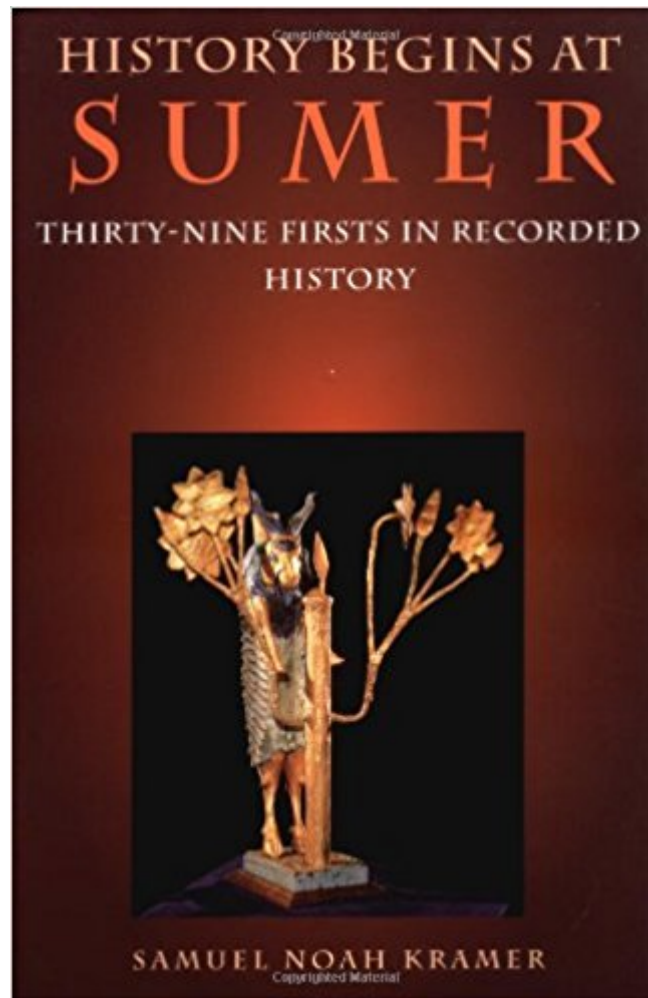




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History Begins At Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts In Recorded History



Synopsis

Which civilization had the first system of law? The first formal educational system? The first tax cut? The first love song? The answers were found in excavations of ancient Sumer, a society so developed, resourceful, and enterprising that it, in a sense, created history. The book presents a cross section of the Sumerian "firsts" in all the major fields of human endeavor, including government and politics, education and literature, philosophy and ethics, law and justice, agriculture and medicine, even love and family. History Begins at Sumer is the classic account of the achievements of the Sumerians, who lived in what is now southern Iraq during the third millennium B.C. They were the developers of the cuneiform system of writing, perhaps their greatest contribution to civilization, which allowed laws and literature to be recorded for the first time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Kramer ranked among the world's foremost Sumerologists. . . . The book will interest both the scholar and the general educated reader."—*Religious Studies Bulletin* "[Kramer] possesses the enviable ability to speak authoritatively in a lively and captivating style."—*Choice*

Samuel Noah Kramer was Clark Research Professor Emeritus of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was also Curator Emeritus of the Tablet Collections.

My knowledge of the Sumerians is about zero. I purchased the book out of curiosity and in particular

any information it might provide regarding Old Testament accounts of early mankind. Looking at other reviews I noted that several reviewers panned the book as being out of date and the new edition not adding any new insights or information. To me this made no difference. Others have noted that the author makes considerable reference to himself and his achievements. To me this bit of hubris actually makes the book a little more readable. What Kramer's book does provide great insight into everyday lives of people who lived four thousand years ago. For example there was a god for everything including the pickaxe. The Sumerians had no concept of cause and effect. Rulers always preached peace, social justice, and equality but that never really happened. Sound familiar? With regard to the Old Testament there are several "myths" that were carried over and adopted by the Jews. Including the Garden of Eden, the conflict between Cain and Able in the form of bickering between shepherds and farmers, and Noah and the flood. I found this curious as Kramer is a Jew and we might think that these and other tales might put Old Testament orthodoxy into doubt. Kramer evidently does not see this as a problem. Now a note about translation. It's incredibly hard. Words change meanings in short periods of time and looking back forty centuries meanings must be very, very difficult to determine.. By the way, Looking at photos and drawings of the clay tablets, I have no idea how anyone figured out what all this stuff meant. For example, as the scribes were all male there are several references to female genitalia. Kramer uses different words in different places. Did the Sumerians really have the words vulva and pudendum or is this Kramer sanitizing the writing? Also slightly irritating is the Sumerian tendency to repeat phrases, I skipped over some of that. Still very interesting book, dated or not. One thing more. The cover is tightly bound light paper and the dear reader must be careful to not crack the spine.

I had fun reading Samuel Noah Kramer's book "History Begins at Sumer". This isn't a typical history book. It doesn't go into any detail at all about the different city-states of Sumer, who ruled what lands, where Sumer was, or even mention any dates or events of any widespread significance, etc. What this most unique book is is a collection of 39 essays on daily life taken almost exclusively from information recorded on 4,000 year old cuneiform tablets. There's an essay on a tablet, Kramer describes, where a father tries to convince his son to study hard and become a scribe, how a farmer should tend to his fields, Sumerian proverbs and wisdom, and Sumerian mythology stories. There's even an essay on sexuality. If you can imagine the Sumerians were a little less inhibited than we are about these matters! There are extensive quotations from these tablets, so you surely get the full flavor of the Sumerian experience right from the source. What most people don't realize is that there are now perhaps tens of thousands of tablets with Sumerian language essays and documentations

in existence that only in the mid 1800's became translatable. This opened up a vast world of insight into a civilization that was in many ways one of the first to use written language extensively yet had vanished beneath the sands of the Mesopotamian desert in 1500 BC. It also means that unlike civilizations and cultures that came before us, the Sumerian civilization in large part failed to get its due credit. Surprisingly, there aren't many scholars who can read these tablets and from what I understand thousands of them still sit undeciphered in the British Museum and many more lay buried and many more were recently illegally excavated, heading for antiquities auctions during the current turmoil in Iraq. Kramer was probably one of the world's foremost scholars on these tablets and he writes beautifully and effortlessly, like you're reading an article in the New Yorker literary magazine. Lastly, although Kramer doesn't come right out and say it, I believe his passion to understand and write about the Sumerian culture is that he is probably Jewish and it appears that many of the Bible stories were taken from the Sumerians, including the flood, Eden, and a "rib" story, and Abraham was born in Ur. The Old Testament was compiled somewhere between 1200 BC and 200 BC. The Sumerians wrote the same stories down perhaps over a millennium before that.

This book contains lots of information and personal notes of Mr. Kramer, but it is a VERY DRY read... Unless you are a student actually studying the Sumerians word for word you don't need this book. If you are looking for a book like this to read and learn about them and their stories, I would recommend buying his book "THE SUMERIANS" instead. It has a lot of the same information and is much easier to read.

it is a recommendable book which contains the old historical facts. And it could move our minds that the life is still same as one that was in an old time.

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