

The War on Footnotes

by Rebecca Bynum

Breasted also planned to augment his five volumes of the Egyptian historical records with seven new volumes of records of other types (economic, religious, etc.).¹ However, the project was not to get off the ground anytime soon due to the untimely death of Harper, compounded by the advent of World War I and then the later reorganization of Breasted's department and staff to found the Oriental Institute. As for comprehensiveness and consistency, prior to the publication of the *Ancient Records*, there was no comparable collection of translations of Egyptian texts in any language. So Breasted noted in his Preface to volume one, "no attempt has ever been made to collect and present all the sources of Egyptian history in a modern language"² (*italics added*). While previously, Near Eastern scholars did collaborate to pool their translations into single publications,³ they never included the entire corpus of any written genre, nor did the various scholars regularize their translations to make them consistent with each other. For these reasons, styles of translations differed from 7 text to text in the same compendia, and the same words might even be translated differently. In his volumes, Breasted worked to overcome such limitations by being as inclusive as possible in his choice of documents, as well as consistent in all his translations. Sixty-five years after his death, Breasted's scholarship, although dated, is still highly regarded, and as late as 1995, *Who was Who in Egyptology* cited it as, "probably the best general history of Pharaonic Egypt ever published."⁴ Even until today, *A History of Egypt* is still useful in many ways.

¹ Breasted, "Editor's Forward," vii-ix.

² *Ibid.*, vii.

³ E.g., *Records of the Past: Being English Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments. Published under the Sanction of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 12 volumes, ed. Samuel Birch (London: S. Bagster and Sons, 1874-1881); *Records of the Past: Being English Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments*, new series, 6 volumes, ed. A. H. Sayce (London: S. Bagster and Sons, 1888-1892).

⁴ Dawson, Warren R. and Eric P. Uphill, *Who was Who in Egyptology. A Biographical Index of Egyptologists*, 3rd ed. rev. by Morris Bierbrier (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1995), 62.

Lately I've noticed that publishers seem to be waging a war on footnotes. A few years ago, footnotes were moved to the end of the chapter and now many publishers are moving them all to the end of the book – out of sight and out of mind. Why? Are publishers afraid that footnotes will put people off somehow?

Footnotes are essential to a scholarly work and add an entire dimension of their own with additional, often very interesting, information that helps to illuminate the text. When footnotes are hidden from the reader, the reader loses that extra dimension and it makes it very hard to gauge the scholarship of the work without easy access to the footnotes. Publishers used to understand this. What is going on?

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Footnotes forever!