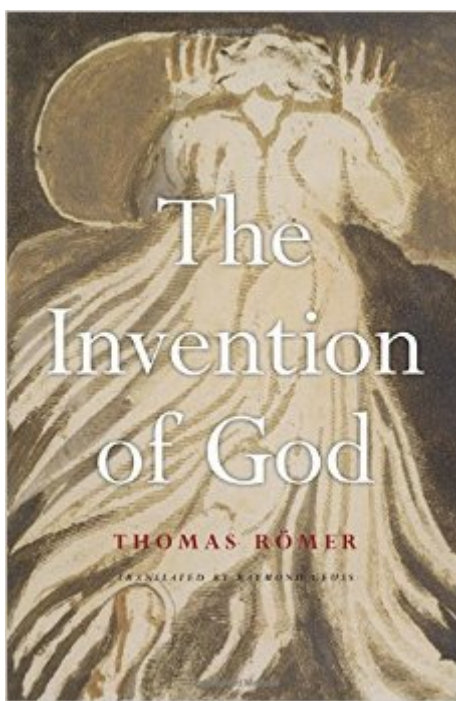


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The Invention Of God



Synopsis

Who invented God? When, why, and where? Thomas R. Jacobson seeks to answer these questions about the deity of the great monotheisms—Yhwh, God, or Allah—by tracing Israelite beliefs and their context from the Bronze Age to the end of the Old Testament period in the third century BCE. That we can address such enigmatic questions at all may come as a surprise. But as Jacobson makes clear, a wealth of evidence allows us to piece together a reliable account of the origins and evolution of the god of Israel. Jacobson draws on a long tradition of historical, philological, and exegetical work and on recent discoveries in archaeology and epigraphy to locate the origins of Yhwh in the early Iron Age, when he emerged somewhere in Edom or in the northwest of the Arabian peninsula as a god of the wilderness and of storms and war. He became the sole god of Israel and Jerusalem in fits and starts as other gods, including the mother goddess Asherah, were gradually sidelined. But it was not until a major catastrophe—the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah—that Israelites came to worship Yhwh as the one god of all, creator of heaven and earth, who nevertheless proclaimed a special relationship with Judaism. A masterpiece of detective work and exposition by one of the world's leading experts on the Hebrew Bible, *The Invention of God* casts a clear light on profoundly important questions that are too rarely asked, let alone answered.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Probably better to call this excellent book *The Reinvention of God* because it chronicles the evolution and recreation of an obscure wind and warrior god of a Middle Eastern nomadic tribe into the only god complete with a sacred book and a monotheistic ideology that still shapes three of the

world's major religions. While the book is accessible to dedicated lay readers, it sometimes lapses into academic jargon and technical detail that is off-putting. Some readers may benefit, as I did, from first reading the same author's reader-friendly paperback, *DARK GOD: CRUELTY, SEX, AND VIOLENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*. As a fan of Sigmund Freud, I was disappointed to see that Roemer dismisses Freud's classic work on Moses and Monotheism with a passing remark and a single footnote. Nevertheless, this is a classic piece of historical analysis.

Most enlightening survey of the origin of the Judaic and Christian concepts of the one God. The book is erudite but highly readable. Not to be missed by any one interested in how Judeo-Christian religion originated and developed.

This is a deep thinker with a good writing skill, able to express his thoughts in a well constructed way. Whether you agree with him or not, he has worked out his theories with logic and clear thinking.

I don't know whether this theological history is more accurate than speculative, but it makes fascinating reading. With an anti-clerical sounding title, the book is more history than theology, although it does incorporate non-trivial distinctions between monotheism and polytheism. Covering history of the Middle-east from about 1300 to 300 BCE, with religion of the Jews throughout the periods of Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian hegemony. Initial parts are difficult to follow, being based on references to biblical and archaeological research rather than a continuous chronology. The very interesting contention is that El, coming to Israel from other sources, was one of many gods. The major part of the book accounts for how he morphed into Yhwh the single God of Israel. Jews either didn't know or wouldn't disclose his name, enabling a mystery for an exclusive position as the tribe witnessing monotheism. The reforms of Josiah after, discovery of Deuteronomy, were a key episode, followed by the synagogue of the diaspora that finalized the transformation. The author certainly knows his topic and does a good job of popularizing much erudite research.

This is a worthwhile read. It traces the development of religion as we know it.

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