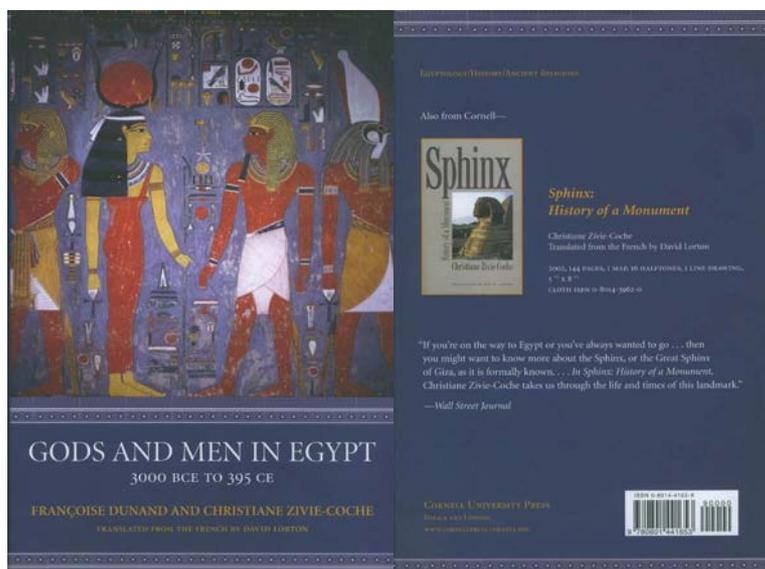


Dunand, F. & C. Zivie-Coche. 2004. Gods and men in Egypt 3000 BCE to 395 CE. – Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press (translated from the French by David Lorton)

Book review by O.E. Kaper



This English translation of a volume originally published in 1991 is a most welcome addition to the textbooks on Egyptian religion already available in English. There are not many recent works that attempt to describe the Egyptian religion in such broad terms, and this is a book that successfully incorporates much of recent scholarship on the subject.

Thanks to the translator, Egyptologist David Lorton, already several volumes on the subject of Egyptian religion have become available to the English reader. Most notable among these are books by Traunecker, Hornung and Assmann (Assmann, 2001, 2005; Hornung, 1999, 1999; Sauneron, 2000; Traunecker, 2001), all Cornell University Press. Another important work by Hornung (translated and edited by Baines in 1982), is in need of an update since the publication in 2005 of a reworked edition of the original German work. Yet, in those books, the Egyptian religion was described principally for the period of dynastic history, leaving out much of the later developments. The Ptolemaic and Roman temples are sometimes mentioned, but only because of their contribution to understanding the earlier phases of the Egyptian religion. The context of these temples, in which the influences of Hellenism and other religions were having a significant impact, is normally left out of such overviews. The book by Dunand & Zivie-Coche is a significant deviation of this practice, as they set out specifically to chart the development of the Egyptian religion from its beginnings in 3000 BCE into late Antiquity. The book is divided into two sections, whereby Zivie-Coche is responsible for describing the Egyptian religion of the Pharaonic period and Dunand deals with the Hellenistic and Roman periods. On p. 72, Zivie-Coche remarks “We can speak of *one* religion throughout the land and through the course of three millennia of a specific, uninterrupted culture”.

In her introduction, Zivie-Coche attempts first of all to define the difference between the ancient Egyptian religion and our own perceptions of divinity. To the ancient Egyptians, the gods were a part of nature, with a physical reality. She rejects the use of standard modern terminology to describe the relations between the Egyptian gods, such as syncretism, pantheism and henotheism, because the gods were, in fact, more closely related to mankind than is commonly assumed (p. 40–41). In the temples the gods communicated directly with the human world. Outside of the temple, communication happened via the means of ‘popular religion’ or ‘personal devotion’, which thus complemented the temple religion and was not in contradiction with it. Dunand discusses more than just the Egyptian religion in her part of the book. She includes sections on Greek and Roman religion, Judaism and Christianity, as well as on the Corpus Hermeticum and the Nag Hammadi Library. The Egyptian religion is discussed in much detail in the book, but the reader is supposed to be familiar with the historical and geographical facts, and as such it is certainly not a book for starters. That being said, the material is presented in a clear manner while avoiding much professional jargon. Every description of a religion will necessarily reflect personal preferences and opinions, which is in the current case based on a wide experience with the topic. On the whole, the richness of the Egyptian religion and world view is admirably reflected in the two parts of this book.

The cited texts are usually presented in translations by experts in the field. It is the only place where the original French edition added bibliographical references. It is a pity that these references have not all been retained in the English translation of the book: even the English translation of Lichtheim has been omitted once as a source (p. 148, which equals p. 154 of the French edition), and once a recent French translation is cited (Grandet, 1995 on p. 61 n. 9), which cannot possibly have been the source for Zivie-Coche's original text from 1991. Such changes by the translator are to be criticised, especially when Lorton states in his introduction that "the translations of ancient Egyptian and classical texts are those of the authors" (p. xvii).

There are undeniable advantages to having an Egyptologist translating works of this nature, because of the large number of specialized terms and concepts treated. It is for this reason always a pleasure to read Lorton's translations, as they are true to the original intentions of the author. Lorton has published in the field of Egyptian religion himself. In reviewing this particular translation, however, a few aspects of the work struck me as less felicitous. A comparison with the French edition (Dunand & Zivie-Coche, 1991) shows that the contents and illustrations have been replicated faithfully in the English version. There are, however, changes in the book due to the translator, which are not announced in the foreword.

The original French edition contained no footnotes, but instead, there was an extensive bibliography at the end of the book, through which the opinions discussed in the various chapters could be traced. In the English edition, the bibliography for Pharaonic Egypt has been made more accurate by Lorton, and he has updated it with many new titles. Lorton's own bias for the Pharaonic period is apparent from these changes, as there are virtually no additions to the bibliography for the later periods. Instead of adding usefulness to the book, I think the additions have reduced its value, as the bibliography can no longer be considered as a justification for the views expressed in the book. The bibliography has become the translator's list of suggestions for further reading, and this seems quite uncalled for.

The book ends with a glossary of divine names, which in the original French version differs considerably from the English adaptation. No justification is given for this. In whichever way, compiling a glossary of divine names is an unrewarding task, as it can never be complete, and the descriptions will always be in need of extension. In Lorton's new version of the list, however, it is inexplicable why Nephthys and Seshat have been removed, when other entries were added for Baal, Harsomtut, Onuris, Sopdu, Tatenen and Tatenent (*sic*). Thirteen entries have additional descriptive text added, and many have additional bibliography, especially monographs, even though the reasons for including some older titles are unclear to me (Aldred, 1988 on the god Aten, for instance, or Chassinat, 1966 on Osiris), and many more could have been included that are not (*e.g.* Bruyère, 1930 on Meretseger and Germond, 1981 on Sekhmet). There is no emphasis on recent items of bibliography, nor is there an attempt to be comprehensive. Already the French edition could be criticised for omitting many Egyptian deities from Greco-Roman Egypt from the glossary, even though this period is central to the concept of the book and these gods are actually described or mentioned in Dunand's part of the book. Examples of these are Pnephros, Panebtawy, Opet, Haroeris, Tutu and Imhotep. The omission of foreign gods from the later periods, such as Heron and Mithra/-s and the many Greek deities is also regrettable, especially when foreign gods from earlier periods have been included.

The book has a total number of 23 line drawings as illustrations in the text, and given the importance of representations of the divine world to the ancient Egyptians, this is a regrettably low number. In the discussion of, for instance, the temple decoration or the appearance of the gods, illustrations are sorely missed.

Concluding, I consider this work to be one of the best overviews of the Egyptian religion currently available. The translation of the text is excellent, and its contents, although not an easy read, is highly recommended for everyone seriously interested in the ancient Egyptian culture.

Dunand, F. & C. Zivie-Coche. 2004. *Gods and Men in Egypt 3000 BCE to 395 CE*. – Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press (translated from the French by David Lorton). 378 pp. ISBN 0-8014-4165-X (cloth); ISBN 978-0-8014-8853-5 (paper). Price: \$ 49.95 (cloth); \$ 25.95 (paper).

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