
Rosetta

Booth, C.; William Carruthers (ed), *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*;
Routledge, Studies in Egyptology Series, 2014

Rosetta **17**: 135 – 139

http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue17/booth_3.pdf

Review: William Carruthers (Ed), *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*. Routledge, Studies in Egyptology Series, 2014. Pp. xii & 283. £85. ISBN 978-0-415-84369-0 (Hardback).

Charlotte Booth

University of Birmingham

Carruthers' introduction explains that this volume is the result of the '*Disciplinary Measures? Histories of Egyptology in Multi-Disciplinary Context*' conference held at University College, London (2011), with the objective of instigating discussion on the isolated nature of Egyptology, which whilst being multi-disciplinary fails to form a coherent whole.

Histories of Egyptology have been formed by various approaches including archaeology, biographies, archives and material culture, although Carruthers emphasises they all focus on the concept of the "best way" of working (p. 5), and how Egyptology could be homogenous if it were not "sullied by the wrong type of personality" (p.4). As parameters for Egyptology in Egypt and abroad have changed since the 2011 revolution, ideas of 'best practice' need to be re-evaluated and such discussions could be an ideal starting point.

The volume is divided into four parts, comprising four articles each with the first part introducing the idea of Egyptology as isolated from other disciplines. Alice Stevenson opens with a discussion on Egyptology at Oxford.

In 1860 it was taught as an element of anthropology with a focus on material culture. By the 1920s Egyptologists turned from material anthropology to philology, thereby separating themselves from the anthropological discipline. By 1961 and the foundation of the Institute of Archaeology, archaeology, anthropology and Egyptology were completely independently taught subjects.

Thomas Gertzen's paper uses the letters of Alan Gardiner and Adolf Erman to demonstrate the changing relationship between the Germans and the British at the start of World War I when the German concession at Amarna was revoked and then

passed onto the EES after the war. At this time it was difficult for German scholars to re-establish themselves in Egypt and Erman believed scholarship should be above politics whilst blaming Gardiner personally for the loss of the site.

The final paper is a rather critical approach entitled *The Cursed Disciple?* in which Moreno García claims Egyptology is a discipline of individuals rather than teams and the peculiar nature of Egyptology is used;

“to justify its excessive insularity and the persistence in many cases of outmoded and unimaginative agendas of research” (p.51).

He emphasises a continued focus on objects rather than the subjects of economics, politics, social conflict or geopolitical concerns which he believes is due to the mass media popularity of Egyptology. Some Egyptologists have attempted to break this insular approach to research but there has been little progress in the last thirty years.

David Gange provides a critique of these papers before discussing how the separatist nature of Egyptology is not just self-imposed but also imposed by other disciplines. He believes the aim of Egyptology should be to cross disciplines, making a broader and more useful contribution to the history of the world.

The second part, *Knowledge in the Making*, investigates the process of learning about the history of Egyptology. The first paper is Andrew Bednarski's *Beyond Travelers' Accounts and Reproductions*. He discusses his publication of Frederic Cailliaud's (1787-1869), *Arts and Crafts in Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia* and the problems encountered with reproducing such material for a modern audience were compared with three other groups of unpublished nineteenth century material.

Nineteenth century archival material provides more than Egyptological facts and Bednarski concludes, “this material can be mined in a number of ways not traditionally presented in English reproductions” (p. 93).

Steve Vinson and Janet Gunn provide an intriguing insight into the nineteenth century fascination with the esoteric using Battiscombe Gunn and his friendship with Aleister Crowley as a case study. Evidence indicates that in his early career Gunn was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and was interested in mysticism. As his career progressed his connection with Crowley and the Hermetic

Order were forgotten. At the time, however, this was not unusual as Wallis Budge was a member of the Ghost Club and Margaret Murray was prominent in witchcraft.

Margaret Murray is the topic of Kathleen Sheppard's paper although she focuses on Murray's teaching and her role in providing Petrie with qualified excavators. Whilst many UCL archaeology students were referred to as Petrie's Pups all were taught first by Murray. Sheppard believes, "Murray's most lasting and most visible legacy was her students" (p. 125).

The critique of the papers in this section is provided by Christina Riggs and investigates what it is to 'know' about Egypt. Modern knowledge is based on technology, and cultural and political beliefs, whereas in the nineteenth century knowledge was also influenced by a colonial attitude. She believes all the articles in this section display a thirst for knowledge concerning the foundation of Egyptology and its study.

The third part, *Colonial Meditations, Postcolonial responses*, opens with Wendy Doyon mapping the changing role of Egyptian workmen on excavation. In particular she discusses the pivotal role of the Ra'is in ensuring the loyalty and efficiency of the Egyptian work force. Doyon demonstrates how intricately archaeology is tied in with modern Egyptian society and politics.

Donald Reid's article *Remembering and Forgetting Tutankhamun* investigates the politics surrounding Tutankhamun who has become a symbol of Egyptian nationalism and identity, appearing on bank notes and postage stamps, used as a tool in political negotiations and a means of producing revenue in Egypt.

This is followed by *The State of the Archive* where Hussein Omar paints a dismal image of archival research in modern Egypt and how this hinders the Egyptian contribution to its own history. Omar explains how the archives are not public institutions, but rather heavily controlled arenas of state propaganda. They are only open to people with permits granted by the Ministry of Interior.

Author Khaled Fahmy (2012) made the valid point that until documents are publically available, "Egypt's modern history is bound to be written from a foreign perspective rather than an Egyptian one" (p.180).

Marwa Elshakry summarises this section in the light of the study of artefacts and how their interpretation was closely linked to national and international political considerations. Despite the barriers to their involvement, Egyptians have always been engaged in Egyptology.

The final part of the book looks at how Egyptology has been presented throughout the last century beginning with an article by Gabriel Moshenska, about Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew who is only known in regard to his public unrollings of mummies. However his important contribution, his book, the *History of Egyptian Mummies*, is largely forgotten. It was "the first British scientific contribution to Egyptian Archaeology" according to Pettigrew's biographer Dawson, and Moshenska adds that "even today it remains an excellent and entertaining read" (p 207).

Remaining with the theme of mummies, Jasmin Day discusses the changing role of the mummy in movies and the division from a single character into two; the mummy and the High Priest, in her paper *Repeating Death; the High Priest Character in Mummy Horror Films*.

Debbie Challis' paper investigates the changing approaches to the display of the Roman mummy portraits excavated by Petrie. Initially they were displayed as pieces of art comparable with Renaissance painters at the Egyptian Hall in London and also in the National Gallery. One of the key elements in the National Gallery exhibition was their Greek identity and this was part of a wider study in the 1890s on racial types.

In 1936 the portraits were moved to the British Museum as they were now considered archaeological. In 1997 the collection was exhibited in the *Ancient Faces* exhibition alongside Egyptian funerary equipment. In 1998 they were displayed in Crete in an exhibition entitled *From the Portraits of Fayum to the beginnings of the Art of Byzantium* once more returning them to the world of art history with the racial element being key.

Stephanie Moser critiques the three articles and states that many people are introduced to Egyptology through movies, art or Egyptomania. Egyptomania in particular is not just how ancient Egypt has influenced Western culture but has also shaped the way we view ancient Egypt itself.

The final paper of the book is presented by Mohamed Elshahed in which he discusses the construction of the Grand Egyptian Museum and what it means for native Egyptians. The article is highly critical of all involved in Egyptology from the government to the tourists and Elshahed explains that the current Egyptian Museum and the ethos of the new Museum at Giza only have tourists in mind with no input from or consideration for Egyptians.

Whilst he is emphatic that encouraging Egyptians to visit museums is essential he makes few suggestions as to how this is to be done making this a rather negative paper with which to end the volume.

This book offers a wide range of opinions about the discipline of Egyptology and its formation, presenting new and refreshing ideas, although in some cases (e.g. Garcia, Omar and Elshahed) rather disheartening. As is to be expected in a volume with a varied collection of articles and authors, some papers will stand out more than others to the individual reader. However, the objective of the volume was to instigate a discussion on the Histories of Egyptology and this has been achieved, whilst leaving a great deal of scope for future Egyptologists.