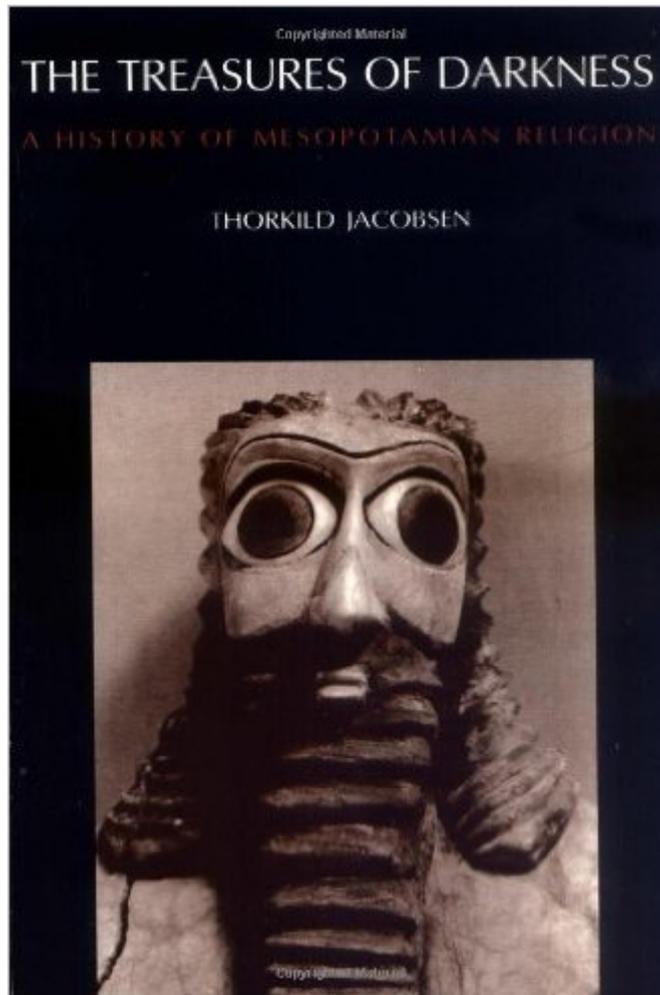


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The Treasures Of Darkness: A History Of Mesopotamian Religion



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book 'Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion' by Thorkild Jacobsen is a text used by courses in my seminary and others to provide a background to religious feeling and development over a long stretch of human history -- nearly three thousand years. Whether one accepts that the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are real historical figures or not, no one can plausibly deny that the religious development of the peoples of Canaan (and indeed of all the ancient world around the eastern Mediterranean to the Indus river) were affected by the cultural and religious developments in Mesopotamia, the centre of the region, and a fertile region second to none known in the world, on a par with the Nile, around which another major civilisation arose. This is a text of history of Mesopotamia in its own right. By the time history gets back this far, the lines become very blurred, rather like parallel lines intersecting on the horizon. Literature, religion, archaeology, sociology, psychology -- all of these disciplines become intertwined in Jacobsen's text as he looks at Sumerian society. The book is organised with an introduction, then according to time divisions of fourth, third, and second millennia, then concludes with an epilogue into the first millennium, during which the Bible as we know it (and most ancient history such as is commonly known occurred) came to be. Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: The Terms The first chapter introduces basic concepts for doing religious studies of any historical era, as well as those specific to this text. Key concepts such as understanding the numinous, the confrontation with power not of

this world, the use of metaphor and the importance and limitations on literalness are explored.

I. Author, Title, Publication Data. As an introduction to Mesopotamian religions, Thorkild Jacobsen's *Treasure of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* is exemplary primarily because of the author's background as an expert in the fields of Oriental philology and archeology. The book is full of prime source texts throughout, some of which are Jacobsen's own updated translations. Reading this as a student has been a broadening experience. This is due the fact that less is taken for granted because of the unusual amount of Semitic texts included. A fuller appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of this work shall be noted in its proper place after a full assessment of the material has been given.

II. Assessment: Content and Methodology.

(a) Content and Methodology. *Treasures of Darkness* is ordered logically on a chronological plane and in addition to the religions themselves, it touches upon weighty issues of historical methodology in each successive section. Jacobsen starts with the fourth millennium, and each section thereafter deals with a successive millennium and its representative metaphors. According to Jacobsen, the metaphors are as follows: (1) the fourth millennium is represented by the Provider metaphor; (2) the third millennium with the Ruler metaphor; (3) the Second with a Parent metaphor alongside the Creation and Gilgamesh epics; (4) lastly, the first millennium with Warrior-King and Hero metaphors. Before delving into the particulars of each epoch, he commences his treatment of the ancient Mesopotamian religions by identifying and clearly defining the terms "religion", "Mesopotamian" and "Ancient".

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