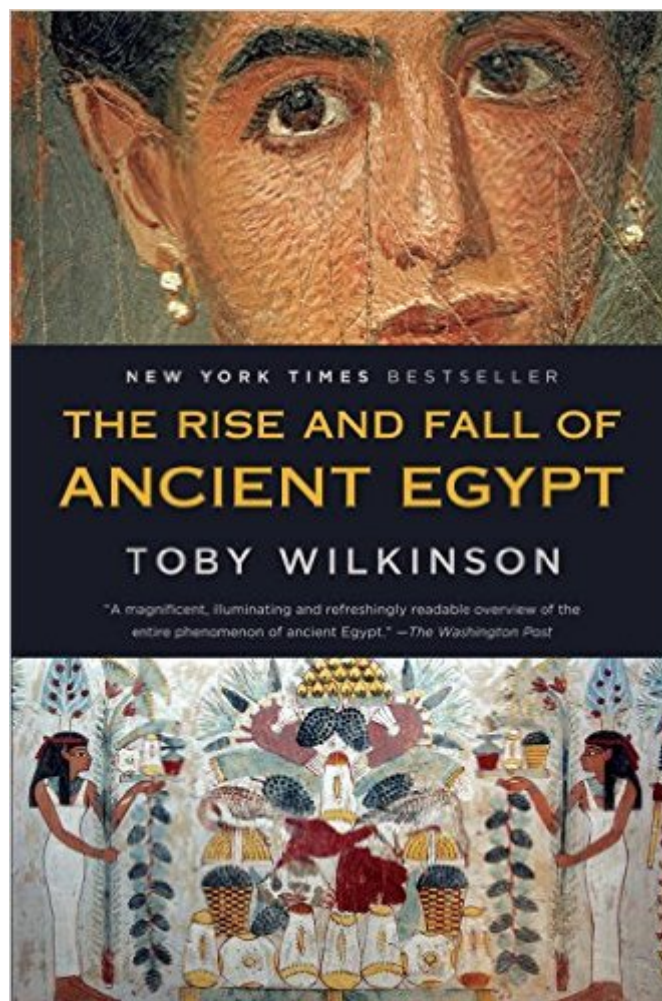


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The Rise And Fall Of Ancient Egypt



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • Magisterial . . . [A] rich portrait of ancient Egypt's complex evolution over the course of three millennia. • "Los Angeles Times" • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The Washington Post • Publishers Weekly • In this landmark volume, one of the world's most renowned Egyptologists tells the epic story of this great civilization, from its birth as the first nation-state to its absorption into the Roman Empire. Drawing upon forty years of archaeological research, award-winning scholar Toby Wilkinson takes us inside a tribal society with a pre-monetary economy and decadent, divine kings who ruled with all-too-recognizable human emotions. Here are the legendary leaders: Akhenaten, the heretic king, who with his wife Nefertiti brought about a revolution with a bold new religion; Tutankhamun, whose dazzling tomb would remain hidden for three millennia; and eleven pharaohs called Ramesses, the last of whom presided over the militarism, lawlessness, and corruption that caused a political and societal decline. Filled with new information and unique interpretations, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* is a riveting and revelatory work of wild drama, bold spectacle, unforgettable characters, and sweeping history. • "With a literary flair and a sense for a story well told, Mr. Wilkinson offers a highly readable, factually up-to-date account." • "The Wall Street Journal" • "[Wilkinson] writes with considerable verve. . . . [He] is nimble at conveying the sumptuous pageantry and cultural sophistication of pharaonic Egypt." • "The New York Times"

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Customer Reviews

Despite having a doctorate in early American history, I have been fascinated with Ancient Egypt

since I can remember. And, having read Toby Wilkinson's earlier works (Early Dynastic Egypt and Genesis of the Pharaohs, in particular), I knew that I would have to read this latest interpretation of the course of ancient Egyptian history. The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt is nothing short of magnificent, with a narrative thread focusing on both the glorious and gritty sides of Egyptian life as fostered by the Egyptian state's exertion of coercive power. Organized chronologically, The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt returns time and again to the problems of state power. States rise and fall, power ebbs and flows: Egypt's leaders attempted to uphold the forces of truth and order against those of chaos and disarray. To do so required developing state infrastructures and means of coercing the appropriation of both labor and material goods to build the glorious monuments that so capture the public's imagined Egypt. From the pyramids to Abu Simbel, the projection of Egyptian glory depended on breaking the backs of the people who toiled incessantly in service to the state. Indeed, the twin themes of ideology (religion, royal divinity) and administration (bureaucracies, taxation, etc.) repeatedly resurface to highlight just how the state secured support for its regime and managed that support. When both aspects of state control broke down, Egypt entered periodically into times of disorder and chaos. Readers expecting a romantic view of Ancient Egypt focused on the archaeological treasures will probably be disappointed to be reminded of the costs of Egyptian grandeur.

I remember wondering as a small boy about life in the kingdoms of ancient Egypt. Maybe it was Sunday school lessons, Moses, and all that, but the Egyptian period of human development has always had me in its spell. And Wilkinson's book makes the spell even deeper. His story begins with Narmer, the first king of a more or less united Egypt and continues through the pyramidal age to the New Kingdom and its fully fleshed art, architecture, literature, government and religion. Wilkinson takes us from there through Egypt's wars with Abyssinia and Persia, Alexander the Great's appearance and ends with the Roman conquest of Egypt and Cleopatra's death. Rather than a dry litany of dates, names and events, the author retells the story of a culture. He has an agenda here, and he doesn't try to hide it, but that's where the story lies. Wilkinson is looking through time from the vantage of a twenty-first century writer, one who sees the evolution of a culture in which some people become more important than others. These elites use humanity's tendency to fear to subjugate them, to keep them under royal and religious thumb. The four thousand years of Egypt's rise and dominance and its subsequent fall, then, are the product of this abuse of masses of humanity for the benefit of the few. What's unexamined are the stories buried in the developments Egypt gave birth to: building techniques for its massive structures. A unique written language. An

enduring religion that has given subsequent religions many of its tenets, cloaked in newer cultural clothes. A central governmental structure not unlike our modern ones. Art. Medicine. The lesson drawn from Wilkinson's examination of these four millennia?

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