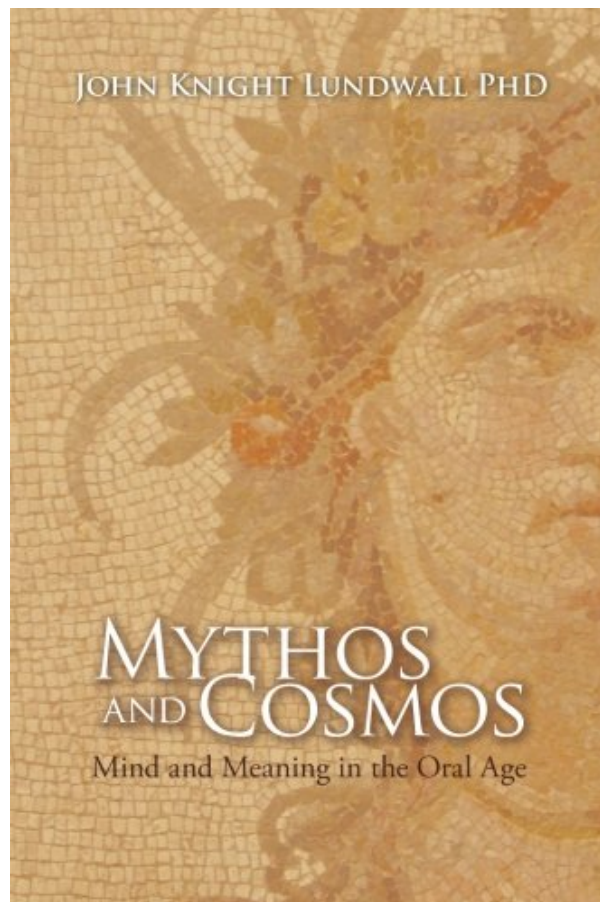
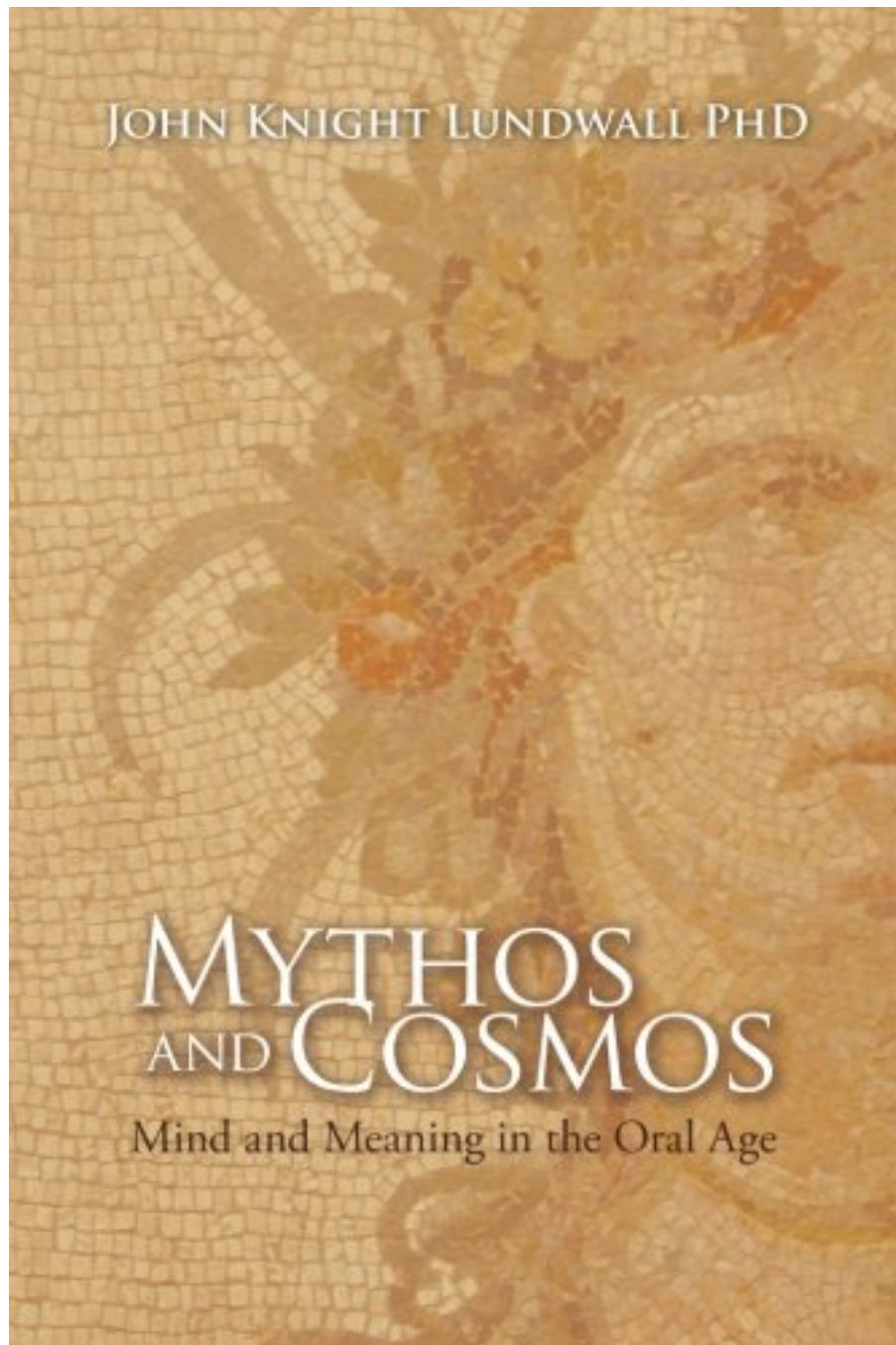


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MEANING IN THE ORAL AGE BY JOHN  
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## Review

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In "Mythos and Cosmos: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age," author John Knight Lundwall, (Ph.D., Comparative Myth and Religious Studies, Editor in Chief, *Cosmos and Logos: Journal of Myth, Religion, and Folklore*.) successfully presents a broad spectrum of facts, analysis, and creative concepts on a subject of great interest and relevance. The book covers the history of myth and ancient scientific record, the intertwined richness of both written and oral human accounts since antiquity, the history of human observations and ideas about cosmology and celestial bodies, the impact of cosmology on ritual and cult practices, and a most detailed discussion of three central myth cycles: the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Labors of Heracles, and selected Old Testament stories.

In summary, "Mythos and Cosmos: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age" by John Knight Lundwall, Ph.D. is truly a magnificent work of research and presentation that will be devoured by those interested in myth, religion, philosophy and human history. The structure of the book is logical and helpful, the facts and historical findings are presented in an accessible, interesting manner, and conflicting approaches are described with fairness and considerate thoroughness. While this book meets high academic standards of meticulousness and objectivity, it is highly readable, easily understood, and offers novel ideas and fresh concepts that are thought provoking, remarkably stimulating, and intellectually memorable. Highly recommended! —Columbia

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There are some philosophical and 'new age' books intended for the general-interest reader that are suitable for skimming and easy reflection; and then there are writings such as *MYTHOS And COSMOS: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age* which are directed to those interested in more of a historical, analytical approach. Designed to challenge popular thinking rather than placate the unexamined mind, *MYTHOS And COSMOS* makes an unusual case for the early intellectual prowess of ancient man.

*MYTHOS And COSMOS* represents the work of a scholar with a life-long commitment to examining ancient myth more closely. He completed his doctorate in comparative myth studies; then applied it to his continuing education. Jungian psychology, he maintains, lends a more accurate thought; that "...our conception of history is often the product of the ego" - and with this in mind, he selects and tackles points in history that have remained incongruous over the centuries. From what constitutes a 'literate person' and his observations, recordings and psyche to the evolution of cosmological thinking, how narratives often cross the boundary from historical fact into mythos, and how knowledge is fragmented and distorted over time, *MYTHOS And COSMOS* surveys a range of evidence - written, oral, and artifacts alike - to reveal the assumptions underlying broken, fragmented evidence.

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A bold new approach to myth studies, *Mythos and Cosmos* reexamines ancient myth through the template of oral thinking and oral cosmology. Contradicting decades of assumptions about the purpose and function of ancient mythology, Lundwall defines myth as "the oral imprinting press of pre-literate peoples" and shows that myth belongs to a complex and rational method of information transmission amongst oral peoples. Further, ancient mythology belonged to a cultus which incorporated ritual and symbol in a cosmological system which sought to found the sacred world. Where this work really shines is in its discussion of how ancient oral peoples saw their universe. Oral cosmology is far more complex than the simple "flat-earth" models discussed in current textbooks. Such myth cycles as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Labors of Heracles, and the story of the Great Flood are seen completely differently when viewed from within ancient cosmological thought. Many strange features of ancient culture, such as the dancing chorus in Greek theater, are explained in rational and revolutionary ways. The pyramids, ziggurats, and megalithic-henges are also seen in a new light. While academic, the book is written for a general audience. It is a fascinating exploration in ancient history, comparative myth and religious studies, and the ancient mind.

- Sales Rank: #400066 in Books
- Published on: 2015-10-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.02" w x 6.00" l, 1.31 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 408 pages

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A book which helps us understand (and increase our sense of wonder about) myth and ritual

By B Daniel Blatt

From the savanna of Africa, the jungles of India, to the steppes of Eurasia, to the mountains of the South America, the plains of North America, even the islands of the Pacific, every human culture we have encountered is a story-telling culture. Through stories, through myths, our forebears have attempted to explain the universe and our relationship to our fellow man.

Even today, with the appeal of such books (& movies) as Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings, we see that stories with mythic elements and themes still call to us, still draw us in. Hollywood has retold stories from ancient Greece numerous times on the silver screen, with Lionsgate about to release a movie based on the gods of Egypt.

And yet we are reasonably certain that the stories that have come down to us, the narratives recorded on stone, papyrus and paper are only a fraction of the stories our ancestors told. For countless centuries, for millennia even, our forebears shared myths by telling them—and sometimes even dancing them. They didn't read, they didn't write. They talked, they listened. They moved.

No wonder that Dr. John Lundwall writes in his study, *Mythos and Cosmos: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age* that we know so little. In the course of this thoughtful book—and aware of the irony of his task—this scholar looks at the limited written record we do have in an attempt to understand these voices we can no longer hear.

He believes that “ancient categories of knowledge and ancient capacities of knowing are far more complex and familiar than has been assumed by ancient scholars.” These storytellers, their mythmakers were not ignorant rubes, but were curious, skeptical and intelligent men and women like us, merely using the resources available to them to make sense of the mysterious world around them.

Lundwall is well aware of the difficulty of his task. As he concedes that the “emergence of writing has had more impact on human culture and civilization than anything ever produced by the mind of the species,” he reminds us that Egyptian “hieroglyphs could be read in multiple ways—alphabetically, ideographically, figuratively and symbolically.”

He goes on to consider how literacy changed our ways of knowing, wondering if “an increase in the output of old texts contributed to the formulation of new theories.”

From the texts he has, he realizes how our forebears very often crafted their symbols and developed their rites by looking to the stars. So omnipresent are cosmological themes in cultures across the globe that he has become “certain that celestial phenomena [are] the primary reservoir of oral cognition.”

Indeed, in his studies of temple architecture, he finds relationships between the layout of these sacred shrines and the movements of the sun, moon, stars and planets.

Finally, he provides a good dose of myth too, interspersing his narrative with descriptions of ritual and details from surviving stories. In the last third of the book, he studies one of the oldest such tales, that of the legendary (and perhaps also historical) Mesopotamian king Gilgamesh as well as the labors of the most popular (as best we can gather) Greek hero, Heracles and even some stories from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Through it all—and with a healthy dose of skepticism—he helps us understand what we can never really know, how and why our ancestors came to tell the stories they did, enact the rituals they performed and design the structures that they built. It is the questions he asks that keeps us turning the pages (and even writing in them as we offer some of our own observations).

This book gives us tools to help us better appreciate the ancient myths that do survive.

And that is what makes this a good book—and well worth your while. As we delight in the stories that our forebears told to explain the world, stories that we still read and retell today, he helps increase our sense of wonder.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Myth, Purpose, and the Spoken Word

By Big Dave

Mythos and Cosmos stands in a line of brilliant and essential books that pierce through the fog of modernity to ask the question: what were our ancestors thinking?

In particular, Lundwall examines the connections among mythology, liturgy, and astronomy in the context of oral culture. He explicates myth as a vehicle for narrating the stars as initiatory maps that gave human life meaning and oriented us towards the larger universe, connecting the microcosm and the macrocosm in the primordial unity captured in the words "as above, so below." On the way, he sheds new light on such perennial favorites as Herakles and Gilgamesh.

If you enjoy the insights of such thinkers as Joseph Campbell, Giorgio de Santillana, Frances Yates, Mircea

Eliade, C.G. Jung, and Jane Ellen Harrison, or if you are simply interested in a different perspective on what was really going on with ancient mythology before Rick Riordan and the D'Aulaires got their hands on it, this book is for you.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Broad, Creative, and Smart

By Dionysus

A broad revisioning of ancient oral cultures and how they create and use mythologies. A fascinating exploration of ancient history, myth, religion, and cosmology. The ties behind many myth systems and the oral cosmos are explained, and such myth cycles as Gilgamesh, Heracles, and Abraham are explored.

Lundwall's introduction is a must read, as he conceptualizes the whole work. Afterwards, the book is divided into 8 chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the nature of mind and consciousness in history. He also discusses how history is constructed. Lundwall poses that human beings have the same intelligence in the ancient past as they do today, and the thought of intellectual evolution is "silly and sloppy." Lundwall backs up his discussion with very interesting examples and insights.

Chapter 2 discusses the main difference between modern and ancient peoples: orality and literacy. People in the ancient past did not read or write (most of them anyway). Oral people organize and conceptualize information differently than literate people, with "keen limitations and curious potentials." This chapter is very illuminating and begins to explain much which seems strange in ancient history.

Chapter 3 discusses oral cosmology, or how oral people's see the universe. Wow. No flat-earth mumbo-jumbo here. This is a very smart discussion on an experiential universe where such things as the "flat earth" are really the observable integration of the horizon with the sky and its examined solar, lunar, and stellar cycles. Lundwall's discussion of the development of the heliocentric system and Copernicus is absolutely fascinating, and the idea of a solar archetype behind the ancient system of thinking turns the strange into the remarkable.

Chapter 4 discusses oral religion and the integration of oral cosmology and the oral religious cult at the center of civilization. Lundwall shows that the purpose of ancient astronomy was a deeply religious cosmivision which related the soul and the heavens. This vision reveals itself in various religious modes of worship and ritual practices. His discussion of the ancient Greco-Roman mystery religions and their stellar theology was fascinating.

Chapter 5 summarizes in a few pages chapters 1 thru 4.

Chapter 6 is a wonderful exploration of the Gilgamesh myth which points out certain stellar motifs embedded within the ancient narrative. A discussion of the Flood myth is included, and this was a complete left turn from all other materials I have read. And it made sense. A rich and textured argument that cross compares other religious and myth systems.

Chapter 7 explores the Labors of Heracles and shows a structured astral theology behind it. Again, I will never look at the lion robe in the same way. I have never read anything like this either, but Lundwall shows parallels with the Gilgamesh cycle and Egyptian religion which I never got in my mythology 101 class in undergrad.

Chapter 8 tackles the Old Testament stories of Abraham and Jacob, with the story of Balaam thrown in. Again, very fascinating. A discussion pure believers of the Bible may find objectionable, but actually makes these stories more sensible, and even more interesting than just a religious history.

And finally, some interesting quotes as examples of the kind of writing and style of the book:

The history of the mind is not a linear history. Each epoch has its “Age of Reason” and its “Fall.” The apex of human reason is not modernity, but an uneven course of analogous magnifications of the mind between super-human spirits throughout history, few as they are. The human mind resides in a fractal universe where genius and ignorance coexist, and where authentic curiosity and moral courage are always something new. p.49

Without a written record like a dictionary or encyclopedia, how does an oral mind catalog and separate all the different principles and dynamics of nature? Quite simply, the oral mind ascribes certain manifestations of nature, by analogy, to male and female rationales. . . . It is impossible, however, to ascribe all male and female manifestations in nature onto one image or being using only oral memory. Every different manifestation in nature must also have a divine will behind it. A different divine spirit is imprinted onto a pantheon of deities who not only organize the oral cosmos but also serve mnemonic needs. Polytheism and orality are wed. p. 57

Might I suggest that with the superhuman spirit that invented writing, the first myth-makers were of an order of mind equal to any human our historians prize—Einstein, Newton, Kepler, Plato. They were a group of people at the very edge of history—people that we know nothing about and to whom we owe everything. p. 108

An oral mind trained in the learning of his ancestors could gaze at the heavenly orbs while reciting myths through song and dance and recall the collective wisdom of the tribe. It is highly probable that the celestial journey was the “temple walk” of oral minds embedding their most profound truths and insights in mnemonic shrines within the stars. p. 163

The eminent Egyptologist Gaston Maspero held the view that the Great Pyramid itself was not solely a tomb, but a mystery temple where the chapters of the Egyptian Book of the Dead were ritually reenacted by initiates in the different chambers and hallways. p. 197

The Anunnakk?, the Argonauts, the heads of Cerberus, the sailors of Cessair, and the sons of the prophets—all are the sacred fifty who aid or witness our hero’s journey through the celestial axis or stand guard in the underworld overseeing the celestial axis. Whence do they come? Why are so many companions required to accompany all our heroes between the worlds? What is the significance of the number fifty? p. 229

As already stated, because the Flood story seems so out of place in the text, current scholarship believes that it is a late appendage added to the Gilgamesh cycle rather than an essential element in the story. The first indication that the Flood story might actually belong to the question Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim, “How did you find eternal life?” comes from a remarkable parallel found in The Egyptian Book of the Dead. p. 279

Like many of our mystery saviors, Dionysus emerges from the sea. Remarkably, in one way or another, so does Gilgamesh, Sargon, Osiris, Noah, Moses, Cyrus, Tammuz, Karna, Oedipus, Adonis, Heracles, Jason, Perseus, Romulus, Siegfried, and Lohengrin, or the Knight of the Swan. All these heroes must board some form of ark and find a new life in a new land. The original primer for this mythic motif is the ritual journey

through the celestial axis of the ancient cosmos where the secrets of the true heaven and the true earth were kept. p. 288-9

Details within the myth show the Greeks did not create the story of Heracles—they inherited it. Heracles' mortal mother's name is Mycenaean. King Eurystheus is also Mycenaean, and the kingdom to which he belongs is a Mycenaean city. The localized traditions of our hero in Tiryns descend from Mycenaean times, and the first five labors Heracles performs all take place in the northeastern Peloponnese. The seventh labor, capturing the Cretan Bull, originates in either Mycenaean or even Minoan times (Nilsson 217). In other words, the entire cycle attributed to Heracles is not Greek. p. 301

The Labors of Heracles are narrative allegories to ritual initiations through the heavenly underworld. This conclusion is no idle speculation, and the first labor turns out to be the master key that unties the entire Gordian Knot of this myth complex. p. 308

Much of the genius in the Old Testament lies within its elegantly constructed literary puns, parallelisms, and conundrums. What should be obvious, but often goes unnoticed, is the fact that a literary construction, no matter how elegant and profound, is a literate one. All the expert wordplay found throughout the story of Jacob in the Genesis text reveals that official history has been recorded within the container of literary technique. This is all well and good, as long as one remembers that the story of Jacob hails from oral traditions. Oral traditions in the ancient world were not constructed by literary technique; they were patterned after cosmological insights and recorded by cosmogonic myths and rituals. p. 336

These are sufficient to show what is going on in this book. It is dense, but creative. It is academic, but understandable and free of jargon. It is a broad exploration into the ancient past and the human soul and mind. A must read.

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Rather than attempt to explain everything from the beginning of time, the author's aim is thoughtfully defined: "This book is an attempt to create a historical context through which one may consider ancient constructs embedded in myth, ritual, and culture." And while the author focuses on the Near East and Mediterranean, which are relatively rich with written records, he gives much weight to the vast amount of human history that preceded, or co-existed with, the art of writing. "My purpose is to show that what looks so strange to us about the past really derives from specific circumstances in which ancient peoples lived and which we have forgotten: the nature of orality and its epistemological consequences . . . and the nature of oral cosmology and how such people viewed the world and their place in it."

In "Mythos and Cosmos: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age," author John Knight Lundwall, (Ph.D., Comparative Myth and Religious Studies, Editor in Chief, *Cosmos and Logos: Journal of Myth, Religion, and Folklore*.) successfully presents a broad spectrum of facts, analysis, and creative concepts on a subject of great interest and relevance. The book covers the history of myth and ancient scientific record, the intertwined richness of both written and oral human accounts since antiquity, the history of human observations and ideas about cosmology and celestial bodies, the impact of cosmology on ritual and cult practices, and a most detailed discussion of three central myth cycles: the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Labors of Heracles, and selected Old Testament stories.

In summary, "Mythos and Cosmos: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age" by John Knight Lundwall, Ph.D. is truly a magnificent work of research and presentation that will be devoured by those interested in myth, religion, philosophy and human history. The structure of the book is logical and helpful, the facts and historical findings are presented in an accessible, interesting manner, and conflicting approaches are described with fairness and considerate thoroughness. While this book meets high academic standards of meticulousness and objectivity, it is highly readable, easily understood, and offers novel ideas and fresh concepts that are thought provoking, remarkably stimulating, and intellectually memorable. Highly recommended! —Columbia Review

There are some philosophical and 'new age' books intended for the general-interest reader that are suitable for skimming and easy reflection; and then there are writings such as **MYTHOS And COSMOS: Mind and Meaning in the Oral Age** which are directed to those interested in more of a

historical, analytical approach. Designed to challenge popular thinking rather than placate the unexamined mind, MYTHOS And COSMOS makes an unusual case for the early intellectual prowess of ancient man.

MYTHOS And COSMOS represents the work of a scholar with a life-long commitment to examining ancient myth more closely. He completed his doctorate in comparative myth studies; then applied it to his continuing education. Jungian psychology, he maintains, lends a more accurate thought; that "...our conception of history is often the product of the ego" - and with this in mind, he selects and tackles points in history that have remained incongruous over the centuries. From what constitutes a 'literate person' and his observations, recordings and psyche to the evolution of cosmological thinking, how narratives often cross the boundary from historical fact into mythos, and how knowledge is fragmented and distorted over time, MYTHOS And COSMOS surveys a range of evidence - written, oral, and artifacts alike - to reveal the assumptions underlying broken, fragmented evidence.

In the process of piecing together possibilities, Dr. Lundwall does more than recreate history: he considers the processes, influences, and politics involved in assigning direction and meaning to ancient data.

Are ancient thinkers primitives? Does modern technology provide the illusion of intelligence through comparative analytical processes? And are the foundations by which we compare and assign judgments uncertain, in and of themselves? These questions and more are contained in a scholarly yet accessible examination of historical, archaeological, and psychological evidence ancient and modern, recommended for readers seeking history, science, psychology and philosophy all wrapped up in a quest for what truly constitutes the realities of ancient cultures, considering how modern investigators organize and analyze historical record as well as the evolution of the processes and patterns leading to understanding. —D. Donovan, *Midwestern Book Review*

Lundwall contends that far from being ignorant and backward savages, the preliterate cultures that created mankind's most ancient mythological tales had a high degree of intellectual sophistication.

Lundwall finds fault with the general line of thinking regarding humanity's oldest known stories, mythologies, and the religious lore of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Mesopotamians, etc. Western European scholarly arrogance—"often the product of the ego"—is at fault, he says, for the Darwin-inspired mindset that our ancestors were either howling barbarians, ruled by childlike superstition and uncouth brutality, or noble hippie-type simpletons living in Edenic harmony and peace with each other and nature. Nor does he agree with so-called "Conspirators," who believe that ancient feats (e.g., the Egyptian pyramids) could only have resulted from contact with and technical assistance from space aliens. In fact, though the ancients relied on oral more so than written traditions, leaving enormous gaps in the annals of history, Lundwall argues that our forebears were much like ourselves, with sublimely subtle levels of metaphysical thinking and nuanced spoken/written languages—ones that have suffered in later translations. They also created tremendous architectural wonders, intricate concepts encoded in ritual dance, and sophisticated astronomical observations.

Admirably wary of self-described authorities who tend to oversimplify, Lundwall argues in prose that sometimes crosses the boundary from academic to pop (he once cites a Jay Leno comedy routine). In terms of actually dissecting a myth, it's mainly the Epic of Gilgamesh (and some of the works of Heracles) that gets a full narrative recounting. In his latter pages, he covers the overlapping of the Old Testament and Genesis with pre-existing lore and historical truth. Several of his salient points stand out, particularly his refreshingly broad perspective of what is, in modern times, the fragmented pursuit of knowledge.

Recommended reading for classicists (and budding Indiana Joneses) graduating beyond Edith Hamilton. —Kirkus Review

#### About the Author

John K. Lundwall received his undergraduate degree in English Literature from BYU in Provo, Utah, and his Masters and Doctorate degrees in Mythological Studies from Pacifica Graduate School in Santa Barbara, California. He serves as the chief editor for the online journal *Cosmos and Logos: Journal of Myth, Religion, and Folklore*. He has presented papers at conferences and international symposiums on his work. His major area of academic study is ancient religious cosmology. Lundwall is also an amateur astronomer and spends many nights gazing through his telescope and teaching people about the stars and constellations. He is married with three children and resides in Utah.

**Mythos And Cosmos: Mind And Meaning In The Oral Age By John Knight Lundwall PhD.** Learning to have reading habit is like learning how to attempt for consuming something that you actually don't desire. It will certainly need more times to assist. Moreover, it will also bit make to serve the food to your mouth and also ingest it. Well, as checking out a book *Mythos And Cosmos: Mind And Meaning In The Oral Age By John Knight Lundwall PhD*, occasionally, if you ought to review something for your new jobs, you will certainly really feel so lightheaded of it. Even it is a book like *Mythos And Cosmos: Mind And Meaning In The Oral Age By John Knight Lundwall PhD*; it will certainly make you feel so bad.