



Egyptology from the First World War to the Third Reich

Ideology, Scholarship,
and Individual Biographies

*Edited by
Thomas Schneider and
Peter Raubwing*

BRILL

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Preface

The publication of this book comes at a propitious time when research in the history of Egyptology in the first half of the twentieth century, long neglected, receives for the first time the attention it deserves. It presents five studies previously published as a thematic issue of the *Journal of Egyptian History* (5/2012). The idea to produce such a thematic collection of studies was first conceived by the editors who were working on comprehensive treatments of Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing's political involvement during the First World War and German Egyptology under National Socialism, respectively. Lindsay Ambridge whose work focused on the scholarship of James Henry Breasted in the context of racial ideologies of the early 20th century, could be persuaded to contribute to the volume. The person competent to place these studies and their significance in context was Edmund Meltzer who wrote the thoughtful introductory chapter. When these studies were ready to be published in late 2011, the death of Manfred Mayrhofer, patron of the study of Indo-Aryans in the Ancient Near East, prompted Peter Raulwing to add a concluding chapter. More than an obituary, it also reflects on the twentieth century ideological context of scholarly interest in the question of Indo-Aryans in the Ancient Near East, making it a suitable final chapter.

The editors and authors of this volume express their hope that their studies help to understand the interplay of academe and politics, and the profile of scholarly biographies between 1914 and 1945.

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Egyptologists, Nazism and Racial “Science”

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Abstract

Only recently has Egyptology begun to examine ideology and its implications for our self-understanding and our understanding of ancient Egypt, of Egyptology as a discipline, and of the past as a whole. Part of this effort is Thomas Schneider’s important research on Egyptology and Egyptologists in the Third Reich. In the present volume, P. Raulwing and T. Gertzen study and document the career and thought of F.W. Freiherr von Bissing; Schneider publishes Georg Steindorff’s letter to John Wilson about Egyptologists in the Third Reich, extensively documenting the scholars mentioned in it and many more besides; and L. Ambridge explores the racial dimension of James H. Breasted Sr.’s historical thought. The continuing influence and relevance of these people and events is shown *inter alia* by the recent controversy over Steindorff’s collection of Egyptian antiquities.

Keywords

Ideology; Egyptology; Nazism, Third Reich; anti-Semitism; Jewish; race; Kuhnian shift; Ancient Near East

* * * *

In an entertaining passage in the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, Adams questioned Jefferson on the meaning of “ideology.”¹ On December 16, 1816, Adams wrote:

‘3 Vols. of Idiology [*sic*]! Pray explain to me this Neological Title! What does it mean? When Bonaparte used it, I was delig[h]ted with it, upon the Common Principle of delight in every Thing We cannot understand. Does it mean Idiotism? The Science of Non compos Menticism. The Science of Lunacy? The Theory of Delerium? Or does it mean the Science of Self Love? Of Amour propre? Or the Elements of Vanity?

¹ Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 500–01.

Surely, especially with the hindsight of the last two centuries, the answer is, all of the above. Egyptologists have only recently begun to reflect in a focused, systematic and coherent way on the consequences and implications of ideology for the study of ancient Egypt and the understanding of our own discipline. That in itself is the result of a Kuhnian shift in which self-scrutiny and ideological self-awareness have become *desiderata* for practitioners in many disciplines—in the humanities, social sciences and hard sciences as well. The ostensible objectivity of an allegedly value-free study in which Egyptologists assumed that they (we) were engaged in a simple plain reading of the factual record has yielded to a nuanced and self-reflective reading in which we try to discern and take account of filters that affect our perception and practice and interpretation on many levels. This can be seen as a kind of self-psychoanalysis in which the ideology with which one operates changes from being an unseen and uninterrogated determiner of how information is perceived and selected and processed, how research is undertaken, which questions are considered appropriate and important, and what types of answers are accepted, to being an identifiable and analyzable part of the equation, a puppeteer if you will whose hands and strings are clearly visible and who thus becomes demystified and disarmed. This has gone along with an approach in which inquiry in Egyptology (or any analogous field) has become more integrated with the social sciences and critical theory. A beginning has been made in pursuing analyses using such perspectives as feminist scholarship and gender studies,² class analysis,³ multidisciplinary social-scientific approaches,⁴ and queer theory.⁵ In a highly provocative and controversial work presented as a direct challenge to the “establishment,” Martin Bernal, biologically the heir of the most establishment of establishment Egyptologists, Sir Alan Gardiner, while simultaneously a left-wing intellectual and of Jewish heritage, has attempted to hold a mirror up to the face of ancient studies, especially Classics but also Semitics and Egyptology, arguing the role of anti-Semitism, colonialism and racism in shaping the way antiquity has been studied and perceived and indeed the criteria by which research outcomes have been reached on factual questions.⁶ Bernal’s work found a largely, even overwhelmingly hostile reception among most Euro-American Classicists and other ancient specialists,⁷ as distinct from

² Meskell, *Private Life*; Landgráfová and Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess*.

³ Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, a study of archaeology itself, not of ancient Egypt.

⁴ Weeks, *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*, really a charter for subsequent studies (see also my review: Meltzer, Review of K.R. Weeks (ed.), *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*); Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*.

⁵ Reeder, “Same-Sex Desire.”

⁶ Bernal, *Black Athena* and *Black Athena Writes Back*.

⁷ Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*; Lefkowitz and Rogers, *Black Athena Revisited*.

constituencies such as people of color and scholars in countries which were fairly recently colonies. Like it or not, Bernal's forays into the ancient Mediterranean and Near East are a part, even an essential part, of the ideological coming of age being discussed and indeed advanced here. In my article "Egyptology" in the *OEAE*, I have made an effort—or taken what might be seen as "baby steps"—to scratch the surface of some of the concerns that we are examining in more depth in the present volume. It is interesting and encouraging that a similar process of self-examination is taking place elsewhere in Near Eastern studies, as witness a paper to be presented at the forthcoming *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in Rome focusing on scholarship in Spain.⁸

One of the scholars most prominently contributing to, indeed spearheading this effort is Thomas Schneider, who has done me the honor of inviting me to contribute this preface to this important, programmatic and eye-opening volume of the *Journal of Egyptian History*. Moreover, he has been doing his work in a context which still carries sensitivities and ambivalences, the involvement of Egyptologists with the Third Reich and its so far largely unexamined consequences for the discipline itself, especially given the major continuity in Egyptological personnel and teaching in Germany and Austria and the chain of transmission or what might be called the *isnad* of Egyptology from the time of the Third Reich through the post-World War II years, often for several decades (as illustrated by the detailed documentation of Schneider's paper). The potential consequences ramify yet more widely when one considers the Egyptologists who emerged from that background and went off to teach elsewhere in the world, as well as the Egyptologists who fled the Third Reich and tried to reestablish their careers elsewhere.⁹

The present volume comprises three fascinating and enlightening articles, two of which focus on Egyptology and Egyptologists in Germany and Austria both before and during the Third Reich, while the third broadens the focus to include a towering or even iconic scholar who stands at the head of institutional American Egyptology and who articulated the mandate for emphasizing the study of the ancient Near East rather than relegating it to a footnote in the rise of "modern Western" civilization.

Peter Raulwing and Thomas Gertzen contribute an extremely detailed account of the career and political writings and activities of one scholar, Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing, from 1914 to his retirement from the University of Utrecht in 1926, by which time he had become a member of the Nazi Party. Thomas Schneider publishes an important historical document, a

⁸ García Ventura and Vidal, "Oriental studies and fascism."

⁹ Schneider, "Egyptology in the Nazi Era."

letter from Georg Steindorff to John A. Wilson immediately after World War II identifying and describing the political personae and actions of Egyptologists who stood against Nazism (“men of honor”) and those who were Nazis and should not be admitted back into the academic life of the post-War world, as well as some who might not exactly fit the mold. Schneider adds extensive background and exhaustive biographical and archival coverage of all of the scholars enumerated by Steindorff and many others who were or began to be active during that troubled and conflicted time. One of many ironies arising in connection with the narratives explored here is the experience that another renowned Near Eastern scholar, Samuel Noah Kramer, had at the Oriental Institute about twelve years before Steindorff addressed his pivotal letter to Wilson. In his autobiography, Kramer recounts how he was told by the then department chair Martin Sprengling,

Sam, we all like you here and think highly of your scholarship. We have therefore decided to appoint you as an instructor in the department. . . . But I must warn you, Sam, that as a Jew you cannot rise in the department above the position of assistant professor. What’s more, to balance your appointment, we shall also appoint a gentile as instructor in the department.¹⁰

A search for information regarding Sprengling produces, in addition to his academic works, mentions in a Congressional Committee report about Nazi propaganda activities in the US,¹¹ in which we learn that Martin Sprengling and his son Kurt were acquaintances of the prominent Nazi propagandist Colin Ross, that Kurt in particular “provided a circle in which Ross moved”¹² and conducted exchange trips to Nazi Germany for select groups of American boys,¹³ and that Ross and his wife stayed in Chicago as house guests of Martin Sprengling, a fact which was noted in a newspaper, *The Chicago American*.¹⁴ John Wilson, in his autobiography, mentions Sprengling several times in strictly innocuous contexts.¹⁵

Lindsay Ambridge addresses the role of race in the concepts of the rise of civilization propounded in the works of James Henry Breasted Sr., whose textbooks and synthesizing volumes such as *Ancient Times*, *The Conquest of Civilization* and *The Dawn of Conscience* were extremely influential beyond

¹⁰ Kramer, *In the World of Sumer*, 50.

¹¹ Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 44, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴ Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 50 citing The Chaperon (columnist), “Swifts, Nitzes Entertain Ross, Nazi Propagandist,” in *The Chicago American*, 4 January 1939.

¹⁵ Wilson *Thousands of Years*, 43, 46, 75, 212.

the ambit of Egyptology and the community of Egyptologists. The relationship between these two ends of a spectrum, and the striking historical and personal ironies involved, provide one of the most thought-provoking aspects of these interrelated studies. (I hasten to note that with this juxtaposition I am in no way picking on the University of Chicago, my undergraduate Alma Mater at which I spent some of the happiest years of my life.)

Certainly in a previous, more "gentlemanly" age of scholarship, some of the material presented in this volume would have been frowned on as *ad hominem* or targeting the person or character rather than the content of the person's work. This itself was a product of the ideological naïveté of that era of scholarship alluded to above. The current Kuhnian shift has left this behind as a false dichotomy and has made it "fair game" when it comes to views that have direct repercussions in the content or conclusions of scholarship. The Third Reich itself, with its exceptionally wide-ranging subversion of scholarship and education, is one of the most glaring illustrations of the untenability of a firewall between scholars' political views and their work. This too is a complex phenomenon involving personal, institutional and economic factors.

My own interest in these matters, alluded to in my *Oxford Encyclopedia* article mentioned above, is of long standing and has grown and deepened over the years, though only recently has it been taking a truly coherent shape. Starting with my undergraduate days (1968–1972) I have heard many anecdotes and reminiscences about Egyptologists during the Nazi period, from a number of different teachers and colleagues. I am not going to name or detail these here, although I have shared them individually with the Editor of this journal who has cited a couple of them below. One interesting point is that different informants (looking at this as an anthropological enterprise) sometimes disagreed about a particular individual. As time went on I also became more aware of, and interested in, the presence and role of ideology beyond the Third Reich. In the process I certainly lost my ideological innocence. This process was accelerated by teaching in and administering a Department of Religion where ideological issues and critical theory were highlighted in many ways, and by the life-changing experience of teaching in China for several years (1990–1996). In the former venue, I was involved in organizing two colloquia on the work of Martin Bernal, at one of which he himself was present, as well as a fairly high-profile interfaith dialogue conference which proved to be something of a minefield. In China, the marvels were as profuse as Herodotus describes for Egypt, but I would mention the ambiguous role of Marxism, the need to justify the reading of the texts in their original languages, the resistance that I encountered to large-scale exploration of interconnections between China and other early civilizations, and the rather surprising assumption on the part of some students that the ancient Egyptians were "white."

But, as Hercule Poirot says, “revenons à nos moutons”. One point which will immediately impress the reader of these articles is the wealth of documentation that exists, indeed abounds, in this as yet largely unexplored territory. Using Steindorff’s letter as a kernel, Schneider follows the trails of sources bearing on the names listed there, and many more besides. Many insights emerge. One is that the brothers von Bothmer were associated with the Georgekreis, as were another pair of brothers better known to the public at large, partially thanks to the movies, the von Stauffenbergs. Another is the stark encounter with anti-Semitic attitudes among those who were no friends of Nazism. Erman, describing Steindorff, affirms that although he comes from an at least nominally Jewish family and had himself baptized as a student, “his nature and his views have however absolutely not that which one calls Jewish.” Erman himself had Jewish ancestry. This citation also highlights the ambivalence or ambiguity that characterized the Jewish identity of a number of scholars of Jewish origin or heritage, including several prominent scholars of the ancient Near East in fields other than Egyptology. Once again we are seeing a microcosm of phenomena that existed in the wider society.

Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing is a noteworthy case study of a scholar who was politically active and vocal in the period from World War I leading up to the Third Reich. His highly nationalistic and conservative affiliations and convictions, and his markedly anti-Semitic outlook, facilitated his transition to Nazism. And yet the career so meticulously chronicled and explored by Raulwing and Gertzen has a surprising sequel in Steindorff’s letter to Wilson, recounting how a distraught von Bissing came to Steindorff in his most desperate days, full of concern and solicitude. We also learn that he joined the Confessing Church and ultimately criticized Hitler and was expelled from the Party. Alas, this did not betoken a lasting change of heart; he remained steadfastly loyal to Hitler and looked back on his criticism as an unforgivable lapse, and as Schneider indicates, his attempts to make amends through Rudolf Hess and directly to Hitler were unavailing.

At the same time, von Bissing’s episode with Steindorff illustrates the observation, one might say the truism, that personal behavior is a complex phenomenon and does not follow simple predictable lines. The historical record so painstakingly assembled by Schneider shows instances in which ostensible Nazi scholars seem to have had second thoughts or moderated their views. Two such are Wilhelm Czermak (whom Steindorff describes as an arch-Nazi) and Hanns Stock, who both started out with apparently solid Nazi affiliations but whose situation then became more ambiguous. Czermak distanced himself from National Socialism especially after the Anschluss and aroused the mistrust of the Nazi establishment. Eventually he was seconded as an adviser to the Ahnenerbe, and Schneider aptly characterizes his situation as conflicted.

After the War Czermak was a member of the Denazification Commission of the University of Vienna. Stock joined the NSFK, or National Socialist Flyer Corps, and attended an SA leadership training, but when he was named an NSFK squad leader he refused to join the Party and at length was summoned by the Gestapo. He was drafted in 1941. According to Scharff, one of Steindorff's "men of honor," Stock was appointed to the NSFK through no effort of his own, and the Nazi rector of the University of Munich distrusted his political reliability. Considering such narratives, one thinks also of the actor Gert Fröbe, well known to American audiences as James Bond's *Goldfinger* and the German officer in *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, who was a member of the Nazi Party but helped Jews escape from Germany; the boxer Max Schmeling, not a Party member but a poster boy for "Aryan" superiority of physical prowess (until he was inconveniently defeated by Joe Louis), who hid Jews in his apartment on "Kristallnacht"; or the world-famous case of Oskar Schindler who needs no introduction.

Yet another noteworthy point, but alas hardly a surprising one, is how revisionist and self-serving later reminiscences can be. The most blatant example in the present group of articles is Grapow's rewriting of his relationship with Steindorff, how it ended and who was to blame. Sometimes the self-justification smacks of desperation, or perhaps of being in denial. There is also the selectivity of colleagues, some of whom are themselves the subjects of scrutiny in the present volume, who affirm for instance that Walther Wolf's writings did not have political content or that he was only a "pro forma" Nazi. In some cases one might suspect that, to use a Yiddish term, they are trying to cover each other's *tuchus*.

One of the discoveries that I have found the most interesting is the way the disclosures in the present articles can provide missing links which enable things to make sense in retrospect. In Schneider's article, we learn that Siegfried Morenz was part of the Nazi effort for the "De-Judaizing" of the New Testament and Christianity. When I taught at The Claremont Graduate School, I had the students in my Egyptian Religion course write a critical review of a significant scholarly work, and some chose Morenz's *Egyptian Religion*. Almost all of the students were involved in Pastoral studies or already ordained, and they picked up on Morenz's hostility to Hebrew Scripture and Rabbinic Judaism. Thus I read the discussion of the early career of that scholar, replete with chapter-and-verse documentation, with especially great interest.

The broadening of the scope of this examination to include Breasted is important and salutary for several reasons. For one thing, it compels us American Egyptologists and Near Eastern scholars to confront or at least acknowledge the racial baggage of our own scholarly forebears and indeed our own society. It prevents us from loading everything on the convenient scapegoat

of the “Other”—in this case the Nazis or the Germans more broadly and indiscriminately labeled—in dealing with the history of racist ideas in the study of the past and of humanity. It is a way of attempting to follow the exhortation of Robert Burns: “O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us / To see oursels as ithers see us”—or to see ourselves with the same critical vision with which we scrutinize others. In this regard I recall vividly an exchange that took place in the 1980s at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, where Walter Burkert was giving a seminar on the Orientalizing Period of Greece. Burkert was very solemnly and indeed contritely acknowledging the role of anti-Semitism in impeding and skewing the study of Near Eastern, especially Semitic influences on Greece. This provoked a very sharp, even belligerent reaction from an American Classicist who for purposes of this essay shall be nameless. This person aggressively and somewhat defensively said something to the effect that, Well, maybe you have a problem with anti-Semitism in Europe but we don’t have anything like that here! (One wonders if this scholar was familiar with the Kramer anecdote above.)

Breasted was in good company (as it were) in an academia in which a racial-hierarchical approach to human cultures and evolution was widely assumed. In his engaging, adventurous narratives of his paleontological and zoological expeditions, the dashing dinosaur hunter Roy Chapman Andrews (sometimes referred to as an Indiana Jones inspiration) talks very admiringly of his boss and mentor, Henry Fairfield Osborn, whom he describes as a kind of paleontological Sherlock Holmes.¹⁶ Osborn, who was for a time President of the American Museum of Natural History, was a prominent exponent of racial views on human development and of the slogan “Asia, Mother of Continents” (definitely not Africa!).¹⁷ Ambridge writes eloquently of how Breasted, an intellectual child of his times but a self-searching and reflective thinker, wrestled with issues of colonialism and imperialism while trying to use his racial understanding of history as part of a grand optimistic (and triumphalistic) narrative of progress. Schneider interfaces with this discussion, quoting Breasted’s son and biographer Charles Breasted about his father’s disgust at the ascendancy of Nazi ideology and attendant debasement of culture.

The travails, traumas and struggles of those times and indeed those selfsame personalities do indeed reach into the present, sometimes with contorted fingers. The current controversy over Steindorff’s collection of Egyptian antiquities demonstrates how the theme and specific subject matter of this important volume continue to be relevant. The courts decided very recently that the

¹⁶ Andrews, *On the Trail of Ancient Man*, 245–46.

¹⁷ Gallenkamp, *Dragon Hunter*.

University of Leipzig, to which Steindorff was compelled to sell his collection at a price well below its value, must relinquish the collection to the Jewish Claims Conference, while Zahi Hawass demanded that the JCC repatriate the collection to Egypt (although it was taken from Egypt legally according to the laws in force in 1915).¹⁸ But at the insistence of Steindorff's grandson, the JCC has agreed to leave the collection where it is, in the Egyptian museum at the University of Leipzig which is now named after Steindorff himself.¹⁹ The result of this controversy will set new precedents and lead to the writing of more chapters of the narrative to which the authors of the three papers in this volume have contributed so substantively and informatively.

Postscript

Long after the present volume of *JEGH* was ostensibly "put to bed," a sad event occurred which has necessitated the belated addition of another paper—the passing in January of the celebrated Indo-Europeanist Manfred Mayrhofer. Peter Raulwing, already featured in this volume as a co-author of the paper on F.W. von Bissing, has risen to the occasion with a detailed, thoughtful and meticulously documented retrospective on a significant component of Mayrhofer's work. Raulwing speaks from a close personal relationship with Mayrhofer as well as comprehensive acquaintance with his work and participation in the same highly specialized field of research. The focus is on "Indo-Aryan and the Indo-Aryans in the Ancient Near East," "Indo-Aryan" being defined as "an earlier phase of Old Indic known from the Vedas," which "neither derived from, nor was it introduced to India" (Raulwing, fn. 11). Egyptologists who have not made a detailed study of Indo-European linguistics, and even those who have, will find Raulwing's detailed treatment of (*e.g.*) the word *maryannu* and a variety of etymologies extremely informative and eye-opening. In exploring these admittedly "sparse traces," Mayrhofer applied an exacting standard of methodology characterized by a clear-headed focus on language itself, putting the study on an objective and to use Dietz Otto Edzard's word, "neutral" footing.²⁰ Raulwing's historical discussion illustrates how in the 1930s and 40s the study of "Indo-Aryan(s)" had become

¹⁸ Anon., "German University loses Egyptian collection bought under Nazis"; El-Aref, "Head of Nefertiti."

¹⁹ Hickey, "Jewish Group Cedes 163 Artifacts."

²⁰ To the very extensive documentation in the notes and bibliography one could add Hodge's rather adventurous study of "Indo-Europeans in the Near East"; for reflection on the influence of people from Mitanni and other foreigners in the New Kingdom Egyptian court, see now Kozloff's new study of *Amenhotep III: Egypt's Radiant Pharaoh*.

intertwined with racial ideas and interpretations, subservient to the ideological trends discussed throughout this volume. The *Nachleben* of these ideas is as noted earlier one of the major foci (and *raison d'être*) of Thomas Schneider's work on Egyptology in the Third Reich. Raulwing provides an ideal punchline (perhaps one can be excused for saying "*Punsch*-line") by quoting a humorous dialogue from *Münchener Punsch* in 1865. Plainly some people have had a sensible perspective on these issues all along despite later ideological excesses.

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Imperialism and Racial Geography in James Henry Breasted's *Ancient Times, a History of the Early World**

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Abstract

James Henry Breasted (1865–1935), founder of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, was a prolific writer of popularizing books on the ancient Near East. This article presents a critical analysis and historical contextualization of one of his most widely read books: *Ancient Times, a History of the Early World*. Published as a high school textbook in 1916 and revised in 1935, it serves as a reference point from which to investigate the effects of political and cultural variables on ancient historiography. Changes between the first and second editions of the book indicate that Breasted increasingly relied on scientific vocabulary to map the geo-racial boundaries of early civilization. Combining this with a model of enlightened exploitation, Breasted constructed a vision of the ancient past that was ultimately a commentary on the socio-political conditions of his own time.

Keywords

James Henry Breasted; historiography; intellectual history; narrative; textbooks; race; imperialism; Oriental Institute

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I. Introduction

In recent years, Egyptologists have moved increasingly toward disciplinary self-reflection as studies on the history of Egyptology rise in popularity and

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prominence.¹ The intersection of academia and popular culture now finds a place in scholarly discourse,² sometimes provoking lively and contentious debates.³ At the heart of this intersection is an important element in establishing a nuanced and informed discourse of disciplinary history: the analysis and contextualization of historical narratives, particularly those written for a popular audience. Such works have found little critical examination in the Egyptological literature,⁴ yet they are of essential importance to understanding the dissemination of historical knowledge into the public consciousness. This article presents a case study of narrative analysis grounded in historical contextualization, focusing on Egyptologist James Henry Breasted and one of his several popularizing books: the high school textbook *Ancient Times, a History of the Early World*. It is hoped that this study will further the discussion of Egyptology as a discipline in the public eye.

Ancient Times was first published in 1916, with a revised version appearing in 1935. This span of years encompasses Breasted's life from mid-career until his death, providing a reference point from which to investigate the effects of political and cultural variables on the historiography of ancient Egypt during his generation. The content of the book itself covers a vast period in human history, from the prehistoric Near East and Europe to the decline of the Roman Empire. From within this broad scope, this essay focuses the discussion on two narrative threads that emerge from Breasted's characterization of the ancient Egyptian past: 1) his delineation and interpretation of a racial geography; and 2) the way in which this geography relates to his vision of humanity's progress via imperialism and enlightened exploitation. In delineating the racial categories of ancient peoples, Breasted puts forward conclusions about race and the origins of civilized society that are tremendously discordant with modern discourse—views that have since been declared as deeply ethnocentric at best. The purpose here is neither to condone nor condemn his characterizations, but to *contextualize*. It is argued that in order to grasp the implications of his racial categorizations, they must be understood in conjunction with his perception of warfare and imperialism, particularly as

¹ Abt, *American Egyptologist*; Bednarski, "Egypt and the Modern World" and *Holding Egypt*; Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*; Emberling, *Pioneers to the Past*; Gange, "Religion and Science"; Jeffreys, *Views of Ancient Egypt*; Quirke, *Hidden Hands*; Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*; Schneider, "Ägyptologen im Dritten Reich"; Vinson, "Lord Elgin to James Henry Breasted."

² For example: Day, *Mummy's Curse*; Holtorf, *Stonehenge to Las Vegas*; Lant, "Curse of the Pharaoh"; MacDonald and Rice, *Consuming Ancient Egypt*; Solomon, *Ancient World in the Cinema*.

³ See Holtorf, "Beyond Crusades"; Fagan and Feder, "Response to Holtorf."

⁴ For a brief introduction to the genres of Egyptological writing and current issues in publishing, see Wheatcroft, "Publishing Egypt."

this perception served as a tool for interpreting the socio-political circumstances of his own day. Breasted used history as a means to understand the conditions of modernity. In the context of the early twentieth century, this meant grappling with the origins of, and sometimes justification for, colonial expansion; militarism; industrialization; and the perceived cultural superiority of those cultures which possess and transmit the hallmarks of “civilization.” To understand Breasted’s perspective on these global events, it is necessary to turn first to a contextualization of his position within academia and the specific conditions from which *Ancient Times* arose.

II. The “Father of American Egyptology”⁵

James Henry Breasted (1865–1935) was one of the pivotal figures of Egyptology and Oriental studies in America, perhaps best remembered for his tireless efforts in establishing the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. His standing within his contemporary academic community can be grasped partially through his peers’ reviews of his publications, as well as the many obituaries that appeared after his death in 1935.⁶ According to William F. Albright, Breasted was “America’s greatest Orientalist, and the greatest organizer of archaeological research whom the world has yet known . . . the foremost humanist of our day among all specialists in the study of antiquity.”⁷ He was respected across multiple disciplines and noted for being both a historian and a scientist. For George Sarton, who was himself a towering figure in the natural sciences, Breasted’s “genius is that he was scientifically-minded to an extent of which the average historian is incapable.”⁸ In fact, Breasted was the first historian/archaeological epigrapher to be chosen as a member of the National Academy of Sciences. To Egyptologist Herbert Winlock, he was a historian of the highest caliber, “whose name may well be mentioned with Prescott, Parkman and Motley.”⁹ Winlock’s comparison is not an unlikely one; indeed, it was Breasted’s skill with historical prose and his concern for the human condition through time that contributed greatly to his fame. He was, in the words

⁵ Sarton, “James Henry Breasted,” 289.

⁶ Although obituaries can convey a positive bias toward their subject, they can also indicate the scope of Breasted’s public profile. He was memorialized beyond the realm of academic journals; his death warranted tributes in such publications as *Time* magazine, *London’s The Times*, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

⁷ Albright, “In Memoriam,” 2.

⁸ Sarton, “James Henry Breasted,” 289.

⁹ “Dr. Breasted Dies; Noted Orientalist” *New York Times*, 3 December 1935, 25. The reference is to William Prescott, Francis Parkman and John Motley, American historians of literary flair and accomplishment who were known as “men of letters.”

of his colleague Alan Gardiner, “so far from being a specialist of the narrower sort that he would doubtless have preferred to hear himself described simply as a student of mankind. To him . . . the history of mankind was an epic.”¹⁰ After his death, his peers remembered his imagination, creativity and most of all, his accessible literary style.¹¹ Seven decades onward, academic conventions and tastes have changed and it is his meticulousness that is most appreciated. In a new introduction to one of Breasted’s classic works, Peter Piccione states that “*A History of Egypt* and the *Ancient Records of Egypt* mark a milestone in the history of Egyptology, so precise and well-considered was Breasted’s methodology.”¹²

Breasted’s reputation consisted of not only his academic position and accomplishments, but also his engagement with the lay public as an author of several widely-read books, a frequent public lecturer, and even as the narrator of a short documentary entitled “The Human Adventure” (1935), a film about the excavation and research activities of the Oriental Institute. Of his popularizing works, the two editions of *Ancient Times* are particularly significant: written in a period of shifting political alliances which saw the crumbling of old imperial powers and the establishment of new ones, these texts spoke of human progress and change to a wide audience that was itself in the midst of great change.

III. World War I and the Emergence of a Textbook

The years leading up to the outbreak of war between the European powers saw major technological advances; alongside this exhilaration came a foreboding about the future and an unease as to which nations would successfully wield these new forms of technological force.¹³ The arena of industrial progress was not limited to Europe; the United States had become an increasingly significant player in the first two decades of the twentieth century. From 1870 onwards, the economic and political influence of the world’s Western nations underwent significant shifts: Japan began utilizing British industrial techniques, particularly military, and their imperial ambitions brought them into conflict with Russia; meanwhile, Germany and the US took the lead in technological advancement over Britain and France, especially in the realm of electrical and chemical science.¹⁴ There was a destructive corollary to these

¹⁰ Gardiner, “Professor Breasted: Dr. Gardiner’s Tribute.”

¹¹ For example, Bull, Speiser and Olmstead, “James Henry Breasted: 1865–1935.”

¹² Piccione, “Introduction,” xxxiv.

¹³ Blom, *Vertigo Years*, 2–3.

¹⁴ Weightman, *Industrial Revolutionaries*, 283 ff., 340 ff.

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