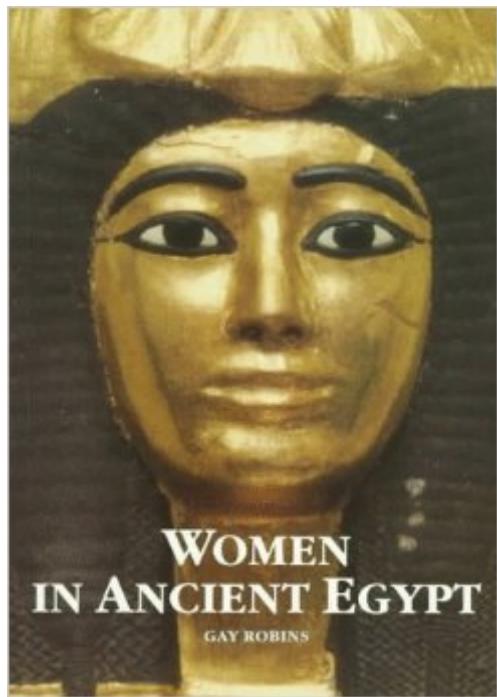


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Women In Ancient Egypt



Synopsis

An idealised version of women appears everywhere in the art of ancient Egypt, but the true nature of these women's lives has long remained hidden. Robins' book, gracefully written and copiously illustrated, cuts through the obscurity of the ages to show us what the archaeological riches of Egypt really say about how these women lived, both in the public eye and within the family. The art and written records of the time present a fascinating puzzle. But how often has the evidence been interpreted, consciously or otherwise, from a male viewpoint? Robins conducts us through these sources with an archaeologist's relish, stripping away layer after interpretive layer to expose the reality beneath. Here we see the everyday lives of women in the economic, legal, or domestic sphere, from the Early Dynastic Period almost 5,000 years ago to the conquest of Alexander in 332 B.C. Within this kingdom ruled and run by men, women could still wield influence indirectly—and in some cases directly, when a woman took the position of king. The exceptional few who assumed real power appear here in colorful detail, alongside their more traditional counterparts. Robins examines the queens' reputed divinity and takes a frank look at the practice of incest within Egypt's dynasties. She shows us the special role of women in religious rites and offices, and assesses their depiction in Egyptian art as it portrays their position in society. By drawing women back into the picture we have of ancient Egypt, this book opens a whole new perspective on one of world history's most exotic and familiar cultures. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Robins' history of women in ancient Egypt is fantastic for Egyptologists and those interested in

women's history especially, but even for the lay reader it is a veritable treasure trove of information. What initially impressed me was how Robins is very clear and upfront about the challenges facing scholars examining the role of women: Egyptians were a conservative society seeking to maintain ma'at - the natural balance in the world - a balance that was largely male-dominated, and therefore the historical record is not very rich in terms of explicit evidence. Further, "ancient Egypt" covers a time span of some 3000 years; in any historical discussion there are changes in society, even one as reluctant and slow to change as ancient Egypt's was, which complicates matters. Added to this, the lives of only the elite were celebrated and preserved in tombs, giving us a very one-sided view of what life was like. Even when the common people were portrayed, it was idealized, so the place of the majority of women (working-class women) is left largely to inference. What continued to impress was the fact that Robins is intellectually honest enough to point out "grey areas" of our understanding of ancient Egypt and clearly delineate when she is making historical inferences - for example, in her chapter on "Women in Temple Ritual," she states that we never find any female lector priests (priests who would read prayers from papyri scrolls), pointing out that this may be that female priests were illiterate, but it is also feasible that their literacy may not have been "officially acknowledged" (i.e., it would have been contrary to ma'at, even as we know that women of the elite classes were taught to read.) I found this both professionally courageous and refreshing.

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