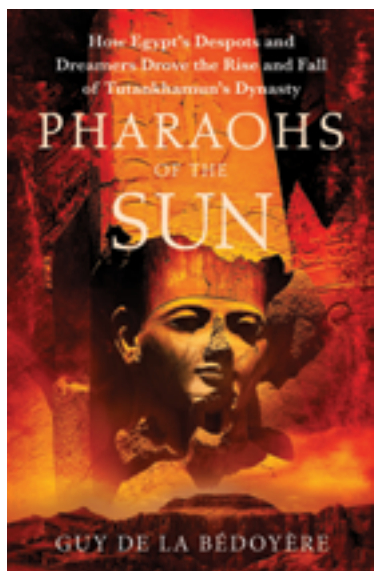


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## Pharaohs of the Sun: How Egypt's Despots and Dreamers Drove the Rise and Fall of Tutankhamun's Dynasty

By Guy de la Bédoyère

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Little Brown

549 pages with illustrations and photographs

ISBN: 9781408714249

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Reviewed by Jack Norris, Lincoln College,  
University of Oxford

Guy de la Bédoyère's *Pharaohs of the Sun* chronicles the rise and fall of Ancient Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty, which was one of the most powerful, wealthy and successful. Tutankhamun reigned over Egypt from approximately 1550 to 1295 BCE. Apart from Tutankhamun, the members of this dynasty are some of the most notable figures from pharaonic Egypt, such as the warrior kings Thutmose I and Thutmose III, the female king Hatshepsut, the opulent Amenhotep III, as well as the

religious zealot Akhenaten and his queen Nefertiti.

A highly accessible text, this book does a good job at concisely summarising and touching on much of the historiography, current scholarship and discussion surrounding this era of Egyptian history. This book would be a suitable introduction and overview for teachers and students covering Ancient Egypt in Year 7 History, as well as those teaching or studying the Egyptian component in VCE Ancient History.

The book also proves a good resource for understanding Egyptology. The first chapter gives a useful overview of how Egyptologists have come to construct and understand this historical period. This section explains why and how Egyptian history is broken into dynasties and time periods such as the 'Old Kingdom' and 'New Kingdom'. It also explains the often-fragmentary nature of the evidence Egyptologists have to study and reconstruct these histories. The book also has valuable appendices featuring timelines, glossaries, king lists, summaries, and a comprehensive further reading list.

My only issue with the book is that de la Bédoyère often characterises the Eighteenth Dynasty kings as narcissistic megalomaniac despots who aggrandised themselves through their vast monuments and military campaigns. Through this, de la Bédoyère does not shy away from recognising that these kings presided over a rigid authoritarian regime that could be brutal to its people and neighbours. However, the personalities assigned to the kings by the author are all highly 'speculative', as he often admits. It is questionable to suggest that much of these actions represent the personalities of the

kings, and instead more likely reflects the well-established millennia-old mechanisms of the Egyptian state and the philosophies of Egyptian religion and kingship. In these instances, the author is viewing and judging these rulers through his own twenty-first century Western world-view and moral code. The Eighteenth Dynasty royal family are vastly removed from us by time and culture. I feel at times de la Bédoyère does not quite grasp this in his delivery.

Because of this fault, I feel this book serves as a great example of historiography, where the historian judges the cultures, societies and individuals of the past with their own contemporary world-view and moral code. This is something that teachers and students of History should be aware of, and which often takes place in historical writing. This book could be used as an example of this in class for the historiography of Ancient Egypt.

Overall, the book is a great read and would serve as a suitable introduction to the Eighteenth Dynasty for teachers and students, as well as an example of how historians write about the ancient past.