



Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies (Cultural Memory in the Present)

Jan Assmann

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In ten brilliant essays, Jan Assmann explores the connections between religion, culture, and memory. Building on Maurice Halbwachs's idea that memory, like language, is a social phenomenon as well as an individual one, he argues that memory has a cultural dimension too. He develops a persuasive view of the life of the past in such surface phenomena as codes, religious rites and festivals, and canonical texts on the one hand, and in the Freudian psychodrama of repressing and resurrecting the past on the other. Whereas the current fad for oral history inevitably focuses on the actual memories of the last century or so, Assmann presents a commanding view of culture extending over five thousand years. He focuses on cultural memory from the Egyptians, Babylonians, and the Osage Indians down to recent controversies about memorializing the Holocaust in Germany and the role of memory in the current disputes between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East and between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

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