



# The Legacy of Ancient Egypt (Facts on File's Legacies of the Ancient World)

*Charles Freeman, Charles Freeman*

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To its neighbors, Egypt was a land of "gold as plentiful as dust" - a kingdom to be admired and envied, but too powerful to be taken. Other kingdoms rose and fell; Egypt endured. To the early Greeks - who arrived late in Egypt's long history - it was the home of an almost unimaginably ancient written language and equally ancient, mysterious religious traditions that were rumored to hold the secrets of the gods. To the Romans, Egypt was the granary that fed their empire, and a source of strange gods and exotic objects that fascinated everyone from slave to emperor. Only the Arabs, who arrived nearly 1,000 years after the fall of the last Egyptian dynasty, found a nearly clean slate on which to inscribe their history with little reference to the old. Over the course of the last 400 years, our picture of the land of the pharaohs has been built up piece by piece, leaving plenty of gaps for the imagination to fill in. Paradoxically, in the twentieth century - when most of Egypt's past has finally been well documented - the more familiar and everyday it becomes, the more there is a desire to cling to the exotic, the mysterious, the impenetrable. This comprehensive and lavishly illustrated book unwraps the layered shroud of history to reveal both Egypts: the real land of kings and queens, officials and craftsmen, archaeologists and tomb-robbers; and the Egypt of the imagination, which has had a hold on Western culture since its origins in classical Greece - a hold that shows no sign of diminishing.

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