

**THE RELIGION OF
ANCIENT GREECE.
[LONDON-1905]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649688715

The Religion of Ancient Greece. [London-1905] by Jane Ellen Harrison

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JANE ELLEN HARRISON

**THE RELIGION OF
ANCIENT GREECE.
[LONDON-1905]**

◦

THE
RELIGION OF ANCIENT
GREECE

BY JANE ELLEN HARRISON

*Hon. LL.D (Aberdeen), Hon. D.Litt. (Durham), Staff Lecturer and
sometimes Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge*

LONDON
ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & CO LTD

1905

BL
781
.H3

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY	7
I. MYTHOLOGY	13
II. RITUAL	37
III. THE MYSTERIES	46
CONCLUSION	62
HISTORICAL SUMMARY	65
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

INTRODUCTORY.

Scope of the Book.—The present sketch does not aim at any complete survey, however brief, of the facts of Greek religion; it is not a handbook. Still less does it aim at setting down in an elementary form the rudiments of the subject; it is not a primer. Rather it is, in the Greek sense, a *historia* — an inquiry into the nature of Greek religion; an attempt to see whence it came and whither it tended; how it resembles and how it differs from other religions. Especially its object is to ask and, if it may be, to answer the question: “What in Greek religion is characteristically Greek?”

Two Factors in Religion; Ritual and Mythology.—Every religion contains two elements. There is first what a man *thinks* about the unseen, his theology, or, if we prefer so to call it,

RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

his mythology ; second, what he *does* in relation to this unseen—his ritual. In primitive religions, though these two elements are clearly to be distinguished, they are never, or very rarely, separable. In all living religions these two elements are informed and transfused by a third impulse—that of each man's personal emotion towards the unseen, his sense of dependence on it, his fear, his hope, his love.

Greek Mythology studied hitherto to the exclusion of Ritual.—The study of Greek religion is still young and struggling. To many ears the very words "Greek religion" ring with a certain dissonance. But the study of one part of Greek religion, of its mythology, is old and honoured. How does this come to be ? The answer is simple, and in the sequel it will be shown to be significant. Some knowledge of Greek mythology is necessary to the understanding of classical Greek literature. The scholar, even after the most rigorous application of grammatical rules, was still occasionally driven to look up his "mythological allusions." Hence we had, not histories but *dictionaries* of Mythology. Mythology was regarded not as a subject worthy in itself of study, not as part of the history of the human mind, but as "ancillary," as of some service to literature. Nothing so effectually

INTRODUCTORY

starves a subject as to make it occupy this "ancillary" position.

Greek Mythology formerly studied through a Roman or Alexandrian Medium.—Until the last decade it was usual to call Greek gods by Latin names. We need not spend time in slaying dead lions; the practice is at an end. Jupiter, we now know, though akin to, is not the same as, Zeus; Minerva is nowise Athena. But a subtler and more dangerous error remains. We are still inclined to invest Greek gods with Latin or Alexandrian *natures*, and to make them the toy-gods of a late, artificial and highly decorative literature. The Greek god of Love, Eros, we no longer call Cupid; but we have not wholly rid our minds of the fat mischievous urchin with his bow and arrows—a conception that would much have astonished his worshippers in his own city of Thespieae, where the most ancient image of Eros was "an unwrought stone."¹

Three disabilities, then, have atrophied and well-nigh paralyzed the study of Greek religion. First, instead of studying religion as a whole we have studied only one part, Mythology. Second, even Mythology was not studied rationally, as a

¹ Pausanias, ix. 27, 1.

RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

whole, but in scraps to explain "allusions." Third, such Mythology as was studied was seen distorted through the medium of Alexandrian and Roman literature. To read a paragraph of Lemprière is to wonder that a study reduced to such imbecility could still keep its hold on the human mind.

Influence of Modern Scientific Methods.—The study of religion as a whole is a tardy modern growth. So long as religions were divided into one true and the rest false, progress was naturally impossible. The slow pressure of science introduced first the comparative, then the historical method. The facts of ancient and savage religions being once collected and laid side by side, it became immediately evident that there were resemblances as well as differences, and some sort of classification was possible. Then came the historical impulse, the desire to see if in religion also there existed a law of development, and if the facts of religion succeeded each other in any ascertainable order.

From this intrusion of the comparative and historical methods, two religions long held themselves aloof : Christianity, as too sacred ; classical religion, as forming part of an exclusive stronghold, which was supposed to stand in some strange antagonism to science. Greek and Latin religions,

INTRODUCTORY

as different perhaps as any two religions could be, declared themselves one. Dying of this unnatural partnership, and of their self-imposed isolation, they at last consented to join hands with the rest of humanity and come to life again. Greek religion is now studied as a whole, not as merely mythology; as part of the spiritual history of the human race, not as the means of interpreting a particular literature; as contrasted, not as identical, with the religion of the Romans.

Accession of New Archaeological Material.—The study of Greek religion owes much not only to reform in method, but to a very large recent accession of material, material which has again and again acted as a corrective to mistaken views, and as a means of modifying mistaken emphasis. To take a single example: the discovery and study of vase-paintings alone has forced us to see the Greek gods not as the Romans and Alexandrians, but as the early Greeks saw them. We realise, for example, that Dionysos is not only the beautiful young wine-god, but also an ancient tree-god, worshipped as a draped post; that the sirens are not lovely baleful mermaidens, but strange bird-demons with women's heads.

Excavation, that used to concern itself with works of art only, now seeks for and preserves every scrap of monumental evidence however