



Egyptian Magic (Illustrated Edition)

E.A. Wallis Budge

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A study of the remains of the native religious literature of ancient Egypt which have come down to us has revealed the fact that the belief in magic, that is to say, in the power of magical names, and spells, and enchantments, and formulæ, and pictures, and figures, and amulets, and in the performance of ceremonies accompanied by the utterance of words of power, to produce supernatural results, formed a large and important part of the Egyptian religion. And it is certain that, notwithstanding the continuous progress which the Egyptians made in civilization, and the high intellectual development to which they eventually attained, this belief influenced their minds and, from the earliest to the latest period of their history, shaped their views concerning things temporal as well as spiritual in a manner which, at this stage in the history of the world, is very difficult to understand. The scrupulous care with which they performed their innumerable religious ceremonies, and carried out the rules which they had formulated concerning the worship of the divine Power or powers, and their devotion to religious magic, gained for them among the nations with whom they came in contact the reputation of being at once the most religious and the most superstitious of men. That this reputation was, on the whole, well deserved, is the object of this little book to shew. Egyptian magic dates from the time when the predynastic and prehistoric dwellers in Egypt believed that the earth, and the underworld, and the air, and the sky were peopled with countless beings, visible and invisible, which were held to be friendly or unfriendly to man according as the operations of nature, which they were supposed to direct, were favourable or unfavourable to him. In nature and attributes these beings were thought by primitive man to closely resemble himself and to possess all human passions, and emotions, and weaknesses, and defects; and the chief object of magic was to give man the pre-eminence over such beings. The favour of the beings who were placable and friendly to man might be obtained by means of gifts and offerings, but the cessation of hostilities on the part of those that were implacable and unfriendly could only be obtained by wheedling, and cajolery, and flattery, or by making use of an amulet, or secret name, or magical formula, or figure, or picture which had the effect of bringing to the aid of the mortal who possessed it the power of a being that was mightier than the foe who threatened to do evil to him. The magic of most early nations aimed at causing the transference of power from a supernatural being to man, whereby he was to be enabled to obtain superhuman results and to become for a time as mighty as the original possessor of the power; but the object of Egyptian magic was to endow man with the

means of compelling both friendly and hostile powers, nay, at a later time, even God Himself, to do what he wished, whether the were willing or not. The belief in magic, the word being used in its best sense, is older in Egypt than the belief in God, and it is certain that a very large number of the Egyptian religious ceremonies, which were performed in later times as an integral part of a highly spiritual worship, had their origin in superstitious customs which date from a period when God, under any name or in any form, was unconceived in the minds of the Egyptians. Indeed it is probable that even the use of the sign which represents an axe, and which stands the hieroglyphic character both for God and "god," indicates that this weapon and tool was employed in the performance of some ceremony connected with religious magic in prehistoric, or at any rate in predynastic times, when it in some mysterious way symbolized the presence of a supreme Power.

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