



# Ancient Egypt

Osher Institute for Lifelong Learning

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**suggestions for a deeper plunge**

## BOOKS

There are thousands of books on Ancient Egypt. I won't begin to try to weed through them. Let this list suffice of some I have found useful or otherwise have noted:

### **general histories**

*Ancient Egypt: An Introduction*, by Salima Ikram, Cambridge University Press (2009). Perhaps the best current overall history.

*The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Ian Shaw, editor, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press). Perhaps as good as the above.

*The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*, by Paul Johnson. A generalist historian with attitude, Johnson pulls off a comprehensive, well-written overview for the general reader.

### **specific subjects or ways of looking at Egypt**

*A History of Ancient Egypt: From the First Farmers to the Great Pyramid*, by John Romer. A rare investigation of who the Egyptians were in the 2000 years before the Old Kingdom.

*Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt* John Baines and Jaromir Malek, (New York: Checkmark Books). Another useful reference source.

### **maps & atlas**

*The Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford. Baines, J. & Malek, J.. This is an excellent general guide and contains some of the best maps available, a general history, and a discussion of all the sites, with illustrations.

*The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. Manley, B.. London. History told through a series of changing maps of Egypt. Good source book for map illustrations.

## **guides**

*Blue Guide: Egypt*. (A&C Black, London, Norton, New York, 1988). The older Blue Guides are magnificent. Newer editions are dumbed down.

## **daily life**

*Red Land, Black Land*, Barbara Mertz (1966, 1978). A personal and engaging overview of most aspects of life behind the march of history. Includes clothing, food, family life, women, education, art, the military, religion, and a long look at the life of the dead.

*What Life was Like on the Banks of the Nile: Egypt 3050 - 30 BC*, by Time-Life Books, Denise Dersin (Editor). Time-Life Books again gives us a lively and very informative look at an historical period. Not a history, but an excellent supplement to history.

*Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*. Rosalie David (1998). More scholarly than the above, & if not as lightly written, perhaps more up-to-date.

*Pharaoh's Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina*, Leonard H. Lesko (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Looking at ancient Egyptian art & the lives of those who did it.

## **religion & religious writing**

*The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, by Richard H. Wilkinson. A fairly thorough, well-written and well-researched reference book. An historical more than mythological look at Egyptian religion.

*The Penguin Book of Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, by Joyce Tyldesley (2011), a fine readable compendium of mythic stories. Like Ovid or other mythographers, a collection like this, however complete, is out of context of the associated ritual or circumstances in which the story would have power.

*Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, by Geraldine Pinch (2004). An excellent single volume on Egyptian religion that better integrates myth and practice.

## **writing**

*Ancient Egyptian Literature: An Anthology*, trans. John L. Foster (Univ. of Texas Press, 2001). A fine selection of texts from ancient Egypt in English. Fresh and alive, without losing the incomprehensible strangeness.

*Writings from Ancient Egypt*, by Toby Wilkinson (2017). As comprehensive collection as generally available of the “rich and varied corpus” of ancient Egyptian writing, sacred to secular.

hieroglyphs -- English Egyptologist, Sir Alan Gardiner, arranged the hieroglyphic signs of Ancient Egypt into categories. See this on: <http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/Gardiner-sign-list.html>

*The Dawning Moon of the Mind*, by Susan Brind Marrow, reinterprets the Coffin Texts of the Old Kingdom as “the earliest surviving body of written poetry and religious philosophy in the world”.

## **individuals**

*Cleopatra - A Biography* by Michael Grant. Perhaps the best standard history of this remarkable woman. Academic, not gossipy.

*Cleopatra: A Life* by Stacy Schiff. The latest biography of her. More personality-driven and aimed at the general reader than Grant.

**Egypt in context** – worthy books that touch on Ancient Egyptian religion’s place in the larger historical context.

*Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture*, William H. Stiebing (2009) is a standard, rather straightforward account of the evolution of Ancient Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt laid out synchronically, for the most part.

Herodotus. The “father of history” (as Cicero calls him) has much to say about Egypt, in his charming, quirky way, both insightful and misguided,. Translations by Robin Waterfield (Oxford Classics) is modern and readable, De Sèlincourt (Penguin) is also clear and perhaps more elegant.

*The Evolution of God*, Robert Wright (Little, Brown & C., 2009). Good general secular view of how the ideas of divinity evolved across historical religions.

*From Primitives to Zen*, Mircea Eliade. A fine collection of myths from cultures across the world. A superior sourcebook and great reading.

### OTHER SOURCES

The **Web** is awash with ancient Egypt, from serious sites (museum collections, online lectures, research findings, amateur historians) to popular histories, summaries, and travel information, to esoterica (necromantic to Rosicrucian to New Age). Exploring it can be great fun. For example, this series is superb:

<http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/history-of-ancient-egypt.html>  
if you can afford it (which I cannot).

Local **museums** with Egyptian holdings include Robert Lowie Museum of Anthropology (Berkeley), Stanford University Museum (Palo Alto), De Young Museum (small collection), and the Rosicrucian Museum (San Jose), which might be the best Egyptian collection in the West, a must visit.

This being northern California, there are weirder places too. For example, if you happen to be in northern Sonoma County, don't miss *Isis Oasis* (<http://www.isisoasis.org>). Residencies available.