

**ANCIENT HISTORY FROM  
THE MONUMENTS; EGYPT  
FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES  
TO B. C. 300**

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Ancient History from the Monuments; Egypt from the Earliest Times to B. C. 300 by S. Birch

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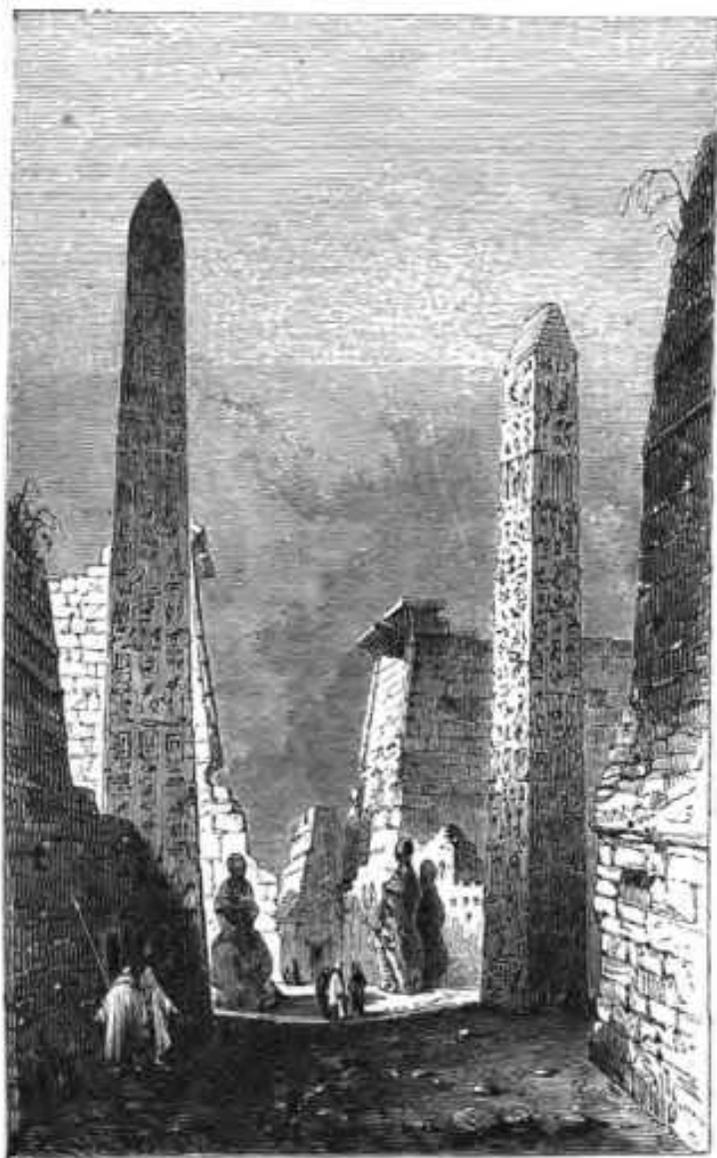
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**S. BIRCH**

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TEMPLE OF LUXOR.

*J. Kennedy.*  
*May. 1884.*

# ANCIENT HISTORY

FROM THE MONUMENTS.

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# EGYPT

FROM THE

*EARLIEST TIMES TO B.C. 300.*

BY

S. BIRCH, LL.D., ETC.

**NINTH THOUSAND.**

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## INTRODUCTION.

ANCIENT Egypt is one of the two great countries of the world which has performed so important a part in the religious history of the East, that its annals, as derived from the monuments, are of the greatest importance to understanding the development of human civilisation and the tendency of religious thought. It was in it that the Hebrews passed their first captivity, entering it as a nomad race with their flocks and herds, and leaving the house of bondage with the knowledge and arts of its early civilisation. The land itself, called in the hieroglyphics Kam or the Black, from the colour of the alluvial mud of the Nile, bore several other names in the Egyptian language. To the Hebrews it was known as Mitsraim or the Two Mitsrs, an appellation found also in the Assyrian as Musr, and the Persian as Mud-raya, but the Greeks called it Aiguptos, a word of uncertain derivation retained at the present day as Egypt, by which it is universally known. No country could have been better fitted for the cradle of the human race: blessed with a rainless sky, a fertile soil, an incessant supply of water, and protected by its conformation from the disaster of early conquest, it possessed all that was necessary for the happiness and safety of its population. It was the bed of the river Nile, which in a course of miles received no tributary stream into its bosom, but, supplied by the outpour of the great lakes of Central Africa, annually spread its waters over a barren desert,

which it fertilized; retiring again to a narrower bed, it left behind it a long and narrow strip of cultivatable land not exceeding the breadth of a few miles till it reached the modern Fayoum or ancient Delta, where the waters of the river, mostly repelled by the Mediterranean, threw down in the shape of a fan the mud they carried in their course, as the choked watercourses gradually silted up. Two ranges of low and barren hills, granite at Syene, sandstone a little beyond, and limestone till they reach the Fayoum, skirt the Valley of the Nile, beyond which lies the arid and lifeless desert. It was in this valley, teeming with vegetable and animal life, that the ancient Egyptians flourished and erected those vast edifices, the admiration of all ages.

It is a peculiarity of this country that the absence of rain, the great destroyer of works of art, has enabled even the most fragile materials, such as rapidly perish elsewhere, to survive the slow process of destroying time, for all above the level of the inundation was safe from the usual elements of decay. The inundation took place at the 28th July or about the summer solstice, and almost to a day; the river as it rose changing rapidly in colour, especially in Upper Egypt, from a slimy green to a turbid red colour. And when it attained a height of sixteen cubits it revived the drooping vegetation of the cultivated lands, which no drop of rain from heaven ever watered except at long and distant intervals of time.

The race of men by whom the Valley of the Nile was tenanted, was considered in their legends to have been created by the gods out of clay; a legend closely resembling the Mosaic account of the creation of man. Modern researches have, however, not as yet finally determined if advancing from Western Asia they entered the alluvial land bringing with them an already developed civilisation; or if ascending from Ethiopia they followed the course of the river to its mouth; or if they were Aborigines, the date of whose appearance is beyond

the knowledge of man and the scan of science. On the earliest monuments they appear as a red or dusky race, with features neither entirely Caucasian nor Nigritic; more resembling at the earliest age the European, at the middle period of the Empire the Nigritic races or the offspring of a mixed population, and at the most flourishing period of their Empire the sallow tint and refined type of the Semitic families of mankind. Placed in the Mosaic accounts as descendants of the family of Ham, or the Black races, it has been usual to style them Hamitic, or an African people. At all periods of history the development, both physical and intellectual, of the Egyptians was of a high order; offering a marked contrast with the Nigritic nations, whom nothing but the pressure of conquest or subjection can elevate to a higher standard, owing to the early arrest of physical and intellectual growth. It is not to be supposed that Egypt was alone inhabited at the time of its earliest monuments. It had soon come in conflict with adjacent countries already partly populated. South of Syene lay the numerous black tribes, the so-called *Nahsi* or Negroes, inferior in civilisation but turbulent and impatient of subjection. The skirts of the Eastern desert were held by wandering tribes called *Satu*, not yet subjected to the arms and discipline of Egypt. The Western frontier was menaced by the *Tahennu* or Libyans, but the waters of the Mediterranean had not as yet been infested as at a later period by the Phœnicians and Greeks, who exercised the arts of piracy and commerce. Beyond the North-eastern desert, in which resided the *Hērusha* or Inhabitants of the Waste, were the *Menat*, perhaps also a Shepherd race, the dwellers of Northern Asia; and hazily in the distance were seen the nascent forms of the Empires of Babylon and Assyria, and the slowly rising power of the Phœnician states and Syrian kingdoms.

The religious notions of the Egyptians were chiefly