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| The Cambridge Ritualists |
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| The Cambridge Ritualists, also known as the Cambridge Group of Classical Anthropologists, were a closely knit group of four classicists – Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), Francis M. Cornford (1874-1943), Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) and Arthur Bernard Cook (1868-1952) (Arlen 1). Harrison, a woman of considerable intellectual influence, was a central figure; except for Murray, a professor of Greek at Oxford, all other members were affiliated with Cambridge University. The group shared a scholarly interest in establishing the common root of myth and ritual and asserted the primacy of ritual practices over written myth in the study of religion, culture and art. Their works captured a new anti-Victorian dynamism, as seen in Harrison’s book *Themis* (1912). Reacting against Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory and the positivist milieu, the ritualists evolved as an intellectual movement between 1900 and 1915. They used anthropological, sociological and psychological theories to study ancient Greek culture and drama, while drawing on diverse scholars and philosophers such as Edward Taylor, Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, Carl Jung, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson and Robertson Smith. Influenced by James G. Frazer’s seminal work *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), the group in turn influenced Frazer, as they also laid the foundation for myth-ritual criticism that anticipated the rise of structuralism in the social sciences. While D. H. Lawrence was familiar with the ritualists’ publications on Greek drama, such as Harrison’s *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) and Murray’s *Euripides and his Age* (1913), the ritualists’ wide-spread influence can be found in the works of many other modernist poets and writers, including T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and James Joyce. |
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| Further reading:  (Ackerman)  (Ackerman, The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists)  (Arlen)  (Frazer)  (Frye)  (Harrison)  (Harrison, Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion)  (Murray)  (Kirk)  (Vickery) |