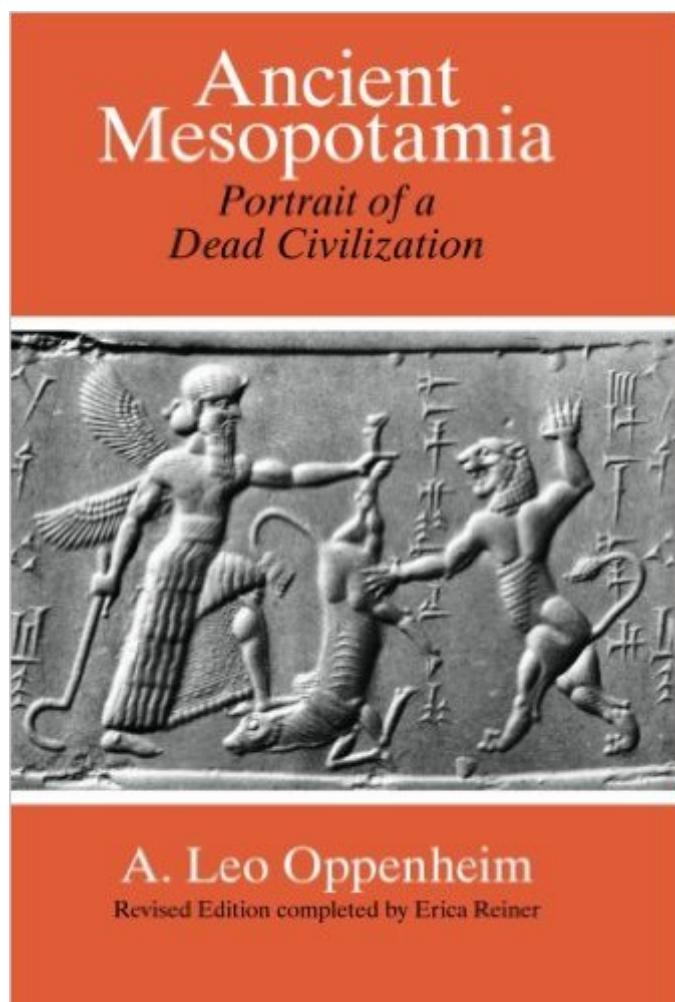


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Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait Of A Dead Civilization



Synopsis

"This splendid work of scholarship . . . sums up with economy and power all that the written record so far deciphered has to tell about the ancient and complementary civilizations of Babylon and Assyria." Edward B. Garside, New York Times Book Review

Ancient Mesopotamia "the area now called Iraq" "has received less attention than ancient Egypt and other long-extinct and more spectacular civilizations. But numerous small clay tablets buried in the desert soil for thousands of years make it possible for us to know more about the people of ancient Mesopotamia than any other land in the early Near East. Professor Oppenheim, who studied these tablets for more than thirty years, used his intimate knowledge of long-dead languages to put together a distinctively personal picture of the Mesopotamians of some three thousand years ago. Following Oppenheim's death, Erica Reiner used the author's outline to complete the revisions he had begun." To any serious student of Mesopotamian civilization, this is one of the most valuable books ever written." Leonard Cottrell, Book Week "Leo Oppenheim has made a bold, brave, pioneering attempt to present a synthesis of the vast mass of philological and archaeological data that have accumulated over the past hundred years in the field of Assyriological research." Samuel Noah Kramer, Archaeology A. Leo Oppenheim, one of the most distinguished Assyriologists of our time, was editor in charge of the Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute and John A. Wilson Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Chicago.

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Customer Reviews

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA : Portrait of a Dead Civilization. 433 pp. Chicago & London : The

University of Chicago Press, 1968 (1964). (pbk.) The civilizational achievements of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians of Mesopotamia only started to become known over the course of the last century or so. For our new understanding of the past we have to thank archaeology, in particular for its discovery of many tens of thousands of baked clay tablets which have miraculously preserved the complex cuneiform writing system, languages, and literatures of the ancient Mesopotamians, and for the patient decipherment of these tablets and other cuneiform-bearing artefacts by a small and dedicated group of international scholars. The literature on this subject today is vast, and much of it is accessible only to specialists. Of the studies that are generally available - such as those of A. Leo Oppenheim, Samuel Noah Kramer, and Thorkild Jacobsen - most tend to be aimed at a more scholarly type of audience, the kind of people who like detailed footnotes, precise references to sources, bibliographies, etc., Oppenheim's valuable study, which weighs in at a hefty 433 pages, contains all of these plus fifteen plates, three maps, a Chronology, a Glossary of Names and Terms, and an Index. As a distinguished scholar and linguist who spent more than thirty years studying the cuneiform tablets, he offers us a personal picture of the Mesopotamians of three thousand years ago which sums up all that the tablets have to tell us about the ancient civilizations of Babylon and Assyria.

Without any doubt, this book is one of the most comprehensive works on ancient Near Eastern cultures with its distinguished structure and unique style. Mr Oppenheim, a well-known Assyrologist of the sixties, provides us a brief but deep and highly detailed portrait of Ancient Mesopotamia, as the subtitle of the book suggests ("Portrait Of A Dead Civilization".) First, I have to inform the enthusiastic reader that this is not a book for "beginners" - it requires a background on ancient history and an acquaintance with Mesopotamian civilizations. But you don't have to be a specialist or a scholar to enjoy the unique taste of the book. While Samuel Noah Kramer's works feed us with the Sumerian part of Mesopotamian culture, Oppenheim focuses the main axis on Babylonia and Assyria. The book is not a plain history textbook in a chronological order. Oppenheim presents the "portrait" under well-designed chapters with essential concepts: The first chapter of the book is an overview on Mesopotamia. Then in the second chapter, Oppenheim leads us to the depths of urbanism, social texture and economical facts of the region in ancient times. Chapter 3 deals with the difference of "historical sources" and "literature" in Mesopotamia, and presents two essays on Assyrian and Babylonian history. The next chapter is, about ancient Mesopotamians' relations with their "gods": Oppenheim discusses why a "Mesopotamian Religion" should not be written. (According to my opinion, this is one of the most important parts of the book which underlines the

"revolutionary" nature of the work.) The last two chapters deal with "the writing" and "science" in Mesopotamia, respectively. J. A. Brinkman's "Mesopotamian Chronology of the Historical Period" is presented as an appendix at the end of the book.

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