



Egyptian Myth and Legend

Donald Mackenzie

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Egyptian mythology is of highly complex character, and cannot be considered apart from its racial and historical aspects. The Egyptians were, as a Hebrew prophet has declared, a "mingled people", and this view has been confirmed by recent ethnological research: "the process; of racial fusion begun in the Delta at the dawn of history", says Professor Elliot Smith, "spread through the whole land of Egypt". In localities the early Nilotic inhabitants accepted the religious beliefs of settlers, and fused these with their own. They also clung tenaciously to the crude and primitive tribal beliefs of their remote ancestors, and never abandoned an archaic conception even when they acquired new and more enlightened ideas; they accepted myths literally, and regarded with great sanctity ancient ceremonies and usages. They even showed a tendency to multiply rather than to reduce the number of their gods and goddesses, by symbolizing their attributes. As a result, we find it necessary to deal with a bewildering number of deities and a confused mass of beliefs, many of which are obscure and contradictory. But the average Egyptian was never dismayed by inconsistencies in religious matters: he seemed rather to be fascinated by them. There was, strictly speaking, no orthodox creed in Egypt; each provincial centre had its own distinctive theological system, and the religion of an individual appears to have depended mainly on his habits of life. "The Egyptian", as Professor Wiedemann has said, "never attempted to systematize his conceptions of the different divinities into a homogeneous religion. It is open to us to speak of the religious ideas of the Egyptians, but not of an Egyptian religion."

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