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## Ancient Egyptian Religion an Interpretation (Cloister Library)

*Henri Frankfort*

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**Henri Frankfort : Ancient Egyptian Religion an Interpretation (Cloister Library)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ancient Egyptian Religion an Interpretation (Cloister Library):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. oldavaiBy oldavaiAnother classic that can be read with profit.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerThis book has lots of detailed history stuff that I never knew about!3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Outdated in important ways, but still insightful and worthwhileBy DAJIt's difficult to rate this book because its historical importance and its usefulness today are different things. Interpretations of Egyptian religion in the early 20th century were dominated by a rationalistic school of thought that tended to dismiss myth as nonsense or to explain contradictory beliefs as the product of political conflicts. Bringing in insights from anthropology, Frankfort changed that. He laid out his general approach in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* in 1946 and then explored it in depth in two books from 1948: this one and *Kingship and the Gods*. Because he interpreted gods and myths primarily as metaphors, he explained how seemingly contradictory ideas could so easily coexist. That insight laid the groundwork for a huge amount of the study of Egyptian religion that has taken place since. The phrase Frankfort coined to sum up this coexistence, "multiplicity of approaches", is now practically an Egyptological slogan.Frankfort wasn't right about everything. Relying on the work of anthropologists, he assumed that one could look at modern "savage" peoples of East Africa to gain insight into ancient Egyptian thought, but as Ancient Egypt in Africa shows, it's not nearly that simple. He thought kings were

absolutely and at all times considered gods, a belief that's now been challenged many times. And he posited a dramatically different mentality, "mythopoeic" or symbolic thought, to explain the way peoples before the development of Greek rationalism interpreted the world. Herman te Velde, giving a generally positive evaluation of Frankfort's legacy in *On Symbolic Representation of Religion*, said that the mythopoeic mentality "must now be dismissed as superfluous fiction." Modern Western culture is still shaped by myths and symbols, and the Egyptians were probably more pragmatic than their religious symbolism makes them seem. Fortunately, in this book Frankfort doesn't dwell on those subjects too much. His easily readable discussions of the thought processes behind Egyptian religion still make a decent introduction to the topic. The first chapter insightfully describes the gods; anyone who's read *Conceptions of Gods in Egypt*, the fundamental book on Egyptian theology, will notice how much it owes to Frankfort. The second is about the Egyptian conception of the king and the state, and the third discusses the concept of Maat and its relationship to morality. Afterlife beliefs and funerary customs come next, and the last chapter discusses how religion shaped literature and art. Many of the details are outdated, and I'd prefer that somebody new to the subject would read a more recent book like Stephen Quirke's *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, but not many of the recent books speak in this much depth about how profoundly religion shaped Egyptian culture.

Fascinating book explores the underlying concept of the changeless as the basis of Egyptian religion, and how it unifies what scholars had believed to be an unrelated jungle of weird myths, doctrines, and practices generated by local cults. Relation of the idea of the changeless to moral and political philosophy, Egyptian government and society, literature and art. ". . . one of the finest elucidations of these materials that we have anywhere." *American Historical Review*. Chronological Table. Index. Preface. 32 halftones.