

The Book of Gates and the Lessons of Egypt

Union of Saints

The Book of Gates, one of the great funerary texts of ancient Egypt, presents striking images of humanity in all its breadth. On the walls of tombs, we see depictions of people with an array of complexions—Egyptians, Nubians, Libyans, and Asiatics—all presented side by side. This artwork reveals not only Egypt's awareness of the wider world but also the acknowledgment of a shared human story.

The beauty of these depictions lies in their testimony: ancient Egypt was not isolated. Different cultures came together, exchanged ideas, and influenced one another. This gathering of peoples was a strength, reflecting the interconnectedness of the ancient world.

Yet, there was also a cost. Newcomers, seeing the brilliance of Egyptian science, architecture, and spirituality, gradually sought access to what Egypt had built. Over time, Egypt's openness allowed others to take advantage of its wisdom and resources. The very temples that had once symbolized the Egyptians' divine connection became doors for outsiders to enter and eventually dominate. This subversion contributed to the decline of a civilization that had endured for millennia.

The lesson for today is clear: culture is sacred. We can and should celebrate the richness of many traditions, learn from one another, and value the beauty of an array of complexions and perspectives. But love of culture also requires boundaries. Without discernment, openness can turn into vulnerability, and what is treasured can be trampled.

To truly honor the legacy of Egypt—and humanity as a whole—we must hold both truths: the beauty of the gathering of peoples and the necessity of safeguarding what is sacred.