

CULTS, MYTHS AND RELIGIONS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649101320

Cults, myths and religions by Salomon Reinach & Elizabeth Frost

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

SALOMON REINACH & ELIZABETH FROST

**CULTS, MYTHS
AND RELIGIONS**

CULTS, MYTHS AND RELIGIONS

CULTS, MYTHS
AND RELIGIONS

BY
SALOMON REINACH

TRANSLATED BY
ELIZABETH FROST

LONDON
DAVID NUTT
17 GRAPE STREET, NEW OXFORD STREET
1912

LOAN STACK

128
R-11

INTRODUCTION

IN the eyes of the evolutionist—and we are all evolutionists nowadays—man springs from beast, humanity from animality. But man, take him where and when you will, is a religious animal; and religiosity, as the Positivist would say, is the most essential of his attributes. It can no longer be maintained, with Gabriel de Mortillet and Hovelacque, that quaternary man was ignorant of religion. Unless, then, we admit the gratuitous and childlike hypothesis of a primitive revelation, we must look for the origin of religions in the psychology, not of civilised man, but of man the farthest removed from civilisation.

Of this man, anterior to all history, we have no direct knowledge, beyond what we glean from the implements and artistic products of the quaternary period. True, these teach us something, as I have striven to show on a later page; but, equally truly, they teach us far less than we could wish. To supplement our information, three other sources have to be tapped: the psychology of the present-day savage, the psychology of children, and the psychology of the higher animals.

It is probable that animals, certain that savages and children, are *animists*—that they project the twilit intelligence, stirring within them, into the external

v

world, and people the universe, especially the beings and objects that surround them, with a life and sentiment akin to their own. Poetry, with her personifications and her metaphors, is only a self-conscious survival of this state of mind, which we might even say has found an eleventh-hour justification in the scientific monism which discerns everywhere the manifestations of one identical principle of energy.

The higher animals not only obey that residuum of ancestral experience known as instinct; they have their physical energies curbed by *scruples*. 'Hawks do not pike out hawks' een,' says the homely adage; and any exceptions that may be alleged against the general rule serve only to confirm it. This scruple, in regard to shedding the blood or devouring the flesh of the species, may not be primitive; but in the case of every species, whose young need to be suckled or protected, it is a vital condition of its preservation. Where no such scruple existed, the species has quickly and inevitably disappeared; natural selection is powerless against suicide. With primitive or savage humanity, the scruple of blood would seem less general than among certain animals. *Homo homini lupus*, said Hobbes. On the other hand it is singularly intense in certain groups united by ties of consanguinity; that is to say, in clans whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common mother—descent from the female being the only form of filiation which can be absolutely established.

Thus the scruple—this barrier opposed to the destructive appetites—is an heritage transmitted to man from animals. Scruples, or at least certain scruples, are as natural to him as the religious sentiment itself. In fact, scruples and animism combined *are* the starting-point of

religion. For if animism is the mother of mythology, scruples lie at the root of religious laws and piety.

Here a third element, peculiar to the *homo sapiens*, comes in. Many of the higher animals live in a gregarious state, implying the scruple of the blood of the species; but they do not form communities. Man, however, is not only a social animal: he is also, in the Aristotelian phrase, a political animal—ζῷον πολιτικόν. Possibly, bees and ants fall into the same category; but among mammals, with the single exception of man, there is nothing similar. This social instinct, a development of the gregarious instinct, impels man to seek the company, the friendship, and the protection of his kind. But he goes further, and, under the influence of the animistic illusion, enlarges indefinitely the circle of his relations, actual or imaginary. The savage finds certain animals and certain plants about him, and the very mystery of their existence leads him to give them place in the group formed by the members of the clan. Soon he infers that animal and plant must spring from a common origin with himself, and he proceeds to apply the same scruple to them as to his own people. This respect for plant and animal life is the germ of dendrolatry and zoolatry. In 1900 I called it an hypertrophy of the social instinct, and I do not believe that anyone has since proposed a more acceptable explanation.

The irrational scruple, leading up to a blank, unreasoning interdiction, the sanction of which is death, is found in all human communities and at all periods. These interdictions, in their most primitive and explicit form, have been carefully studied in Polynesia, where they bear the name of *Taboo*. Sociologists have acquiesced in this barbarous but convenient term, and I see no