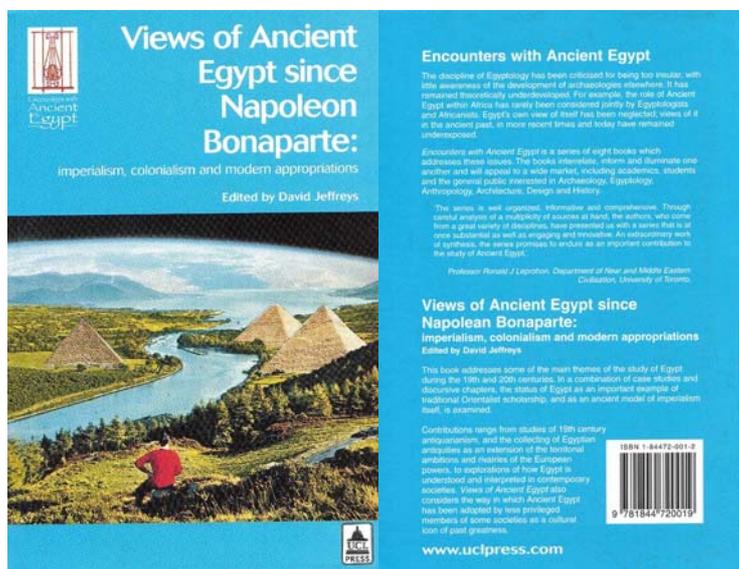


**Jeffreys, D. Ed. 2003. Views of ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: imperialism, colonialism and modern appropriations. – London, UCL Press (Encounters with ancient Egypt)**

Book review by C.H. van Zoest



The series ‘Encounters with ancient Egypt’ is the product of a conference aiming “to move the study of Ancient Egypt into the mainstream of recent advances in archaeological and anthropological practice and interpretation” (p. 4). The editors’ dedication to this ambitious goal is apparent, and it is certainly true that the subjects addressed in the series, including this volume, usually receive little attention in Egyptology. The ways in which ancient Egypt has been viewed since the Napoleonic campaign form an interesting subject in it self. From a scientific point of view, it is important to acknowledge that these views still influence the views of modern scholars. The series is made up of an attractive mixture of case studies and accounts of a more general nature. Moreover, the design of the volumes makes them a pleasure to read.

The introduction (chapter 1) is a concise overview of the study of ancient Egypt, with attention to the political background of the countries that are involved in Egyptology. While it constitutes a solid summary for Egyptologists, it is perhaps too concise and drawing on presumed knowledge of the matter to appeal to non-Egyptologists (another goal of the series).

The most often relocated, adapted, copied, reinterpreted and imitated monuments of Egypt are obelisks. Though there are more extensive publications on “obelisks in exile”, chapter 2 shows how ancient Egyptian obelisks (and a few modern ones) have been (re)used as symbols of imperial power by different countries.

Chapters 3 and 5 are complementary to the introduction; the latter explores the contributions made to Egyptology by the British and French armies during the Egyptian war of 1882. The former compares the British and French history of research on and acquisition of Egyptian monuments. Again, Egyptologists should perhaps be familiar with the events, but the historical outline throws light on modern-day research and museum collections.

A figure with whom most Egyptians are probably not familiar is discussed in chapter 4. Sir William Gell, a contemporary of Champollion, Young and Salt, never published on Egyptology himself but served as an intermediary between the first generation of Egyptologists. At a time when news on the latest discoveries and theories was not as accessible as in the present internet-age, he corresponded with many of them and relayed important information between a number of scholars. Before his voyage to Egypt, Sir Gardner Wilkinson was instructed and inspired by Gell and later encouraged to publish his material.

Not only British and French achievements are discussed; chapter 6 and 7 focus on Egyptology in Spain and Meso-America respectively. Ancient Egypt and the study of it served as an important model for the development of Meso-American archaeology at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter 8 discusses the theory of G. Elliot Smith and W.J. Perry on the Egyptian origin of all human civilisation. Now forgotten or dismissed as not to be taken seriously, this was an important school of thought in the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was perhaps more telling of the *Zeitgeist* than of ancient Egypt and its influence on other parts of the world. Next, the impact of Michael Rostovtzeff on the study of the agrarian history of Graeco-Roman Egypt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is sketched. The views expressed in his fundamental works mirror the views of the Russian intelligentsia on the Russian peasantry.

One topic that I found missing in this book, is the view of modern Egyptians on their ancient past. In my experience, not only do most modern Egyptians seem uninterested in their own pre-Islamic past, except when it comes to the exploitation of it (an issue addressed more in-depth in the volume 'Consuming ancient Egypt') but the approach of modern Egyptologists to present-day Egypt and its inhabitants often still bears ill-concealed colonialist traits. The matter is briefly touched upon in a few instances, but I find it ironic that a chapter on the degree and mode of involvement of Egyptian nationals in Egyptology since the time of Napoleon lacks from the volume: a regrettable omission in an otherwise highly recommendable publication. Characteristically, a contribution on the British opinions ca. 1820-1920 on the Copts *is* included (chapter 10). The dichotomy between admiration of the supposed authenticity of their traditions and disdain for the modern people still exists, and not only with regard to the Copts.

Chapter 11 is a concise overview of the different views on ancient Egypt held by different groups: it is claimed by Europeans, Africans and Egyptians. A highly theorising contribution on the relationship between modern western values (which are a self-perceived digression from divine kingship) and the study of the ancient East concludes the volume.

The diversity in topics and in writing styles makes this volume a varied read, appealing both to Egyptologists and others who are interested in the development of the study of ancient Egypt. Moreover, the enthusiasm that speaks from its pages is inspiring.

Jeffreys, D. 2003. Views of ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: imperialism, colonialism and modern appropriations. – London, UCL Press (Encounters with ancient Egypt). 220 pp. ISBN 1844 72 00 12. Price £ 25.00 (paperback).