engrossing novel *The Golden Bull*. Cowley has taught prehistory to school children from first grade to high school for many years, but didn't begin writing for children until her 60's. Her first two books focused on prehistoric times, but *The Golden Bull* fills a special niche by focusing on Mesopotamia, an area covered in 6th grade history here in California. Times are hard in the countryside where our main character, 14-year-old Jamar, lives with his sister and family; crops are failing because of a long-lasting drought and there is not enough to eat. Hoping to save the children from famine, their parents send them to the city of Ur, where Jamar will be the new

apprentice to Sidah, a master goldsmith for the temple of the moon-god. But his sister, a gifted but untrained musician, is not wanted in Sidah's household. Jomar takes quickly to assisting the goldsmith with crafting a magnificent gold and lapis bull which will embellish a special lyre to be used in the temple. But will his sister, too, find a place in the city? When she is accused of stealing a valuable lapis bead, she must face a terrible test of determining guilt or innocence--being thrown into the water of the sacred Euphrates river, a river whose existence was as critical to this region as the Nile to Egypt.

I have always been fascinated with the history of ancient Mesopotamia and read many fiction and non fiction history books about it. When this young adult story about the ancient city of Ur was released I was eagerly anticipating an evocative and exciting tale. Wrong. I found this story beyond simple, a bit sappy, and very predictable. And, it had an unsatisfactory ending. The story line is a common one, we have Jomar and Zepha, a sister and brother who find themselves on their own after their parents apprentice Jomar out due to local famine and drought causing strife and poor economy. Not able to feed their children, the parents shoo the children off to survive alone working with a temple Goldsmith. My first disappointment was that although this supposedly takes place in ancient Ur, not once did I ever feel like I was there. Most of the story takes place inside a workroom where Jomar, apprentice to a goldsmith, works to assist the goldsmith on a decorative lyre for the temple priestess. In fact, this creation of the lyre, takes up an enormous part of the story and becomes boring. There is very little else going on besides a small mystery in the background. I cant imagine too many children or teens getting really into this story. There were no outside attractions or descriptions to make me realize I was in old Mesopotamia at this time, no historical background or myth. I actually felt that this story could have taken place in many cities in various ancient times, it was so strongly lacking in detail. My last point of disappointment was the ending. This famous lyre that is so laboriously worked on throughout most of the book was to be presented to the high priestess of Ur, and played on by Jomar's sister Zefa.

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