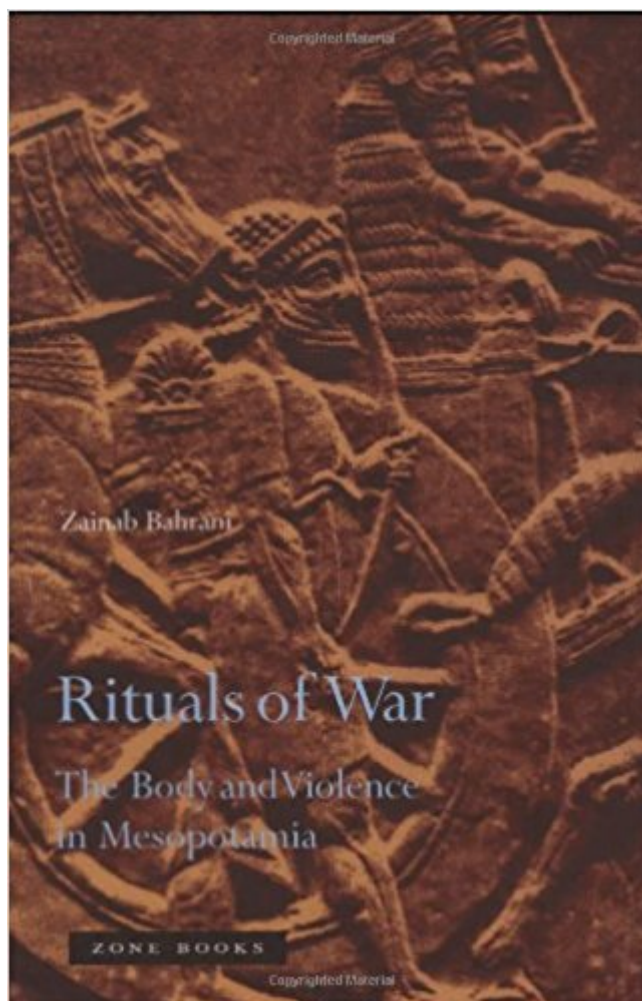


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Rituals Of War: The Body And Violence In Mesopotamia



Synopsis

Rituals of War is an investigation into the earliest historical records of violence and biopolitics. In Mesopotamia, ancient (ca. 3000-500 BCE) Iraqi rituals of war and images of violence constituted part of the magical technologies of warfare that formed the underlying irrational processes of war. In Rituals of War, Zainab Bahrani weaves together three lines of inquiry into one historical domain of violence: war, the body, and representation. Building on Foucault's argument in Discipline and Punish that the art of punishing must rest on a whole technology of representation, Bahrani investigates the ancient Mesopotamian record to reveal how that culture relied on the portrayal of violence and control as part of the mechanics of warfare. Moreover, she takes up the more recent arguments of Giorgio Agamben on sovereign power and biopolitics to focus on the relationship of power, the body, and violence in Assyro-Babylonian texts and monuments of war. Bahrani analyzes facets of war and sovereign power that fall under the categories of representation and display, the aesthetic, the ritualistic, and the supernatural. Besides the invention of the public monument of war and the rituals of iconoclasm, destruction, and relocation of monuments in war, she investigates formulations of power through the body, narrative displays in battle, the reading of omens before the battle, and historical divination through the body and body parts. Bahrani describes these as the magical technologies of war, the realm of the irrational that enables the ideologies of just war in the distant past as today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Zainab Bahrani's groundbreaking study of the arts of war in ancient Mesopotamia may seem at first glance to have only the remotest connection to the current war on terror and the war in Iraq. But her investigation of the 'magical technologies' of ancient imperial warfare could not be more timely. Beheadings, mutilations, images of torture and triumph, displacement of populations, and ethnic cleansings justified as sacred missions are just as common today as they were in 653 B.C. Instead of the divination of animal entrails, we have 'actionable intelligence' to provide the rationale for war and a set of dubious predictions of its outcome. This brilliant book is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the role of images in war, and the way that media, symbolic representations, and ritualistic spectacles of iconoclasm play a role just as important as weapons and the movement of armies. (W. J. T. Mitchell, University of Chicago)

Zainab Bahrani is Edith Porada Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. She is the author of *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* and *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia*.

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