

The Search for Nefertiti by Joann Fletcher.
Hodder and Stoughton 2004.

The very name of Nefertiti conjures up images of sublime beauty and, if one has a little knowledge of ancient Egypt, the mystique of Pharaonic power: but apart from that probably little more.

With the Search for Nefertiti, Dr Joann Fletcher has brought to life one of the most fabled figures from Egypt's great past as well as shedding vast amounts of light on a plethora of other subjects, including female Pharaohs – Hatshepsut was definitely NOT the only one – the process of mummification, how the Egyptians coped with contemporary tomb robbers invading the last resting place of their Pharaohs, cosmetics, the study of ancient hair and, related to that, the alarming tenacity of head lice!

This is a book that will fascinate anyone like me who has had more than a passing interest in ancient Egypt, but it will also serve as a marvellous introduction to that world with which, according to the Bible at least, ancient Israel collided.

Undoubtedly there will be some dry and fusty Egyptologists who will condemn Dr Fletcher's populist style, but their snobbishness will reveal more about them than about her; she writes with verve and enthusiasm and not inconsiderable humour and brings her subject to pulsating life. The final chapters, where she moves to a solid identification of the mummy of the fabled Queen has particular pace and tension, and the reader is left not only with a sense of greater knowledge of the subject but a deep appreciation of the author's skill and tenacity which have brought it to life.

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