

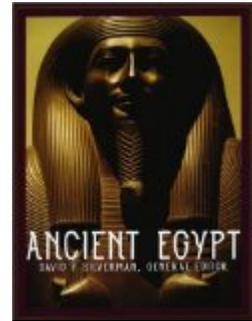
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David P. Silverman, ed. *Ancient Egypt*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 256 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-521952-4.

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## Insiders' Views On Ancient Egypt

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*Ancient Egypt* is reviewed, here, on the basis of a number of factors, including its format and appearance, its content, its usefulness as a reference, its application for teaching, its cost, and its overall integration and comprehensiveness. On all of these measures, the book scores very well, indeed. Silverman's volume should quickly reach the mass market for which it is intended.

The cost of this book is low, its quality is excellent, and its content is relevant and up-to-date. Its fifteen chapters are authored by specialists, and include the basics of history, religion, culture, geography, politics, funerary practices, economics, demography, art, and architecture. The volume's structure makes it suitable for undergraduate courses that are organized topically. All of the contributors are well-known experts in their respective sub-fields of Egyptology.

Focused chronologies for specific periods, and an abundant number of maps and hundreds of images, make *Ancient Egypt* useful as a general reference volume. It is bound so handsomely that it may even reach the "coffee table market," in fact. One pesky issue for this reviewer is that the typeface is small, and when italicized under the image captions it becomes difficult to read for my middle-aged eyes. I appreciate that the small font allows for more words per page, and I can get higher magnification for my glasses, but the tiny print remains a barrier to easy usage.

As a reference work, the provision of a nine-page in-

dex is extremely helpful. The bibliographic breakdown for each of the topical chapters is equally handy for undergraduate or general readers. On the other hand, the glossary is rather sparse, and offers only one page for many specialized terms. The selection of topics here is not very clear and since virtually all of the glossary terms are also indexed they could just stand there with references back to the main body of the text.

As a specialist on Nubia, I checked closely on related topics in order to make a test of general accuracy, and did find a few basic errors. Dynasty XXV is listed as ending in 664 BCE, rather than in 756 BCE (p. 242), placing it deep into the seventh century BCE (though on page 37 the correct date is given). On other topics related to Kush, Nubia, Taharka, Montuemhat, and such, I checked many of the references and found them to be accurate, relevant, and indeed very balanced. The section on art in the Late Period was very good, but Dynasty XX ends and the Third Intermediate Period begins without much effort to address the intriguing complexities in the rivalry between the Delta king Smenides versus the High Priest of Amun and the King's Son of Kush (which begins the Nubian recovery period, also known as the "Nubian Dark Age"). There are also no entries on Ta-Seti or Ta-Nehesi, and the discussion of the Hyksos (p. 31) could have amplified their strategic relationship with Nubia/Kush. The list of tribute from Nubia (p. 40) does not include slaves, but page 41 is very good in its description of the dynamic interaction between these two states, during the Old and Middle Kingdom. The discussion of the Mesehti military

tomb models (p. 51) in this section could have mentioned the discovery of Nubian soldiers in the same location. Yet it is at least noted that Nubians worked in the gold mines of Wadi al- Alaqi (p. 54). Meroe is also mentioned in passing (pp. 55, 191). Through this text, one may conclude that a serious effort was made to represent the important relationship between Egypt and Nubia, but that it is not consistent, and sometimes falls into an Egypto-centric framework. This may be natural for a book on ancient Egypt, but other voices are possible.

I was very glad to see an entire chapter on gender. Silverman should be congratulated for making scholarship available on this often neglected topic. I did wish for more discussion about the controversial issue of race, ethnicity and identity along the ancient Nile. Other areas covered—such as religion, animals, agriculture, art, technology, writing and chronology—are all informative and excellently covered. To make one note on demotic writings: various sources claimed an origin dating back to Dynasty XXV or XXVI for this Ancient Egyptian writing

system. But Petrie (1905, vol. 3, p. 295) lists a demotic text found in Taharka, and this is the oldest-known case of demotic writing, of which I am aware. Perhaps it is thus time to credit this innovation to the Nubians? In *Ancient Egypt's* chapter on writing, there is no mention of Meroitic, even though it is morphologically heavily influenced by Egyptian demotic and hieroglyphics.

To summarize, this is a wonderful book, that has many uses. I strongly recommend its purchase for Egyptologists. One should keep a critical view of the interpretation, however, and keep in mind that decisions have been made regarding the inclusion and exclusion of specific material.

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