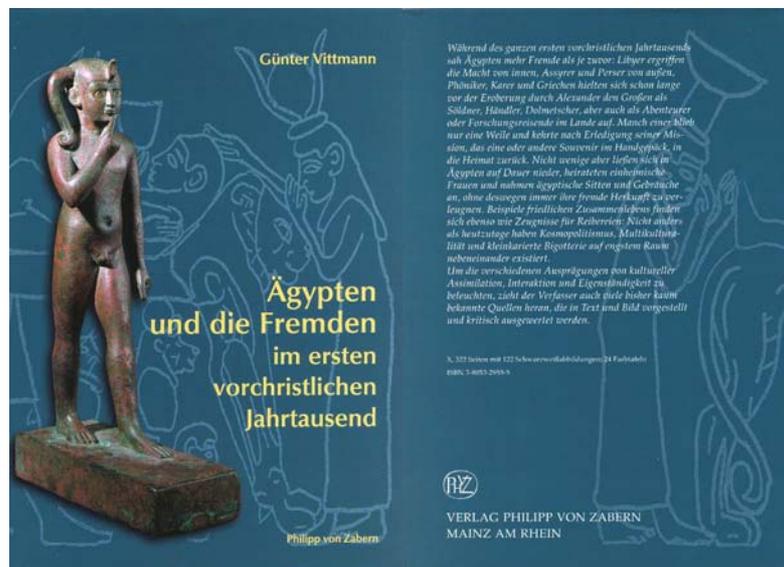


Vittmann, G. 2003. **Ägypten und die Fremden im ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausend.** - Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein (Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 97)

Book review by J. Dieleman



To cut a long story short, this book is a must-have for anybody with an interest in pharaonic Egypt of the Late Period. This book may not lack in any library, either personal or institutional, which claims to cover pharaonic Egypt in particular or the ancient world in general. Günter Vittmann brings together an astounding wealth of information concerning the interplay between Egypt and foreigners in the first millennium BCE and makes, in many important respects, the necessary differentiations in our understanding of the international world of the Near East in the Iron Age. In about 248 pages he presents the peoples concerned, discusses the relevant artifacts, analyses the historical events and developments, and unravels the many legends, or to use a more correct term, the ‘cultural memory’ of this encounter between Egypt and its many invaders or immigrants, as it can be found in later, mainly classical sources. The amount of information and the breadth of Vittmann’s knowledge are so overwhelming, that I had to read the book twice to truly value the fullness of the book. I recommend any future reader to take a similar path: it is only on second reading that I could focus on the many intricate –and truly important - details of Vittmann’s presentation. This is not to say that Vittmann confuses the reader or that the book is disorganized. On the contrary, this is a very rich book, which needs – and deserves - time to be digested properly. Moreover, it is not easily depleted. Even after having read it twice, the book will remain prominently on my bookshelves as a reference for my own research.

The book contains nine thematic chapters, which are more or less chronologically arranged, from the Third Intermediate Period (Libyans) over to the Late Period and, finally, to the beginnings of the Hellenistic period (Greeks). The chapters are concerned with the Libyans (chapter 1), the Assyrians and Babylonians (chapter 2), the Phoenicians (chapter 3), the Aramaic documents (chapter 4), the Persians (chapter 5), the Carians (chapter 6), people from south Arabia (chapter 7), the Greeks before Alexander the Great (chapter 8), and some concluding thoughts about cultural assimilation in Egypt (chapter 9). It is unnecessary to reiterate here Vittmann’s discussions and argumentations. It suffices to say that the book is made up as a history book, this is to say, that the historical sources and artifacts are carefully described and studied in order to judge their historical value and to untangle the information they contain. Vittmann does not lose himself in theoretical reflections about cultural assimilation and antagonism. Instead, he has chosen to devote his attention to the many, many artifacts, found throughout the Mediterranean world and dispersed over modern museums, which have so much to tell about the encounter between Egypt and its neighboring peoples, but are hardly addressed because of their inaccessibility, lack of esthetic appeal, or unknown existence. The reader can now become fully familiar with this material, because the book is illustrated throughout with drawings and photos in black-white and color. The notes to the chapters can be found at the back of the book and provide an indispensable tool for those who want to pursue an even more detailed investigation of the material. The notes are thorough, with clear references to scholarly journals and monographs, and contain many hidden gems in addition to the information presented in the chapters themselves.

Vittmann demonstrates a phenomenal grasp over the material covered. He does not only know all the languages concerned, from Egyptian, to Aramaic in its many phases, and to Carian and Nabataean, but also is

conversant with the philological particularities of the various languages and scripts. Thus, Vittmann does not rely on translations from other scholars and is able to bring in many detailed observations about the authentic inscriptions. Many of these texts are made available in facsimile or photo, in a number of cases for the first time outside specialized and rare publications. If so desired, one could object that Vittmann relies too heavily on textual evidence at the expense of archaeology. However, the presented material is already so abundant and thought-provoking, that Vittmann's focus is warranted. Hopefully, an archaeologist will take up the challenge to complement this book with a study of the archaeological realities of the issues discussed by Vittmann.

In conclusion, I recommend this book as an essential reading to any serious student of the ancient world.

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