



The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies

By Thomas McEvilley

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This unparalleled study of early Eastern and Western philosophy challenges every existing belief about the foundations of Western civilization. Spanning thirty years of intensive research, this book proves what many scholars could not explain: that today's Western world must be considered the product of both Greek and Indian thought—Western and Eastern philosophies. Thomas McEvilley explores how trade, imperialism, and migration currents allowed cultural philosophies to intermingle freely throughout India, Egypt, Greece, and the ancient Near East. This groundbreaking reference will stir relentless debate among philosophers, art historians, and students.

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- Sales Rank: #134662 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-02-07
- Released on: 2012-02-07
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"... one of the great works of scholarship of our time. McEvilley has brought together complex and diverse data to weave a tightly organized, panoramic account. (. . .) I should think that [the book] will become indispensable for any and all specialists on antiquity."

(Professor Katherine Harper, Indologist and art historian, author of The Roots of Tantra)

From the Publisher

Two Worlds, One Philosophical Cradle:

Scholar Explores Hidden Kinship Between Eastern and Western Culture in Revolutionary Study;

In the Early Days, Ideas Traveled Freely Between India and Greece

A revolutionary study by the classical philologist and art historian Thomas McEvilley is about to challenge much of academia. In *THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT*, an empirical study of the roots of Western culture, the author argues that Eastern and Western civilizations have not always had separate, autonomous metaphysical schemes, but have mutually influenced each other over a long period of time. Examining ancient trade routes, imperialist movements, and migration currents, he shows how some of today's key philosophical ideas circulated and intermingled freely in the triangle between Greece, India, and Persia, leading to an intense metaphysical interchange between Greek and Indian cultures.

As the author explains it, "The records of caravan routes are like the philosophical stemmata of history, the trails of oral discourses moving through communities, of texts copied from texts. . . .What they reveal is not a structure of parallel straight lines—one labeled 'Greece,' another 'Persia,' another 'India'—but a tangled web in which an element in one culture often leads to elements in others."

While scholars have sensed a philosophical kinship between Eastern and Western cultures for many decades, *THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT* is the first study to provide the empirical evidence. Covering a period ranging from 600 B.C. until the era of Neoplatonism and a geographical expanse reaching across the ancient world, McEvilley explores the key philosophical paradigms of these cultures, such as Monism, the doctrine of reincarnation in India and Egypt, and early Pluralism in Greece and India, to reveal striking similarities between the two metaphysical systems. Based on 30 years of intense intellectual inquiry and research and on hundreds of early historical, philosophical, spiritual, and Buddhist texts, the study offers a scope and an interdisciplinary perspective that has no equal in the scholarly world.

With a study like *THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT*, students and scholars of history, philosophy, cultural studies, and classics will find that their field has been put on entirely new footing. Yet as editor Bill Beckley points out, the merits of this work reach into a broader social context: "More recently, events have leant an unexpected urgency to the [book] by focusing the world's attention on Afghanistan (ancient Bactria), where much of the story unfolds in this volume, and where the difficult karma of cross-cultural contacts is still alive."

From the Inside Flap

"... one of the great works of scholarship of our time. McEvilley has brought together complex and diverse data to weave a tightly organized, panoramic account. (. . .) I should think that [the book] will become

indispensable for any and all specialists on antiquity." — Professor Katherine Harper, Indologist and art historian, author of *The Roots of Tantra*

"This is a wonderful book. The author has assembled material from the ancient Greek world and the world of ancient India and systematically demonstrated the interchange of ideas and mutual influence. . ."— Professor Christopher Chapple, Indologist, author of *Karma and Creativity*

"Reading it is like reading a novel. Thomas McEvilley has given us the novelistic anthropology of our time."
—David Shapiro, Poet

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