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The Book Of The Dead Or Going Forth By Day: Ideas Of The Ancient Egyptians Concerning The Hereafter As Expressed In Their Own Terms (Studies In Ancient Oriental Civilization)



Synopsis

Subject classification:- Archaeology

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation)

This is NOT one of the beautifully illustrated editions of "The Egyptian Book of the Dead," such as the computer-assisted facsimile of the Papyrus of Ani (edited by James Wasserman, et al.), or some other recent editions based on the (very good) Raymond O. Faulkner translation. Nor should it be confused with Thomas George Allen's own "The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago" (Oriental Institute Publications vol. 82), with its set of black-and-white documentary plates. In fact, it has no illustrations at all. It might be argued that it should -- the images were supposed to join with the texts to provide help for the recently-deceased -- but the book is text-centered. It also certainly should never be confused with the oft-reprinted works of E.A.W. Budge, whose late-nineteenth-century and early twentieth century editions and translations continue to be reprinted. (For the curious, I have reviewed the Wasserman edition, the Dover Books edition of Budge's popular edition of the Ani manuscript,* and Allen's "...Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum..."). "The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms"

was originally published as Number 37 in the "Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization" series of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. It is a critically edited translation (not a text edition), with appendices and other helps so that the reader trace where each portion, or sub-portion, assigned to a specific chapter ("Spell") came from. Consulting the various tables at the back, one can determine (more or less quickly) when a passage entered the Egyptian "Mortuary Literature" (of guidebooks for the dead), and the age of the source Allen chose as representative for a given passage. It completely outclasses Budge's "complete" translation from the early twentieth century, of course. It also compares well to Faulkner's translation, the only real modern competition (in English). The book was published posthumously in 1975, in the Oriental Institute's near-coffee-table format, and was at one time available as a (large) paperback. Alas, it is now out of print, in hardcover as well. So long as a copy is reasonably priced, and the binding is in good condition (so that all the pages are there), a used copy should be quite satisfactory. If that exceeds your budget (and, too, I have no way of knowing how prices asked for it, and availability, may fluctuate; at the moment any price in three figures seems steep), the Oriental Institute offers a PDF free on their website (just use your favorite search engine to locate their homepage, and follow directions from there.) If you go with the digital option, you can use a pdf reader, or drag it onto a Kindle app to open it. (This also works for the Nook app, although I'm not as happy with its appearance, and with other e-readers.) There may be some problems due to the original folio-size pages, which may have to be viewed in portions to legibly fit on a digital screen. Still, taking a look might also help you decide whether you want, and how much you want to spend for, a hard copy. I am not wildly enthusiastic about the digital option, because it is a (searchable) image, without internal links of any kind, and the page numbers are absolute, not "logical" (that is, roman and arabic numbered pages are treated as a continuous set). I have yet to figure out how to 'flip through' a pdf to find what I want! It is possible, with some effort, to work up a detailed table of contents, with adjusted page numbers, but I've never gotten around to finishing my version, so I still have to "guess-timate" the page number to go to for, say, spell 169. Would anyone want to go to the trouble of making up such a list? Well, it is a very good translation, about as "complete" as one is likely to get, and just loaded with information on textual sources (papyri, tomb walls and other monuments, inscribed statuettes, etc.), and use of the appendices also allows the reader to track New Kingdom chapters, and sections of chapters, back to their origins in Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts, and in a few cases to Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts. Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife were quite persistent, although they did change over time, and eventually were complexly layered, with solar, stellar, and subterranean versions of where the afterlife would be located. Being able to flip back and forth between text and documentation was an

important part of the book as planned. To repeat: this is a solid, text-oriented translation, meant for serious students, not an art book, or an "easy introduction" of any kind. The introductory matter is clear and useful, but the reader is otherwise left to make sense of the Egyptians' own ideas. Which those prepared to make the effort will find worth their time and energy.*[Addendum, May 2017, for the curious: I have found that editions of Budge's "Papyrus of Ani," both the first, with the color plates, and the revised, without them, are available as PDFs from the Internet Archive (Archive.org), a site hosted by the Library of Congress. The reproduction qualities of the first leave something to be desired (especially taking into account different resolutions on different screen), but they are free. Just to add a little confusion, the color plates edition is apparently available in both the original, three-volume, version, and in a Medici Society reprinting in two volumes.]

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