

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

A. Rosalie David. *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*. New York: Facts-on-File, 1998. xvi + 382 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8160-3312-6.

Reviewed by Alexandra O'Brien (University of Chicago)
Published on H-AfrTeach (January, 1999)

David's ambitious book aims to be a reference for all aspects of Egyptian civilization from the predynastic to the Graeco-Roman periods. This 4,000 year slice of history begins with the rise of predynastic culture, then moves to the beginnings of a unified Egypt around 3100 BC, then on to the ups and downs of that unified country, its empire and peak in the New Kingdom, and then through Persian, Ptolemaic and finally Roman domination, with the book's scope ending in the seventh century AD at the Islamic conquest. In her introduction, David explains that the material is organized thematically in order to facilitate access to topics rather than chronology (p. xii). This arrangement is a good idea as it makes information more accessible to the non-specialist. The book is intended to be used as a reference source and so, in addition to the topical sections, there is a detailed index (pp. 355-82).

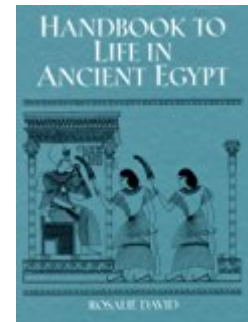
David has a record of good scholarly and popular books including *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* and *Discovering Ancient Egypt*. The latter book is also published by Facts on File, which incidentally publishes Baines and Malek's excellent *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* and Geraldine Harris' *Ancient Egypt: A Cultural Atlas for Young People*. Thus it's a good bet that this book too will be a useful tool for high school students and interested lay persons of any age.

The thematic sections into which the book is divided are as follows: "Historical Background," "Geography of Ancient Egypt," "Society and Government," "Religion of the Living," "Funerary Beliefs and Customs," "Architecture and Building," "Written Evidence," "The Army and Navy," "Foreign Trade and Transport," "Economy and Industry," and "Everyday Life," followed by the chronological table, museum collections list, bibliography and in-

dex.

Each section is divided into sub-headings covering aspects of the main topic. The text is liberally accompanied by helpful tables and b/w illustrations, many photos and line drawings. At the end of each section, further reading suggestions are presented to the reader under the sub-headings which facilitate the search for further bibliography. These "further reading" sections contain abbreviated citations as the reader is required to look up the full reference in the main bibliography towards the end of the book.

Examples of the handy references included in the sections are the sketch history of Egypt (pp. 7-15) and short biographies of major rulers (pp. 48-53), both in the "Historical Background" section. The "Geography" chapter has a handy gazetteer of place names with short descriptions (pp. 76-80). These two sections of the book are the most successful and will serve as excellent introductions to the geography and history of Egypt. The remaining three sections of the book are also good introductions to their topics but suffer perhaps from lack of editing (or perhaps from the author "running out of steam" with this ambitious project!). The "Society and Government" chapter might have benefited from a diagram illustrating the set-up of Egyptian administration (such as that to be found for New Kingdom Egypt in Trigger[1]), and reference to this book as well as Kemp's (1991 below) rather than Edgerton's 1947 work might have been more appropriate in the further reading suggestions for "Bureaucracy and Administration" (p. 97). The section on "Funerary Beliefs and Customs" includes a map of ancient Thebes but not of the Memphite necropolis. There are no reading suggestions for "Rock-Cut Tombs," which might have referred readers to Reeves' *Complete Valley of the*



Kings and *Complete Tutankhamun*, both of which are included in the main bibliography on page 352. The “Architecture and Building” section does not include Arnold’s excellent work *Building in Egypt* in the reading suggestions, nor is it in the main bibliography. The Lucas book listed by David is out of print though a new printing is forthcoming by Dover in 1999.

Additional books to consider for this text’s bibliography: Arnold, Dieter. *Building in Egypt: Pharaonic Stone Masonry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Kemp, Barry J. *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Lucas, A. D. and Harris, J. R. *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1999. Robins, Gay. *The Art of Ancient Egypt*. London: British Museum Press, 1997.

I notice some other surprising omissions from the main bibliography. No works by Assman are listed in the bibliography, although this scholar has done much important work on Egyptian religion (some of it in English). Omitted too is Wentz’s *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (as well as any other work by this scholar), and Murnane’s excellent *Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt*, now available in an updated edition and an excellent survey of Egyptian sites which would have been appropriate to include in addition to his *Road to Kadesh*. [2] Mark Lehner’s book *The Complete Pyramids* should also be added to the bibliography as this publication is a recent survey of pyramids and pyramid building designed to be accessible to the interested non-scholar. I would also suggest that perhaps works by Budge should not be included in the bibliography. I wonder too at the criteria used for deciding what books were to be included, as their being in print and being accessible does not seem to have been necessary for them to be included yet there are the omissions I have pointed out.

A couple of minor editing problems: Schafer’s name

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-aftrteach>

Citation: Alexandra O’Brien. Review of David, A. Rosalie, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. January, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2678>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication,

is consistently spelled without the umlaut in the body of the text (as it has been here as a result of internet browser limitations), though it is spelled correctly in the main bibliography and in the readings suggested for “The Family” (p. 338); a book by David herself is listed which is apparently published in 1996 and on the workmen’s town of Kahun. No such book is listed in the main bibliography and I haven’t been able to find it in “Books in Print” or at Amazon.com.

Despite these criticisms, this book is an excellent reference to the culture and history of ancient Egypt and certainly succeeds in being what its author aimed to produce, a concise “Handbook” designed to facilitate access to information and bibliography for the reader. The text in the book would be accessible to older school children and college students, although some of the works cited would be difficult. This book is definitely a worthwhile purchase for a school, college or public library as well as for any interested non-scholar; even though this book is on the expensive side the density of information contained within makes the cost worthwhile.

Notes

[1]. Trigger, Kemp, O’Connor and Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p. 208, fig. 3.4 (There is a later reprint available).

[2]. Wentz, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); Murnane, *Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), and *Road to Kadesh: A Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1990).

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.