

**The Archaeology of Ancient Egypt: beyond pharaohs**

**By Douglas A. Brewer**

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**Review by Charlotte Booth MA**

This book is a small format volume with 200 pages divided into 10 chapters, an index and further reading list. It is illustrated with a number of black and white pictures, line drawings and tables. Some of the images are poor quality and what they are depicting is not always clear, and would have been better in colour. I imagine this was the choice of the publisher rather than the author when they produced this paperback copy from the original hardback.

The author, Douglas Brewer, is a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois and his expertise and knowledge is clear throughout the text. In the introduction he states the intended readers were undergraduate students who had completed a course in Egyptology and were planning the next step. The text reads like a modern rendition of an ancient "be a scribe" text where he is trying to convince the student that archaeology (in replace of a scribe) is the ideal career over one of Egyptology.

On this point, Brewer starts by compartmentalising the disciplines used in modern Egyptology; separating it into science represented by the archaeologists and culture-history interpretation represented by the Egyptologists. This separation may have been true in the past but modern Egyptologists are trained in multi-disciplinary approaches and cannot be said to be so separatist. Throughout the book he tries to emphasise that a cross-disciplinary approach is needed in order to reconstruct the history of Egypt; an idea that is not new to the modern generation of Egyptologists.

However, the odd division of the discipline aside, the book is written in a very conversational style which is easy and pleasant to read and would appeal to the undergraduate as well as the layman. Brewer draws on his own experiences and that of his friends and colleagues to explain processes of archaeological interpretation and their strengths and limitations. The further reading list is extensive and is an invaluable resource to any student.

*The Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* is written primarily as an archaeological book dealing with a different method or technique in each chapter. Each chapter gives a very brief overview of some of the available archaeological methods and there are a number of things which are not dealt with at all although he explains that whilst another volume would be needed many things omitted follow similar patterns of application.

The methods discussed include lithic and pottery analysis, dating techniques (relative and absolute), settlement analysis, model application, sampling and different forms of archaeological analysis (pollen, sediment). These methods are then applied to ancient Egypt. Brewer draws on recent excavations and those of the past to create a detailed overview of the early stages of Egyptian history.

The majority of the volume deals with the formation of the Egyptian state with six chapters dedicated to the pre-dynastic and early dynastic periods. One chapter is dedicated to the desert

areas surrounding Egypt and the study of the Bedouin and pastoral groups using a combination of archaeology and ethnography. These Bedouin groups range from pre-dynastic to the modern day, although there is more focus on the pre-dynastic evidence. Another chapter is dedicated to the Amarna period and Akhetaten as a case study of the process from the discovery of artefacts to cultural interpretation.

This book provides the history of the archaeological approach to the study of ancient Egypt, with clear explanations of the archaeological processes and using case studies of an ancient Egyptian site to demonstrate how it is used in practice.

On the whole the book is very interesting and a useful text for any student to have on their bookshelf, as an introduction rather than a definitive tome. A certain amount of knowledge is required as there is no glossary for some of the archaeological terms, but anyone with a basic knowledge of the subject would find this book informative and well-written.