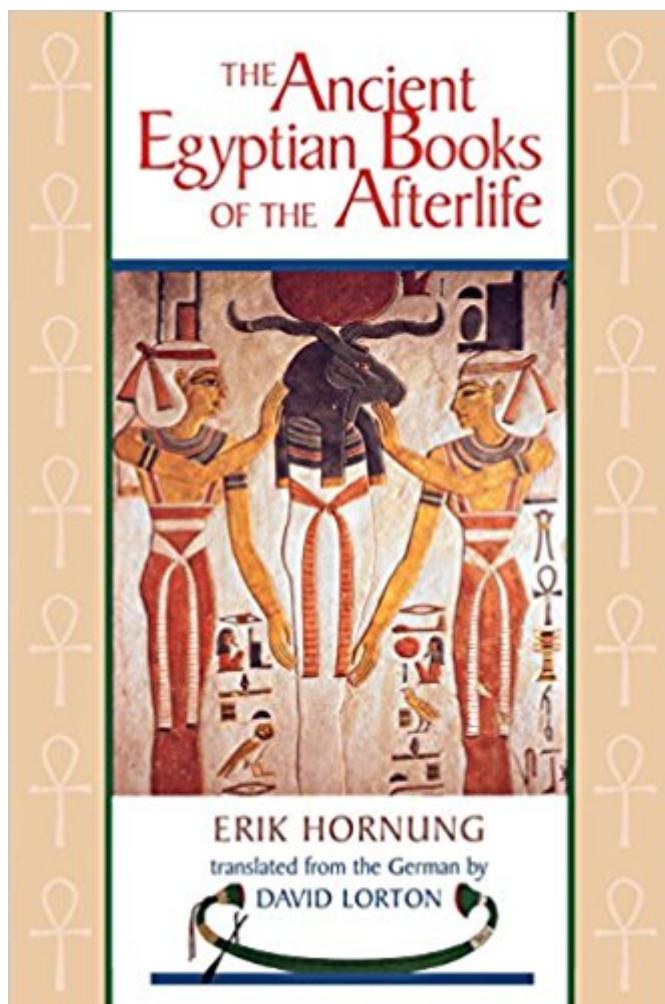


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The Ancient Egyptian Books Of The Afterlife



Synopsis

Ancient Egyptians held a rich and complex vision of the afterlife and codified their beliefs in books that were to be discovered more than two millennia later in royal tombs. Erik Hornung, the world's leading authority on these religious texts, surveys what is known about them today. The contents of the texts range from the collection of spells in the Book of the Dead, which was intended to offer practical assistance on the journey to the afterlife, to the detailed accounts of the hereafter provided in the Books of the Netherworld. Hornung looks closely at these latter works, while summarizing the contents of the Book of the Dead and other widely studied examples of the genre. For each composition, he discusses the history of its ancient transmission and its decipherment in modern times, supplying bibliographic information for any text editions. He also seeks to determine whether this literature as a whole presents a monolithic conception of the afterlife. The volume features many drawings from the books themselves—drawings that illustrate the nocturnal course of the sun god through the realm of the dead. Originally published in German and now available in a fluid English translation, this volume offers an accessible and enlightening introduction to a central element of ancient Egyptian religion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A concise and detailed summary. . . This is a recommended book for all searching for details on important Egyptian texts." •Francesca Jourdan, quik.com "Erik Hornung's new book. . . goes a long way toward beginning to correct and to inform our understanding of religion in Ancient Egypt." •Tom Collins, Religious Studies in Secondary Schools, April, 2000. "There has long been a

need for a thorough English language survey of this material, a need that is well met by the present volume. . . . even specialists in Egyptian funerary literature will find much of interest The ancient Egyptian literature of the afterlife is a complex and involved subject and the volume under review provides a clear and concise overview of the individual texts. It will be useful for anyone interested in these ancient Egyptia books for the dead."•Terry G. Wilfong, University of Michigan, Bryn Mawr Classical Review."Hornung's book is a good general survey, with a voluminous bibliography that Egyptologists will find useful."•James Allan Evans, University of British Columbia. The Classical Outlook. Fall, 2000, Vol. 78, No. 1"It is a fortunate circumstance that Eric Hornung. . . has rendered the invaluable service of producing a complete guide and manual to the texts. . . It now appears in an admirable English translation by David Lorton."•Leo Depuydt, Brown University. Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, 2000"Horning's study of ancient Egyptian afterlife books, translated into English for the first time by D. Lorton, fills a major gap in the available literature in English and will prove indispensable to students of Egyptian funerary religion. . . His presentation is clear and thorough."•Denise M. Doxey, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Religious Studies Review, Vol. 25, No. 4, October 2000

Text: English (translation) Original Language: German --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you're like me, you didn't know there were more than one Egyptian Book of the Afterlife. I was familiar with the famous Book of the Dead but ignorant of the numerous other Egyptian funeral texts described in this book. Author Erik Hornung begins with the oldest of the Egyptian "books"--which are not actually books at all, but sets of spells engraved on the walls of tombs. Among these oldest are the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, all of which are essentially spells meant to be read by the deceased in the afterlife. As time went on, the sets of spells became more elaborate and carefully attentive to the possible incidents that could occur beyond the grave, and Hornung charts the development of these different "books" carefully. As an ardent student of Dante, I was perhaps most interested in the Amduat, which is an hour-by-hour description of the sun's journey through the Netherworld to be reborn at dawn the next day. The Amduat catalogs every obstacle and opponent the dead king--identified with the sun-god--may meet in the afterlife and how he may overcome them. The pharaoh must rely on friendly gods and certain spells in his journey. The book is lavishly illustrated--almost half of it is made up of illustrations of the various books. In fact, this is where my only complaint comes up--the way in which the illustrations are arranged makes for difficult reading.

Rather than placed over the text concerning the individual scenes Hornung describes, each book is printed whole in a section following Hornung's description. This arrangement results in a lot of flipping, turning, and diligent searching when what he describes is not readily apparent. But this issue aside, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* is a fascinating and detailed catalog of the funerary texts so sacred to the Egyptians. Recommended.

Great book

Hornung takes a fascinating topic and renders it fairly dry and academic, but that's probably his purpose here. Unfortunately, everything is touched on only sketchily, so that you only get tantalizing hints without any real depth. I will likely have to get a second resource now since this was too general for my purposes. It was, however, wonderfully illustrated, and is probably a great 'quick guide' if you need some information fast.

Hornung is a great Egyptologist. But I think his other books are better.

OK book. Use it in research. Some of his theories are a bit lacking in evidence - more narrative than fact.

Expected the piece to be more capturing to readers. It is kind of bland and wasn't as insightful to the books of Egyptian Afterlife as I expected.

Hornung presents us with a fascinating wealth of Egyptian lore. The texts present in the book are fully translated into layman's English, and almost all portions are followed with the copies of the accompanying reliefs and frescoes. This is a magnificent work that allows the reader, whatever his background, to gain some insight into the oft-misunderstood religion of the Ancient Egypt.

This book is rather odd in its focus. It tries to be an introduction to all the funerary texts, but it focuses on the New Kingdom "underworld books," Hornung's specialty, which illustrate the nighttime journey of the sun god through the surreal underworld. As a result, the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and Book of the Dead—“the largest and most important collections of funerary texts”—receive pretty cursory treatment. Hornung's reasoning is that the three major collections have received more attention from other authors than the netherworld books, but I'm not sure that's

true for the Coffin Texts. Shorter texts like the Litany of Re or the Books of Traversing Eternity are also treated briefly, though that's more understandable given how small they are. The only books whose contents are treated in real depth are the Amduat, Book of Gates, Book of Caverns, and Book of the Earth. Hornung doesn't analyze the meaning of the texts very much, instead just stating what they say. That can bore readers, as it apparently did for many of the people who have reviewed the book here. But, as Katherine Griffis-Greenberg's review points out, it also means he avoids speculative interpretations. The greatest advantages of this book are that it lists all the major Egyptian funerary texts and gives an idea of what they contain, and it includes a bibliography for anyone who wants to study a particular text in more detail. Of course, many studies of funerary texts have come out since Hornung's book was written, so I'd like to mention three of the most important here. "A Journey Through the Afterlife" is an in-depth examination of the Book of the Dead. "Traversing Eternity" by Mark Smith is a very large collection of short Ptolemaic and Roman funerary texts, including the Book of Breathings and Book of Traversing Eternity. "The Enigmatic Netherworld Books" by John Coleman Darnell is a very in-depth and rather speculative interpretation of the most cryptic of all New Kingdom funerary texts.

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