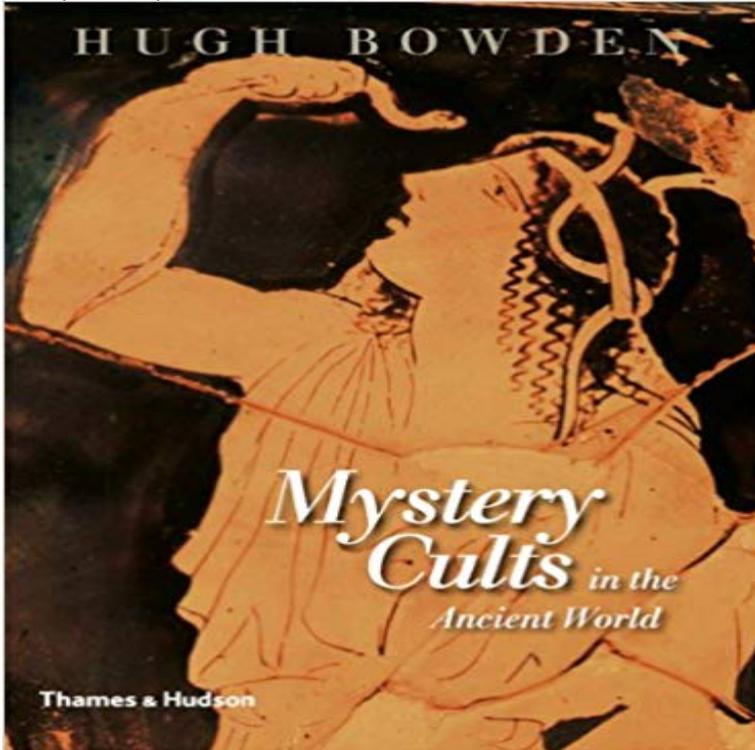


Mystery Cults in the Ancient World



Mystery cults are one of the most intriguing areas of Greek and Roman religion. They were an important part of life in the ancient Mediterranean world, but their actual practices were shrouded in secrecy, and much of what they were about has remained unclear until now. What participants did, and what they actually experienced, should be central to our understanding. This is the first book to describe and explain all the major mystery cults of the ancient world, cult by cult, reconstructing the rituals and exploring their origins. It makes plentiful use of artistic and archaeological evidence, as well as ancient literature and epigraphy. Greek painted pottery, Roman frescoes, inscribed gold tablets from Greek and South Italian tombs and the excavated sites of ancient religious sanctuaries all contribute to our understanding of ancient mystery cults. Making use of the most recent work on these cults, the book is also informed by crucial current work on the anthropology and cognitive science of religion. Richly illustrated and clearly written, it is a significant contribution to the study of these cults, but it is also accessible to a general readership. More than any other book on ancient religion, it allows the reader to understand what it was like to participate in these life transforming religious events.

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