

**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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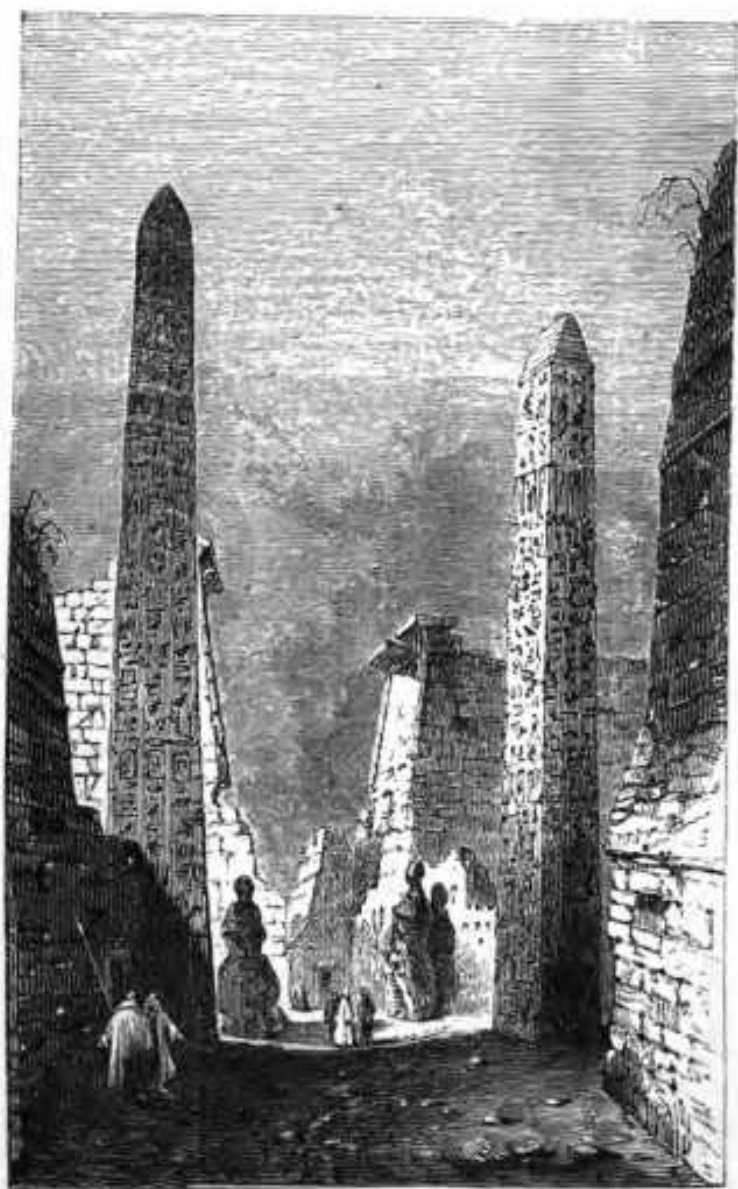
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S. BIRCH

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TEMPLE OF LUXOR.

ANCIENT HISTORY

FROM THE MONUMENTS.

EGYPT

FROM THE

EARLIEST TIMES TO B. C. 300

BY

S. BIRCH, LL. D., ETC.

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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 *Mudraya*, 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