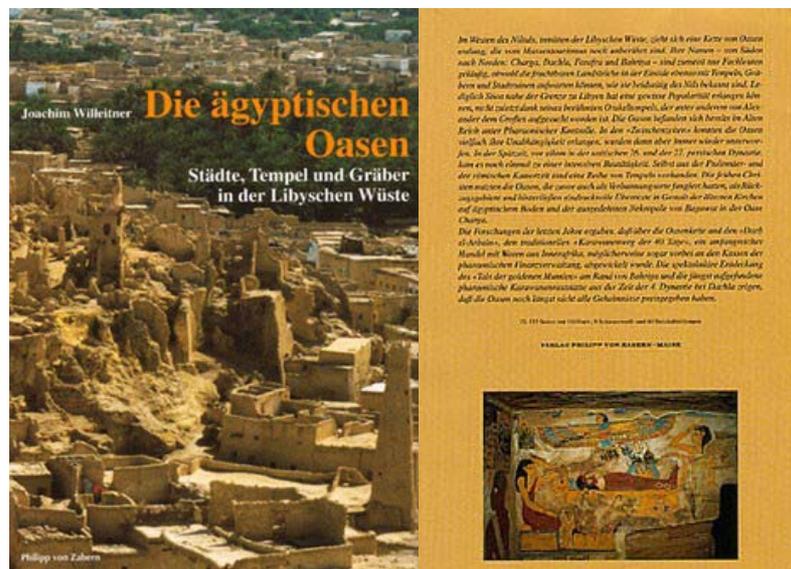


**Willeitner, J. 2003. Die ägyptischen Oasen. Städte, Tempel und Gräber in der Libyschen Wüste. – Mainz am Rhein, Verlag Philipp von Zabern**

Book review by S.M. van Roode



Visitors to Egypt usually limit their visit to the Nile Valley. Most tour operators offer package tours including visits to the Pyramids of Giza, the many temples and tombs at Thebes and the Nubian charm of Aswan and its temples that have been rescued from the rising waters of Lake Nasser. Often a side-step into the eastern desert is made, to the Red Sea-town of Hurghada, where the weary tourist can rest for a few days before returning to his or her own country. This focus on the Nile Valley is not surprising, since most of the worlds well-known monuments are situated on the fertile banks of this river.

Tourism to the Western Desert is far more limited, although a few of Egypt's most beautiful surroundings can be found there. The oases of Bahariya, Farafra, Dachla and Kharga are situated in depressions in the desert and have been populated since early times. The oasis of Siwa, near the Libyan border, once housed the oracle of Amun visited by Alexander the Great, and the Wadi Natrun, at easy travelling distance from Cairo, has not only provided refuge for hermits and monks since early Christianity, but is also the décor for the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant. This story also illustrates the importance of the oases as stations on the ancient caravan-routes. This importance only ended with the construction of the railway in the Nile Valley, but in the centuries before the Arabs and ancient Egyptians recognised the track from the oases Kharga and Dachla southward into Sudan as the most efficient way of travelling with trading expeditions. Of the oases, Bahariya has recently been the focus of attention after the discovery of the so-called 'Valley of the Golden Mummies'. In the present book relatively little attention is paid to this discovery; at the end of the chapter on Bahariya a small paragraph is dedicated to the subject. The subtitle of the chapter is an appropriate 'More than the 'Valley of the Golden Mummies' '; the rest of the chapter concerns the rest of the sites of the oasis.

In this richly illustrated book Joachim Willeitner provides an overview of the history of the oases, and offers concise descriptions of the archaeological sites and monuments. The lay-out in three columns gives the book an almost newspaper-like appearance, which is enhanced by the many photographs and linedrawings. The writer shortly introduces, among others, the temple of Hibis in Kharga, the Old Kingdom necropolis in Dachla, the rock-tombs of Farafra, the temples of Bahariya, the monasteries of the Wadi Natrun and the ruins at Siwa. Unfortunately, the photographs are not of constant quality: some are excellent, sharp and beautifully composed while others seem to be tourist snapshots, with flat colours. The descriptions of the various elements are sometimes rather short and general, but at the end of the book the reader is provided with references to Egyptological literature in which more information on a specific detail can be found.

In short, the book brings these relatively unknown destinations to the attention of a broader public in a comprehensive way.

Willeitner, J. 2003. Die ägyptischen Oasen. Städte, Tempel und Gräber in der Lybischen Wüste. – Mainz am Rhein, Verlag Philipp von Zabern. 155 pp. ISBN 3-8053-2915-6. Price € 41.00.