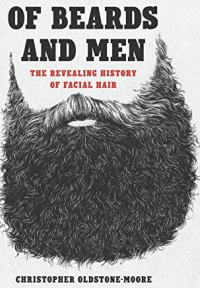




Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: Of Beards and Men

Author: Christopher Oldstone-Moore

Published: University of Chicago Press, 2016

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. Looking at the natural selection process, what did the author surmise as the reason beards have survived as part of the male human's face? Is this what you would guess? Why or why not?
3. Who do you currently know who wears a beard. Why do you think they wear the beard? Do you think it impacts your perception of this person? Why or why not?
4. What are your personal preferences on beards? In what ways has that changed throughout your life?
5. What was something that surprised you about the history of beards?
6. How does the practice of wearing beards relate to religious beliefs? Were there any surprises in the book for you related to spiritual traditions and beards?
7. In the last chapter he talks about the current culture related to beards and body hair. Was this news to you? Why or why not?
8. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
9. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?

On YouTube:

CBS Sunday Morning' puts Wright State in the spotlight for story on beards



NANCY: I had no idea that there was so much information on beards! Certainly a well-researched book by a historian who could weave the historical information with beards quite well. I found the reading engaging and kept reading on, to find out why beards survived natural selection, which societies liked and didn't like the beards, and the many religious perspectives on facial hair. I was quite surprised to find out the Sinai Jesus with whom I like to meditate was actually a late version of Jesus and not grounded in reality as I thought. I like a well-trimmed beard, but I generally prefer a clean-shaven face. Throughout history, some agree with me and others not!



SALLIE: Well, since I gravitate toward children, I kept focusing on the "youthful" faces. It seems that throughout history the lack of facial hair has been a symbol of youth. I don't think about beards very much, but I'm with Nancy. I prefer the clean, "youthful" faces.



ABIGAIL: Well, with my Mennonite background, the more traditional men always wore the beard. I grew up with the idea that we are in the world, but not of the world. I always knew that within our religious tradition, the beard was countercultural, and what set our men apart. So the fact that beards are usually a departure from the norm in modern cultures made sense to me. Isn't the beard cutting story something? Fighting Amish? Oxymoron!



MOLLY: I didn't like that the author just focused the history of Western civilization, and there's an assumption there of this being the white man's history. Yet he wrote about Egypt and the Middle East which include mostly people of color. Sometimes history gets white-washed too much. I thought a little bit of this was going on in this book. I'd like an African-American beard book.



PRISCILLA: Did you notice how the clean-shaven men were often considered the religious ones? That was surprising that they depicted Jesus as a clean shaven in the early centuries and not until later did they add the beard. I have to re-think Jesus. How could Jesus not have a beard? But the reality is, we don't really know. I found that very surprising. But the duck hunting guys and Pastor Rick Warren and their beards, they are becoming popular with Christian men, don't you think? I don't really like beards, but I'm trying to accept this. Jesus, okay. Others, no!



JANE: Well, I really liked the story of the woman King—Hatshepsut, who wore a beard! And then more recently we have the cross dressing person who wins a contest, all dressed like a woman, but with a beard. I liked these quirky stories that show women can wear beards, too. This book isn't really my cup of tea, because as a woman I can't grow one, so I found it boring.



KATHARINE: I admire the scholar who wrote this book! The book has so much history, from the Sumer valley to the modern metro men, I found this well-researched and good reading. I think it would add some intrigue to the history classes, to include these beard stories. Alexander the great wins a battle by having his men shave, and the early kings depicted with beards as warriors, and without as gods. So many interesting stories!