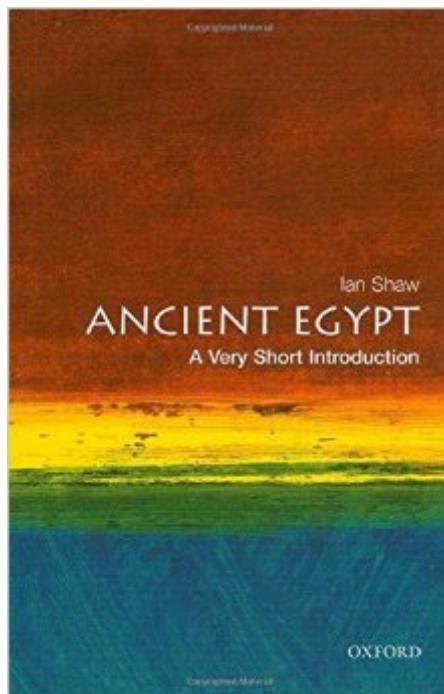


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Ancient Egypt: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

The ancient Egyptians are an enduring source of fascination--mummies and pyramids, curses and rituals have captured our imaginations for generations. We all have a mental picture of ancient Egypt, but is it the right one? How much do we really know about this once great civilization? In this absorbing introduction, Ian Shaw, one of the foremost authorities on Ancient Egypt, describes how our current ideas about Egypt are based not only on the thrilling discoveries made by early Egyptologists but also on fascinating new kinds of evidence produced by modern scientific and linguistic analyses. He also explores the changing influences on our responses to these finds, by examining the impact of Egyptology on various aspects of popular culture such as literature, cinema, opera, and contemporary art. He considers all aspects of ancient Egyptian culture, from tombs and mummies to the discovery of artifacts and the decipherment of hieroglyphs, and from despotic pharaohs to animal-headed gods. From the general reader interested in Ancient Egypt, to students and teachers of ancient history and archaeology, to museum-goers, this Very Short Introduction will not disappoint.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For someone who dreams of becoming an archaeologist or another Indiana Jones, this book provides an amusing and bracing dose of reality. The title, unfortunately, leads you to think the book is about Ancient Egypt rather than the study of it, a mistake that doesn't immediately become clear upon reading if you skip the Preface. It sneaks up on you, as you gradually realize that the book mentions Flinders Petrie rather more than Ramesses, and that the dates it gives are those of

discoveries and publications rather than dynasties and kingdoms. The main text doesn't actually state that the book covers Egyptology rather than Ancient Egypt itself until midway through the last chapter. By that time, it's become pretty obvious; the actual sequence of Ancient Egyptian history has not yet shown up -- it's found only in an appendix -- but the various issues in Egyptian archaeology have been well covered. Fortunately, the author wields a dry wit, without putting on a gossipy tone. Shaw acknowledges both the successes and mistakes of earlier archaeologists, with a spice of opinion; one section he titled "Wilbour's Phonecian Rolls, Petrie's New Race, and other embarrassments". His skewering of the "New Age" appropriation of the ancient Egyptians is delightfully understated and devastating. I enjoyed the book enough to read particularly good bits of it to my spouse, and found it easy to read. Out of a large stack of fiction and non-fiction I'm working my way through, it came quickly to my hands. I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the science of archaeology, ancient history, or interest in what we really know about ancient Egypt.

Book Review: Ancient Egypt - A Very Short Introduction by Ian Shaw

This is a small paperback book of 192 pages with some b/w photographs and various line drawings which is published by Oxford University Press and is one of a series of small introductory books on a vast array of subjects (a list is provided at the start of the book). The book, although supposedly a very short introduction to Egyptology, is indeed compact and covers a lot of ground. The book opens with a detailed discussion of the Narmer Palette, a carved flat stone which was discovered in 1898 by two British Egyptologists. This Palette has been dated at about 3,000 BC, which is the apparent beginning of the 1st Dynasty of ancient Egypt. There follows a discussion on how the ancient Greeks and Romans viewed Egypt. A discussion of the Bible and ancient Egypt then follows - it appears that definable references in the Bible to ancient Egypt don't appear until the 1st Millennium BC when there are a number of specific allusions to the Egyptians, especially in regard to battles against the Assyrians and the Persians. There appears to be no mention of Moses by the Egyptians (and he has never appeared in any hieroglyphs as far as I am aware despite his supposed high status in Egyptian society according to the Bible). Attempts have been made by others to associate Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) with Moses, however there are no other aspects of this pharaoh's life or indeed within his religious cult known as Aten (worship of the sun) that resemble the biblical account of Moses. Egyptologists generally regard the Moses and Exodus stories as mishmashes of stories which probably originated in distant memories of the expulsions of the Hyksos period, when Egypt expelled Asiatic rulers from northern Egypt.

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