

(Quick Reviews of Books from the Fred Adams/Feraferia Library)

"Mystery Religions in the Ancient World" by Joscelyn Godwin, 176 pp., Thames and Hudson, publishers, 158 illustrations.

Joscelyn Godwin has done a great job of organizing key information on many of the important cults and mystery religions of ca. 200 BC - 500 AD, and the influences which informed them during that tumultuous period, in the area of Egypt - Syria - Palestine - Greece - Anatolia - Italy and especially Rome. His clear, succinct presentation of key philosophers and what made them tick would have benefited greatly from including more than the 3 covered - especially the misogynist Aristotle, who closely followed on the heels of Plato, and continues to influence Western thought.

The best thing about the book is the coverage of most of the era's mystery religions. Each short chapter has several insightful pages detailing what is known of the beliefs and practices and their relations to each other, plus several more pages of the iconography of each.

The glaring omission, not explained for its absence, is the lack of any more than passing mention of the world's greatest mystery religion, the Mysteries of Eleusis. That initiatory system lasted at least 1,200 years, yet to this day has kept its central teaching secret. Godwin boldly states that the climax was "the displaying of an ear of wheat" - but this statement is widely disputed, and is not in any way accepted as the whole story. Perhaps Godwin feels that others have adequately covered the material already.

One fascinating point was that unlike all the other religions of the era, "Isis' sacrifices, like Christ's, never involved the taking of animal life: milk, honey or herbs were the chosen elements".

An excellent, visually satisfying, well organized read. Highly recommended.