

Ancient Art and Ritual

Jane Ellen Harrison


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JANE ELLEN HARRISON

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Jane Ellen Harrison : Ancient Art and Ritual before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ancient Art and Ritual:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Ian Myles Slater on: Short Book, Large Concepts By Ian M. Slater "Ancient Art and Ritual" is a short, "popular" book by Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), who was a classical scholar by training, and a student of anthropology (or sociology) when Frazer's "The Golden Bough" was still astonishing (or infuriating) classicists with its message that the customs and beliefs of "beastly heathen savages" might shed light on those of the Greeks and Romans. (Who were, of course, strictly speaking, "beastly heathens" themselves.... Not to mention some of their other customs.) On top of this, she pioneered the role of professional academic for women; separating the two aspects in some of the negative reactions to her work can be difficult. Those curious about her now have a very good Wikipedia article to refer to, so I'll forgo a biographical sketch, and a lot of bibliographic detail on her publications. (This takes advantage of well-documented modern studies, Sandra J. Peacock's 1988 biography, "Jane Ellen Harrison: The Mask and the Self," and Mary Beard's 2000 "The Invention of Jane Harrison," Book 14 in the Harvard University Press "Revealing Antiquity" series, which supersede the

biographical sketches available in earlier decades.) Like many of her works, "Art and Ritual" is available as a free pdf from archive.org (a Library of Congress website); a few (including this one) are available in Kindle editions (based, in this case, on a Project Gutenberg text). There are also no less than four competing editions of "Ancient Art and Ritual" for NOOK Books (although I have not taken the time to compare them). In "Ancient Art and Ritual," she used some of the insights (real or supposed) gained from her classical and anthropological studies to analyze the place of the arts in (despite the title), the "modern" world. (Mostly Britain, as it was just before the First World War.) Her basic thesis (much simplified) is that art, including visual and dramatic art, and ritual ("religion") were once united, expressing and evoking strong personal and communal emotions through the mode of imitation; and that the modern world had severed the connection, to its own considerable loss. She notes that she could have written the book with reference to India, or Medieval Europe, but argues that the modern world -- or at least the educated part at which the book was aimed -- felt closer to the ancient Greeks, so that the contrast was clearer. (One may doubt the extent to which this is now a compelling argument, but it made sense at the time.) If one takes her argument seriously, the temptation to apply it to, say, television, may be irresistible. However, if asked to list Harrison's major works, I would restrict my selection to three connected books: "Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion," first published in 1903, with various re-printings containing additional technical notes and some revisions of her views on particular issues; "Themis, a study of the social origins of Greek religion" ("With an excursus on the ritual forms preserved in Greek tragedy by Gilbert Murray and a chapter on the origin of the Olympic games by F.M. Cornford"), in 1912; and "Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion," published in 1921 (by which time she was cutting her connections to classical studies in favor of other interests, like Russian literature.) The first two volumes are massive studies, of which the first was the most successful with fellow-classicists in her own time. ("Themis" had to wait to the later twentieth century for belated recognition). "Epilogomena" is very short, and can't stand alone, being mostly limited to "reconsiderations" of (mainly) theoretical issues, but it is well worth reading. In these volumes, she attempted to go past the "barrier" erected by Homer and Athenian Tragedy, with their Olympian deities, and find the "real" roots of Greek ritual actions and religious feeling, particularly concerns for subsistence. In her view (shared by the so-called "Cambridge School"), it was the ritual which gave rise to the mythology, and the concepts of the gods, and not the other way around. Whether or not one comes away convinced, the argument is extremely interesting. "Prolegomena" in particular is packed with reflections on the "Lower Mythology" (daemons, and various types of local spirits, benevolent or malicious) usually ignored -- or deplored -- in older treatments of "Greek Religion." "Ancient Art and Ritual" (1913; corrected edition with some new bibliography, 1948) is something of a satellite to "Prolegomena" and "Themis," without the illustrations from ancient art, the edited Greek texts, and the careful documentation. It was originally published in the "Home University Library of Modern Knowledge," issued by Williams and Norgate (UK) and Henry Holt and Co. (US), in a volume roughly the size of a mass-market paperback. So far as I know, "Ancient Art and Ritual," despite a fair number of reprintings, had little impact; the classicist who might have been most impressed by it, Gilbert Murray, was its editor. However, in 1926, one of Harrison's close friends, Hope Mirrlees (1887-1978; again, see her own Wikipedia article for details), published a fantasy novel, "Lud-in-the-Mist," with an epigraph by Harrison. The book, currently available in a very nice Kindle edition (besides out-of-print paperbacks) has a number of (mostly favorable) reviews on . From my perspective, the ideas about society, art, and religion embodied in the novel are in part a reflection on "Ancient Art and Ritual."

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Art Emotion Go Hand in Hand! By Lynn M. This book is a scholarly read and Jane Harrison shows how man has always dealt with rituals to celebrate new life or some rite of passage. He could be seen enraptured in a dance or a song as he asks the gods to show mercy for rain, a healing or for food. She shows how these ancient rituals evolved into art forms such as choral readings, dance forms and even drama itself. Also, Greek sculpture was developed as a demure way to give homage to the gods. The one common thread behind all of the art forms was high emotional energy because the needs were so great. She then moves towards the premise that art is borne out of emotion and when man has a dire need, he becomes active and participatory. She then shifts to the artist himself and says he speaks when he is vexed or his feelings are deeply stirred. It is the artists' duty to transfer those feelings into some medium and this expression will eventually be seen as a spoken truth whether done through writing, painting or drama. The artist normally has a keener emotion and though often perceived as somewhat removed or aloof from practical life, it is his responsibility to tell what he sees and feels.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Lasting Classic by a Lasting Scholar By Maggy A. Anthony Jane Ellen Harrison was one of the great classical scholars of her time, at a time when women were scarce in academia. She had the respect of other scholars in her field too and was an inspiration to the next generations. She was far ahead of her time as a multi-disciplinarian bringing all her knowledge in various fields to bear in her works. This book is seminal for the ritual and art of ancient times.

Paphos Publishers offers a wide catalog of rare classic titles, published for a new generation. Ancient Art and Ritual discusses ancient Greek sculpture, art, and dance.

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AuthorJane Ellen Harrison (9 September 1850 ndash; 15 April 1928) was a British classical scholar, linguist and feminist. Harrison is one of the founders, with Karl Kerényi and Walter Burkert, of modern studies in Greek mythology. She applied 19th century archaeological discoveries to the interpretation of Greek religion in ways that have become standard. Contemporary classics scholar Mary Beard, Harrison's biographer, has described her as "in a way ... [Britain's] first female professional 'career academic'". Ellen Wordsworth Crofts, later second wife of Sir Francis Darwin was Jane Harrison's best friend from her student days at Newnham, and during the period from 1898 to her early death in 1903.