H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ann Heinrichs. *Egypt.* New York: Children's Press, 1997. 144 pp. $32.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-516-20470-3.

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The old, the new, and the eternal. Egypt has it all. Perhaps that helps explain the endless fascination so many people have for that remarkable country in the north-east corner of Africa. These are the themes studied in this useful book. From the pharaonic civilization to modern history, and from the geographical features of Egypt to its peoples and customs, all are presented in lively fashion and in a language that is easy to understand.

The book begins with an anecdote – the story of a little girl whose family insists she wear the traditional Muslim *niqab*-veil while the school authorities insist she remove it–which sums up nicely the various forces at work in a country with such a diverse history. The anecdote also reminds us that Egypt is made up of people, not just of stone buildings, tombs, and golden treasures. The book makes a nice point throughout its narrative of stressing the people behind the historical events, an important pedagogical principle. After introductory remarks, the book moves efficiently through two opening chapters on the geographical setting of Egypt–from the desert to the Nile river, and the importance of the latter in the survival of the population–and the fauna and flora found in the country. The next three chapters offer a short history of Egypt, from the pharaonic period down to the modern era, a breathtaking run through 5000 years of history!

The next chapter deals with the economy of modern Egypt, concentrating on the agriculture, manufacturing, and natural resources of the country, as well as everyday living in the cities. We next move to a description of the demographics in Egypt. This includes a discussion of some of the minorities found in Egypt, especially the Copts (the Christian community), the Bedouins, and the Nubians, a few words on the main language spoken there–which includes a useful sidebar that shows Arabic alphabet and numbers as well as some common words and phrases–and ends with a section on population growth problems. The next chapter deals with the main religions found in Egypt, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The final two chapters, on the arts, education, recreational activities, diet, clothing, and housing, leave us with a useful overview of the Egyptian people. Some historical charts and general information offered in a "Fast Facts" format, as well as a short bibliography and index, close off the book.

As can be seen, the book contains pretty much all that one would like to learn about this most fascinating of countries. Presented in short sections properly set apart by colored headings, with useful sidebars throughout, the book is easy to use and read, and should be a welcome addition to any school curriculum. Although it is always easy to question an author's choice of topics and the placement thereof within the flow of the story, my only argument with the book comes with the discussion of the Coptic minority within the chapter on the country's population. Although the text specifically tells us that Copts are a religious rather than an ethnic minority, their inclusion in this chapter may perhaps create confusion in some readers' minds, especially when the Coptic religion is presented in the next chapter on religious observances in Egypt.

Additionally, a preface telling us which readership was intended for the book might have been useful. Although the book must appear on various school boards' curriculum, advising teachers which grades the book is meant to service would have been helpful. Perhaps this information could have been included at the beginning of the book.

I end this short review with a few minor suggestions and corrections: P. 14: the mention of "The Great Pyramids of Giza" under the World's Largest Monuments rubric is misleading. Only the pyramid of King Khufu (Greek Cheops) should be called the Great Pyramid. In fact, compare p. 44, where the text correctly identifies the Great Pyramid as that built by Khufu. P. 18: the spelling of three of the oases mentioned may perhaps be closer to the local pronunciation, but the oases of Farafirah, Dakhilah, and Kharijah may also be found in atlases as Farafra, Dakhla, and Kharga respectively. P. 32: the first charac-

ter in the transliteration of the word *'aa* in the expression "great house" should be a sign curving toward the right (i.e. an *ayen*) and not toward the left, which renders an *aliph.* The same goes for p. 39, in the transliteration of the word *n'r* ("fish"). P. 34: after "A black substance called *kohl*..." add the word "today;" the text as it reads gives the impression that *kohl* is an ancient Egyptian word. P. 35: after "On festive evenings, women..." add "and men, from the period of the New Kingdom on," since both men and women wore the perfumed cones and these are only found from the New Kingdom on. P. 39: the statement that some hieroglyphs show whether a word is a noun or a verb is inaccurate: only the position of the word in the sentence indicated this. Pp. 39-40: the number of Egyptian hieroglyphs was close to eight hundred as early as the Middle Kingdom period (twentieth century B.C. on), not only "by 300 B.C." as the book states. P. 40: the inclusion of the *men* sign in the chart of hieroglyphic symbols might cause confusion. I assume the sign (a gaming board with pieces on it) was added to help the students spell out the name Tutankhamen, since the *ankh* sign is also included in the chart, but the book should tell us this is an actual ancient Egyptian word and not the plural of the English word "man." P. 41: the description of the god Aton is not accurate. What is said there represents the sun god Re; the Aton was simply the sun disk itself. P. 44: King Khufu's pyramid was not covered with granite slabs; that is Menkaure's pyramid at Giza. P. 46: it might have been more prudent to point out that the recent re-dating of the sphinx to a period "long before Khafre's time" is highly controversial and far from being universally accepted. P. 47: the statement that Thebes was built on the Nile's east bank is correct but the map showing Thebes on the west bank may be confusing to some readers. P. 48: the Hyksos realm never reached as far south as Thebes; perhaps reword to say "... and later spread toward Thebes." Additionally, the Hyksos never used iron, which was not introduced in Egypt before the thirteenth century B.C. or so. P. 50: one of the later dynasties (the twenty-fifth) did not come from Ethiopia but from Sudan. P. 51: write "Ptolemaic ruler" for "Ptolemy ruler." P. 61: re: the curse of King Tut, it might have been nice to add that Howard Carter died in 1939 at the age of 65, seventeen years after the discovery of the tomb! P. 134: in the bibliographical entry entry for G. Harris, read "Pharaoh" for "Pharoah."

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