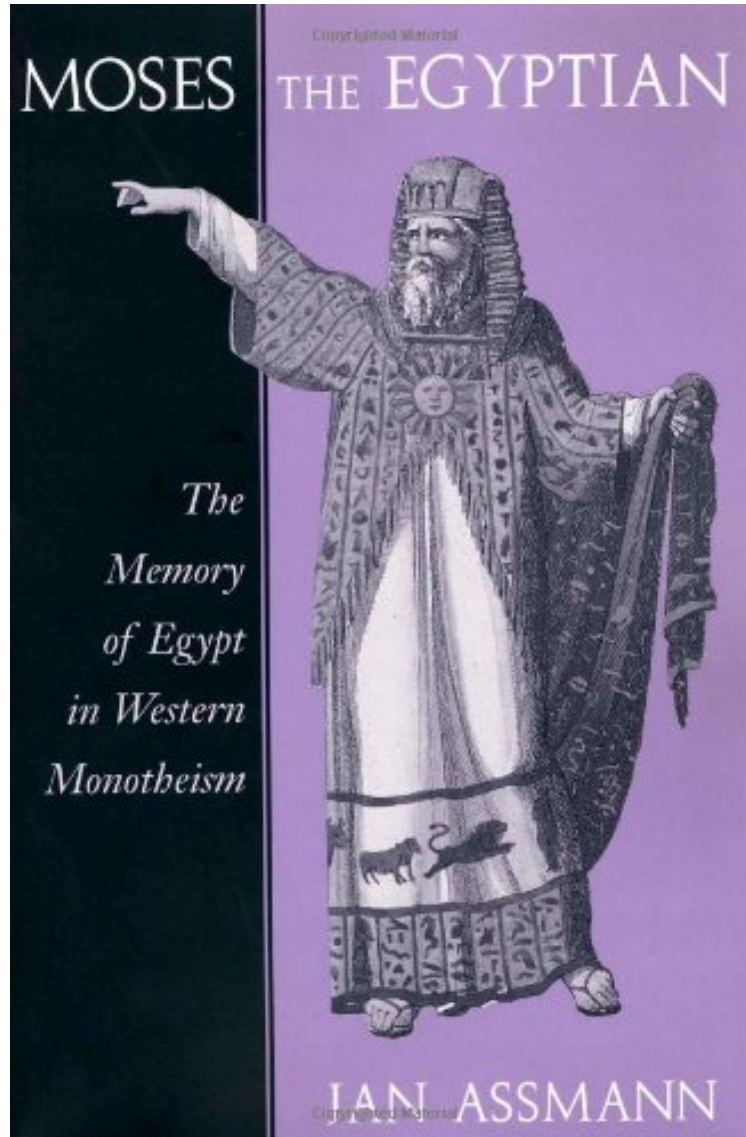


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Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism

Jan Assmann

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Jan Assmann : Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The foundation story of all Western Religions, in Spellbinding prose! By Minnesotan This is the most fascinating book I've found in years! Assmann brings profound insight into both the historical aspect of this story, but a shrew understanding of how our collective memory of this period has shifted

and changed over time - and geography. How historians back to Manetho have given different meanings to the story is fascinating. But never disheartening, thanks to Assmann. I'm going to buy several copies - it's going to be my Christmas gift of the year. Thank you, Professor. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By CustomerVerifies previous information. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent By R. Elmaghrabi Great deal and service

Standing at the very foundation of monotheism, and so of Western culture, Moses is a figure not of history, but of memory. As such, he is the quintessential subject for the innovative historiography Jan Assmann both defines and practices in this work, the study of historical memory--a study, in this case, of the ways in which factual and fictional events and characters are stored in religious beliefs and transformed in their philosophical justification, literary reinterpretation, philological restitution (or falsification), and psychoanalytic demystification. To account for the complexities of the foundational event through which monotheism was established, Moses the Egyptian goes back to the short-lived monotheistic revolution of the Egyptian king Akhenaten (1360-1340 B.C.E.). Assmann traces the monotheism of Moses to this source, then shows how his followers denied the Egyptians any part in the origin of their beliefs and condemned them as polytheistic idolaters. Thus began the cycle in which every "counter-religion," by establishing itself as truth, denounced all others as false. Assmann reconstructs this cycle as a pattern of historical abuse, and tracks its permutations from ancient sources, including the Bible, through Renaissance debates over the basis of religion to Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. One of the great Egyptologists of our time, and an exceptional scholar of history and literature, Assmann is uniquely equipped for this undertaking--an exemplary case study of the vicissitudes of historical memory that is also a compelling lesson in the fluidity of cultural identity and beliefs.

A brilliant study... World-renowned as a specialist on Egyptian texts, beliefs, and rituals, Assmann combines great technical virtuosity in his chosen field with wide--very wide--theoretical and comparative interests... Elegantly argued, impressively documented, and written in eloquent English, *Moses the Egyptian* offers challenging new findings on the early history of monotheism, and a new reading of the place of Egypt in modern Western culture--and it puts both into the larger context of a theory of cultural memory. (Anthony Grafton *New Republic*) For early writers... Moses invented a religious tradition that was the deliberate antithesis of that of Egypt. Later, in the period treated here... they credited Moses with having instructed the Hebrews in a version of Egyptian religion... This is certainly a fascinating work... This account of the theme of Moses the Egyptian should appeal to students of the time period mostly treated here. Moreover... the volume will serve to introduce any number of students of the Near East to several thinkers who were prominent in their own time but not widely known today. (David Lorton *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*) Jan Assmann revisits the ground covered by Freud [in *Moses and Monotheism*], but with important differences. Assmann is no amateur. He is an eminent German Egyptologist, and no one writes with more authority about relations between ancient Egypt and ancient Israel. Equally important, Assmann aspires to something at once more tenable and more valuable than Freud. Freud tried to describe Moses as he really was... Assmann instead chose to write an account of how Moses has been remembered in different times and places... Assmann gives a dazzling account of several centuries of [the Moses-as-Egyptian] tradition... Moses the Egyptian, for all its brilliant erudition, is not simply dispassionate history. It is equally a homily. It is this that makes [it]--so rare for an academic monograph--a profoundly moving book... Assmann argues passionately that we today have much to learn from the ancient Egyptians whom he has spent his life studying... Most moving of all, Assmann is a consummate scholar with courage enough to moralize... Assmann's reconstruction of an ecumenical tradition of interpreting the Exodus is an important contribution to the history of religion. At the same time, his plea that modern theologians adopt similar views has great moral force. Assmann has done nothing less than suggest that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam be set upon different, more inclusive foundations. By demonstrating that these alternate foundations have long been part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Assmann makes such sweeping reform almost plausible. Plausible or not, Assmann has written a book that is scholarly and passionate, a book that inspires as well as informs. (Noah J. Efron *Boston Book*) [Moses the Egyptian's] scholarly depth lends legitimacy to its revisionist claim. [It is not] designed to ignite controversy in the culture wars--something that cannot be said for some other efforts in the field. This deep seriousness alone is sufficient to recommend Assmann's study. Assmann tells several interlocking stories. His primary narrative line is the memory of Egypt in the European scholarly imagination. Here he attempts--with considerable success--to move beyond a conventional history of scholarship... Assmann moves beyond cultural history to something more subtle: the complex transmission of ideas which are sometimes recorded, sometimes recessive, sometimes almost forgotten. What is striking is not only Assmann's account of the written record of the Moses and Egypt story but his recovery of the reasons for its historical retention... Assmann has produced a learned study whose theses will themselves endure in the scholarly memory. (John Peter Kenney *American Historical*) [Moses the Egyptian] opens up a question that is crucial to adherents of all three religions that claim their origin in biblical Judaism. That question has to do with the religious distinction between truth and falsehood. It seems natural to a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim to consider his or her own religion true and other

religions false. This tendency is especially strong in Christianity. But according to Egyptologist Jan Assman, people who practised the ancient religions we call pagan did not see the world in this way. People of different nations might worship different sets of goddesses and gods, but there were alternative expressions of the same underlying reality. (Bob Chodos Catholic News Times) This very ambitious book keeps its promise... Assmann tells us that he wrote the book as if under a spell. Its readers, too, can feel spellbound... Rather than seeking to cover the whole historical span, Assmann has wisely chosen to focus on some of the major articulations of the Moses/Egypt discourse throughout intellectual and religious history. One hopes that this strategy, which leaves other books to be written, has reopened an inexhaustible well of inquiry. (Guy G. Stroumsa Journal of Religion) One will find in this fascinating book an investigation of 'the history of Europe's remembering Egypt.' Assmann's term for this is 'mnemo-history,' a way of studying the past that is concerned 'not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered.' Assmann serves as a penetrating critic who shows that before the Enlightenment the books on Egypt spoke the language of the Enlightenment. What the scholars and philosophers presented when they described ancient Egyptian religion looked very much like Spinozism, Deism, pantheism, or 'natural religion,' the kinds of religious sensibilities they favored. This is a feature that is no less apparent today than it was two hundred years ago. (Robert Louis Wilken First Things) In this remarkable book, Assmann takes the very essence of Western religion--the principle of monotheism--as his topic, tracing its effects by looking at its counter-image in the Western imagination--the memory of Egypt... Based on his intimate and profound knowledge of ancient Egyptian religion, Assmann is able to construct a new image of the contrast between Egypt and monotheism. (Ronald Hendel Biblical Archaeology) This is a gripping and richly documented response to Y. H. Yerushalmi's tracing of Freud's Moses to Schiller, John Spencer, Strabo, Celsus, Apion and Manetho, and a development of Assmann's earlier complementary attempt to link Akhenaten's religious revolution with the story of the reception of the memory of Moses via a similar chain of classical, mediaeval, renaissance and enlightenment authors by Schiller and Freud. (G. Glazov Society for Old Testament Study) Assmann's story is as good an explanation of this history as anyone has come up with, and it must be based on a firmer foundation than anyone else's could be. It is tantalizing and inviting. No one can fault him on his scholarship or erudition. He is one of the most talented historians of the Ancient world. (Saul Friedlander) Assmann's fascinating book is a meditation on the very notion of true vs. false religion and its historical effects... There is a bit of something for nearly anyone in church history in this book, and a lot of methodology for everyone. The book is highly recommended, and... quite a good read. (Daniel Boyarin Church History) Moses the Egyptian is a book of great learning, historical savvy and keen insight as well as a cornucopia of fascinating information. (Robert L. Wilken Los Angeles Times) About the Author Jan Assmann is Professor of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg.