

Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2023 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

The Pyramid Texts: The Earliest Ancient Egyptian Rituals



In this reading group, we will read selections from the Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts – the oldest religious literature in the world and the foundation of the long history of Egyptian mortuary texts. The Pyramid Texts are inscribed on the walls of the tomb chambers in the royal pyramids of the Fifth Dynasty and record the spoken utterances of Old Kingdom rituals. Each week, I will provide a selection of Pyramid Texts for the discussion group participants to read that highlight a particular theme. Although the overall corpus of the Pyramid Texts is large, many of the individual texts are quite short, just a few clauses, and so multiple texts could be discussed in one week – this is important, as some texts will express the same ideas in different ways, while others will present wildly different and seemingly incompatible beliefs. We will discuss how to interpret the often enigmatic texts in order to understand not only the beliefs and myths that underlie them, but also how the rituals functioned to ensure the deceased passed safely into the Afterlife and transformed into an *akh*, or “Effective Spirit.”

Participants will gain knowledge of the key concepts of Egyptian religion in the Old Kingdom and see how these concepts were incorporated by the ancient Egyptians into their ritual practices. They also

will get to see the diversity of early Egyptian religious beliefs, including some of the strangest and most unique beliefs and rituals attested in ancient Egypt.

Your SASA Educational Ambassador:

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[Session Recordings Playlist - Youtube \(Private\)](#)

[Reading Group Folder Link - Find readings for each week here!](#)

Week 1 - Mortuary Rituals and Practices

Texts to read:

- The Offering Ritual (PT 23, 25, 32, 34–57, 72–79, 81–96, 108–171, 223, 224, 199–200, 244, 204–205, 207, 209–212)
- Apotropaic Rituals (PT 226–243)

Bonus Readings:

- Allen 2015, "Introduction"
- Allen 1994, "Reading a Pyramid"

Week 2 - The Sun, the Stars, and the Night Sky

Texts to read:

- PT 215, PT 216, and PT 217
- PT 320
- PT 481
- PT 513
- PT 606

Bonus Readings:

- Faulkner 1966, "The King and Star Religion in the Pyramid Texts"
- Wilkinson 2003, "Re"

Week 3 - Celestial Waterways of the Afterlife + The Ba, Ka, and Akh

Texts to read (Celestial Waterways):

- PT 264
- PT 270

- PT 519

Texts to read (Ba, Ka, and Akh):

- PT 422
- PT 437
- PT 450
- PT 457
- PT 468

Week 4 - The Cannibal Hymn

Texts to read:

- PT 273+274
- Coffin Text 573

Bonus Readings:

- Faulkner 1924, "The Cannibal Hymn from the Pyramid Texts"
- Eyre 2002, "Cannibalism: Symbol and Reality"

Week 5 - Osiris and the King

Texts to read:

- PT 219
- PT 264
- PT 356–357
- PT 690

Bonus Readings:

- Wilkinson 2003, "Osiris"
- Hays 2011, "The death of the Democratisation of the Afterlife"
- Smith 2017, "Unreading the Pyramid Texts. So Who is Osiris?"
- Shalomi-Hen 2015, "The Dawn of Osiris and the Dusk of the Sun-Temples"