



Middle Eastern Mythology

Samuel Henry Hooke

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The role of mythology in ritual and its place in the origins of customs, cults, and hero worship are the fascinating subjects of this comparative survey. Based on firsthand sources, it recounts legends of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, and Canaanites, in addition to discussing the mythological elements of Jewish apocalyptic literature and the New Testament.

S. H. Hooke, a distinguished scholar who taught at the University of London and served as Speaker's Lecturer at Oxford University, presents a well-documented commentary. Accessible and informative, his text highlights the similarities between a variety of Middle Eastern legends and offers revealing citations from documents, tablets, and inscriptions recovered by archaeological excavations. Familiar stories such as the events described in Genesis and those surrounding Noah's flood and Christ's nativity and resurrection — whatever their basis in fact — have parallels in other cultures. Professor Hooke provides a broad perspective on these and other tales, encompassing the roots of Greek, Roman, and even Celtic mythology.

Middle Eastern Mythology Details

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Author : Samuel Henry Hooke

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Middle Eastern Mythology, An academic research on Middle East (Mesopotamian) mythology ...

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Peter Crofts says

A concise, quick read. Somewhat out of date, particularly when it comes to Mesopotamia, it's still worth reading, particularly for the section on Hebrew mythology. As anyone who has taken a cursory look at the the mythologies of the surrounding cultures knows there's a lot in common between all of them. Which suggests underlying shared sources. Once you familiarize yourself with these basic myths the early books of the Old Testament open up and reveal themselves to be variations on some very old Bronze Age stories. I read the first few books of the Pentateuch recently and was struck by what seemed to be a continual conflict between pastoral and agricultural worldviews. It begins with Cain and Abel and crops up repeatedly through the narrative right up to the time of King David. Astounding to think that below the cultural, religious and ritualistic particulars at least some of the Old Testament has managed to preserve bronze age tales of anxiety and conflict for thousands of years.

Lukerik says

An excellent introduction to the subject. More than an introduction really, due to the detail. He covers Mesopotamia and Egypt as well as the more obscure Hittite and Ugaritic mythologies. He follows the texts closely, either quoting or summarising, and keeps his commentary to a minimum allowing you to draw your own conclusions about the common fertility myths of these similar religions. The flower of the book is his treatment of Hebrew mythology. This is the area of Hooke's expertise and a lot of what he has to say is gob-smacking. Much of this part is either quoted or closely adapted from his earlier book *In the Beginning*. He closes the book with a brief discussion of Christian myth. He is very careful what he says here because it would be very easy to draw the conclusion that Christianity was another local agrarian religion founded entirely on myth. Hooke of course cannot say this, not only because of his own beliefs but because, while this is not a religious book, due to his fame as a Protestant OT scholar, much of his readership will be Christian and he doesn't want to become a pariah.

Svetlana Silaeva says

The book that I had for 10 years. The book that I thought I would not like due to supposed scientific language and monotone narration... Hell I was so wrong! I have already read the detailed history of Ancient Middle East and discovered in that book little pieces of mesmerising connection between the mythology of the people and their minds - almost feeling very alive their imagination and way of thinking. And this book gives you a more detailed information on the essence of a myth in the history and the changes in the narration depending even on the geolocation. A very enjoyable book! Especially if you read it simultaneously with a scientific research on the evolution of our planet)

Kevin Milner says

An interesting study of myth as it relates to ritual in ancient Fertile Crescent societies.

Paul says

This concise, authoritative text gives an excellent overview of the myths of the ancient Middle East and their interconnections.

I bought this little Pelican paperback in January 1986, which reminds me that I got it while researching my novel Truth of the Python. Now, working on a new opus also set partly in the ancient Near East, I find myself dipping into it again. My copy is mostly disintegrated, but it's also heavily highlighted.

My own introduction to mythology had been by way of Carl Jung and then Joseph Campbell, both of whom I admire deeply. But brilliant and deep as those scholars were, I find myself leaning on the introduction to S. H. Hooke's little book when I'm looking to remind myself of what myths are. In the first paragraph Hooke says

The myth is a product of human imagination arising out of a definite situation and intended to do something. Hence the right question to ask about the myth is not, "Is it true?" but "What is it intended to do?"

Using this simple, pragmatic question, Hooke discerns five types of myth:

- the ritual myth
- the myth of origin
- the cult myth
- the prestige myth
- the eschatological myth

He gives a brief description of each, and notes how the diffusion and combination of myths can be partly traced by various methods. Then, having laid the groundwork of the subject and his method in 7 short pages, he launches into the main text, in which he summarizes and discusses Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hittite, and Hebrew mythology, and follows that with a look at the role of myth in Jewish apocalyptic and in Christianity. It's a huge field of survey, which the author makes seem both full and unhurried.

The longest chapter is that on Hebrew mythology, and indeed for us readers in the West the main point of interest in Middle Eastern mythology is no doubt the Bible. Hooke shows how the mythic parts of Genesis (Creation, Cain and Abel, the Flood, etc.) relate to similar tales in the other Middle Eastern cultures, and shows briefly and clearly how the Bible itself contains several mutually inconsistent myths of its own.

The chapter which seemed the most sketchy to me was that on Egyptian mythology--a vast field which Hooke treats in just 14 short pages. Nonetheless, the myths that he does treat are well chosen and simply described.

In all, this is an excellent survey of material that is hard to find all in one place, especially at this short length, and with this level of authority. In that respect it is almost like a briefing document. If you're

wondering, Why should I care about Middle Eastern mythology?, this is a good, quick way to find out.

Labeba Salameh says

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Jennifer says

I originally bought this as research, and, while it did not end up being what I was looking for, it did provide an interesting summary of some of the more prevalent myths of the ancient Middle East and their shared features. Nearly the entire second half of the book concerns the Hebrew myths, and I found it interesting to read about the transition from polytheism to morality-based Judaism. I enjoyed this, but it is certainly dated.
