David Gange, 2013 *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion, 1822-1922,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, ISBN 9780199653102, 357pp, £75.

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Dr David Gange previously published a paper entitled, 'Religion and Science in Late-nineteenth-century British Archaeology' (*The Historical Journal*, 49/4, 2006, 1083–1103) where he argued that rapid archaeological developments in scientific technique were largely driven by spiritual objectives rather than any other ideologies. This book exponentially broadens the canvas of that earlier analysis and probes the cultural landscape of the nineteenth century in England to understand its relationship with Egyptology.

At the conclusion of the Introduction Gange clearly defines the purpose of the book

> *This book hopes to nudge the history of Egyptology, and archaeology more generally, gently in the direction of broad cultural involvement and catholicity of approach, and away, for now, from exclusive focus on the generalized grand narrative or heroic life. It also hopes to encourage scholars of the nineteenth century to integrate Egyptology more fully into their understanding of the period's intellectual life. Its aim is to recover the reactions alternating between intense excitement and debilitating neurosis, of readers who devoured accounts of the discoveries and innovations that changed the cultural landscape in which archaeologists of the Near East worked (52).*

The book is a pleasure to read because Gange treats his subjects with equanimity and in fact appears intrigued by the events he describes and the religious and cultural traditions behind them. The book is divided into chapters named after Egyptian chronology, Old, Middle and New Kingdoms to cover the development in Egyptological attitudes between 1822 and 1922 and two Intermediate periods that contain transitional reflections. Before 1822, English society had learned about Egypt from the Napoleon-inspired publications of Vivant Denon and Edme-François Jomard and the activities of collectors-looters such a Henry Salt and Giovanni Battista Belzoni. The Tutankhamun discoveries provide the other book end. This is not a blow-by-blow account of the development of Egyptology, but as the title conveys, it is a discussion about the growth of ancient Egyptian knowledge set against the cultural milieu in Britain at the time. To get the most from the book, readers should already be generally aware of early Egyptologists, their societies and chronology.

The period is broadly important because it sees the beginnings of science, geology, anthropology and prehistory. At the outset the world was considered a recent creation, and by the end geological time was the frame of reference for the earth's genesis. Gange is able to demonstrate that the contemporary debates about ancient Egypt 'related directly to the status of the Bible and classical literature' (31). But whereas many commentators have adopted a one-dimensional perspective, often referencing Darwin's *The Origin of Species* or 'higher criticism' and selective religious reactions to them, Gange accepts that biblical archaeology 'was never just engaged in 'proving' the literal truth of the Bible; it always involved elucidating the many gaps in the biblical narrative' (25). With respect to Edward Said's Orientalism, he refers to the analysis of Suzanne Marchand (*German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, CUP, 2010) who argues that Orientalist knowledge has a long history in Europe, and 'was not always 'power' to be exerted over others, but was just as frequently appreciation, dialogue and self-criticism' (33). It offered new ways to read the Bible well before the 'age of Empire'. With such perception, Gange is able to present a much nuanced study.

The Old Kingdom chapter begins with a brief study of the art of John Martin and John Marshall. According to Gange, the apocalyptic work of John Martin portrayed Egyptian architectural forms in scenes inspired by the industrial revolution to align Egypt, the biblical enemy, with the development of British industry. Marshall does the opposite. This section is illuminating, but would have benefitted from illustrations of the art works in question.

Gange's engagement with non-conformist ideas of ancient Egypt is refreshing. In the tradition of his Trinity College, Cambridge colleague, Boyd Hilton (*A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?* OUP, 2008), he delves into Mechanics Institute lectures, Sunday School lessons, regional media and books published outside the centres of learning to discover the role Egypt played in legitimising those who were not members of the classically-based establishment, 'relationships with state power, religious authority and ideological hierarchies were always conflicted and ancient Egypt was a means of attacking state authority more often than enforcing it' (71).

Belzoni's Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, was open at the beginning of the study period. The biblical links suggested at the time were to prove illusory, but Gange argues that these were 'the best guesses by the most advanced and authoritative scholars' (78). While Belzoni sought high-society through Egyptology, Gange is inclined to agree that the next group of Englishmen to engage with ancient Egypt were 'borderline aristocrats' who wanted to shed the strictures of their birth by not so much discarding the 'silver fork', but by abandoning forks altogether. The tradition of the Grand Tour is not mentioned, nor is the role of William Gell. The significance of John Gardner Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs* (1836) is discussed noting that while religion was not an important aspect of the work, it was the preoccupation for most contemporary commentators. The inability of the intelligentsia to address the reality of Egyptian evidence is a recurring

theme from Belzoni onward. Conversely, *The Westminster* quoted by Gange reflected on 'how remarkable an extent the Egyptian monuments are illustrative of Biblical records' (89). Illumination of the biblical narrative, which even the unlearned may appreciate, was mentioned by other reviewers. Gange does not discuss if this is the genesis of this hermeneutical methodology.

Gange moves on quickly to another of Gardner Wilkinson's fellow adventurers, Joseph Bonomi. Apart from being an excellent architectural draftsman and author, Bonomi acted as a focal point for nearly all non-French involvement in Egypt for the next half-century. Bonomi's correspondence was a significant source for Gange. However, it was the ideas of Christian Carl Josias Bunsen and two Unitarians, John Kenrick and Samuel Sharpe that dominated mid-century attitudes to ancient Egypt. The speculative nature of their analyses is illustrated by Sharpe's argument that Trinitarian theology derived from Egyptian religion; ancient Egypt during this time existed primarily in British thought to serve contemporary religious and political debate.

Many of the protagonists were members of the hitherto neglected Syro-Egyptian Society. Gange describes this fascinating association that not only had a broad English membership but also included European scholars, whose papers were translated and read to the society. One such was the German scholar Georg Friedrich Grotefend, who was a member of the society from its 1844 foundation until his death in 1853; he made an important contribution to the decipherment of cuneiform, something not recognised in Germany for a further forty years. Gange discusses the development of Akkadian and especially the discovery of the Deluge tablets by George Smith, which was in contrast to Egyptology where 'exposition was entangled in religious and political controversy' (119).

This disorder was to change after 1870 when 'radicalism, heterodoxy and social subversion had once been expected; conservative, orthodox and constructive expectations were increasingly generated and met' (127). The First Intermediate chapter is an excursus dealing with this transition and the development of science. In fact Gange argues that Petrie and the Egypt Exploration Fund work in the 1880s followed from British intellectual life in the 1870s, not from earlier Egyptology associated with people such as Gardner Wilkinson. The mythology surrounding the Great Pyramid, the discovery of the Deluge Tablets, and attitudes to Schliemann, Troy and Homer are explored by Gange. While these issues may seem divergent, Gange argues that public subscribers to British excavations in Egypt after 1880 were inspired by Schliemann and Homer and George Smith's Deluge Tablets. Gladstone, and A.H. Sayce, viewed Schliemann's work as an 'archaeological revolt against the fantasies of subjective criticism' (146) and Gange argues that Schliemann, like Layard before him, 'restored ancient literature to its rightful status as records of fact, not tissues of fiction' (149). Public curiosity was generated by the possibility that ancient Egypt might be equally significant.

The third chapter deals with the last twenty years of the nineteenth-century. Gange takes issue with Martin Bernal's *Black Athena,* arguing the very opposite that in fact the rekindled popularity of Egyptology at the time was a direct result of 'a broad fight-back of popular religion against perceived 'irreligious' tendencies in British intellectual life' (163). It was in this period that hieroglyphic and hieratic literature and archaeology started to influence the history of ancient Egypt.

Gange's analysis recognises the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) as a watershed. The EEF exploited popular interest in the biblical narrative set in the delta region of ancient Egypt to raise excavation funds. Gange does not view this as a negative, the 'elevated importance of biblical associations after 1880 meant that artefacts were valuable insofar as they permitted the reconstruction of Old Testament cultures' (191). Finds were not just valuable as 'art'; the down side was that the culture of ancient Egypt itself was still secondary.

The discussion about the organisation of archaeological information as science or religion is interesting. The outcomes influenced publishing and the training of Egyptologists and are still relevant today. The publication of texts exposed the British public to ancient Egyptian religion, and drew forth attempts to conceptualise it using the mind-set of contemporary Christian theology. 'It was the potential to combine this grotesque sensation with Christianized moralizing that made ancient Egypt a perfect vehicle for 1890s romance' (215).

According to Gange, Petrie's discoveries at Amarna played a pivotal role. The Amarna letters made many of the higher critics assumptions invalid; the art of Akhenaton discredited those who thought Art was a classical Greek innovation, and Akhenaton himself was a monotheistic idealist demonstrating Egypt's perceived religious superiority. Amarna was a British contribution to Egyptology and it was popular.

The 'Second Intermediate Period' chapter begins with Petrie's 1899 establishment of a relative Egyptian chronology, revealing 'a discipline in which Egypt finally mattered more than its associations' (238). A second development was the attempts to investigate ancient Egypt's races, especially after Petrie's discoveries at Naqada, 'Petrie now more often excavated alongside anthropologists … than .. classicists or biblical scholars' (243). The discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri is described in some detail and demonstrates the broadening of the archaeological enterprise. The first publication of the papyri was not acclaimed and is somewhat of an irony given the direct Christian theological relevance of the texts and the vast amount of British Egyptological literature written in preceding years on virtually no evidence at all.

The final chapter deals with the last twenty years and describes a period when Egyptology was largely freed from the biblical agenda. It was now taught at the universities of UCL, Oxford and Liverpool where it was brought together with anthropology; publication and fieldwork were also often associated with anthropology. The origin of civilisation was now the primary subject for study. Petrie published his *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (1904) and Gange believes that this showed that 'the study of prehistoric Europe and the ancient Near East had at last been aligned closely enough for fruitful exchange' (280). It was also indicative of Petrie's training of new Egyptologists; most students spent only the one season with him, probably as much a result of his 'excruciatingly bad table' (286) as it was the completeness of the program.

While seriation and stratigraphy described by Petrie claimed a certain scientific status for the discipline of archaeology, analysis also took new directions. In *The Revolutions of Civilisation* (1911) Petrie 'set out to demonstrate that the racial 'character' of a people, rather than its modes of governance or environmental conditions, determined the success or failure in the global power struggle' (292). Petrie believed that Egypt, the country with the longest continuous series of revolutions, eight cycles in all, could be studied archaeologically to derive a theory of civilisation. Whatever one makes of Petrie's approach, Egyptology in his mind had become a primary source for humanity, not just a place to supply data to bolster disparate world views.

The last major person studied by Gange is Grafton Elliot Smith, who was named after the New South Wales town of his birth. In 1900 Elliot Smith was appointed to the chair of Anatomy in Cairo, a position from which he was able to study disease in ancient Egypt and to use the new X-ray technology to investigate mummies. It was the Nubian Project led by George Reisner where Elliot Smith and a young assistant, Frederic Wood Jones, made their main contribution to Egyptological fieldwork. Wood Jones later held the chairs of Anatomy at Adelaide and Melbourne Universities.

Elliot Smith was later knighted for his distinguished contribution to anatomy, but in archaeology he was known for his writings that advocated the Egyptian origin of everything relevant to civilisation, later called Hyperdiffusionism. While his influence on academic anthropology was limited, Gange describes how important his ideas were for public perceptions of ancient Egypt. Elliot Smith became Professor of Anatomy at UCL and although he and Petrie became bitter enemies, both men gave the study of ancient Egypt an autonomy that it had lacked prior to 1900. Gange sees the irony, 'Egyptology allowed the assumption that civilization developed from a point of origin in the Near East to survive the rejection of the scriptural evidence that had once been its rationale' (318f).

Influences on English attitudes to the Orient such as William McClure Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1859) are not mentioned. While written by an American and not specifically about Egypt, this book had wide circulation in England. Thomson described and illustrated Middle Eastern cultural practice as he encountered it during forty years as a missionary and he suggested ways that this culture explained parts of the biblical narrative. Nonconformist English Christian circles came to understand that the context of the biblical narrative was essentially foreign.

Tourism as a means to explore this otherness developed, and was especially popular amongst non-conformist Christians; visits to Egypt were common. Gange does not interact with this tradition at all. Maybe it did not influence the literature on which his book relies, however it would certainly have been a factor in the minds of those to whom the EEF appealed.

The book has a select bibliography and a not so complete index. It will be especially useful for Egyptologists and historians of archaeology. Other readers may need to return to it more than once to appreciate the many intertwined themes. The people and organisations that pass through these pagers are truly interesting and one is left hoping that histories of people such as Joseph Bonomi and organisations such as the Syro-Egyptian Society will follow. However it is as an example of a nineteenth-century British cultural history as it related to the development of a discipline that the book will make an enduring mark.