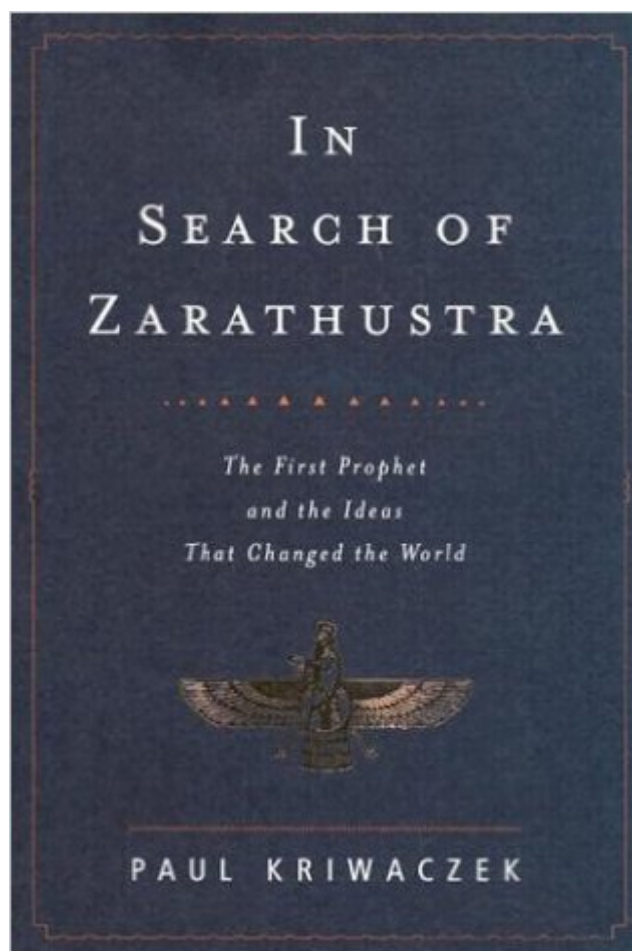


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In Search Of Zarathustra: The First Prophet And The Ideas That Changed The World



Synopsis

A fascinating journey through time and across Europe and Central Asia, in search of the prophet Zarathustra (a.k.a. Zoroaster) "perhaps the greatest religious lawgiver of the ancient world" and his vast influence. In Persia more than three thousand years ago, Zarathustra spoke of a single universal god, the battle between good and evil, the devil, heaven and hell, and an eventual end to the world "foreshadowing the core beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Moving from present to past, Paul Kriwaczek examines the effects of the prophet's teachings on the spiritual and daily lives of diverse peoples. Beginning in the year 2000 with New Year's festivities in Iran, he walks us back through Nietzsche's nineteenth-century interpretation of Zarathustra to the Cathars of thirteenth-century France and the ninth-century Bulgars; from ancient Rome to the time of Alexander the Great's destruction of the Persian Empire; and, finally, to the time of Zarathustra himself. Not only an enthralling travel book, *In Search of Zarathustra* is also a revelation of the importance of the prophet, and a brilliantly conceived and lucid explication of the belief systems that helped shape the European Enlightenment, the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, and the beginning of the Christian era. It is an enthralling study of a little-explored subject.

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Customer Reviews

The ancient Persian prophet Zoroaster taught that the world was caught in a struggle between good and evil. He believed in one God, called Ahura Mazda, in a struggle with the forces of darkness. He was a theological monist and an ethical dualist. Human beings had the responsibility of working to bring about the good and eliminate the evil. The good would triumph in the end. Zoroaster was one

of the first religious teachers to preach the afterlife. He founded a religion called Zoroastrianism which remains one of the fundamental religions of man and, although it has relatively few adherents, it survives today. Paul Kriwaczek has written a fine book which is travelog, political commentary, history, and study of Zoroastrianism all rolled into one. Mr. Kriwaczek was trained as a dentist but subsequently joined BBC as a specialist in Central and South Asian affairs. It is good to see a nonspecialist who can write on Zoroaster with enthusiasm and knowledge and convey something of both to his readers. The book is written in the form of a reverse chronology beginning with the present-day and progressing through successive chapters to the hazy early days (perhaps 1800 B.C.) of Zarathustra himself. We see many interesting figures along the way, and Kriwaczek is full of entertaining stories and digressions. This mostly makes the book a pleasure to read, but there are moments when the organization becomes confusing and the story gets a bit off track. Kriwaczek spends a great deal of time on Frederick Nietzsche and his famous work "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." He explains well the sources of Nietzsche's fascination with the ancient Persian prophet and he discusses the advances in scholarship contemporary with Nietzsche that helped make Zoroaster accessible.

I'm going to get right to the point: what a fantastic book!! The subject of the book, the ancient prophet Zarathustra and his world-changing message, is absolutely fascinating, not to mention how important it is to our proper understanding of history and who we are; and the author really does it justice, too! I can only think that if this book isn't widely read and talked about, it will be through no fault of the author's. "In Search of Zarathustra" is very well-written and an excellent example of how to make history entertaining, without compromising the requirement to accurately inform. But the book is much more than simply history though. It's really a search for something important and very profound, and the author makes it a joy for the reader to join him on the journey. Part history. Part travelogue. Part investigation of the soul... All seamlessly woven together!! I can find very few things to fault with this book, which is why I'm giving it 5 stars. Overall the editing is superb, and I spotted only very few (mostly minor) errors; e.g., in a couple of places incorrect dates related to Cyrus the Great are given, and Yazd is shown as 'Yadz' on the maps. While not a scholar per se, the author clearly is educated, well-travelled, and has done his homework very, very well. There's little in this book that can't be verified easily, and a comprehensive list of sources is given in the notes section at the end. Another thing I think adds real value to the book is the inclusion, in both front and back, of clearly marked maps; something I found to be most useful!! The book has 28 photos, which also helped to bring the subject matter to life.

In his journalistic account of the religion of Zarathustra (also known as Zoroaster), author Paul Kriwaczek takes us on a journey back in time from the Iran of the ayatollahs to the ancient days of Persia's pre-Islamic glory. Along the way, we encounter Nietzsche's anti-Zarathustra, the 13th-century crusade against the Cathars, the religion of light preached by the 3rd-century prophet Mani, the mysteries of Mithras in Roman Britain, the Zoroastrian apocalypse and its influence on the Hebrew Bible, and the religion of Ahura Mazda (the ancient Persian name for God) in the days of Cyrus the Great, Darius and Alexander. There is much to recommend this book, especially to those with little or no prior knowledge of ancient Iran and the nature of its historical influence (even on the West). Kriwaczek is a good storyteller and the book is full of diverting anecdotes of his journey through central Asia in search of the "first prophet". Most rewarding are his discovery of Zoroastrian sun symbols in a mosque in Samarkand -- and the pretended ignorance of local Muslims when asked to explain its presence; his experience of Noruz (Zoroastrian New Year) celebrations in Teheran, including a meeting with a belated follower of Zarathustra who reveals the ironic hidden meaning of the Noruz "haft sin" (seven "S") table; and his account of a sort of Muslim passion play on Ashura, the Shi'ite day of mourning for Muhammad's grandson Hussein, which reveals an ongoing Zoroastrian influence on Shia Islam's conception of an eternal war between good and evil that will only end with the coming of a "messiah", whom they call the Mahdi or "hidden Imam".

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