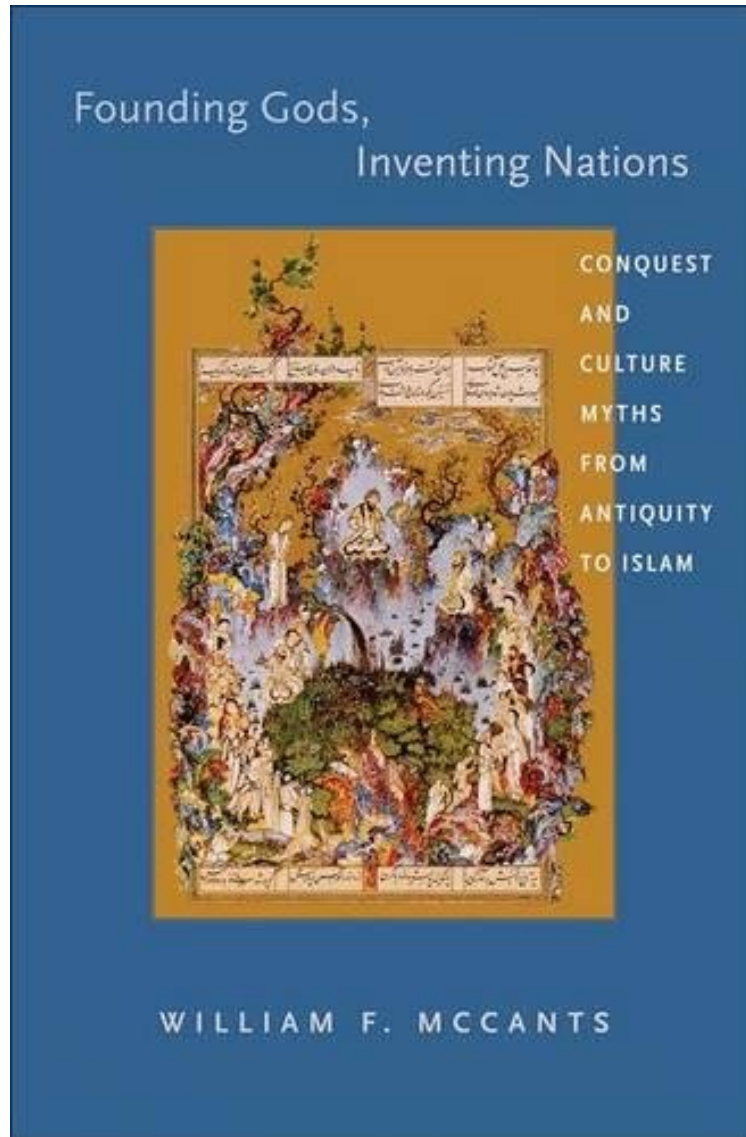


[Download] Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam

Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam

William F. McCants

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William F. McCants : Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. How the western world began.By William J. ConklinA very

scholarly review of the origins of Western civilization. I have organized a study group to explore its implications. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Gerald Healy Insightful and thought provoking. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Challenging, But Rewarding By Diana Wueger Founding Gods isn't an easy read - it's very much an academic work, and assumes a degree of familiarity with the history of several early civilizations - but it's rewarding, and very much worth the read. Caveat lector: you need a dictionary handy - there are many, many Big Words, some of which Will may have made up (probably not) (maybe). You may wish to have Wikipedia close by as well, unless you're already very familiar with the histories of most early civilizations. Also, I recommend reading this backwards - read the book's conclusion first, then go back to Chapter 1 and read the conclusion of that, then read the full chapter, etc. Founding Gods is short but dense, and it's easy to get caught up in the details and lose sight of the broader arguments. This is Serious Academic Stuff, though McCants does use the phrase "new kids on the Mediterranean block" and makes a sly reference to "winter is coming" (p. 15) (apparently the ancient conception of that idea requires people to build greenhouses, not armies and fortresses - see, you'll learn things!). McCants' central idea - that elites used their interpretations of the origins of culture and civilization to shape their political, social, and intellectual environment - seems fundamentally reasonable. I personally have no basis of knowledge from which to evaluate his scholarship or evidence as presented, but if the origins of a cultural artifact or technai do matter, then it's logical to assume that elites will interpret or modify those origins to suit their needs as he describes. In antiquity, the question of whether a technology or type of knowledge was human-derived (and therefore less acceptable and possibly sinful) or taught to humans by a divine being (and therefore assumed to be beneficial to humanity) was worthy of debate, because the origin of the technology determined the acceptability of its pursuit or study. There are modern parallels to suggest that origins continue to matter - see [...] for that argument, plus a few additional thoughts on Founding Gods. Overall, Founding Gods is a neat little piece of scholarship, and I highly recommend it.

From the dawn of writing in Sumer to the sunset of the Islamic empire, *Founding Gods, Inventing Nations* traces four thousand years of speculation on the origins of civilization. Investigating a vast range of primary sources, some of which are translated here for the first time, and focusing on the dynamic influence of the Greek, Roman, and Arab conquests of the Near East, William McCants looks at the ways the conquerors and those they conquered reshaped their myths of civilization's origins in response to the social and political consequences of empire. The Greek and Roman conquests brought with them a learned culture that competed with that of native elites. The conquering Arabs, in contrast, had no learned culture, which led to three hundred years of Muslim competition over the cultural orientation of Islam, a contest reflected in the culture myths of that time. What we know today as Islamic culture is the product of this contest, whose protagonists drew heavily on the lore of non-Arab and pagan antiquity. McCants argues that authors in all three periods did not write about civilization's origins solely out of pure antiquarian interest--they also sought to address the social and political tensions of the day. The strategies they employed and the postcolonial dilemmas they confronted provide invaluable context for understanding how authors today use myth and history to locate themselves in the confusing aftermath of empire.

"McCants's richly textured analysis points to some cultural anomalies that can lead to provocative reflections."-- Donald J. Dietrich, *European Legacy* "McCants book is an outstanding work, its composition demanding not only vast knowledge of the various cultures which thrived in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean basin but academic audacity as well. . . . [A] thorough, accurate and intelligent debate on a very interesting subject which has until now not been treated cross-culturally."--Milka Levy-Rubin, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* From the Back Cover "This innovative book tackles the fascinating subject of how and by whom culture was invented, and discusses this phenomenon by looking at the ancient, Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Arabian, and Muslim worlds. Examining various texts that have rarely been analyzed in the same place, the book will appeal to a diversity of readers and fields."--Robert Hoyland, University of Oxford "McCants explores culture myths over a long period--from Sumerian literature of the third millennium BCE to Arabic works of the ninth century CE--and over a wide but interconnected geographical area spanning the Mediterranean basin to the Near East as far as Persia. The breadth of this undertaking and the materials gathered together, especially from the Arabic side, are quite original."--Ian S. Moyer, University of Michigan About the Author William F. McCants received his PhD from Princeton University and is currently adjunct faculty at Johns Hopkins University.