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Adam G. Anderson

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992

Reviewed by Adam G. Anderson

The historical origins of the ancient world are ambiguous at best. As any historian will admit, the further back into history one goes, the more questions one will encounter, many of which have no apparent answers. For example: Where does the history of man begin? Who does it start with? How far back do the records and writings of man go? Without the LDS scripture (which provides many of these answers) we are left to the echoes of the great empires which lived and died over four thousand years ago. For many people, these remnants of ancient history are shrouded in a veil of mystery and darkness. Jean Bottéro’s *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* sheds light on the dark and obscure beginnings of known world history.

*Mesopotamia* is a masterful work written by one of the world’s top Assyriologists to the broad audience of anyone interested in the ancient world and its historical beginnings. Unlike the countless works of dry and humorless historians, Bottéro’s witty and eloquent narrative is sure to captivate even those least interested in the ancient Near East. On this journey into the dusty antique world of Mesopotamia, Bottéro provides a fresh perspective into the Mesopotamians’ influence on the origins of science, religion, and writing. Bringing the reader in contact with some of
the earliest known civilizations, Bottéro beautifully illustrates the colorful daily life of the people of Mesopotamia, complete with vivid and sometimes comical depictions of their rituals, religious beliefs, forms of kingship, inventions, and discoveries.

Bottéro’s humor shines through in his essays as well, many of which were delivered as lectures to an audience. These interactive essays were then revised and expanded to include intriguing discoveries of this ancient civilization between two rivers. *Mesopotamia* explores discoveries covering a wide range of topics, such as the inquisitive field of Assyriology; the relevance, religion, and culture of Mesopotamia; the birth of writing and science; and a new look at the Code of Hammurabi.

Bottéro’s candid style gives *Mesopotamia* an enjoyably personable tone. Bottéro manages to take his work both seriously and with a sense of humor, understanding that at times it is as applicable to his readers as resurrecting dinosaurs. But if properly understood and applied, *Mesopotamia* is wonderfully informative and insightful. As Bottero himself put it, his intent in writing this ancient history 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” (3).