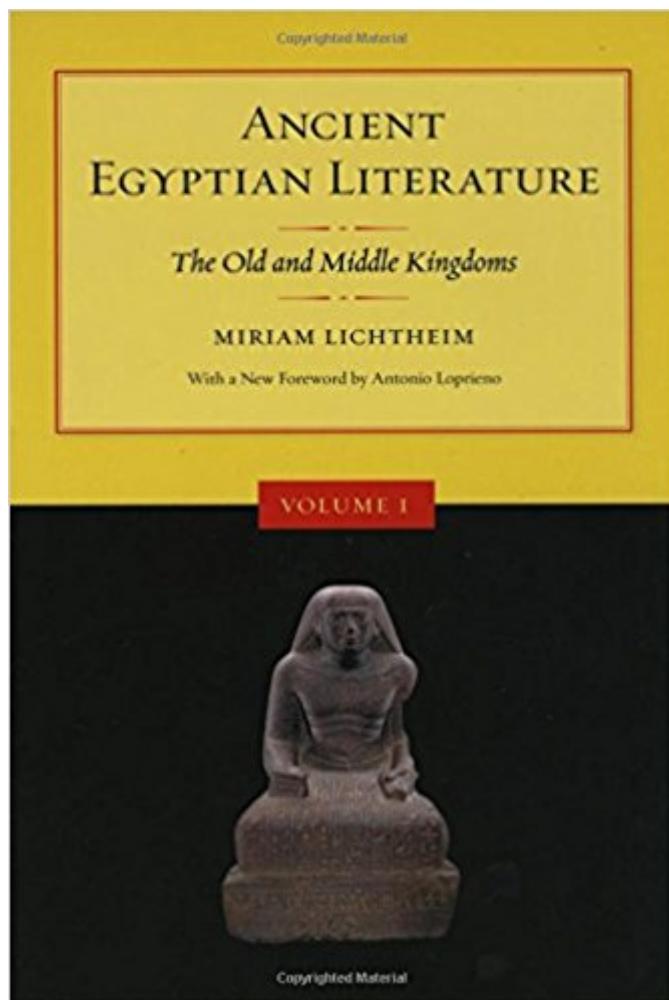


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Ancient Egyptian Literature: Volume I: The Old And Middle Kingdoms



Synopsis

First published in 1973 and followed by Volume II in 1976 and Volume III in 1980; this anthology has assumed classic status in the field of Egyptology and portrays the remarkable evolution of the literary forms of one of the world's earliest civilizations. Volume I outlines the early and gradual evolution of Egyptian literary genres, including biographical and historical inscriptions carved on stone, the various classes of literary works written with pen on papyrus, and the mortuary literature that focuses on life after death. Introduced with a new foreword by Antonio Loprieno. Volume II shows the culmination of these literary genres within the single period known as the New Kingdom (1550-1080 B.C.). With a new foreword by Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert. Volume III spans the last millennium of Pharaonic civilization, from the tenth century B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era. With a new foreword by Joseph G. Manning.

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Customer Reviews

Having read a number of books in recent months on Egypt, Canaan, and Israel, I decided that I needed to go to the source to see for myself what the many partially quoted Egyptian texts actually say. Miriam Lichtheim's "Ancient Egyptian Literature - Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms" was my starting point. The customer reviews recommended it - and what other customers have to say about a book is usually an important factor as to whether I will buy it. In this case, I was cautious and only bought the first volume. I enjoyed it immensely. Professor Lichtheim's aim was to provide

an up-to-date translation of a representative selection of Egyptian Literature, and in preparing these she states that she has made full use of existing translations and studies. I found her introductory survey on the development of Egyptian literature and her detailed explanation and notes of each text to be most useful in helping me understand what I was reading. This first volume includes translations of about 50 texts dating from the 5th dynasty of the Old Kingdom to the 14th Dynasty of the Middle kingdom - which covers the period c 2450BCE to c 1650BCE. The texts include tomb inscriptions, selected "Utterances" from the Pyramid texts, Didactic Instructions, Songs and Hymns, as well as three amusing and interesting prose tales - The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, Three Tales of Wonder, and The Story of Sinuhe. The Didactic literature is also very interesting, generally being instructions from kings to sons on how to properly rule the kingdom after his death. But they also include such texts as "The Dispute between a Man and his Ba", "The Eloquent Peasant", "The Satire of the Trades", and the much (partially) quoted and often misquoted "Admonitions of Ipuwer".

Perhaps I am being a bit pedantic in my mediocre review of Ancient Egyptian Literature, but the flaws in the translation and the relative narrowness of its scope compared to other anthologies warrant a solid 3 star review. Lichtheim's introduction is fantastic - its explanation of the role and importance of Egyptian writing strikes a perfect balance between clarity and academic exposition. However her translation of the Htp di Nsw ("Hotep di nesu" - a formulaic prayer common throughout Ancient Egypt) immediately caught my attention. The prayer ("An offering the king makes ...") should be translated with the preposition "for" or better, "to" ("An offering the king makes to [insert deity here: Ra, Set, Anubis ...]") - yet Lichtheim has it as "An offering which the king gives and Anubis ..." which really makes no sense at all given the context and purpose of the prayer not to mention it is simply incorrect. Admittedly I am being nit-picky here, but such a basic error brought into question the accuracy of the rest of the literature she translates. This minor issue aside, the selection of literature in the anthology is good: Lichtheim includes autobiographical stele, excerpts from the Book of the Dead, songs and hymns and a handful of prose tales. Taken as a whole, they give a solid overview of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom literature. Were this the only book on the subject, it would warrant a much higher rating from me. However, it is not.

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