

The Origins of the World's Mythologies


By E.J. Michael Witzel

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This remarkable book is the most ambitious work on mythology since that of the renowned Mircea Eliade, who all but single-handedly invented the modern study of myth and religion. Focusing on the oldest available texts, buttressed by data from archeology, comparative linguistics and human population genetics, Michael Witzel reconstructs a single original African source for our collective myths, dating back some 100,000 years. Identifying features shared by this "Out of Africa" mythology and its northern Eurasian offshoots, Witzel suggests that these common myths--recounted by the communities of the "African Eve"--are the earliest evidence of ancient spirituality. Moreover these common features, Witzel shows, survive today in all major religions. Witzel's book is an intellectual hand grenade that will doubtless generate considerable excitement--and consternation--in the scholarly community. Indeed, everyone interested in mythology will want to grapple with Witzel's extraordinary hypothesis about the spirituality of our common ancestors, and to understand what it tells us about our modern cultures and the way they are linked at the deepest level.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Not since Frazer's Golden Bough has anyone achieved such a grand synthesis of world mythology. Boldly swimming upstream against the present scholarly emphasis on difference and context, Witzel assembles massive evidence for a single, prehistoric, Ur-mythology. An astonishing book."--Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago and author of *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was*

"[Witzel's] novel approach brings a different perspective to the myths he analyzes. By all rights, this book should provoke debate and is, therefore, indispensable to any research library. Summing Up: Essential."
--*CHOICE*

About the Author

E.J. Michael Witzel is Wales Professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University.

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