

# **Book Review: The Tree at the Navel of the Earth**

Cyrus H. Gordon

October 1971

E. A. S. Butterworth: *The tree at the navel of the earth*, xii, 239 pp., 31 plates. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1970. DM 68.

This book deals with a number of wide-ranging mythological themes in the Mediterranean, the Near East, and beyond. The author correlates texts and art pertaining to motifs such as the sacred mountain, astral bodies, the Garden of Eden, various symbols, the Gilgamesh epic, myths of (East) Indian origin, Yoga, Homeric tales, and even a crucifix at Aachen.

The reviewer feels that comparative mythology is so susceptible to vagueness that only specific and clearly expressed conclusions based on a mastery of the primary sources are worth-while. This book does not conform to such a standard.

The author refers to Flinders Petrie's excavations at Tall al-'Ajjul as though they were at Gaza (pp. 47, 166) just because Sir Flinders entitled his reports Ancient Gaza.

On p. 66 the author speaks of al-Mas'udi's Murvj al-dhahab as 'Morug-el-Dseheb'. No one conversant with Arabic would transliterate that way. On pp. 148-9, the author describes Gilgamesh as 'the descendant of nomad shamans', who 'had once known a way of escaping from the mortal world into the spiritual but, taking upon himself the Sumerian kingship, had abandoned it for the secular duties, the formal rites and the political aims of a ruler'. I have been reading Sumerian and Akkadian texts for over 40 years and I cannot make sense of such statements against the background of the cuneiform record.

One aspect of the book is praiseworthy. The photographs are of interest and very well reproduced.

CYRUS H. GORDON

The Ted K Archive

Cyrus H. Gordon

Book Review: The Tree at the Navel of the Earth

October 1971

Bulletin of SOAS, Volume 34, Issue 3. <[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)>

**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**