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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Denise Allard. *The Egyptians.* Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens, 1997. 32 pp. $18.60 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8368-1714-0.

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Published on H-AfrTeach (July, 1998)

The civilization of ancient Egypt flourished along the River Nile for around three millennia. Egyptian culture is relatively well known to us due to the survival of many written records and the wealth of goods and painted scenes discovered in tombs. This book gives a brief introduction to several aspects of this civilization. It is presented in the form of one-page descriptions, accompanied by an illustration, under the following headings: Egypt, Long Ago, At Home, Children and Work, Writing, Farming, The Nile River, In Towns, Making Items (what's wrong with the word "things"?), Parties, Games and Sports, A New Life, Pyramids, Gods and Goddesses, Books/Videos/Web sites, Index.

With the exception of the map and photograph of the Great Pyramid and Sphinx accompanying "Long Ago," the illustrations are paintings similar to Egyptian tomb scenes.

The positive things I can say about this book are that the illustrations are attractive and look like Egyptian tomb scenes. The print is large and clear, and the language straightforward. This book is appropriate for primary school children.

Some of the pictures include information not in the written descriptions. This is particularly the case with the map ("Egypt") which includes locations not mentioned elsewhere (Western Desert, Giza, Thebes and Eastern Desert) and the scene accompanying "In Town," where the idea of "trade" (i.e. buying things by barter rather than with money), may need more explanation than is given. The latter scene includes people making mud bricks and hoeing, activities more suited to the countryside or edge of town rather than a town centre. I realise that the intention is to pack in a lot of information in a very small book, but here I feel it would be more helpful to the child to have a busy market scene with a variety of goods and people.

The description of "Writing" is inadequate. It is true that the Egyptian writing is not alphabetic but to describe it as "small pictures" perpetuates the notion of Egyptian writing being mystical and esoteric. It is not. It works much like many other non-alphabetic languages such as Chinese, Akkadian, Sumerian and others. It wouldn't take any longer for a speaker of those languages to learn to write it than a speaker of an alphabetically written language to learn to write with facility and skill. A sample of Egyptian writing should have been illustrated here also. In "Farming" we are told that the ancient Egyptians "grew vegetables and fruits" while there is a picture of workers harvesting grain. Grain was always Egypt's most important crop and her chief export to Rome and should have been mentioned in the text. It is nice to see that in this book slaves are not mentioned in the page on pyramids: a small step in countering the foundless notion of Jewish slaves building these royal tombs.

The end matter was added by the U.S. publisher. The page "Gods and Goddesses" is a good summary of the major Egyptian gods. However, it is much more complex than the rest of the book and seems out of place. None of the gods are mentioned elsewhere in the book. There is no glossary of terms which one might expect here. The last page is a "further reading" list of books, videos and web sites. I was unable to find one of these books in Books in Print (*Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* by Anne Pearson [Watts]). The citations of the suggested books are insufficient and would be hard for a parent or teacher to find: date of publication and ISBNs should have been included. The two web sites suggested are inappropriate. The first (www.seas.upenn.edu/%7Eahm/history.htm) is a page aimed at parents, encouraging them to teach history (in general) at home. The second page (www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/History/Home.html) is an index of sites on Ancient Egypt, but sites for adults. There are several web-sites on ancient Egypt aimed at children, why not include those here? I have many indexed at: http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/DEPT/RA/ABZU/YOUTH_RESOURCES.HTML including Rosetta Stone: http://www.clemusart.com/archive/pharaoh/roset and Odessey On-line: http://www.emory.edu/CARLOS/ODYSSEY/

If I were a school librarian or parent with $18.60 to

spend on a book for kids about ancient Egypt, I should spend it on something else, such as Rosalie David's *Growing Up in Ancient Egypt*, George Hart's *Ancient Egypt* (Eyewitness Book #23) or Geraldine Harris' *Ancient Egypt (Cultural Atlas for Young People)*.[1]

Notes:

[1]. Rosalie David. *Growing up in Ancient Egypt*. Growing Up In. Mahwah: Troll Communications, 1997. 32 pp. Illustrations. $4.95 (paper), ISBN 0-816-72718-X.

George Hart. *Ancient Egypt*. Eyewitness Books (No. 23). New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1990. 64 pp. Illustrations. $19.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-679-80742-X.

Geraldine Harris. *Ancient Egypt*. Cultural Atlas for Young People. New York: Facts on File, 1990. 96 pp. Illustrations. $17.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-8160-1971-1.

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