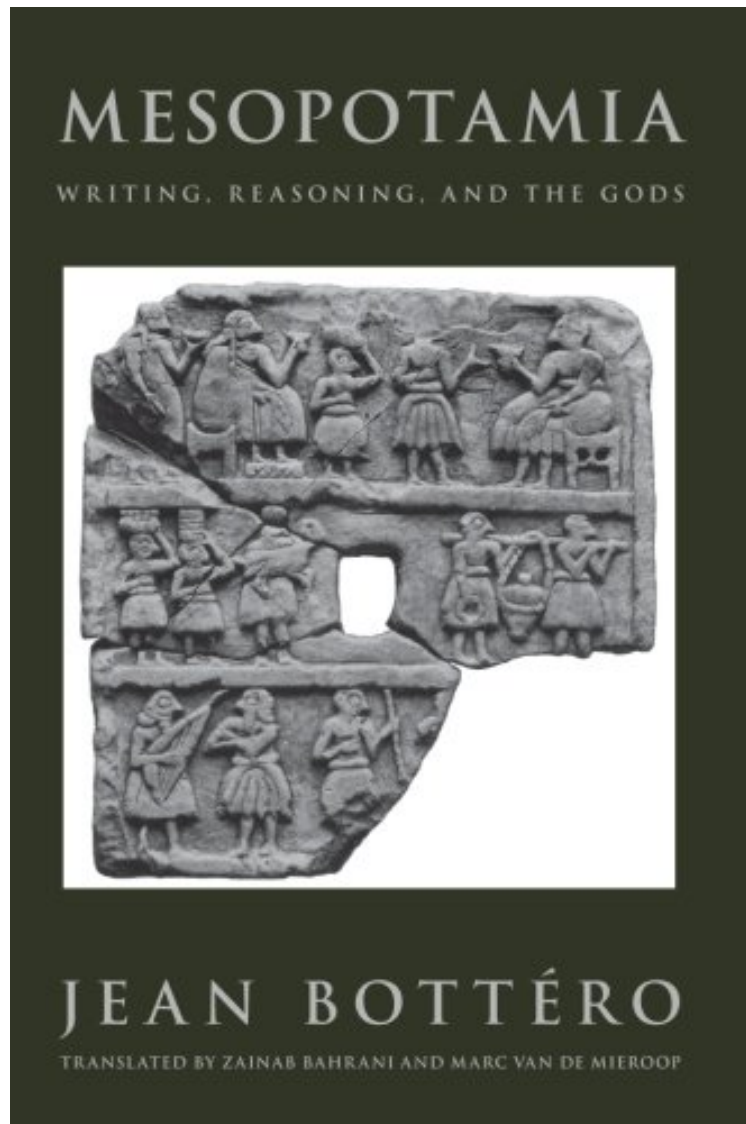


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Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods

Jean Bottro

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Jean Bottro : Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Essential writings on Mesopotamia By Craig A set of the best explanations of god names, death beliefs, substitute king, and other aspects of ancient Mesopotamian life. 26 of 27 people found the following review helpful. Stimulating articles from a Continental scholar. By tepi MESOPOTAMIA : Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods. By Jean Bottero. Translated by Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop. 311 pp.

Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press, 1992. ISBN 0-226-06727-0 (pbk.) Jean Bottero is emeritus director of Assyriology at the Ecole pratique des hautes études, Paris. His book, which is a compilation of 15 of his earlier and reworked scholarly articles on various aspects of Assyriology, would require a specialist in the field to do it justice, though it contains much that the general reader and enthusiast can enjoy. One of the things that greatly appealed to me about this book was the warm and human personality of its author. Anglo-Saxon scholars tend as a rule to be rather aloof, distant, and formal, but Continentals such as Jean Bottero and Jean Paulhan don't seem to have quite the same fear of appearing human, and the personal touch they bring to their work can be quite engaging. It's also nice, after having read US scholars such as Kramer, Oppenheim, and Jacobsen, to be allowed to see things from the rather different Continental perspective. In his 10-page introductory essay on 'The Birth of the West, Professor Bottero writes: "... the plan that I am pursuing here [is] to discover step by step the ways of seeing, of sensing, and of living, and the unpredictable thoughts and hearts, of our oldest recognizable ancestors (page 3). Although the whole book can be read with pleasure, three articles in particular stood out for me. These were 'A Century of Assyriology,' 'Writing and Dialectics, or the Progress of Knowledge,' and "'Free Love" and its Disadvantages.' The book also includes a brief Chronology and an excellent map, and is rounded out with a Glossary-Index, a List of References, and a 'Bibliographical Orientation' which describes some of the more important studies in the field and which serious students should find very useful. The book is beautifully printed in an exceptionally clear font on excellent paper, contains a number of interesting illustrations, and is bound in a sturdy plasticized wrapper. As such, it should stand up to the wear of the repeated readings it deserves to get. Although I found much to agree with in Professor Bottero, I was a bit disturbed by what seemed to me to be his overvaluation of reason (predictable in a son of Descartes) and of writing, and by his worship of the 'scientific method.' Personally I'm not altogether convinced that the effect of the invention of writing on the human mind was an altogether good thing. How much true wisdom and culture is lost when we move from the pre-literate to the literate state? I also like to draw a distinction between a reasonable use of reason and that excessive use of reason which has led to the distortions of the present era. But perhaps I've misread him and should allow myself the pleasure of reading him again. Professor Bottero's book should be of real value and interest to anyone with a serious interest in Ancient Mesopotamia, and I feel sure that the honest and unpretentious way he goes about presenting his ideas will prove as charming to other readers as it did to me. 19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful as an Introduction or Companion By Timothy Dougal "Mesopotamia" is not a history, but a foot in the door toward understanding the complex issues involved in the study of the West's remote, but culturally crucial ancestor. The author maintains a conversational, sometimes humorous, tone throughout the book, which helps in getting through some of the more tedious, but necessary, areas of Assyriology. Bottero divides this work into four sections: I. Assyriology, II. Writing, III. Reasoning-Institutions and Mentality, and IV. The Gods-Religion, containing a total of fifteen articles. These deal with the development of cuneiform script, how it influenced and reflected thought, the beginnings of science, reason and law, divination, dreams, and the religious system and its literature. The writing is clear as the author moves smoothly through hundreds of years at a time. After a while I started thinking, "A millenium here, a millenium there, and pretty soon you're talking about some real time!" There are some typos in my edition (for shame, University of Chicago Press), but not enough to be more than a minor annoyance. In the Bibliographical Orientation at the end of the book, Bottero recommends a few other books "that are not pedantic, heavy or annoying, as is usually the case." This phrase can also speak for "Mesopotamia"

Our ancestors, the Mesopotamians, invented writing and with it a new way of looking at the world. In this collection of essays, the French scholar Jean Bottero attempts to go back to the moment which marks the very beginning of history. To give the reader some sense of how Mesopotamian civilization has been mediated and interpreted in its transmission through time, Bottero begins with an account of Assyriology, the discipline devoted to the ancient culture. This transmission, compounded with countless discoveries, would not have been possible without the surprising decipherment of the cuneiform writing system. Bottero also focuses on divination in the ancient world, contending that certain modes of worship in Mesopotamia, in their application of causality and proof, prefigure the "scientific mind."

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