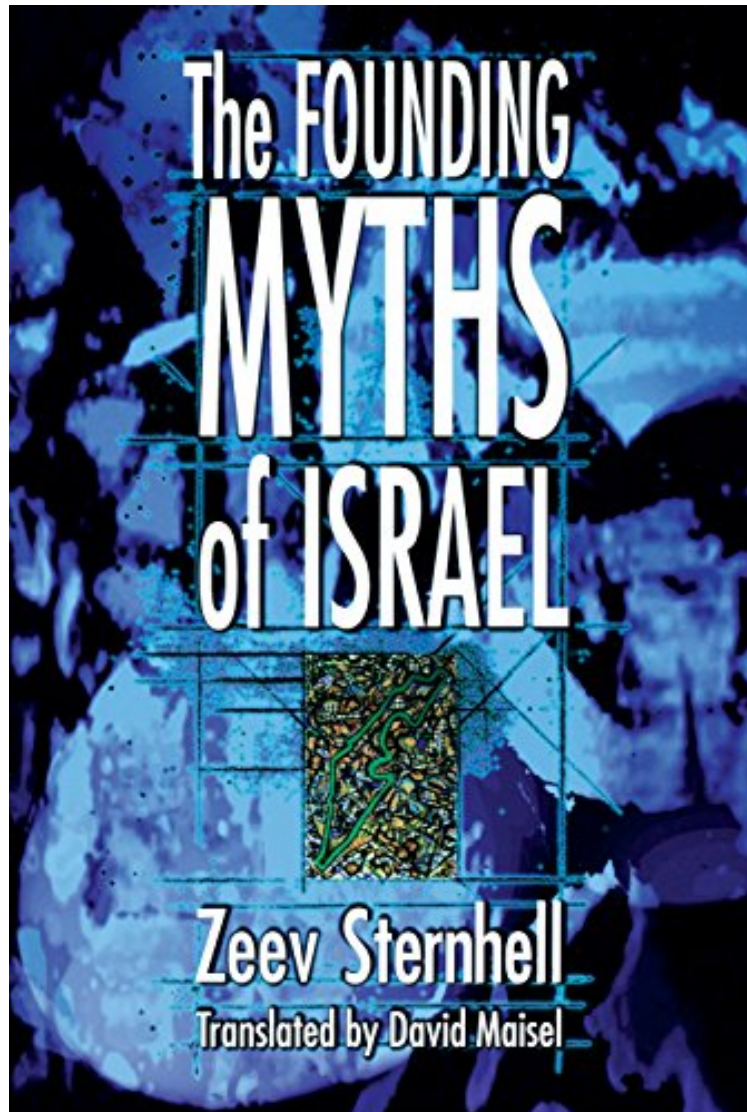


[Library ebook] The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State

The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State

Von Zeev Sternhell

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Von Zeev Sternhell : The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 0 von 2 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Wordy but worthwhile Von matt craig The author successfully documents the Labor Zionist founders as adherents of

mentality hostile to liberalism, democracy, and despite their own pretensions, socialism. He sees them as national socialists of the typical type of the early 20th century. Individual rights and the human spirit did not animate them, just narrow crude nationalism of a mystical variety. This led to the creation of a state mired in tribalistic thought rather than universalism. Sternhell is a leftist and sees socialism as a universal value but his arguments apply just as well as a critique of the anti-liberal, anti-free market, and anti-humanistic spirit of the founders of modern Israel which explain their strange mixture of religion and secularism, land worship, ill-treatment of Arabs, and dark picture of the nature of Jews.

Kurzbeschreibung The well-known historian and political scientist Zeev Sternhell here advances a radically new interpretation of the founding of modern Israel. The founders claimed that they intended to create both a landed state for the Jewish people and a socialist society. However, according to Sternhell, socialism served the leaders of the influential labor movement more as a rhetorical resource for the legitimation of the national project of establishing a Jewish state than as a blueprint for a just society. In this thought-provoking book, Sternhell demonstrates how socialist principles were consistently subverted in practice by the nationalist goals to which socialist Zionism was committed. Sternhell explains how the avowedly socialist leaders of the dominant labor party, Mapai, especially David Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson, never really believed in the prospects of realizing the "dream" of a new society, even though many of their working-class supporters were self-identified socialists. The founders of the state understood, from the very beginning, that not only socialism but also other universalistic ideologies like liberalism, were incompatible with cultural, historical, and territorial nationalism. Because nationalism took precedence over universal values, argues Sternhell, Israel has not evolved a constitution or a Bill of Rights, has not moved to separate state and religion, has failed to develop a liberal concept of citizenship, and, until the Oslo accords of 1993, did not recognize the rights of the Palestinians to independence. This is a controversial and timely book, which not only provides useful historical background to Israel's ongoing struggle to mobilize its citizenry to support a shared vision of nationhood, but also raises a question of general significance: is a national movement whose aim is a political and cultural revolution capable of coexisting with the universal values of secularism, individualism, and social justice? This bold critical reevaluation will unsettle long-standing myths as it contributes to a fresh new historiography of Zionism and Israel. At the same time, while it examines the past, *The Founding Myths of Israel* reflects profoundly on the future of the Jewish State. For decades, Israel's social-democratic Labor Party was the country's predominant political force, consistently holding a plurality of power against the right-wing "revisionist" and religious parties. Yet contemporary Israeli society has more social inequity than almost any other developed nation. Asks political scientist Sternhell (Hebrew Univ.): How can this be? Easy, he answers. From at least the 1920s and possibly earlier, the ruling elites of the Jewish settlement in Palestine were far more interested in increasing the Jewish population (about 75 percent of the total population was still Arab in 1947, the year of the UN's partition resolution) and in other forms of state-building than in redistributive socioeconomic policies. Sternhell exhaustively documents his thesis by quoting extensively from the writings and speeches of Labor Zionism's long-time political and ideological leaders, David Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson. As the latter put it in 1925, "It is not the interests of class warfare that must determine the needs and strategy of the movement, but those of building up the land." Thus, the national workers' federation, the Histadrut, took on a strongly centrist orientation, in which a certain degree of antidemocratic tactics, as well as some financial corruption, were tolerated. The government was thus also uncompromising in staking Jewish claims to the land against those of Arabs. In general, this account is so focused on political ideology that it doesn't quite provide enough of a demographic, geopolitical, and historical context when it comes to issues of equity in Jewish-Arab relations or another matter he broaches, Zionism's commitment to rescue, rather than to internal issues, during the Holocaust. Still, for those fascinated by Zionist ideology and Israel's early history, this is one of the most provocative of the recent rash of "post-Zionist" studies that debunk earlier works on Israel's founding fathers and mothers. -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. From *Library Journal* This comparative political study takes a revisionist historical approach, reinterpreting what it considers mythical to explain the origins of the state of Israel. Sternhell (Neither Right nor Left, Princeton, 1996) studies the ideological nature of the socialist-labor movement in Jewish Palestine under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion and sees the role of Zionism as a key bonding social feature and a politically divisive element. Ben-Gurion's goal, according to the author, was to create a state for Jews, with all organized efforts geared toward that end. This book will undoubtedly create discussion and debate for some time. An excellent companion to Simha Flapan's *The Birth of Israel* (LJ 8/87) and worthy reading for anyone interested in comparative political development. Recommended. -- Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba Coll., Salisbury, N.C. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.