

*Through a Glass Darkly:
Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*

Kasia Szpakowska, ed. Wales, UK: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006.

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Reviewed by Jennifer Davis, McGill University

For both the serious scholar and others interested in learning more of phenomena associated with ancient Egyptian life the essays in this volume provide careful exegesis of narrative literature covering a time span from the Old Kingdom (c. 2250 BCE) through to the Ptolemaic period (c. 330 BCE). John Baines (Oxford) notes that current scholarship proceeds with the recognition that by acknowledging magic (*heka*) as a basic cosmic force, rituals associated with the gods might be better understood. Magic, dreams, and prophecy form the basis of religious and socio-political relationships between people, deities, kings, the dead and the afterlife. He suggests that artifacts or tomb depictions such as amulets, beads and pouches might be considered as symbols of identity intended to effect transition to the afterworld. The influential role of *heka* in Egyptian society is reiterated by Alan B. Lloyd (Wales, Swansea) who notes that words and actions have the potential of altering normal experience. Certainly, understanding *heka* in this way encourages the reader to apprehend the diverse subjects covered in the essays as attempts to elucidate an ancient culture held together by this unifying force.

Alan B. Lloyd (Wales, Swansea), discusses the evolution of the role of magic, dreams and prophecy in Egyptian narrative literature such as the *Westcar Papyrus*, *Prophecy of Neferti*, *Amasis and the Skipper*, *Book of the Heavenly Cow*, *Eloquent Peasant*, *Shipwrecked Sailor*, *Doomed Prince*, *Two Brothers*, the *Setna tales*, and the twentieth dynasty manuscript of the *Conflict of Horu[s]*. He concludes that this literature reflects the religious, political, social and personal concerns of the people which produced it. Revealing the individual lives of ancient people is made easier when texts are discovered detailing the complexity of domestic and bureaucratic issues. John Ray (Cambridge) composes an historical picture of social, economic and familial tensions from the letters and dream episodes in c. 168–152 BCE of four individuals living in Greco-Egyptian Memphis. Joachim Friedrich Quack (Heidelberg) searches as yet unpublished papyri for references to the divination of life experiences. He discusses the use of omens to predict or influence the future and suspects that determination of the future might have included the use of die. Details of political campaigns inscribed on stelae suggest to Anthony Spalinger (Auckland) that the dreams of Amenhotep II (1428–1397 BCE) and Merenptah (1213–1202 BCE) might have been precipitated by fear of the unknown: the god's Amun and Ptah responding to their respective sons with divine assurance.

Textual conventions exemplified in *The Tale of Sinuhe* suggest to Richard B. Parkinson (British Museum) that the role of simile in dream interpretation emphasizes a contrast between reality and non-reality forcing subjective reflection on the meaning of existence. A similar sense of dislocation is found in the essay by Leonard H. Lesko (Brown) who concentrates on a succinct eschatological reference in a small number of texts. Amongst an ancient people who appear to be confident in their views of the afterlife, the uncertainty faced at a time of dynastic/political change and an apprehension about the quality of eternity may have been a contributing factor in these texts. Further analysis of this literature acknowledges the use of paronomasia, which connects a dream with its interpretation, suggesting to Scott Noegel (Washington) a close parallel with Mesopotamian oneirocritic literary style. He argues that in 'both cultures the concept of punning was grounded in a belief in the performative power of the spoken and written word and symbolic dreams were understood to be manifestations of a higher order'. Noegel explores this argument from both the Assyriological and Egyptian perspective and concludes that it is most likely that the literature displays a cultural exchange of methodology and style. Religious iconography of ancient Egypt has influenced other cultures, e.g. properties associated with the snake are attested both in symbolic form and ritual in religious and medical literature of ancient Egypt, tomb inscriptions and artifacts. Robert K. Ritner recounts the ancient history of this symbol and illustrates its use both in the Mosaic corpus and in modern medical tradition.

Egyptian culture, the setting for second-century B.C.E.–fifth-century C.E. Greek fictional and magical literature has enabled Daniel Ogden (Exeter) to reconstruct a general story type which seemed popular in Egypt during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It is interesting to note that the outline to which each story seems to conform suggests not only a continuation of traditional storytelling but also an evolving understanding of the social/magical/theological and political implications of each tale.

The importance of textual sources is underscored when considering the purpose of naturally formed and crafted ancient Egyptian artifacts and careful consideration is given to a number of these in the essays. Maria Centrone (Swansea) considers corn mummies in association with the annual agrarian Khoiak festival suggesting that, as a symbol of the renewal of life, it is possible to distinguish between the corn mummies and the small packages of grain used in the festival. She agrees that both celebrate the principle of death and renewal and that supplications for a successful corn harvest are intertwined with the ritual execution of Osiris depicted in the parcels of grain, subsequent burial followed by a successful rebirth, thereby maintaining the cosmic order of the yearly cycle. A thorough discussion of the wide range of meaning given to the great variety of knots and binding used in the ritual practices

of medicine, mythology and magic as they relate to daily life is well illustrated by Willeke Wendrich (California). He distinguishes between negative and positive, restrictive and protective, concluding that whereas the result of bindings may vary according to intent, generally knots are used for positive purposes. A phenomenon marking the limestone Theban landscape at the necropolis at Deir el Medina is that of flint nodules which appear to emerge from the hillside. The response from the local people has been to select, collect, paint and place nodules in chapels to be revered as symbols of creation from the primeval mound. Graves-Brown shows that particular preference was given to those which were thought to symbolize the religious beliefs associated with the sun god, Rē, the passage of the sun, birth and renewal, thereby maintaining a significant link with the natural order.

Though the brevity of this review does not do justice to the scholarship in this volume, this is a book which will be of interest not only to Egyptologists but also to scholars of religion and culture. The essays are contextualized and critical, revealing insights into the complex role of dreams, magic and prophecy in ancient Egyptian life.

Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education

Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

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Reviewed by Aun Hasan Ali, McGill University

The editors of this book have assembled a group of diverse scholars to bring their expertise to bear on Islamic education in the modern world. Its authors share the conviction that Islamic education is characterized by multiformity on many levels, and have agreed not to allow recent events to obfuscate core issues inscribed in its contestation. The book's twelve chapters are individually summarized below.

Robert W. Hefner's introduction, "The Culture, Politics, and Future of Muslim Education," gives an overview of the historical development of *madrasas*. He argues that pre-modern *madrasas* served as sites for the standardization of religious knowledge and authority; and, just as intellectual, social, and political forces transformed medieval Islamic education, so too is modern Islamic education in the throes of a transformation, albeit under a uniquely modern set of forces. Western colonialism and mass education programs linked to post-colonial nation-building projects are among the forces that Hefner sees as decisive in this regard.