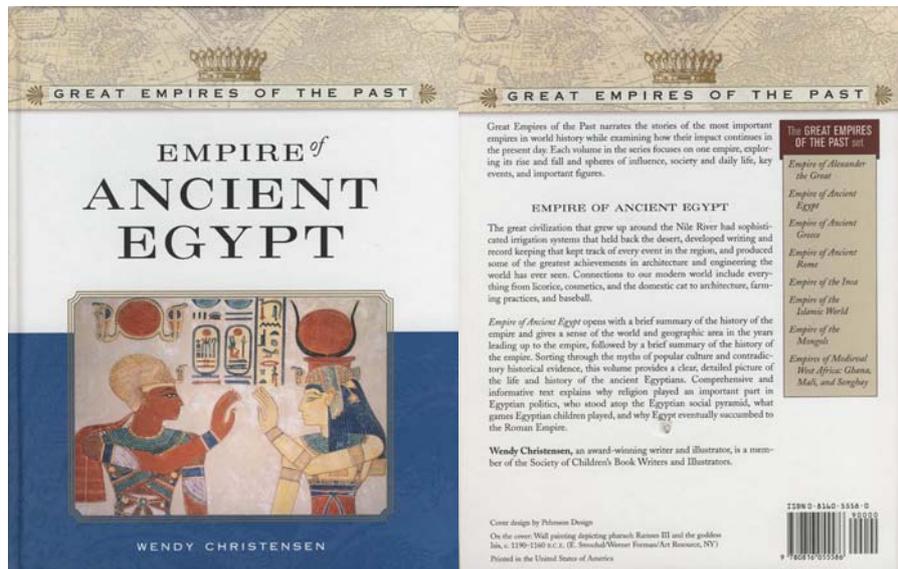


Christensen, W. 2005. *Empire of ancient Egypt*. – New York, Facts On File

Book review by S. Ikram



Although the audience for this book is unclear, it appears to be geared to young adults (about 13–15 years). It is divided into two parts of three chapters each, and runs to 119 pages, generously illustrated with black and white photographs, and enhanced by text boxes scattered throughout the work. The book has a brief time line, list for further reading, which includes both books and websites, a bibliography, and an index.

After an introduction the book starts with part I, focusing on the history of Egypt, divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 deals summarily with Egyptian history from the Predynastic to the end of the Second Intermediate Period. Chapter 2 continues with the New Kingdom, quickly followed by chapter 3, entitled 'Egypt's Long Decline', which briefly covers the remainder of Egyptian history through the Roman domination. Part I is, out of the two parts, by far the weaker. Part II deals with the society and culture of Egypt and is also divided into three chapters. Chapter 4 is concerned with Egyptian society, chapter 5 concentrates on everyday life, and chapter 6, the final chapter, covers Egyptian religion, science and culture. It concludes with an epilogue relating to modern Egypt. Part II is, on the whole, much better than part I.

All in all, despite a promising start, I found this book disappointing. The writing is fairly uneven, with some very simple passages alternating with quite complex ones, and vastly different levels of information being provided. A few typos also appear (although one is hard pressed not to find these in any work, e.g. mineral power [p. 41]). Granted, it is very difficult presenting a complex culture such as that of ancient Egypt to younger audiences as some degree of simplification must take place. However, some of the oversimplification and the resulting errors, coupled with the factual mistakes that are scattered throughout the book render this volume disappointing. For example, the box on obelisks (p. 11) fails to mention their solar connection, dynasty III is excluded from the Old Kingdom, while dynasty VIII is included (p. 24), the description of the end of the Old Kingdom (p. 28) is odd, especially as it is intimated that it started at the end of the dynasty V. The population estimates are of dubious authenticity, and the idea that *serdab* statues were introduced in the Middle Kingdom (p. 31) is incorrect, as is the idea that *carob* was used as a deodorant (p. 41), and the idea that wool shawls were commonly worn (p. 41), that iron hooks were commonly used in excerebration (p. 99) and so on.

There are some very good things in the book, however, such as the refreshingly positive view of the Hyksos, and some of the boxes, especially those dealing with water-clocks, king's symbols, the section on papyrus and papyrologists, as well as some of the games. Despite these, however, this is not the best book on ancient Egypt that has been produced for adolescents.

Christensen, W. 2005. *Empire of ancient Egypt*. – New York, Facts On File. 128 pp. ISBN 0–8160–5558–0. Price \$35.00 (hardback).

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