



‘A sharply original, beautifully written book which counters the surge of cultural pessimism that opened the 21st century.’

NEAL ASCHERSON

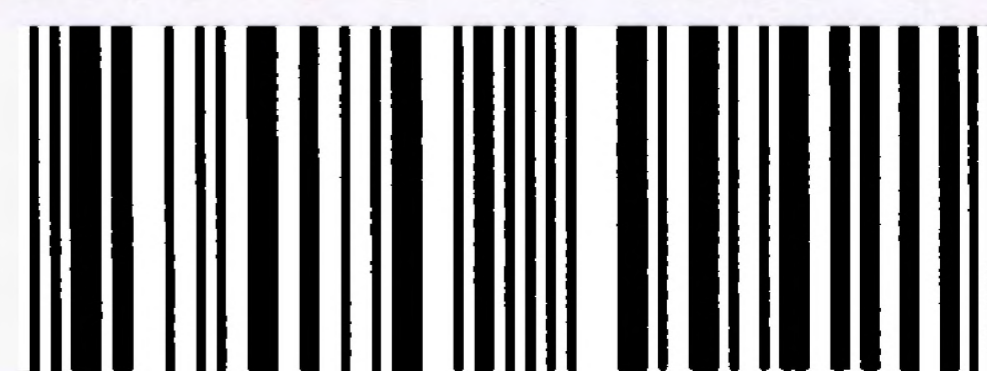
This is the story of Ancient Mesopotamia (Iraq/Syria) and Egypt: the ‘birthplace of civilization’, where the foundations of our societies were laid, including everything from farming, writing, and living in cities, to familiar ways of preparing food and cleansing our homes. Why have these ancient cultures, where so many features of modern life originated, come to symbolize the remote and the exotic? Why are their remains now drawn with such ferocity into the conflicts of the present? Are the sacrifices we make in the name of ‘our’ civilization so different from those once made on the altars of their gods?

Cover image: detail of *The Tower of Babel*, 1595, by Lucas van Valckenborch. Mittelrhein-Museum Koblenz.

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