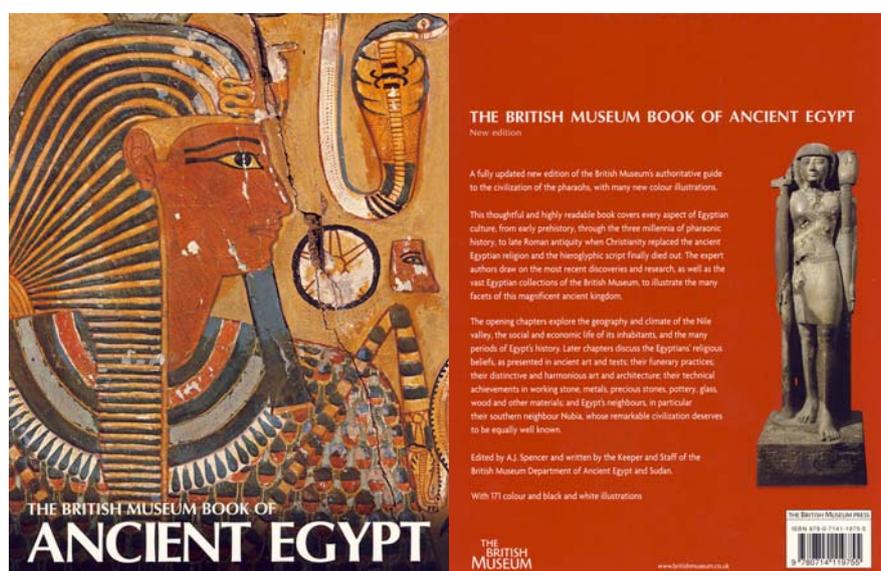


Keeper and Staff of the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan. 2007. The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt. - London, British Museum Press

Book review by W. van Haarlem



The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt is a new edition, preceded by various editions, even by editions from as long ago as 1930 and 1909. The current edition consists of general chapters on geography and society (I), history (II), religion (III), funerary matters (IV), language (V, subdivided in several paragraphs highlighting different kinds of literature, which is a helpful division), art (VI), technology (VII) and international affairs (VIII). A helpful chronological chart, a king-list with cartouches, suggestions for further reading and a general index is provided, but an object index is, unfortunately, missing: one would expect this for a general introduction to Ancient Egypt, based upon the British Museum's holdings.

A few critical remarks. There is evidence, like large numbers of pig bones in temple precincts, that pigs gradually became unclean only in post-Old Kingdom contexts, and not before (p. 19). Whether the structure of HK29A in Hierakonpolis really was a temple (p. 70) is debatable; the Phase 7 (Naqada IId) building at Tell Ibrahim Awad might be a better candidate. In the overview of the Dynasties 19 to 21 (p. 51-53), mentioning the identification of modern Qantir with the Ramesside residence Piramesse or the later move (literally) of the capital to Tanis would not have been out of place. At p. 92, it is stated that "Only select initiates were allowed past the main portals." This general statement is, as such, not correct. It is often assumed that entering the temple's *inner sanctum* was usually strictly limited to people associated with the temple cult in one way or another and that others had to stay out, being only permitted inside the temple compound. There is, however, no clear evidence that such strict rules were applied at all times. Arguably, other rules may have been observed in smaller provincial temples than in state shrines (cf. Wilkinson, 1999: 303 ff). Contrary to the general rule, the sanctuary of the Roman temple at el-Qal'a was, for instance, sometimes open to be seen by visitors to the frontal part of the building (Pantalacci, 1984-1985: 133-141, fig. 2). Also, different types of temples or chapels may have differed in this regard. In the New Kingdom, private shrines at Deir el-Medina and perhaps those in Amarna (Peet & Woolley, 1923: 92-108;¹ cf. Kemp, 1987: 56-62; Stevens, 2003: 143-168) suggest that the priesthood was not necessarily a full-time occupation; the workmen themselves could act as full-fledged priests in these local cults (Bierbrier, 1997: 96-97; Bomann, 1991: Ch. 5; Valbelle, 1985: 328-331). It is said that "The festivals were always central features in the year of the temple, but they receive prominent architectural expression for the first time in the surviving record at Thebes under Hatshepsut. She set up a series of wayside shrines for the sacred Bark of the god Amun to allow the procession of the god to rest on the way from Karnak to Luxor" (p. 95-96). To me it seems that Hatshepsut was not the first one to introduce these resting shrines for the Sacred Bark. There is always the Bark station of Senusert I to consider, now in the Open Air Museum at the Karnak temple, but moved from an unknown location. It may very well have been one of an earlier set of Bark stations. Although Tell el-Dab'a and Avaris are mentioned separately (p. 256-257), they are not explicitly identified as being identical.

¹ They give a description of similar structures as in Deir el-Medina.

All in all, and despite these few remarks, this is a highly useful and compact introduction to many aspects of Ancient Egypt in general and the Egyptian Department of the British Museum in particular.

Keeper and Staff of the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan. 2007. *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*. - London, British Museum Press. 304 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7141-1975-5/ISBN-10: 0-7141-1975-X. Price £16.99 (paperback).

Cited literature

Bierbrier, M. 1997. *The tomb-builders of the Pharaohs*. - Cairo, AUC Press.

Bomann, A. 1991. *The private chapel in ancient Egypt*. - London/New York, Kegan Paul International.

Kemp, B.J. Ed. 1987. *Amarna reports IV*. - London, Egypt Exploration Society (Occasional Publications 5).

Pantalacci, L. & C. Traunecker, 1984-1985. *Premières observations sur le temple Coptite d'el-Qal'a*. - *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*, 70.

Peet, T.E. & L. Woolley. 1923. *The city of Akhenaten. Part I. Excavations of 1921 and 1922 at El-'Amarneh*. - London, Egypt Exploration Society (Memoirs of the Egypt Exploration Society 38).

Stevens, A.K. 2003. *The material evidence for domestic religion at Amarna and preliminary remarks on its interpretation*. - *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 89: 143-168.

Valbelle, D. 1985. *Les ouvriers de la tombe*. - *Bibliothèque d'Étude* 96: 328-331.

Wilkinson, T.A.H. 1999. *Early Dynastic Egypt*. - London/New York, Routledge.