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## Ideas and Studies.

*The earliest civilizations, as Dr. Speiser points out below, were highly integrated, and the local conception of Church and State "embraced everything that was significant in nature and society." Again, among the primitives studied in Howells's "The Heathens," religion was an indispensable part of the tight-knit social organization. Society today, richer and more complex, has lost the earlier close integration of beliefs and practices, and has suffered thereby. Yet a trend in reverse, towards the creation of a more unified society, is discernible. Science, for example, is groping towards philosophy and ethics, and the historians increasingly employ the concepts of science. An example of the new thought is L. L. Whyte's attempt at a unitary philosophy in "The Next Development in Man," reviewed by Lewis Mumford in SRL April 24. Whyte is, significantly, a scientist.*

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## Mesopotamian vs. Egyptian Way

KINGSHIP AND THE GODS: By  
Henri Frankfort. University of Chicago Press. 1948. 444 pp. 43 plates. \$5.

Reviewed by E. A. SPEISER

**C**HURCH and state in the world's oldest civilizations—Egypt and Mesopotamia—were awesome factors to which all else was held subordinate. Together they embraced everything that was significant in nature and society. The gods personified natural order. The keystone of social order was the king. The manner in which nature and society, or the gods and kingship, were integrated was the basic norm of civilized life. Meaningful existence was unthinkable without such integration.

The extent to which those fundamental experiences of mankind which we know as the cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia were bound up with government and religion is brought out fully in the latest book from the pen of Professor Henri Frankfort of the University of Chicago. Like all his other studies, this contribution is a happy blend of insight and learning, enthusiasm and analysis. Many details in this challenging account are certain to be subjected to critical onslaught—in some instances not without valid reason. The over-all pattern, however, has been securely established.

Perhaps the most striking of Frankfort's results is the clear demonstration that, for all their intimate contacts which go back to remote prehistoric times, the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian ways of life were not closely related. To the contrary, their underlying philosophies were poles apart. The fundamental contrast between the two ancient centers of progress has come to be appreciated only in the past few years, reversing



many of our traditional beliefs. Art, law, and literature have furnished the necessary clues. Frankfort himself has been one of the pioneers in this exciting reconstruction. The book before us presents the combined results, but the author's own share is incomparably the largest. In briefest outline, his findings are as follows:

In Egypt, the universe was the outcome of a single creative process. The demiurge continued his absolute rule on earth through a king in whom the creator was perpetually incarnate. The king was thus himself a god and his world was as stable as the immutable rhythm of the Nile. Because the land was ruled by a divine mediator, the alignment of nature and society was perfect and complete. In this static cosmos, unveiled in serene splendor, there could be no room for insecurity and human frailty. Even the reality of death was denied. Festivals were but occasions for reaffirming that all was well with the world. History itself was little more than a series of accidents—a most il-

luminating observation in view of the Egyptian's notorious lack of historical perspective.

In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, creation was the outcome of violence and confusion. Life was in constant flux, a process as restless as the activity of the Tigris and the Euphrates, their silt unceasingly forming new land at the head of the Persian Gulf. The king was a mortal, abject in his service of the unpredictable gods. Each succession was a new solution in society's desperate struggle for harmony with nature. The destiny of the universe no less than that of mankind must be determined afresh with each New Year. In this dramatic order divine whims such as the Great Flood might easily be repeated. Hence the everlasting anxiety and the unending effort to do something which might influence fate. Hence, too, the exultation that succeeded gloom each spring in tune with the recurring miracle of resurrection.

In the final analysis, to win peace of mind the Egyptian sacrificed his liberty. By submitting to the inevitable the Mesopotamian retained a substantial measure of independence. These are Frankfort's conclusions and they find strong support in the total evidence available. One might add that in Egypt the end-product was a sense of resignation; in Mesopotamia anxiety pointed a way to hope.

Frankfort is content on the whole to confine his penetrating search to the two great centers of ancient Near Eastern civilization. A brief epilogue attempts to draw in the Hebrews. In the reviewer's opinion, this attempt is a mistake because by doing too little it oversimplifies the issue and fails to place it in proper perspective. The book provides rich and ample fare as it is. A remarkable experiment on the part of history in two contrasted approaches to life can be followed over a period of three thousand years, a period more than half as long as recorded time. Environment and culture produced in Egypt an order that was sublimely totalitarian. In Mesopotamia the same two factors promoted the rudiments of democracy. Each system was in full harmony with its own particular background, and each established a record of astounding cultural achievement. Yet it was the Mesopotamian way that was singled out for creative borrowing by the Hebrews and the Greeks, to become thereby an important ingredient in modern civilization. There would seem to be here a legacy and a memento for our own time.

E. A. Speiser, Orientalist, is chairman of the division of humanities at the University of Pennsylvania.

# Rites, Dogmas, and Survival

**THE HEATHENS:** *Primitive Man and His Religions.* By William Howells. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1948. 293 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CLYDE KLUCKHOHN

THIS book is both learned and lively. Professor Howells is one of the few anthropologists who can write. A new and better book on the religions of primitives has long been needed. Robert Lowie's "Primitive Religion" has many excellent features but suffers from his ceremonial avoidance of psychoanalytic theory and his failure to understand the work of the great French sociologists of the Durkheim school. Apart from Lowie, one had to choose between the brilliant but somewhat private speculations of people like Paul Radin, and dull compendia. These latter are useful enough if one is seeking a selective digest of well-authenticated data on such topics as "Sacred Trees" or "Fast, Feast, and Vision"; if one, in short, is willing to take the data and let the concepts go. However, the facts speak for themselves only through the manipulations of a kind of ventriloquism on the part of the author. The very selection of data and their arrangement in categories proceeds in terms of premises which are the more questionable because suppressed and because often the writer himself is not consciously aware of his standards and hence cannot subject his concepts to the rigid

criticism that he applies to his facts.

Mr. Howells has a simple conceptual scheme, and he tells the reader about it in the first chapter. He asks consistently: what kind of sense do specific beliefs and practices make in terms of the whole life of a people? How do rites and dogmas promote the survival of the group, social harmony within the group, and the psychological adjustment of individuals?

The book starts with an excellent brief introduction to the anthropological approach, not neglecting the biological basis of human nature. There follows a sensible discussion of the nature of religion that is integrative as well as eclectic. The heart of the study consists in a series of case histories on mana and tabu, black-and-white-magic, divination, disease and medicine, witchcraft, shamanism, the after-world, souls and ghosts, ancestor worship, totemism, demons, deities, ritual, and the rise and fall of the Plains Indian Ghost Dance cult. Each case study is based on carefully chosen materials from the monographs. Howells's judgment as to what constitutes acceptable evidence is, so far as the reviewer can control it, rigorous. He has discriminated critically, selected wisely, and synthesized interestingly as well as lucidly. The light touch comes off well on the whole, though occasionally the lecturer wise-cracking to keep his class awake throws a shadow on the page.

Howells is primarily a physical anthropologist (and a first-rate one). Therefore the range of his reading in ethnology and social anthropology is astonishing. But it is equaled by its intensity. I suspect that this book gains much of its freshness and integrity from the circumstance that the writer was poaching on the territory of his colleagues in cultural anthropology. As Spencer (or someone) said, you would never expect a goldfish to discover the existence of water. But Howells has poured old wine from many bottles into a new container and produced a heady punch. Some of his bold generalizations are on the startling side, but in the main they appear sound.

The pedant can always, of course, find a few slips. I shall omit these details so boring to the non-specialist. However, two more general criticisms would be made by a good many anthropologists. The first is that he overplays the functional situational theory. The processes that determine events are imbedded in time as well as in situation. Howells gives little attention to concrete bits of religious behavior as the products of historical accident,

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