

## The One and the Many: One book, Many misunderstandings

A famous book by Erik Hornung on AE religion is "The One and the Many" (translation from "Der Eine und die Vielen: Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen, 1971). In a very careful, methodical survey, Hornung investigates all facets of the AE concept of divinity. One of his principal findings is, that no matter how often the AE's combined elements of different gods together, and irrespective of the clear evolution towards interchangeability of the gods, their religion never lost it's fundamental polytheistic character.

On some US websites however, his book is being used to support the idea that the AE's "really worshipped only one god, in many appearances". When I first saw this, I was really amazed that Hornung could be so completely misunderstood. So I took the book at hand, to look up a clear-cut quote to refute the argument. Only to find, that I could not find such a quote anywhere in the book.

Hornung is so careful in his exploration of the terrain, and so cautious in the formulation of his conclusions, that in the end he practically leaves it to the reader to come to the only logical conclusion. Alas, a subtle approach is wasted on those with preconceptions.

On July 14, 2002, I wrote an e-mail to Dr. Hornung, as follows:

Dear Dr. Hornung,

As an admirer of your book "Der Eine und die Vielen", it saddens me to see it misused to promote a modern monotheistic interpretation of the ancient Egyptian religion (e.g. [www.kemet.org](http://www.kemet.org)). Still, to prove them wrong is not so easy. One should really read all of your book to become convinced about what exactly is your opinion. In very brief, I would summarize your thesis as follows:

- "The One" and "The Many" were elements of the ancient Egyptian's concept of divinity. (page 237)
- The ancient Egyptians never held a true monotheistic faith, neither as an original phase, nor as a later phase, neither for all, nor for the initiated (with the possible exception of the Amarna period).

If I am wrong about this (admittedly very short) summary of your book, or if you later came to other conclusions, I would be very grateful if you could let me know.

On July 31, 2002 Dr. Hornung wrote back to me:

Dear Mr. Willockx,

Many thanks for your e-mail. I have already noticed several times that the internet is full of wrong and misleading information, so I am not using it.

Your short, but ingenious summary of my book is absolutely correct, and in the scientific literature there has been no revival of the "monotheistic" interpretation.

Thanking you for your attention,

Yours, Erik Hornung.

I rest my case.