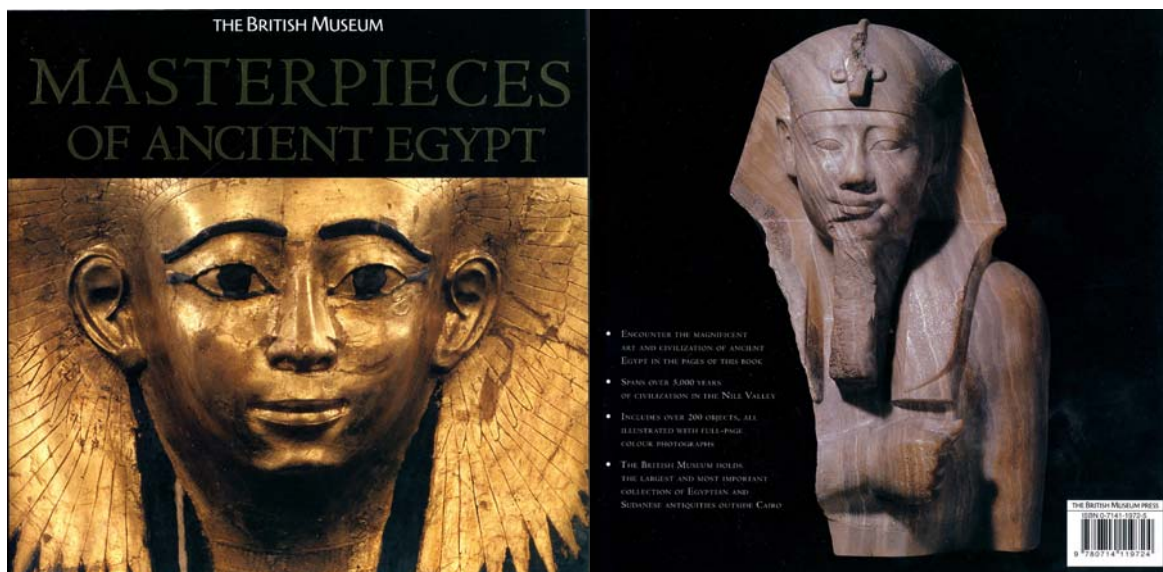


Strudwick, N. 2006. Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt. – London, The British Museum Press

Book review by A.J. Veldmeijer



Nigel Strudwick's book 'Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt' truly is a masterpiece itself. The 352 page book presents objects from one of world's most important collections on ancient Egypt: the British Museum.

The book is divided in roughly three parts: the introduction shortly describes Egypt's long history (note that Nubia is included too!) and the history of the collection of the Museum's Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan. The end of the introduction is marked by a map which gives all major Egyptian and Sudanese sites from which objects are housed in the collection. The part 'The Masterpieces', the main part, starts rather abrupt, which is caused by the fact that the headings, as presented in the contents, are not used in the book itself (this in contrast to the headings of the 'third part'). This is remarkable and to my opinion a pity because it would have made the book even better structured than it already is. The left page gives a description of the object which is shown in full colour on the right hand page; the left margin of the text page is used to give details on the date of the object, the material, measurements and the museum number as well as how it became part of the collection. The last part consists of a short glossary with all necessary terms explained, followed by a short 'further reading' for, as explained in the preface by the author, the general reader. The professional reader is directed for relevant publications to the 'Bibliography for the objects'. Finally, there is an 'Index of British Museum numbers', an 'Index of Egyptian names' and an 'Index of place names'.

As explained by the author in the preface (p. 7), "the selection criteria for the almost 200 objects is somewhat personal, and beyond the obvious pieces, I know that many readers will regret the omission of this object or wonder why that one does appear". Indeed, I think it is a pity that so few objects of 'daily life' (such as footwear, clothing, utensils) are included, even though I understand that such objects are not often regarded 'masterpieces'. The choice however, is understandable as there is limited space and the number of object to choose from is enormous.

In conclusion I can be very short on the book: the text is well written, a joy to read and gives a good insight in ancient Egypt. The photographs (many of which were taken especially for this publication) are excellent, or, as stated in a review in the 'Good Book Guide' of 1 November 2006¹ "The quality of the photography is outstanding so that the objects, whether paintings, sculpture, jewellery or papyrus, leap off the page." The book is a must for everyone, layman or professional alike and should have a prominent place on every bookshelf of he/she who is interested in ancient Egypt.

Strudwick, N. 2006. Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt. – London, The British Museum Press. 352 pp. ISBN 0-7141-1972-5. Price £ 20.00 (hardback).

¹ According to the website of The British Museum Press dd. December 13 2006 (<http://www.britishmuseum.co.uk/Product.aspx?ID=1151>).