



# Mystery Cults of the Ancient World

By Hugh Bowden

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**Mystery Cults of the Ancient World** By Hugh Bowden

This is the first book to describe and explain all of the ancient world's major mystery cults--one of the most intriguing but least understood aspects of Greek and Roman religion. In the nocturnal Mysteries at Eleusis, participants dramatically re-enacted the story of Demeter's loss and recovery of her daughter Persephone; in the Bacchic cult, bands of women ran wild in the Greek countryside to honor Dionysus; and in the mysteries of Mithras, men came to understand the nature of the universe and their place within it through frightening initiation ceremonies and astrological teachings. These cults were an important part of life in the ancient Mediterranean world, but their actual practices were shrouded in secrecy, and many of their features have remained unclear until now.

By richly illustrating the evidence from ancient art and archaeology, and drawing on enlightening new work in the anthropology and cognitive science of religion, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* allows readers to imagine as never before what it was like to take part in these ecstatic and life-changing religious rituals--and what they meant to those who participated in them. Stunning images of Greek painted pottery, Roman frescoes, inscribed gold tablets from Greek and South Italian tombs, and excavated remains of religious sanctuaries help show what participants in these initiatory cults actually did and experienced.

A fresh and accessible introduction to a fascinating subject, this is a book that will interest general readers, as well as students and scholars of classics and religion.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Booklist

This intriguing book offers the latest archaeological and textual information about some of the ancient world's least-known, most compelling religions, most of which center on goddesses; for instance, Demeter, whose rites at Eleusis were attended by millions of initiates who kept the experience secret for hundreds of years, so that we still do not know exactly what happened in the "mysteries." Two goddesses imported to Rome, Isis of Egypt and Cybele of Asia Minor, developed ecstatic cults among their converted followers. Among the male gods considered, the most significant is Dionysus, the wine god worshiped by the wild maenads, whose religion may have survived for almost a thousand years to crop up again in Pompeii. Bowden distinguishes these religions from others by noting that they are based in experience rather than in doctrine. Full of rarely published information but accessibly written, this is an excellent addition to the literature of ancient religions. --Patricia Monaghan

#### Review

"*Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* is clearly written and richly illustrated, and gives a solid introduction to an extremely elusive phenomenon. . . . [I]t remains a reliable and accessible guide to the religions that gave 'mystery' its name."--**Richard Smoley, *Parabola Magazine***

"Greek and Roman men and women by the thousands, even millions, chose to be initiated into religious cults amid strict vows of secrecy; remarkably, not a single voice from antiquity has ever spilled the beans. Despite centuries of scholarly probing, the exact words, visions, benefits, or promises revealed during these closely guarded rituals remain unknown. This important book presents a sensible, convincing account of what these occasions may have offered their participants; how they related to mainstream, public traditions; and what the mysteries likely entailed. . . . Well-organized by cult types, splendidly illustrated, and jargon-free, the book deserves a wide readership."--**Choice**

"This book should be on the bookshelf of every thinking pagan, from the most scholarly reconstructionist to the most insouciant eclectic. What we need to know--and what it abundantly reveals--is why mystery cults were (and still are) important. . . . [A]s a guide to pre-Christian classical Paganism, this book is unsurpassed."--**Barbara Ardinger, *Witches and Pagans Magazine***

"Students and generalist readers, as well as classicists looking for basic information on mystery cults, will find much useful information here. . . . [T]his is an eminently readable, enlightening overview of a fascinating topic and will become the go-to generalist resource . . . on ancient mystery cults."--**Bronwen L. Wickkiser, *American Journal of Archaeology***

"*Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* is clearly written and highly accessible both to scholars and interested general readers alike. . . . Bowden's multi-discipline approach to studying the value of these cults in people's lives, rather than an attempt to piece together a list of rituals or practices from scattered sources, is refreshing."--**Carey Fleiner, *Canadian Journal of History***

#### From the Back Cover

"As clear and well-informed an account as one could imagine of ancient cults involving secret initiation. Hugh Bowden puts together in a highly accessible way the literary and material evidence. Well-paced and an attractive read, this is a very welcome addition to ancient history and religious studies, and will also appeal

to the general reader."--**Robin Osborne, University of Cambridge**

"This book debunks some longstanding misconceptions about mystery cults and provides an accessible introduction to a fascinating topic."--**Radcliffe Edmonds, Bryn Mawr College**

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#### **Floyd Wyatt:**

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their leisure time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book may be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the book untitled Mystery Cults of the Ancient World can be great book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

#### **Charles Smith:**

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent all day long to reading a e-book. The book Mystery Cults of the Ancient World it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book offers high quality.

#### **Rebecca West:**

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