



# RASNET CONFERENCE 2022 Unit 1 AOS 1.1

Dr Amanda Burritt

# Unit 1: The role of religion in society

- In this unit students explore the origins of religions and their role in the development of society, identifying their nature and purpose over time. They investigate the contribution of religion generally to the development of human society. They also focus on the role of religious traditions over time in shaping **personal and group identity**. Students examine how **individuals, groups and new ideas** have affected and continue to affect religious traditions. The unit provides an opportunity for students to understand the often complex relationships that exist between individuals, groups, new ideas, religious traditions and the Australian society in which they live.

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/religion-and-society/Pages/Index.aspx>

**Key Knowledge point to be covered in the presentation:**

## **Unit 1: AOS 1.1**

**The nature and purpose of religion, past and present, considering:**

- the **questions and life experiences** which shape religion and religious identity
- other needs to which religion responds
- the extent to which religion can satisfy these needs

# Spiritual and religious ideas, beliefs and expressions

For all areas of study, students explore detailed examples from more than one religion. These may be from one or more than one of the groups below. In addition, for Areas of Study 1 and 2 further shorter illustrative examples should be selected for study from across all the groups below.

- Spiritual and religious ideas in Prehistory (associated with, for example, Lascaux, Gobekli Tepe, **Stonehenge**, Jericho)
- Religious traditions of ancient civilisations (for example, Sumerian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, **Egyptian**, Canaanite, Roman, **Greek**)
- Asian religious and philosophical traditions (for example, **Buddhism**, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism)
- Abrahamic religions (for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam)

# Plan for today

- Focus points from Study Design
- Key issues, concepts, questions about the nature and purpose of religion
- Question time
- Case Study 1: Egypt
- Question time
- Case Study 2: Stonehenge
- Question time
- Where to next?
- Concluding remarks

# The aspects of religion

For the purposes of this study, religion can be understood to have particular interrelated aspects.

- Beliefs
- Sacred stories
- Spaces, places, times and artifacts
- Texts
- Rituals
- Symbols
- Social structures
- Ethics
- Spiritual experiences

# Religion and/or spirituality?

- What is the sacred?
- Are religion and spirituality the same?
- What is the role of personal and collective experience in religious belief and practice?

# What is religion?

- Religare: to tie, to bind  
to connect to the creative source of our being
- An organised body of doctrine and practice
- Religious tradition: 'a **belief** and **practice** that comes from, and leads to, a human recognition of an ultimate reality and which is perpetuated, interpreted and communicated by an organised believing community' (Tuohy, Green, Shayndel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xiv)



# What is spirituality?

- Transcendence
- Sense of numinous
- Sacred
- Beyond ordinary and physical
- Beyond reason?
- ‘the act of being open to the perception and experience of everything being interconnected through an ultimate reality’ (Tuohy, Green, Shayndel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xv)
- Spiritual experience: ‘when a powerful emotion is stirred by an encounter affecting one’s beliefs, emotions...’ (Tuohy, Green, Shayndel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xv)

# Direct religious experience

Prayer

Transcendence

Mysticism

Vision

Meditation

Shamanism

# Questions asked across time, societies and cultures, to which religions respond

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What is the purpose of life?

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Is there continued existence after physical death?

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If so, what is it like?

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How is it achieved by the individual?

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How did the world and the cosmos come to be?

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Is there an ultimate reality or being?

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Is this being morally good and powerful or capricious and judgemental?

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How do I relate to the ultimate reality?

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Why is there suffering?

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How do I know how to behave towards other people and the natural world?

- Christian theologian St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE) said that both reason and faith are valid ways of seeking truth.

# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

# Defining some relevant terms

- Theism – belief that God exists
- Atheism – belief that God does not exist
- Agnosticism – belief that there is insufficient knowledge to know whether God/gods exist or not
- Henotheism – worship of one god while accepting the possibility of the existence of other gods
- Polytheism – worship of many gods
- Anthropomorphism – representation of gods in human form
- Theriomorphism – animal form as representation of the divine
- Pantheism – belief that the whole natural world is identical with God
- Secular Humanism – world view based on the value of human experience and reason without belief in transcendent spiritual powers

Visual and  
material  
culture



## Xenophanes of Colophon c. 570 – c. 475 BCE

‘But if horses or oxen or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had.’

— Fragment 15





# Communication of ancient beliefs: Egyptian

- **Egyptian hieroglyphs (hiero: sacred, holy)**
- Rosetta Stone: found at Rosetta (Rashid) in the Nile Delta by Napoleon's troops in 1799
- Inscribed with decree issued at Memphis (Cairo) dated 27 March 196 BCE
- Not a religious document – record of benefits provided to Egypt by Ptolemy V Epiphanes
- 3 scripts – Hieroglyphics, Demotic (cursive Egyptian script), Greek
- Deciphered by Champollion 1822
- Hermeticism – ancient wisdom, Rosicrucian, Masonic – powerful symbols
- Egyptomania – design/aesthetic

EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD  
'SPELL/CHAPTERS FOR COMING  
FORTH BY DAY'



# What is the Book of the Dead?

- Essential **tool** to navigate through judgement to the afterlife Introduced end of Second Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BCE)
- About 200 spells or chapters
- Mortuary texts called 'The Chapters for Going Forth by Day' were called the 'Book of the Dead' by German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius in 1842

# What does the Book of the Dead tell us about ancient Egyptian belief systems?

- There is an afterlife
- The otherworld has both cthonic and solar/stellar aspects
- The gods are real and powerful
- The individual must account for their actions and prepare for judgement before the gods

# What does the Book of the Dead tell us about ancient Egyptian belief systems?

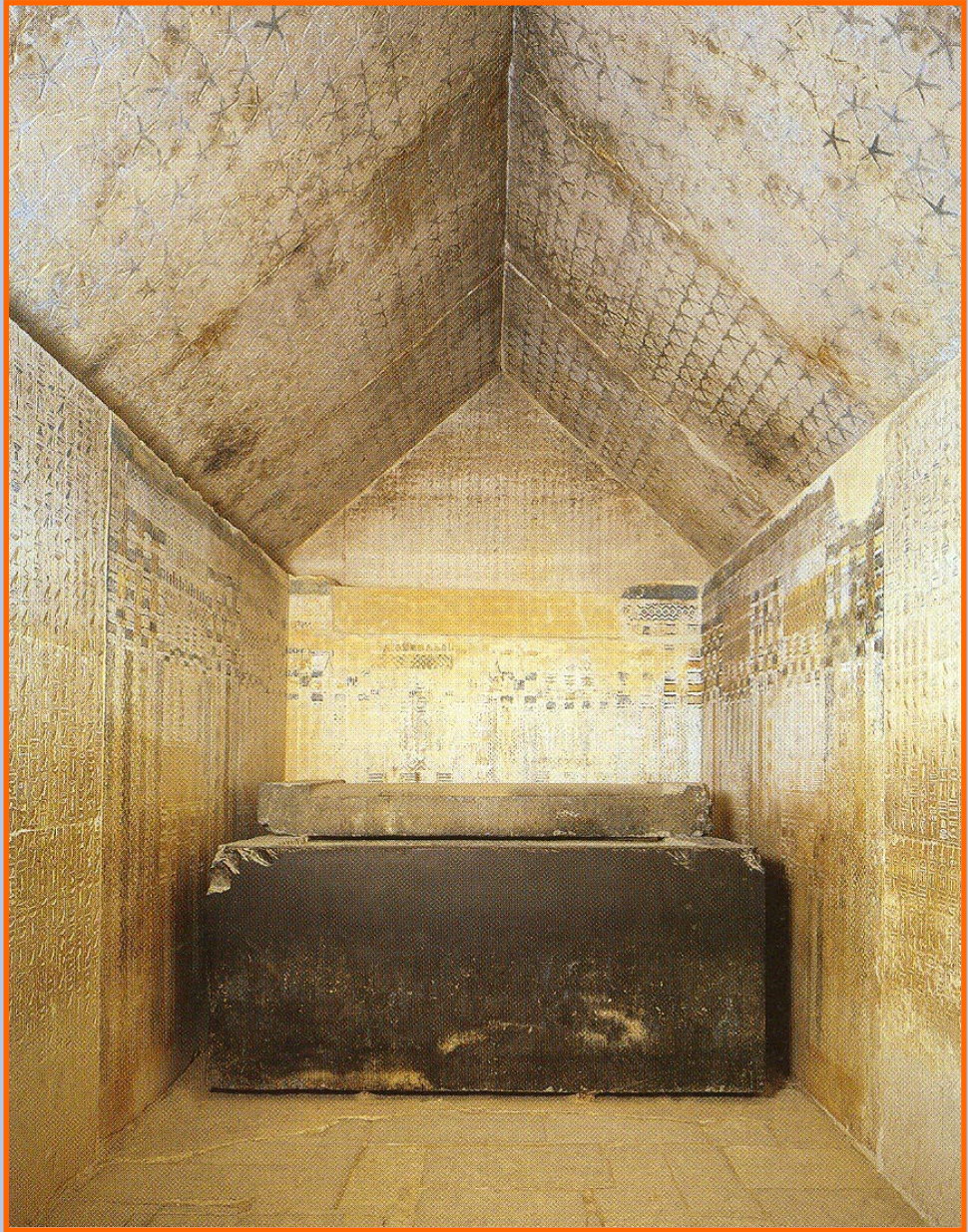
- Priest read excerpts in funerary ceremony
- ‘opening of mouth’ ceremony at sarcophagus to reactivate senses of deceased (importance of mummification)
- Ch 9 “I have opened up every path which is in the sky and which is on the earth, for I am the well-beloved son of my father Osiris. I am noble, I am spirit, I am equipped; O all you gods and all you spirits, prepare a path for me.”



# PYRAMID TEXTS

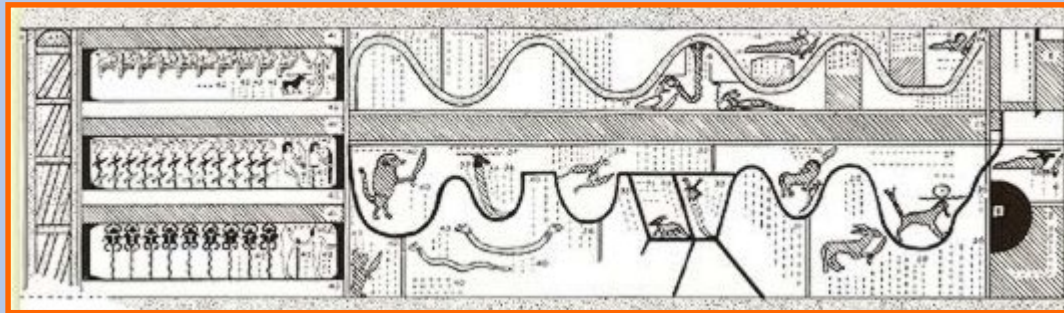
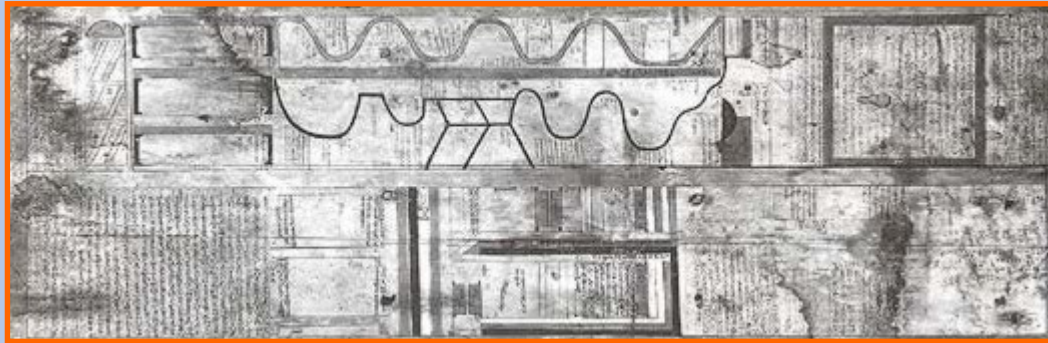


Sarcophagus chamber of  
King Unas 2375-2345 BCE (5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)





# COFFIN TEXTS



Coffin Text – ‘Book of the Two Ways’ - describes cosmography

It takes the deceased on a journey to the Kingdom of Osiris on a route with the sun god, first from east to west along a waterway through the inner sky and then back again from west to east by land through the outer sky (the two ways)

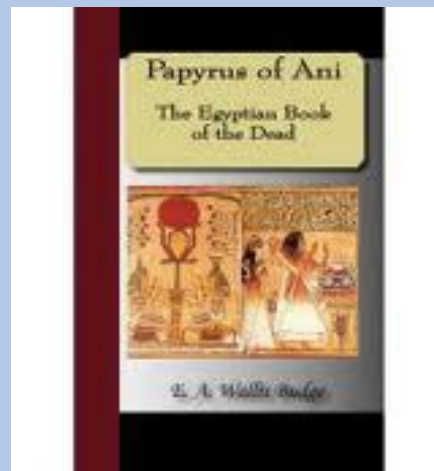


shabtis



# The Book of the Dead of Ani.

- Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities
- Acquired for the British Museum in 1887
- Originally 78 feet long, cut into 37 sections



# Four major sections

- Chs 1-16: enters tomb, descends to underworld
- Chs 17-63: gods, rebirth
- Chs 64-129: travels through sky to Osiris
- Ch 125: before Osiris and forty-two judges

- Journey following route of Re – setting sun in West, boat through underworld, reborn in East
- Deceased – boat journey, ferocious creatures, especially serpent Apep who tries to stop boat and bring chaos
- Ch 7 offers help against Apep: ‘I will not be inert for you, I will not be weak for you, your poison shall not enter my members, for my members are the members of Atum.’



- Next labyrinth – to pass recite specific text
- Then trial – negative confession – declaration of innocence (list of things the deceased hasn't done e.g., stealing, lying), weighing of heart
- Scarab amulet – Ch 30: “Oh my heart...Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance.”

# Weighing of the heart

- Papyrus of Hunefer c. 1275BCE
- Anubis weighs heart, Thoth records result, Ammit (crocodile, hippopotamus, lion) waits....



# The weighing

- Ani and his wife enter
- bird with human head (*ba*) represents Ani's soul
- male figure represents his destiny
- Heart/feather of Maat (symbol of justice) on scales held by Anubis
- Thoth (scribe)
- Ammit (devourer)



# After the heart weighing

- Ani makes offerings to gods
- rows across Lake of offerings
- worships falcon representing the west
- carries out agricultural tasks
- pays homage to bird Benu, symbol of rebirth
- boat of Wenefer (Osiris) moored on lake
- Ani pays homage to Sokar/Osiris (funerary god)

# Spell 89: Letting a soul rejoin its corpse in the God's domain

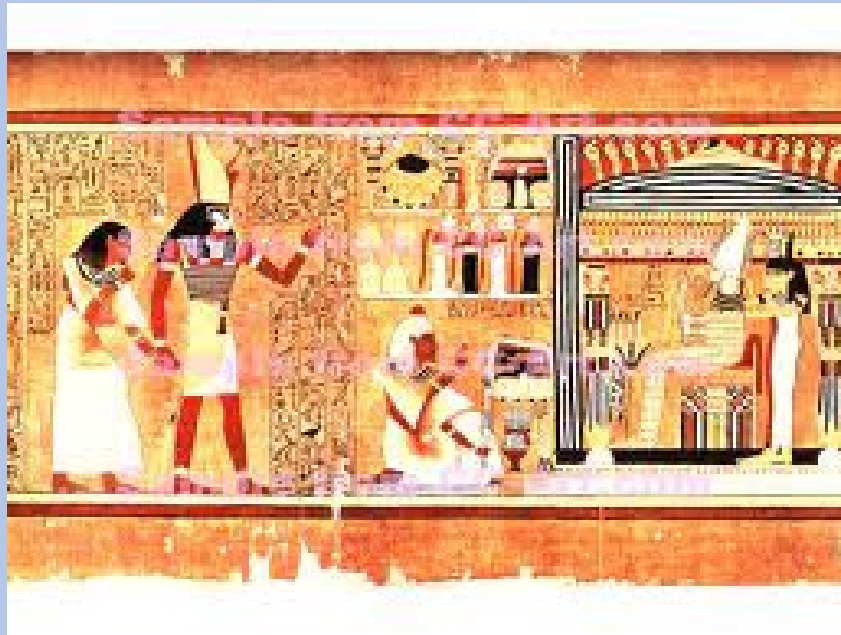




# Ch 148 making provision for a spirit in the God's Domain



# The scribe Ani vindicated in the day of his judgement



# The Field of Reeds

“He shall flourish and his children shall flourish...he shall be ushered in with the kings of Upper Egypt and the kings of Lower Egypt, and he shall be in the suite of Osiris...”

# Field of Reeds



The Amarna  
Period:  
Akhenaten  
(Amenhotep IV)  
1352-1336 BCE

**Monotheism?**  
**Heresy?**



# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS



# Stonehenge





# Stonehenge : sacred sites, built and natural

- **Pre-textual – symbolic inscriptions, not written language**
- **Limitations of our knowledge of prehistoric beliefs – interpretation of archaeological evidence incorporating range of comparative contexts**
- **Ritual landscape: whole context and orientation of topography and cosmos**

# Stonehenge : sacred sites, built and natural

- Stonehenge began as a ditched and banked circuit c.5,000 years ago
- Original bluestones were brought from the Preseli Hills in west Wales
- c. 4,500 the sarsen uprights and trilithons were erected made from locally quarried stone
- Mark Parker Pearson: Stonehenge is place of ancestors, (stone: dead, wood: living)
- Significance of type of stone – cooperative and organised community needed to move and construct
- Avesbury Archer – traveller from Europe
- Durrington wells – winter solstice – village, feasting,
- Astronomical alignments – summer solstice Stonehenge, mid winter alignment Newgrange (Ireland)

## British Museum Exhibition, 2022

- **‘The sun was a dominant element in the world of Stonehenge. For farming communities, the length of the days and the turning of the seasons was central to the patterns of life and religious belief.** As people started to transition to using metalwork around 4,000 years ago, gold was turned into jewellery and cult objects imbued with the power of the sun.’
- **‘In the centuries that followed the raising of the great sarsens, burying bodies with valued objects on sacred land became the dominant way of expressing cultural and spiritual meaning across Britain.’** Jennifer Wexler, Project Curator, The world of Stonehenge 7 December 2021

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/world-stonehenge>



Stonehenge

Summer Solstice 2018

# Contemporary spiritual significance

What draws neo-Pagans, modern Druids and Hare Krishnas to Stonehenge for the solstice?



Newgrange, Co.  
Meath, Ireland

5,200 yr old  
passage tomb

<https://www.newgrange.com/>



# British Museum Exhibition, 2022

- ‘The magnificent tomb at Newgrange constructed around the same time as the first monument at Stonehenge, was designed to let light into the interior of the tomb through an ingeniously placed opening in the roof, illuminating the long passage with new light at the midwinter sunrise. **The intentional illumination of burial chambers by the sun at turning points in the year has clear metaphorical associations with rebirth and regeneration, and would no doubt have spoken to communities about the cyclical nature of time, the journeys of celestial bodies across the sky and of humanity’s place in the wider cosmos.**’ Jennifer Wexler, Project Curator, The world of Stonehenge 7

December 2021

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# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

# Contemporary influences on belief

- How important is cultural and societal authority?
- What is it about contemporary Australian society that leads to a tendency to view religious faith negatively?
- How influential is a utilitarian way of thinking in our society?  
Importance of the rational and the immediately useful.
- How do we separate cultural practices and political motivations from religious belief and doctrine?

## Some contemporary questions to consider

1. To what extent do you think your attitude to religion has been affected by the society and cultures in which you grew up?
2. To what extent do you think your attitude to religion has been affected by your family and school?
3. If it can be argued that a religious person's beliefs are the result of indoctrination, could the same be said about an atheist's beliefs?

- Ultimately people of religious faith believe in the existence of a personal God or gods or have a spiritual world view based on their own experience, which cannot be verified or denied by anyone else. This faith is not dependant on the capacity of human reason.
- Ultimately those who do not have a religious faith put their faith in the capacity of human beings to understand life and the world around them through other ways of knowing and other forms of expression.

**QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

## Assessment: SD p 13

- The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks that provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes. The areas of study, including the key knowledge and key skills listed for the outcomes, should be used for course design and the development of learning activities and assessment tasks. Assessment must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and should be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe. All assessments at Units 1 and 2 are school-based. Procedures for assessment of levels of achievement in Units 1 and 2 are a matter for school decision.

# Assessment (cont.) SD p 13

Suitable tasks for assessment **may** be selected from the following:

- reports
- debates
- identification exercises
- analytical exercises
- an essay
- written exercises
- annotated charts.

Where teachers allow students to choose between tasks they must ensure that the tasks they set are of comparable scope and demand.



# ACTIVITY

- Identify and explain content on which you will focus in your teaching of AOS 1
- How might you use **visual images** or **material objects** in your teaching?