

advocate more ethnoarchaeological research, believing that certain facts drawn from ethnographic material may, in similar circumstances, give similar results in prehistory. It seems as though they see the role of ethnoarchaeology in very much the same way as processual archaeology.

They stress the difference between archaeology and prehistory, the former occupies the central role in the latter. Concepts of the past - the creation of synchronic and diachronic entities - are constructed as general hypotheses. In drawing general conclusions, they claim that empirical observations depend on the theoretical framework, and that theory and data are two complementary components of one process. However, when they deal with detailed analysis, it appears to be contradictory to those general considerations when they treat description and classification of archaeological material as objective one. As a result, this proposition is highly formal and draws little attention to the relation between objectivity of description, and description as interpretation.

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Jean Vercoutter, *The search for Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames and Hudson 1992 (original French edition 1986), pp. 207. "New Horizons" (Ancient Worlds).

Reviewed by Andrzej Niwiński

Professor Jean Vercoutter, an excellent scholar and president of the French Association of Egyptologists has undertaken the task of presenting a most interesting subject: the long history of study of the ancient Egyptian civilisation, taking into consideration the first European travellers and collectors, some distinguished archaeologists of the 19th century, and modern research methods. Since Egyptology is in possession of a very ample source material, and the book has a small format, one gets an impression that the author was obliged to respect rigid frameworks and to make difficult decisions in choosing between equally good and interesting subjects. It should, of course, be stressed that he has ingeniously solved this problem. The result is that the reader is unable to tear himself away, and it is only a professional Egyptologist who would regret how many important things have been excluded in this valuable outline.

Here is perhaps a good place to remark on the general advantages and disadvantages of such compact books which are wide spread and fashionable. An unquestionable good point of these is their price: 6.95 pounds is not very much for a book of high editorial quality, printed on good paper and containing plenty of illustrations. These are sometimes very attractive, indeed: we find in the reviewed book numerous reproductions from the colour plates once published in the practically inaccessible works of some 19th century travellers, and also there is an interesting colour folding plate with a conventional map of tourist

sights of Egypt, and the reproduction of two water-colours from the National Library in Paris by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson. One can only regret that all these beautiful pictures are reproduced in the pocket-format scale. The small scale of books like this one results in an obvious subordination of the contents to exterior form. Another disadvantage is characteristic of the lay-out (which, paradoxically, is generally considered as a virtue): one finds on each page, beside the main text, an ample commentary (printed in smaller letters) accompanying the illustrations. Both these informative sequences, which should assist each other, often mutually disturb, because the reader is in a dilemma: should he continue reading the main text, or break off in favour of the commentaries to the illustrations? Moreover, text and illustrations are not always in harmony; as an example on the pp. 14-15 shows. The main text discusses the burning of the library of the temple of Sarapis in Alexandria under Theodosius I (the end of the 4th century AD); and it recalls another disaster, when the Alexandrian Library was set on fire by Julius Caesar's soldiers in 47 BC. The small-letters text on the same page brings more details of the latter period while it accompanies an illustration showing the ruins of the port in Alexandria from the painting by L. Mayer of 1804 (so described in the list of illustration on p. 201, however on p. 15 the picture is said as showing the ruins of the Library). Another illustration on this page (15) is portraying the king Ptolemy I on a coin. Hence, on one and the same page parallel information – textual and illustrative ones – evoke the 4th century BC (Ptolemy I), the 1st century BC (Julius Caesar) and the 4th-5th centuries AD, not to mention the painting of the 19th century with its double interpretation. It is not easy to follow all these informative sequences, especially when the reader is a non-Egyptologist.

The book itself begins with several pages describing the steps that led J.-F. Champollion to his splendid decipherment of hieroglyphics. This subject certainly merits much fuller explanation; it can be regarded here as a mere introduction pointing out the role of Champollion as the symbolic “father of Egyptology”.

The Chapter I entitled “The disappearance of pharaonic Egypt” begins with a thesis that the decree of Theodosius in AD 391, ordering the closure of the pagan temples in Egypt, caused a collapse of the knowledge about the hieroglyphic script. This seems, in general, true; however it should be mentioned that the last pagan temple in Egypt (that of Isis on Philae) functioned until 526 or even 537. The chapter contains information about the fate of the Alexandrian libraries, about the Egyptian motifs in the Bible and the works of the classical authors as well as about the obelisks, which played such an important role in the revivification of the memory of the Ancient Egypt in the Renaissance. Unfortunately, the whole chapter, including the illustrations, takes only five pages, although each of these fascinating plots could very easily be treated in separate books. Examples of such books are: *The myth of Egypt and its hieroglyphs in European tradition* by Eric Iversen (Copenhagen 1961), or *The obelisks of Egypt. Skyscrapers of the past* by Labib Habachi (Cairo 1984). One regrets that these are not mentioned among the works suggested for further reading (on p. 199).

Chapter II, devoted to the ancient visitors to Egypt, would have been better preceding the first one. The author only mentions the pre-Greek travellers from Asia, while he passes over in silence some other early visitors to Egypt like the Libyans or the inhabitants of the Aegean area. The Cretans were the first to bring descriptions of the Nile valley to Europe, one thousand years earlier than the Greeks did; from the recent excavations in Santorini we know of the painting showing a Nilotic landscape. Among the Greeks, only mercenaries and soldiers of the 7th-6th centuries BC are mentioned, while one should remark that a real (mostly peaceful) invasion of the newcomers from the Europe took place only under the Ptolemies and the Romans, from 4th century BC onwards. The accent in this chapter is on the accounts by Greek and Roman writers: Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Plutarch; much stress is laid on the cult of the crocodiles observed by them.

In Chapter III the European travellers from the Middle Ages up to the 18th century are described, and it is here that the proper history of the search for Ancient Egypt begins. The author has gathered a number of events, little known even to Egyptologists, and this is also true for the illustrations that accompany the text. The early history of the studies on the pyramids is emphasized. Unfortunately, on the p. 41 we come

upon a serious error – undoubtedly a slip of pen – when the Great Pyramid of Cheops is declared as being constructed “of granite blocks”. The granite was used only for some internal parts of the pyramid near the funeral chamber, while the bulk of the pyramid is constructed of the limestone blocks cut from neighbouring quarries and from the Tura quarries opposite Helwan; the quarries of granite near Aswan are more than 1000 km far away.

The fascinating presentation of the (very shortened) history of the “rediscovery” and the exploitation of Egypt by the Europeans in the early 19th century is the subject of the next chapter. We can find here an outline of the history of the looting of antiquities in Egypt that started far back in the ancient Egypt itself, and was continued without a break up to modern times. However, one should distinguish between the looting of the precious materials in the ancient Egypt and in the Middle Ages, with the early 19th century activity of collectors. While the former were mischievous proceedings that lead to the complete destruction of the objects treated as a mere raw material, the latter aimed at the preservation of the antiquities. Thanks to this activity – although careless and destructive for the archaeological context, priceless objects were saved for science. Among the collectors, Drovetti, Salt, and especially Giovanni Belzoni are described, and we find several quotations from the latter’s *Narrative of the operations [...] in Egypt and Nubia*. These, beside the reproductions from Belzoni’s own drawings form a very vivid illustration to the text.

The next three chapters present the activity of the Egyptologists from Champollion up to our days. The first chapter of the three is mainly devoted to Champollion who is presented not only as a linguistic genius, but also as man with his emotions and political engagement. Some lines are devoted in the same chapter to Lepsius, Wilkinson and Prisse d’Avennes – the representatives of German, English and French scholarship, respectively.

In the next chapter the archaeology of the second half of the 19th century is portrayed by the discovery of the Serapeum at Memphis by Auguste Mariette in 1850, and of the Royal Cache of mummies at Deir el-Bahari in 1881, in the time of Gaston Maspero and Emil Brugsch. The first part of the book ends with the description of the famous discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, and the mention of the find of another royal tomb, that of Psusennes I at Tanis, by the French Mission in 1939.

After the aforementioned folding map of the sights in Egypt, the second part of the book begins, quite different in form (printed on a different kind of paper, with monochrome illustrations). It contains a number of the selected texts that can expand the reader’s knowledge of the subject, treated in the first part. Vercoutter plays the role of editor, although several texts of his authorship are included, too.

The selected documents begin with a very interesting article by Jean Tulard on the Egyptian campaign of Napoleon, gathering information of a number of rather little known circumstances of the expedition. The inner history of this also contained a Polish thread: when considering the possible reactions of the European powers to the Egyptian campaign, Talleyrand took it for granted that Russia, Austria and Prussia “could scarcely protest after having wiped the Polish kingdom off the map”.

This is followed by some illustrations taken from the *Description of Egypt* showing the Egyptomania that followed Napoleon’s expedition. Here, among the examples of the objects of domestic use decorated with Egyptian motifs, a bronze candelabrum and gold inkstand are reproduced with some pseudo-hieroglyphs (p. 143); contrary to the statement that these were “faithfully rendered”, one can see rather a collection of fancy-shaped signs without any meaning.

There follow reports on the transportation of two obelisks presented by Mohammed Ali to France and England, and on the inauguration of the Suez Canal. Then the editor changes the subject to archaeology, when presenting the great Egyptologists: William Matthew Flinders Petrie, George Andrew Reisner and Auguste Mariette, with an added account of a visit paid to the pyramids by the well-known writer Mark Twain in 1867. Further texts concern three important archaeological sites: Karnak, Philae and Abu Simbel, showing the restoration and preservation efforts devoted to the three temples, as well as the history of their discoveries. It is worth mentioning that the Polish traveller, count Michał Tyszkiewicz visited all the three sites during his trip in 1861-62 and he made valuable descriptions of these in his *Journal*.

The next subject is an account of the pillaging of the ancient monuments. Included is the translation

of a passage from *The book of buried pearls*, an Arabic work written sometime in the Middle Ages – a curious “handbook” of the clandestine search for the treasures of the Great Pyramid at Giza.

The final selected texts are devoted to Egyptology today, and the application of new, sophisticated methods of the modern science, to investigate the monuments without any destructive activity by traditional techniques. However, while some results are promising (the radiation treatment of the mummy of Ramesses II in Paris in 1976, aiming at the stopping of its deterioration caused by a fungus), others are disputable (the microgravimetry and microboring inside of the Pyramid of Cheops by the French and Japanese engineers: the latter are scholars from the Waseda, and not “Wascola”, University at Tokyo, p. 195).

The chronological table on the pp. 196-198, together with the notes on the main achievements in the field of the ancient Egyptian culture, seems oversimplified, as is the proposed “further reading”. Here the reader finds beside of some popular books, suggestions for studying, e.g., *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopen* in twelve “*imperial folio*” volumes of 1849-59, or the lithographs of D. Roberts of 1846-50; these works are practically inaccessible for the non-professionals; at the same time a number of valuable popular-scientific books are omitted.

The book ends with a list of illustrations and general index. It can be stressed again that this most interesting and beautifully illustrated book, in spite of some weaker points and its too abbreviated character, is worth keeping in the libraries both of Egyptologists and laymen.