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**Book note:**

**Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.**

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## **MOSES THE EGYPTIAN: THE MEMORY OF EGYPT IN WESTERN MONOTHEISM.**

By Jan Assmann. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. Pp. x + 276. \$18.95, ISBN 0-674-58739-1.

An impressive and impassioned investigation into the ways in which Egypt, as an image antithetical to monotheism, and Moses, a figure central to monotheism, were transformed in several centuries of religious belief and interpretation. Placing the development of monotheism into a fascinating historiographic framework, Assmann's study moves us away from questions of historicity and into the history of cultural memory. Thus, Moses the Egyptian, as some early traditions remember him, "embodies the inversion or at least the revision of the Exodus myth, ... symbolizing a first distinction, the cutting of an umbilical cord." By challenging Freud's understanding of the relationship between Akhenaten and Moses and by refining his concepts of latency and the return of the repressed within a theory of culture, Assmann offers a subtle revaluation of the history of monotheism. His exploration of ancient distinctions between fact and fiction, his insights into the religious reforms of Ahkenaten, and his sophisticated treatment of the Egyptophilic movement that swept the West since Horapollo all demand a

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...tation of the concept of complex polythe-  
...ssmann's understanding of the oneness of  
C...s implicitly valuable to contemporary  
monotheists. Erudite and accessible, this is a bril-  
liant book.

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