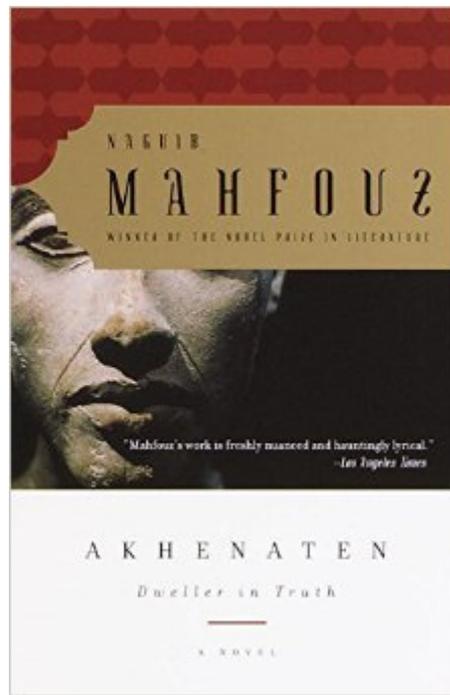


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Akhenaten: Dweller In Truth A Novel



Synopsis

From the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature and author of the Cairo trilogy, comes Akhenaten, a fascinating work of fiction about the most infamous pharaoh of ancient Egypt. In this beguiling new novel, originally published in 1985 and now appearing for the first time in the United States, Mahfouz tells with extraordinary insight the story of the "heretic pharaoh," or "sun king,"--and the first known monotheistic ruler--whose iconoclastic and controversial reign during the 18th Dynasty (1540-1307 B.C.) has uncanny resonance with modern sensibilities. Narrating the novel is a young man with a passion for the truth, who questions the pharaoh's contemporaries after his horrible death--including Akhenaten's closest friends, his most bitter enemies, and finally his enigmatic wife, Nefertiti--in an effort to discover what really happened in those strange, dark days at Akhenaten's court. As our narrator and each of the subjects he interviews contribute their version of Akhenaten, "the truth" becomes increasingly evanescent. Akhenaten encompasses all of the contradictions his subjects see in him: at once cruel and empathic, feminine and barbaric, mad and divinely inspired, his character, as Mahfouz imagines him, is eerily modern, and fascinatingly ethereal. An ambitious and exceptionally lucid and accessible book, Akhenaten is a work only Mahfouz could render so elegantly, so irresistibly.

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Customer Reviews

Not being much of a history-seeker, I borrowed this after having it recommended by a friend who read it, and was startled by its immediacy and was easily pulled in to the story of Akhenaten. The framework of having the story proceed as the narrator, Meriamum, piece together the history

through interviews, brought everything into believability, and somehow contemporary at the same time. Even if you have only a passing interest in Egyptology (and I can hardly claim that... only a few minutes of halting channel-surfing on the Discovery Channel), you will be drawn in to this well-written and engrossing book!

Okay, I confess: I plagiarized the adjective beguiling from the back cover, but it was the best one word phrase I could come up with to describe this quirky book. In some senses, it reminds me of a detective narrative, a kind of Egyptian Oedipus who is searching for the "truth." The story in this case revolves around this monotheistic pharaoh and his peculiar religious leadership and reign. I'm not an expert at the history of the period -- my above reviewer points out several inaccuracies which if true would be disappointing to me. After reading 15 or so different interviews of those close to Akhenaten, some of the mysteries are resolved. It's a short read and quite a unique narrative that will transplant you to ancient Egypt. It's amazing at times how modern the narrative feels. How much really separates sexual escapades of someone like Clinton from those of the ancients? Not much as we see from our study of history. A bit offbeat, but a good read on an intriguing subject.

Pharaoh Amenhotep IV - husband of Nefertiti and brother of Tutanhamen - is enlightened to "The One and Only God". He changes his name to Akenaten, denies the god Amun, has the name of all other gods extinguished and distributes their temples and the wealth of the priests to the poor. He leaves Thebes and creates Akenaten, his own city of light. He will never tell a lie, will never punish an evildoer and believes only in the surmounting power of love. How do you deal with such a heretic? Love turns to envy, envy turns to hate. The enemy crosses the country's borders. The people revolt. The priests plot against him. All friends desert. Nefertiti leaves him. He dies young. His city of light disintegrates. The book consists of "interviews" - about 15 years after the Pharaoh's death - with his closest friends and counsellors: his teacher, the high priest of his new religion, the chief of police, the leader of the army, and many more - ending with Nefertiti herself. By now they can tell the truth about their relationship to the king. Obviously, the message of all encompassing love for all the creatures on earth did not penetrate very far. Some want to promote their own gain, others just simply hate. Most think that he was somewhat demented. The author looks at the story of love from many sides and comes up disappointed. The Pharaoh has a striking resemblance to a more modern Messiah who also had to fail in his lifetime. The parallels to the New Testament are striking and wonderfully written. Mahfouz is a religious thinker and writer of the very first rank. He makes you think. It would help greatly in the understanding of this book to study the historical

background of the heretic Pharaoh. I recommend "The Murder of Tutankhamun" by Bob Brier.

In all truth, very little is known and can be asserted as fact surrounding the lives of ancient Egypt's ruling couple, Akhenaten and Nefertiti. Arguably, they may be a pair of history's most elusive figures ... yet, Akhenaten is the more intriguing of the two. In trying to tell the story of the Pharaoh so little is known about, Mahfouz employs a narrative not unlike that of one of film's most revered projects, *CITIZEN KANE*: a narrator -- a young man, perhaps a budding scholar -- begins by asking his father about the recently deceased king, and his father suggests that the true story could best be told by those who knew him well ... the surviving members of the royal party. Curiosity propels our narrator to visit a host of Akhenaten's supporters and detractors, ending with a conversation from even the exiled queen, Nefertiti. However, is it truth ... or is it fiction? As is the case with *KANE*, the reader ends up learning more about the psyche of the tale's teller (those who knew Akhenaten best) than we do the late king. The pieces of the puzzle do provide a fascinating look, nonetheless, at Akhenaten. Was he a visionary? Was he a heretic? Was he a scholar and artist, or was he driven to do what he did -- changing the complete worship structure of Egypt to one God instead of many -- out of madness? A work of excellence by a scholar on the subject, *AKHENATEN, DWELLER IN TRUTH* is highly recommended for any students of ancient history, archaeology, and perhaps even conspiracies. We may never know all regarding the 'heretic king,' but Mahfouz brings us close enough to believing that we were there.

Naguib Mahfouz is one of my favorite writers and, though this tome is not my favorite of his titles, it is, no less intriguing. Mahfouz tackles the controversial historical figure, Pharaoh Akhenaten, by posing the question of his identity and impact on the ancient land, to historical figures of the time. The chapters of the book, are linked by the narrative of a fictional writer, seeking the 'real story' of Akhenaten. The narrator interviews, Maya, Horemheb, Nakht and several others, including the enigmatic Queen Nefertiti. Each respondent has a different perspective on the so-called 'heretic king'. Some hate him. Some love him. Many have mixed emotions about the man who, first, selected a god among the pantheon of Egyptian gods, then promoted this god to the position of state god. As time and political events passed, the king came to conceive of his one god as the ultimate, unseen power in the universe. The tales detail the effect this revolutionary concept had on the ancient land. It is obvious that Mahfouz sees Akhenaten as the precursor to the three 'great religions', in that he was the first in recorded history to espouse the concept of one god. The story teller is a master at creating the whole complex picture, from disparate views. He has succeeded

again.

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