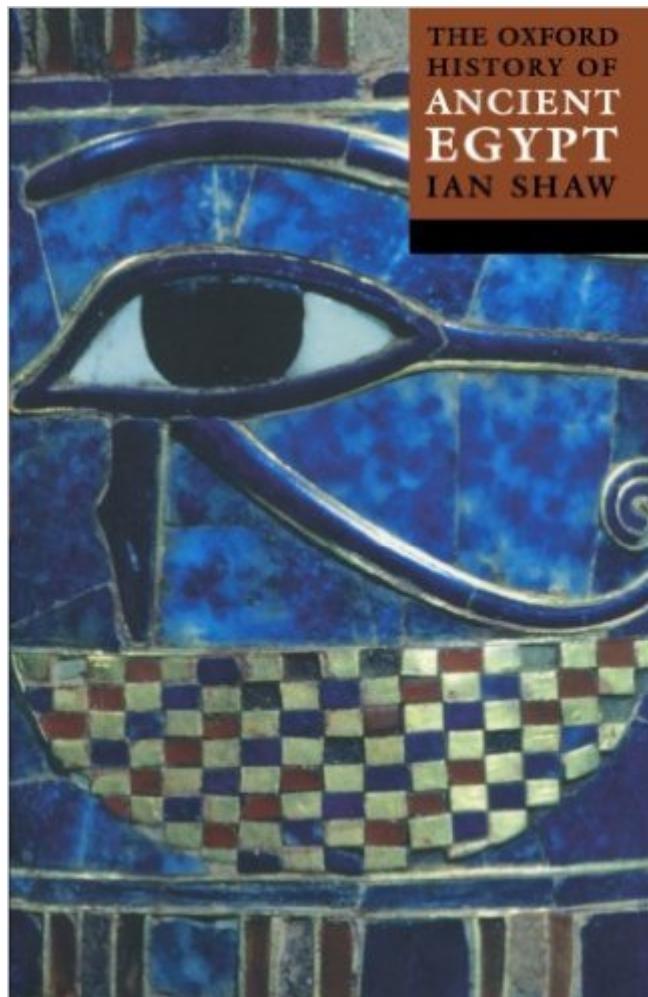


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The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt



Synopsis

The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt uniquely covers 700,000 years of ancient Egypt, from c. 700,000 BC to AD 311. Following the story from the Egyptians' prehistoric origins to their conquest by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans, this book resurrects a fascinating society replete with remarkable historical information. It investigates such subjects as the changing nature of life and death in the Nile valley to some of the earliest masterpieces of art, architecture, and literature in the ancient world. The authors--an international team of experts working at the cutting edge of their particular fields--outline the principal sequence of political events, including detailed examinations of the three so-called 'intermediate periods' which were previously regarded as 'dark ages' and are only now beginning to be better understood. They also examine cultural and social patterns, including stylistic developments in art and literature. Addressing the issues surrounding this distinctive culture, vividly relating the rise and fall of ruling dynasties, exploring colorful personalities, and uncovering surprising facts, The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt is certain to enrich our understanding of this endlessly intriguing civilization. "Brimming with...intriguing facts...also provides a first-rate overview of le progrÃ¨s Egyptien--from the period when Homo erectus first stalked the land right up to Octavian's triumphant entry into Egypt in 30 BC."--The Times (London) (on the previous edition)

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Customer Reviews

I cannot praise this book enough. Unfortunately in academic areas, introductions and overviews to various fields, particularly broad histories, tend to reflect the opinions and suppositions of the

authors much more than render the actual environment they are working in. This book proves to be a rare exception to this sad fact and sets a standard of scholarship to be emulated by all researchers of the ancient world. Never in egyptology, assyriology, or biblical studies have I found a history that did such a wonderful job of laying out the textual and archaeological finds that scholars base their judgments upon. This is important to me, as I am in disagreement with many scholarly communities about issues of chronology. This book, rather than simply laying out tables and dates, supplements those tables with actual references to the texts and archaeological items that have lead scholars to date things the way they have, pointing out inconsistencies and uncertainties along the way. After reading this book, I have become convinced that the history of Egypt is not as well known as most books on Egypt would have us believe. The book is a mammoth undertaking, attempting to chronicle the history of Egypt from prehistory until 311 BC. Introductory sections on the state of research and certainty of chronology are extremely enlightening. I was particularly impressed with the chapters on prehistory and the naqada culture, in which the archeological evidence and its interpretation were expressly explained to the reader, allowing the reader to agree or disagree with the authors as they wish. My only complaint is that the book, being an anthology of essays by a variety of scholars, shows some inconsistency in its thoroughness.

As a quote expresses on the back of this book, "If you only want to read one book on Egypt, then read this one." Ian Shaw's history of ancient Egypt is a beautifully constructed volume that is at once densely packed with information and high in its level of scholarship, and aesthetically appealing and fairly accessible. The book surveys Egyptian history from 700,000 years before the present through the Roman period (ending in AD 395). This is an enormous task, and one might assume that the book could only be very summary and superficial in its treatment of each period. However, every member of Shaw's team of scholars manages to describe his or her period of expertise in a good amount of detail, discussing not only historical events but also art, religion, economics, and material culture. The book thus very successfully follows current trends in history of approaching periods from myriad points of view. Equally importantly, each author discusses the current problems and debates in the scholarship of his or her field. The multi-author approach allows the reader insight into the nature of research for each stage of Egyptian history: the reader gets a sense of the way in which research is conducted, the modes of analysis applied, and the style and terms of discussion. This book serves as an introduction to Egyptian historiography and to the nature of the study of ancient history almost as much as it serves as an introduction to ancient Egypt itself. Thus, The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt manages a high level of scholarship while

remaining a useful survey of a huge span of time and culture.

The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt is really more of an encyclopedia than a narrative history. Each of its 15 chapters is written by a different author, presumably an expert in the particular time period under study. This lends itself to a disjointed style as each author presents an overwhelming welter of archeological facts in an effort to deal with their own view of the controversies in the assigned area. While no doubt providing the experienced Egyptologist with fine details is important, the casual reader will find the book a dense and confusing read. The details of stone-age arrowhead manufacture or the various types of thrown pottery in the First Intermediate Period tend to obscure the bigger picture. As a prerequisite for reading this book I would recommend something lighter and more cohesive such as "A History of Ancient Egypt" by Grimal. That said, the book is definitely a significant resource for anyone interested in Egyptian history. It covers the Egyptian state from prehistory through its incorporation into the Roman empire. Three chapters cover the pre-dynastic period including one on the Paleolithic period, one on the Naqada period and one entitled "Emergence of the Egyptian State" (Dynasties 0-2). Subsequent chapters for the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms (2 chapters for the last of these) and the Intermediate Periods follow. A rather strange and slightly redundant chapter, entitled "Egypt and the Outside World" is located just prior to the article on the Third Intermediate period. Its insertion here seems an afterthought as it covers the material of several preceding chapters using a topical, rather than chronologic, approach. Finally, several shorter chapters cover the Late Period, the Ptolemaic Period and the Roman Period.

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