

Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation

Written by Henri Frankfort in 1948, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*¹ succinctly guides the student through the complex religious perspectives of ancient Egypt. Frankfort begins with the claim that, “In the whole of the ancient world there is only one religion with similar characteristics [to the Torah, the Gospels, and Islam]: the monotheistic cult of the sun introduced by the heretic Pharaoh Akhenaten.” Frankfort explains Akhenaten’s heresy as a result of his denial of recognition to all but one god, and his attempts to convert those who thought otherwise.

Frankfort walks the student through a discussion of sacred animals and their symbolical use, and he denies the Egyptian understanding of them as transitional forms of the gods. Instead, he suspects “that the Egyptians did not intend their hybrid designs as renderings of an imagined reality at all and that we should not take the animal-headed gods at their face value.” Frankfort explains the Egyptians’ worldview as “a rhythmic movement contained within an unchanging whole” and animals were viewed as far less changeable than the weather or mankind.

Frankfort moves through the various creation myths espoused by upper and lower Egypt, with Ptah/Enki glorified in Memphis, the power of the sun worshipped at Heliopolis, and Amon the “Hidden One” honored in Thebes. Only one Egyptian dogma recognized divinity beyond worldly phenomena, according to Frankfort, and that was the Memphite Theology, wherein it is stated that, “Every divine word came into being through that which was thought by the heart and commanded by the tongue.”

Frankfort asserts that the Pharaoh derived power and the right to rule from his bloodline connection to the god Osiris, and equates the Pharaoh’s power over the kingdom with the later French King Louis the XIV who famously stated, “I am the state.” Frankfort carries the student

through the Egyptian way of life, including their conception of success, sin, tradition, and their preoccupation with death and the afterlife. He closes the book with a discussion of the importance of myth in folk tales and literature and the various forms they can take.

1. Henri Frankfort. *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*. Mineola, N.Y, Dover Publications, 2000.

<https://www.amazon.com/Ancient-Egyptian-Religion-Henri-Frankfort/dp/0486411389>.