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Sumerian Mythology

By Samuel Noah Kramer



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The Sumerians, the pragmatic and gifted people who preceded the Semites in the land first known as Sumer and later as Babylonia, created what was probably the first high civilization in the history of man, spanning the fifth to the second millenniums B.C. This book is an unparalleled compendium of what is known about them.

Professor Kramer communicates his enthusiasm for his subject as he outlines the history of the Sumerian civilization and describes their cities, religion, literature, education, scientific achievements, social structure, and psychology. Finally, he considers the legacy of Sumer to the ancient and modern world.

"There are few scholars in the world qualified to write such a book, and certainly Kramer is one of them. . . . One of the most valuable features of this book is the quantity of texts and fragments which are published for the first time in a form available to the general reader. For the layman the book provides a readable and up-to-date introduction to a most fascinating culture. For the specialist it presents a synthesis with which he may not agree but from which he will nonetheless derive stimulation."—American Journal of Archaeology

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Editorial Review

About the Author

About the Author:

"Kramer was born in 1897 in the Ukraine. In 1905 as a result of the anti-Semitic pogroms of Czar Nicholas II of Russia, his family emigrated to Philadelphia, where his father established a Hebrew school. After graduating from high school and obtaining a bachelor's degree, Kramer tried a variety of occupations, including teaching in his father's school, becoming a writer and becoming a business man.

He later stated in his autobiography, concerning the time when he began to approach the age of thirty, still without a career: "Finally it came to me that I might well go back to my beginnings and try to utilize the Hebrew learning on which I had spent so much of my youth, and relate it in some way to an academic future." [citation needed]

He then enrolled at Dropsie College of Philadelphia for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, and became passionately interested in Egyptology. He then transferred to the Oriental Studies Department of the University of Pennsylvania, working work with "the brilliant young Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, who was to become one of the world's leading figures in Near Eastern Studies." [citation needed] Speiser was trying to decipher cuneiform tablets of the Late Bronze Age dating from about 1300 BC; it was now that Kramer began his life-long work in understanding the cuneiform writing system.

Kramer earned his Ph.D. in 1929, and was famous for assembling tablets recounting single stories that had been distributed between different institutions around the world. He retired from formal academic life in 1968, but remained very active throughout his post-retirement years.

In his autobiography, published in 1986 he sums up his accomplishments as follows: "First, and most important, is the role I played in the recovery, restoration, and resurrection of Sumerian literature, or at least of a representative cross section . . . Through my efforts several thousand Sumerian literary tablets and fragments have been made available to cuneiformists, a basic reservoir of unadulterated data that will endure for many decades to come. Second, I endeavored . . . to make available reasonably reliable translations of many of these documents to the academic community, and especially to the anthropologist, historian, and humanist. quote; (*Quote from wikipedia.org*)

Users Review

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