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HST100

Primary Source Assignment #2

Option 1: Egyptian Book of the Dead, Chapter 125

The “Book of the Dead” was a religious text primarily concerned with funeral rites and the afterlife. The contents a collection amassed over time, starting with the funeral rights even before the unification of Egypt. It was not a static text, as can be deduced from the many versions found. Its purpose and interpretation would change, as can be seen when it is later used as an induction rite in the Greek ruled Egypt. Despite this variance, it is rooted primarily in the creation legends of Egypt and the cult of Osiris.

I would assume that this passage was recited during the funerary rites. It is unclear to me, though, if it was a rite left to priest to recite, or if it was a text studied by ordinary people. Where all educated in it or only a few? Is it something akin to the Heidelberg Catechism Taught to protestants in Sunday school. Maybe even as familiar as The Lords Prayer.

The main message of the text is to live a life pure and fruitful for judgment awaits in the afterlife. It serves not only in establishing the events that follow death but also serves as a moral code for the living. Although some of the ethical infractions are impossible for a mortal to attain (not blinking), it still is a moral code worth aspiring too.

The correspondence of the provinces of Egypt with the Gods in the hall suggests an inclusive nature of Egyptian religion. The regional gods are incorporated seamlessly into this complex multi god structure. It probably has its origins in pre unified Egypt or maybe splinter religions formed during transition periods. It asks the question of how inclusive and open to outsider ancient Egypt was. There certainly seems to have been reasonable room for religious variance.