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**Book review:**

**Malek, Jaromir. *Egypt: 4000 Years of Art*. London: Phaidon, 2003.**

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# Book Reviews, con't.

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tian Museum and shut down a school for Egyptian men who wanted to study ancient Egypt.

In fact, the Egyptians have only controlled the nation's antiquities since the 1950s, the service having been under French control, even when Britain effectively ruled Egypt.

How things have changed. The Supreme Council for Antiquities' (SCA) Secretary General, Zahi Hawass, is probably the most visible Egyptologist today and a National Geographic Explorer in Residence. Every year, Egyptians train at the ARCE Field School. Egyptian teams excavate ancient sites and publish and speak alongside their foreign colleagues.

But in Maspero's day, his attitude toward Egyptians was the norm, not the exception. In *Whose Pharaohs?*, Reid shows readers the other side of the development of Egyptology, its effect on the growth of tourism and its entanglement with Egyptian and European ambitions. *Whose Pharaohs?* is ideal reading for anyone interested in the ramifications for a society when politics, archaeology and nationalism collide.

The tale of Napoleon's scientific expedition has been told many times and need not be repeated here. Reid mentions notable Western Egyptologists such as Flinders Petrie, but his focus is on the development of Egyptian Egyptology and how foreign control of Egypt's past helped give birth to Egyptian nationalism.

The earliest Egyptian pharaonic scholars, such as Rifaa al-Tahtawi and Ahmad Kamal, endured treatment as second-class citizens by their Western peers, who literally carted away their past to distant museums and private collections. Egypt was in the grip of a gold rush fueled mainly by European museums and collectors.

Cultural and religious differences, as well as different perceptions of the past, further widened the gulf between Western and Egyptian scholars. Egyptian culture and perceptions were reduced to stereotypes and overshadowed by the all-encompassing behemoth of Orientalism, a Western creation.

Eventually the likes of Petrie, Howard Carter and George Reisner began to supplant treasure hunters masquerading as archaeologists. While this development benefited Egypt's heritage, it did not necessarily benefit contemporary Egyptians. For example, until the 20th century, Egyptians might aspire to be a reis, but not the excavation director.

Reid deftly ties together Egyptian and Western nationalism, tourism and colonialism to demonstrate how they shaped the Egypt and the state of Egyptology we know today. The furor over Tutankhamun's tomb marked the beginning of the end of Western domina-

tion of Egyptian antiquities. Rather than allowing the traditional 50-50 split between excavator and government, the Egyptian authorities claimed the entire contents. Carter, Lord Carnarvon and the West in general may have felt that the nationalist movement was the real curse of the pharaohs, but it was the first step in Egyptians' achieving what Western nations took for granted – equality with other nations and control over their past. Reid also devotes chapters to the study of Egypt's Coptic and Islamic heritage.

One might have a sense of déjà vu in light of the media coverage of Hawass' efforts in recent months to recover illegally acquired antiquities. And Egypt and Egyptology still collide. Today, the discipline is as mired in politics, nationalism, tourism and international relations as it was when the French had to surrender the Rosetta Stone to the British in 1802. Witness the recent controversy over the bust of Nefertiti and the artists who temporarily joined it to a statue in the name of art.

This is not a tale of good versus evil; rather it is a recounting of individual and national ambitions and rivalries tempered by an Egyptian perspective. Reid gives a voice to the earliest predecessors of Hawass, Fekhri Hassan, Farouk el-Baz and other Egyptian Egyptologists; he places them in the context of an ancient land struggling to find its identity and sovereignty in the modern world.

– Susan Cottman

Donald Malcom Reid will lecture on this topic for ARCE/NW at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture on Thursday, October 2, 2003 at 6:30pm. **Admission is free.**

*Egypt: 4000 Years of Art*  
By Jaromir Malek  
Hardbound, 376 pages  
ISBN: 0714842001  
Phaidon Press

Those interested in the development of Egyptian art will find this book very useful. Its author, Jaromir Malek, is the Keeper of the Archive at the Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. He is perhaps best known for the *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts*, which he edited, and for a previous monograph on Egyptian art, also published by Phaidon in 1999. Malek is unique among authors on Egyptian art in that he is both a gifted Egyptologist with a firsthand knowledge of Egyptian artifacts and a

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scholar conversant within the discipline of art history. The present work under review represents the best of this combined expertise.

After providing a concise but informative introduction to Egyptian art (pp. 4-13), Malek contextualizes his introduction by taking readers on a pictorial journey. With the turn of each page, Malek moves readers chronologically forward from predynastic to Roman times. Each page contains a handsomely produced photo of a particular artifact and a list of the piece's title, date, provenience (if known), current location, size (in decimal and metric measurements), and material of construction. Beneath this register, Malek has placed a brief discussion of the artifact's distinguishing features; its original use and purpose; and significance for understanding the development of Egyptian art. Often these descriptions contain useful cross-references that allow readers to move back and forth among its many pages to compare and contrast various themes and artifacts.

Though of course many items that appear in this book are well-known (e.g., images of Akhenaten from Amarna and several other tomb reliefs), a great many more rarely appear in books on the subject. Just to mention a few: a 14th century cosmetic container in the form of a servant carrying a jar; a gold ring bearing horses dated to the 13th century (p. 226); a statue of a bearded demon from the tomb of Ramesses II (p. 247); and a large painted leather funerary canopy belonging to the priestess of the god Min and dating to the 11th century (p. 264).

Malek's coordination of each artifact with others in the greater collection makes the book a handy reference work. This aspect is also facilitated by a glossary, series of indices and chronological chart placed at the end that lists Egyptian dynasties and kings, as well as corresponding dates and important events in the greater ancient Near East. The artifacts that appear in the preceding pages also are listed where they belong in the chronological chart, along with their page numbers for easy reference. The integration of lesser-known artifacts, and the accessible and personal way in which Malek discusses each of the pieces, make for an interesting read.

One cannot help but get a sense of the incredible care and devotion that Egyptians brought to their works, and for the changing economic and political times that led to changes in the artistic canon. One comes away from reading this work rewarded with a better understanding of the subtleties and sophistication of Egyptian artisans, the diversity and ingenuity of

their crafts, as well as with a greater appreciation for the continuities and discontinuities that are the hallmark of Egypt's long artistic history.

*Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt*

By Lynn Meskell

Hardbound, 288 pages

ISBN: 069100448X

Princeton University Press

What makes this book valuable, and it is a valuable addition to any Egyptophile's library, is its examination of private life in a broader context than that traditionally covered by Egyptologists. Author Lynn Meskell is interested in restructuring the contexts in which we view the lives of ancient Egyptians, removing the discussion from tired categories that may not carry any relevance or serve the topic well. She sets that tone by reminding the reader that the Western taxonomies into which ancient Egyptian material is generally placed are a potential trap (particularly when they become ossified).

Meskell essentially asks, what did the concept of personhood embody in ancient Egypt and what can we know about it from the evidence available? The book is organized along the continuum of the lives of individual, non-royal ancient Egyptians, covering birth, maturation, love, marriage, sexuality, aging, and death among other topics. Women in ancient Egypt have been a popular topic in recent years and this book adds a very cogent voice to that conversation, while making the point that Egyptian women are nearly silent in the extant evidence in comparison to the men in the culture.

Meskell's analysis is thorough for such a small volume. She presents the material in a confident tone but always with the caution that it's an analysis through today's prism. *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* is an accessible read that never talks down and does a good job of bridging the interests of popular and professional audiences.

— Brian Hunt