

Extracts from the Escclapius

Further, in that 'tis fitting that the prudent should know all before, it is not right ye should be ignorant of this.

The time will come when Egypt will appear to have in vain served the Divinity with pious mind and constant worship (*religio*); and all its holy cult will fall to nothingness and be in vain.

For that Divinity is now about to hasten back from Earth to Heaven, and Egypt shall be left; and Earth, which was the seat of pious cults (*religio*), shall be bereft and widowed of the presence of the Gods.

And foreigners shall fill this region and this land; and there shall be not only the neglect of pious cults (*religio*), but—what is still more painful,—as though enacted by the laws, a penalty shall be decreed against the practice of [our] pious cults and worship of the Gods—[entire] proscription of them.

3. Then shall this holiest land, seat of [our] shrines and temples, be choked with tombs and corpses.

O Egypt, Egypt, of thy pious cults (*religio*) tales only will remain, as far beyond belief for thy own sons [as for the rest of men]; words only will be left cut on thy stones, thy pious deeds recounting!

And Egypt will be made the home of Scyth or Indian, or someone like to them,—that is a foreign neighbour.

Ay, for the Godly company shall mount again to Heaven, and their forsaken worshippers shall all die out; and Egypt, thus bereft of God and man, shall be abandoned.

4. And now I speak to thee, O River, holiest [Stream]! I tell thee what will be. With bloody torrents shalt thou overflow thy banks. Not only shall thy streams divine be stained with blood; but they shall all flow over [with the same].

The tale of tombs shall far exceed the [number of the] quick; and the surviving remnant shall be Egyptians in their tongue alone, but in their actions foreigners.

1. Why dost thou weep, Asclepius? Nay, more than this, by far more wretched,—Egypt herself shall be impelled and stained with greater ills.

For she, the Holy [Land], and once deservedly the most beloved by God, by reason of her pious service of the Gods on earth,—she, the sole colony of holiness, and teacher of religion [on the earth], shall be the type of all that is most barbarous.

II. The Perfect Sermon, or The Asclepius, chapters 24-25

translated by G.R.S. Mead.

See The Corpus Hermeticum with introduction and notes by John Michael Greer at <http://hermetic.com/texts/hermetica/>

Saint Augustine knew this treatise attested in Europe as early as the Middle Ages in an important manuscript tradition (attributed at first to Apuleius) going as far back as the 12th century. Only fragments of the original Greek text are known, the rest of the documents existing mainly in Latin (based on an early translation)

See also Garth Fowden *The Egyptian Hermes : a historical approach to the late pagan mind* (Cambridge/New York : Cambridge University Press), 1986.