



Five Stages of Greek Religion

Gilbert Murray

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Gilbert Murray's book "The Five Stages of Greek Religion" is the outgrowth of a lecture series given before the First World War. Murray traces the growth and development of Greek religion from its beginnings in prehistorical animism to the full flowering of the major schools of philosophy, and thence to their extinction. Murray explores the irrational, Dionysic strand that emerged independently of the Olympian mythos, and shows how both predate Homer. He considers the minor deities, such as the boundary statues (koures) mentioned by Thucydides in connection with Alcibiades' impiety. The eloquent chapters on the rise of philosophy-cum-religion are the most memorable in a memorable book. Murray's vignettes on the lives and actions of the founders of the famous schools - linked as they are in lineal descent from Socrates, Epicurus excepted, are excellent biographical sketches in their own right. His examination of the faults in each philosophical system, Aristotle's Peripatetic School excepted, shows how, after banishing Olympian myth, essential to keeping hold of thinking minds, they let them back in, pantheistically, or as manifestations of the universal creator, etc. (Epicurus preached a materialism that did not fully recognize divinity, and so he may be partly excused, as well.) This book thus lays out how the hellenistic world was prepared for the advent of Christianity, as the rise of philosophy asked the right questions to move thinkers beyond myth, and philosophy's subsequent fall into Neoplatonism and other pantheistic movements left the Greco-Roman world looking elsewhere for answers. The "Five Stages of Greek Religion" is an outstanding addition to any classical library.

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