



Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt

Rosalie David

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The ancient Egyptians believed that the Nile - their life source - was a divine gift. Religion and magic permeated their civilization, and this book provides a unique insight into their religious beliefs and practices, from 5000 BC to the 4th century AD, when Egyptian Christianity replaced the earlier customs. Arranged chronologically, this book provides a fascinating introduction to the world of half-human/ half-animal gods and goddesses; death rituals, the afterlife and mummification; the cult of sacred animals, pyramids, magic and medicine. An appendix contains translations of Ancient Egyptian spells.

Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt Details

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Author : Rosalie David

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From Reader Review Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt for online ebook

theStorykeeper says

Surprisingly readable for a history book, but the title is a misnomer; this was a general Egyptian history, not about religion and magic specifically or very much at all.

Jain says

An encyclopedic volume of information and sources for reference.

Summer White says

Fantastic account of ancient Egypt's religion. Rosalie David tells the story of thousands of years of religion in a very readable way. It's a great book for the new to Egypt reader and the more experienced reader.

Waleed says

More an overview of Ancient Egyptian history from the pre-dynastic period to Roman times than a study of Egyptian religion and magic. It's a fairly useful primer if, like me, one's knowledge of Ancient Egypt is based on the odd visit to the British Museum. But it reads like it's been compiled from various lecture notes, and is severely limited by a lack of schematics of temples and tombs.

Chris says

What is it about ancient Egypt? Would I like to go and live back in that time? No, I like, really like, indoor plumbing. There is something about ancient Egypt that interests many people. Maybe it's because it gave the world artwork like the tomb paintings.

This book is an overview in layman's terms of Egypt's religion. It is not a collection of myths, but it is an examination of religion and how it affected Egyptians.

The book is highly informative, though having some general knowledge about Egypt helps. At times, however, the writing is a little dry.

Sam says

Review of Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt by Rosalie David. Published by Penguin in 2002

4/5

This book, while different from what I had been expecting, was a well written and insightful read. It focuses on the development of the Ancient Egyptian belief system chronologically, focusing on the historical events that affected who and how Egyptians worshipped. While I was expecting an in-depth look at the religious practices themselves, it was fascinating to watch as local deities became national gods according to what was occurring politically. While the prose is engaging and David obviously knows what she is talking about, I'm not sure if someone who didn't have a basic understanding of Ancient Egyptian history already would be able to fully enjoy this book.

The book offers a number of interesting theories such that the concept of the Pharaoh being a god on Earth was developed in order to balance the power of the priests, after some of the gods became universal. Many of the changes in Egyptian beliefs reflected the struggle between the priests and the Egyptians although she disagrees that Akhenaten's attempts to unite the religion under one god was a political move to undercut the power of the priests. Instead, she argues that Akhenaten truly believed in Aten and any political fall out was only a secondary consideration. I have always found Akhenaten to be a fascinating pharaoh and that was the one of the most interesting part of the book for me.

The second most important part was the analysis on the Cult around Osiris. David argues that Osiris became popular because he offered salvation to every day Egyptians. This contrasted sharply with the old beliefs that said only the royal family would find salvation in the afterlife. This seems strangely similar to the concept of Jesus Christ offering salvation to everyone, instead of a special people. The Osiris cult was created during a difficult period of Egyptian history and seemed to have been an attempt to placate the suffering people.

Overall, it was a fascinating read that gave a quick, but concise look at how the Egyptian religion changed based on historical pressure.

Caroline says

Ancient Egypt is one of those civilisations where we seem to know far more about Egyptian death than Egyptian life, far more about the attitudes and arrangements relating to funerals, gods and the afterlife, than we do about their daily lives, their domestic arrangements, social interactions and hierarchy. This is because, obviously, most of what has survived from Ancient Egypt are burials, tombs and temples - those relics of civilisation that were built for eternity, rather than the more earthly and temporal homes and workplaces of the population.

As a result, our mental images of Ancient Egypt have been shaped to place religion and death in a central position that may not entirely have reflected reality - any more than our own day-to-day lives are currently defined by our deaths or our thoughts on the afterlife. In fact, religion and spirituality probably plays more of

a role in daily life today than it did in antiquity - modern faith reflects a universalism and a personal relationship with the divine than did not exist in antiquity. The gods were ever-present, it's true, and controlled all life on earth, but few required any kind of moral code or rules for living, at least from the mass of the population.

Rosalie David takes a chronological approach in this book, working from the very earliest days of Egypt as an identifiable unified country, all the way up to the end of pharaonic rule with the death of Cleopatra VII - an immense sweep of time. She explores not just the current knowledge of the practice religion and magic in Ancient Egypt, but how and why archaeologists and scholars have come to the conclusions we have. Personally I found the discussions about the archaeological digs as interesting as the conclusions drawn from them, much of which, as is inevitable, is speculation. You simply cannot learn about a civilisation in entirety from its burials, grave goods and religious precincts - anymore than a survey mosques and Catholic churches could adequately tell the story of modern Europe, for example.

The downside of this chronological approach is that the author cannot tell the story of religion in Ancient Egypt without also telling the history of Ancient Egypt - and to narrate the sweep of thousands of years of history, and its impact and influence on religion, in less than 500 pages, means it's a very cursory and shallow exploration of both. I was quite frequently lost, and the pace at which the text proceeded meant that it felt patchy and jumpy, immediately proceeding from a contextual historical explanation to some new religious or magical fact with no real bridge between.

So whilst this book was interesting in places, overall I found it a letdown. Perhaps the scope was just too large, too ambitious for such a slim book; or perhaps such a complex subject, with so much conjecture, extrapolation and scholarly interpretation, just cannot adequately be condensed into 500 pages and still remain coherent and enjoyable to the average reader.

Siria says

I brought this along with me for a little light reading on the plane to Scotland, and it really didn't disappoint. It's only 380 pages long in paperback (not including the appendices), and covers something like 5,000 years of Egyptian history, so it's obvious that David was never really going to go into depth with what she was covering. What she does touch on, though, she covers with clarity and insight.

The organisation of the book into chronological sections was also very helpful, allowing you to clearly see the separate stages in the evolution of Egyptian religious views and practices over the course of their history, rather than giving you a potted synthesis as is the case in so many books. David is also careful to provide some contextual analysis for the development of each stage of Egyptian religion - I thought her sections on the democratisation of Egyptian religion/society through the Osiris cult was particularly interesting and well thought out. The appendices were very good, providing the full text of some Egyptian spells and prayers, as well as some of the hymns to the Aten.

It's not perhaps a book to do more than dip into or use as a basic reference if you already have more than a basic knowledge of Egyptian history, but still an excellent primer and highly recommended.
