



The Egyptian Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends

Garry J. Shaw

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This survey of Egyptian mythology explores how the ancient Nile-dwellers explained the world around them. It delves into the creation and evolution of the world and the reigns of the gods on earth, before introducing us to the manifestations of Egypt's deities in the natural environment; the inventive ways in which the Egyptians dealt with the invisible forces all around them; and their beliefs about life after death. Through his engaging narrative, Garry Shaw guides us through the mythic adventures of such famous deities as Osiris, the god murdered by his jealous brother Seth; the magical and sometimes devious Isis, who plotted to gain the power of the sun god Re; and Horus, who defeated his uncle Seth to become king of Egypt. He also introduces us to lesser known myths, such as the rebellions against Re; Geb's quest for Re's magical wig; and the flaying of the unfortunate god Nemty. From stars and heavenly bodies sailing on boats, to the wind as manifestation of the god Shu, to gods, goddesses, ghosts, and demons--beings that could be aggressive, helpful, wise, or dangerous--Shaw goes on to explain how the Egyptians encountered the mythological in their everyday lives.

The Egyptian Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends Details

Date : Published April 22nd 2014 by Thames & Hudson (first published March 17th 2014)

ISBN : 9780500251980

Author : Garry J. Shaw

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Fantasy, Mythology, History, Northern Africa, Egypt, Archaeology, Egyptology



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sam says

A fun little book to satisfy my sudden fanaticism with everything mythology. Especially as it provided not only information and tales of the gods and goddesses, but also insight into Egyptian civilisation and belief. The historical aspect, plus the fitting illustrations, really appealed to my eagerness for history as well as story-telling. The narration is simple and effective; surprisingly funny at times. An impressive and enjoyable read, overall, particularly as a first delving into the world that is ancient Egypt.

Erin BookNut says

I received this book in exchange for an honest review. I love mythologies of all kinds but Egyptian myths are particularly interesting. This book is full of all sorts of interesting stories about the gods and stuff but there's nothing spectacular about it. I enjoyed it though.

Sebrina says

This may be a high rating because I have no other point of reference for Egyptian Mythology, but I feel it was a good jumping off point. It expanded on what little I did know, and taught me things that aren't widely mentioned when such myths are mentioned.

Trisha says

As somebody who knows almost nothing about Egyptian mythology -or ancient Egypt at all, really- I found this book both informative and entertaining. Shaw kept up a fairly relaxed, conversational tone throughout the book, but not so much that he didn't sound like he knew what he was talking about. I checked this out from my college's library, and I'm definitely going to have to get a copy for myself some day!

Iset says

Very clearly and simply this book lays out a mythological chronology of how the ancient Egyptians believed their world was created, and various events that occurred up to the time of recorded history. Then, Shaw goes on to explain how religion intersected with the everyday lives of Egyptians; how they explained the sun and the moon, ethics and the concept of afterlife, kingship, and everyday appeals for help and curses upon one's enemies. As part of this, Shaw presents several alternative myths, noting that over time different versions, sometimes competing, arose to explain certain events. The one thing that's missing – and Shaw acknowledges its absence – is a discussion of when these alternative myths arose, and how worship shifted

and evolved over time. I would've liked a section on the practical activities of the priesthood and worshipper, and how cults evolved, but other than that, I can't fault the book at all. A great resource for understanding the basic ancient Egyptian worldview.

8 out of 10

Lisa says

I debated for awhile whether I would get *The Egyptian Myths* for myself. I had loved Garry J. Shaw's *The Pharaoh: Life at Court and On Campaign* and was keen to read more of his work – but a guide to Ancient Egyptian myths and legends wasn't a book I simply had to add to my to-read list. When I stumbled over a copy in a bookstore, it was really too pretty to resist.

It didn't take much more than the first couple of pages to make me very glad of this. *The Egyptian Myths* may not be, strictly speaking, filled with brand new information, but it has very quickly become my favourite book on Ancient Egyptian mythology. Shaw's writing is incredibly evocative, authoritative and at times humorous. His writing is such that it allows the reader to consider how it would feel to navigate the Duat upon their death.

The book is divided up into three main sections, each attempting to answer a common question: where did we come from (creation myths), what is happening around me (the mythic/divine in everyday life) and what happens when I die (the vision of the afterlife). Shaw doesn't tackle the myths and legends of Ancient Egypt as the tangled mess that they are, but attempts to sort them into a workable narrative that the layperson can understand without having to worry about the inconsistencies. These two facts means that the book ends up being, in my opinion, the best effort to describe the worldview of the Ancient Egyptians.

Shaw acknowledges the difficulty and danger in presenting such insight as a true reflection of the Ancient Egyptians:

Like chasing distant entities disappearing into the sunset, we map the Egyptians and chart their lives based on their shadows, measuring their footprints in the sand. Their true selves remain elusive, just out of reach, but the force of their personalities is imprinted on discarded personal possessions, glimpsed among their glorious ruins and, indeed, manifest in their myths. (p. 211)

There are reference books I love for presenting new and exciting information, but there are also reference books I adore for tackling a familiar subject and presenting it a fresh way that makes it feel new. *The Egyptian Myths* may not belong in the first category, but it most definitely belongs in the latter. Highly recommended.

Karima says

In this book Shaw manages to condense origin stories of the ancient Egyptian gods, individual god

mythologies, and variations of these legends to create a complete account of how ancient Egyptians viewed their gods (and how those crazy gods behaved). I have used this book for research and found that reading it cover to cover proved challenging since the myths jogged creativity in my own stories and I would end up going on tangents before returning to the book to learn more.

The world of the ancient Egyptian gods and legends is complicated. Shaw does an excellent job putting stories together. Great for research or anyone interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Egyptian mythology.

Mills College Library says

299.3 S5346 2014

Thomas says

Ancient Egyptian mythology is complicated and convoluted. As with the Greeks (some of whom thought their knowledge of the gods actually came from Egypt) there is an early primeval system, the gods of the Ennead, who are by and large abstractions. Then there are the primary gods, akin to the Olympians in Greek mythology, followed by a miscellany of less important gods. The difference is that the Egyptians were remarkably conservative people, and they survived that way for over 3000 years. Over that time new myths were related or acquired from other peoples, but they refused to throw out any of the old beliefs or gods. They were hoarders of mythology like they were hoarders of everything else, piling up the old gods and spells in the sacred garage -- who knows when they might come in handy, especially in the afterlife. So there isn't a lot of cohesion or coherence in the stories. They're more like relics, or the ushabtis that the pharaohs had placed in their tombs to serve them in the afterlife. They're more like individual things, holy knick-knacks, than parts of a theological system.

So presenting this material in an orderly fashion is a bit of challenge. Garry Shaw does it pretty well by dividing it into three parts -- creation stories, the gods in everyday life, and the mythology of death and the afterlife (incredibly important for the Egyptians.) Sprinkled between the stories are photos and drawings of the images and hieroglyphs that tell the stories, as well as an occasional spell or two. Shaw has a sense of humor, obviously. Here he shares how to summon Imhotep (the architect of the first pyramids, and later a god himself) :

If you feel the need to summon Imhotep in a dream, follow these instructions, as recorded on a 3rd century AD Greek magical papyrus, now in the British Museum:

1. *Find a 'gecko from the fields'.*
2. *Drown it in a bowl of lily oil.*
3. *Engrave the words 'Asclepius of Memphis' (i.e. Imhotep) in Greek onto an iron ring that was once a shackle.*
4. *Dunk the ring in your expired-gecko lily oil.*
5. *Hold the ring up to the Pole Star.*
6. *Say seven times, 'Menophri, sitting on the cherubim, send me the real Asclepius, not a deceitful demon instead of the god.'*

7. *In the room where you sleep, burn three grains of frankincense in a bowl and pass the ring through the smoke.*
8. *Say 'Lord Asclepius, appear!' seven times.*
9. *Wear the ring on the index finger of your right hand while you sleep.*
10. *Wait for Imhotep to appear in your dream.*

Good luck!

Sarah Holz says

I received this book as an ARC from Goodreads

With the enormous cottage industry in books about Ancient Egypt, it's easy to forget that much of what we know is simply a tiny fragment of the whole. Stories of the gods, even basic facts of everyday life are often no more than educated (or less educated) conjecture. That said, Garry Shaw does an admirable job of fitting Egypt's dizzying pantheon into workable, readable narrative that focuses on the Man-On-The-Street ancient Egyptian as much as on which of Ra's dozen or so incarnations you should be addressing your concerns to. This book also has one of the more thorough discussions on formative Egyptian cosmology I've seen in a text geared towards laymen, in addition to lots of alternate versions of the more seminal myths.

On a fun note, there are a ton of photos and illustrations, as well as helpful insert boxes that give more specific information about a topic throughout the book. Bonus points for the inclusion of a spell to summon Imhotep for assistance in a dream, and one to dispel demons with beer. And who says that studying mythology has no practical applications?

Amy says

I received this book through First Reads and was thrilled to get it. I've always been fascinated by Ancient Egypt and the myths associated with the culture. I thoroughly enjoyed the introduction and was pleasantly surprised to learn that this book was presented by the author as an overview of Egyptian myths. Overall the book was a lovely balance of overarching themes concerning Egyptian myths and specific stories about individual gods. I particularly liked the way the book was set up in three parts: the first concerning the creation of the world and the hierarchy of the gods, the second concerning the physical world around us and the third concerning the myths of death.

With so much material to cover in such a short book, I was worried that it would be too dense and dry for casual reading but the author has a great conversational tone throughout the course of the book and even becomes a little too cheeky towards the end for my taste. It's a great read for someone who is looking for a light introduction to Egyptian mythology. There are also a plethora of beautiful images that accompany the text and add a level of visual understanding to each story.

Jen says

I was excited to find out that I had won this as a first reads giveaway. I love mythology and have been fascinated by Ancient Egypt since I was young. I liked how this book was structured into three parts. I also liked how it was easy to read, great for anyone who wants to begin to learn about Egyptian mythology. I do, however, wish there had been more about the post-pharaonic influence. It was mentioned on the back of the book but there was barely a passing mention in the epilogue. I would have liked to have seen a chapter about the transition from the old gods to Christianity.

Pooja Pathak says

"What is mythology now, was once an explanation."

Beautiful introductory book on Egyptian myths with good and concise description on some of the many Gods.

Jayne says

If you're unfamiliar with Egyptian mythology, this is the book for you ! Beautiful and magnificently articulated account of the great stories from Egyptian antiquity from Creation to the end of the world. You will be entranced by the grandeur, wisdom and knowledge of the ancient Egyptians in Khemet.
