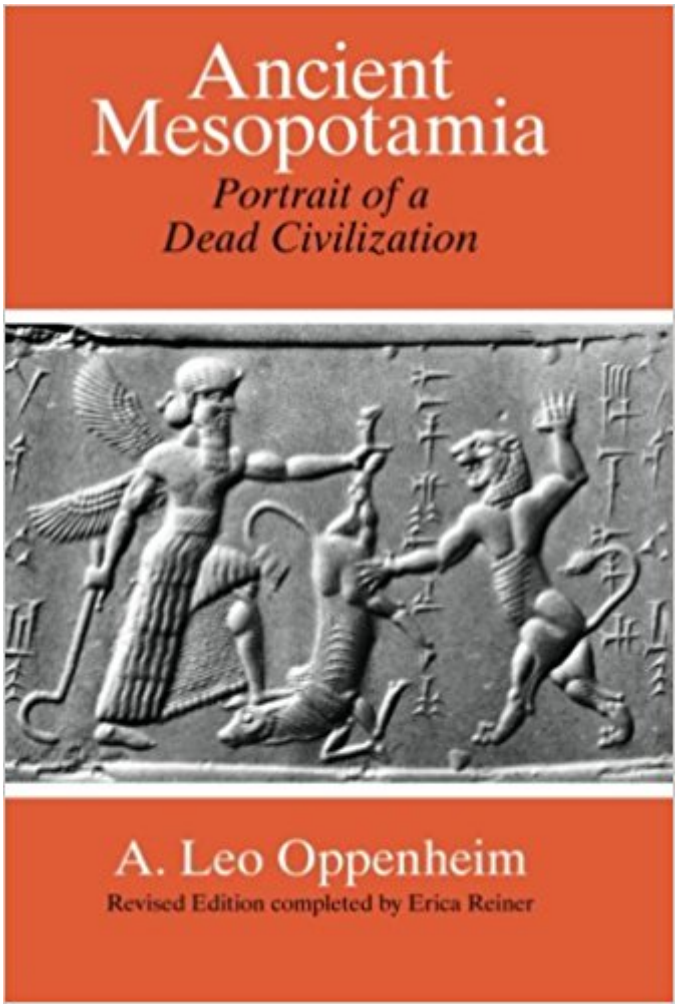
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Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait Of A Dead Civilization



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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."Ã¢â ¬â •Edward B. Garside, New York Times Book ReviewAncient MesopotamiaÃ¢â ¬â •the area now called IraqÃ¢â ¬â •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."Ã¢â ¬â •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."Ã¢â ¬â •Samuel Noah Kramer, ArchaeologyA. 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A.L. Oppenheim's work is certainly outdated in some respects but his work remains a starting point

for any serious student of Assyriology. Those who seek a more recent overview might want to turn to Snell's 'Life in the Ancient Near East', for a review of social life, or Khurt's 'Ancient Near East' for history. Yet two stars given because the importance of this work should not be understated.But this review is less about Oppenheim's work and more about the University of Chicago's revised 2nd edition (1977). Buyers and sellers beware that a number of these books have significant errors in publishing that make the text impossible to read. After page 48, in the middle of chapter one, the text begins again from page 17 (the introduction). All of the introduction is reprinted as well as all of chapter one up to page 48. Then the text jumps to page 81 and all of pages 49-80 are completely missing.It was quite frustrating to realize this only after reading the first 48 pages then having to purchase a new copy and throw this edition in the recycling bin.

good on the subject of a long lost culture

good book

Oppenheim's foundational work Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization, is a detailed account of the civilizations that grew out of Sumeria and set a pattern for all the civilizations that followed in the near east, but that does not mean it is easy to read or that the contents are not out of date. And that is the problem. I have seldom encountered a book that was so hard to read. It is dry beyond all description. It was, no doubt, intended as a scholarly work and not as a popular history, and it no doubt is a scholarly work, but it is so difficult to follow that it is amazing. Here is the first sentence of the first chapter "Early in the fourth millennium BC there occurred in the southwest Asia a phenomenon of lasting importance for the history of man: the appearance in quick secession of a group of culture foci." Ok, so we all know what it says, but the wording isn't something that just jumps to mind.The book is also badly out of date. It was written in 1964 and a revised edition was published in 1977 from notes completed before the author's death by Erica Reiner. Still, even 1977 was a long time ago (it is now 2011) so 30 plus years is bound to bring new facts to the fore and new ideas about the ancient past into the discussion.The best thing about the book is the fact that Oppenheim stresses the lack of information we actually have about the ancient past. This lack of information leads to a lot of guesswork, and he is up front about this problem. Few others are. In fact many authors guess about the meaning of the past off of known facts. They go far into the realm of speculation in talking about the past. I have read books discussing the cave paintings of 30,000 years ago and the authors told us that the paintings were religious paintings with tribal

significance; however, they can’t know that. Oppenheim avoids this type of error and openly discusses how little we actually know about the past, even when we have written text to work off of.Unfortunately the book could not hold my attention. It is just too hard to read.AD2

A. Leo Oppenheim’s "Ancient Mesopotamia:Portrait of a Dead Civilization" is one lively read. It is not a chronologically arranged history, (you’ll have to go to Georges Roux’s "Ancient Iraq" for that), but it is an unusually comprehensive series of essays on aspects of ancient Mesopotamian civilization. After introducing Assyriology as a discipline, Oppenheim situates Mesopotamia geographically and culturally within the ancient world, and discusses its relations with and influence on its neighbors. From there he goes on to analyze the root forms of almost everything we know of as civilization: urbanism, political and social organization, religion, writing, literature, and scientific thought. Particularly interesting are the discussions on the care and feeding of the gods, ancient psychology, and the scribal subculture. Throughout the book, Oppenheim refers to historical and literary data of every sort in an even-handed way. A helpful chronology, glossary, notes, and index fill the final 100+ pages of the book. Illustrations and maps could be a little better, but that’s small change in a book of this scope. Come visit the impossibly exotic, yet oddly accessible, past

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