



Count Like an Egyptian: A Hands-on Introduction to Ancient Mathematics

By David Reimer

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The mathematics of ancient Egypt was fundamentally different from our math today. Contrary to what people might think, it wasn't a primitive forerunner of modern mathematics. In fact, it can't be understood using our current computational methods. *Count Like an Egyptian* provides a fun, hands-on introduction to the intuitive and often-surprising art of ancient Egyptian math. David Reimer guides you step-by-step through addition, subtraction, multiplication, and more. He even shows you how fractions and decimals may have been calculated--they technically didn't exist in the land of the pharaohs. You'll be counting like an Egyptian in no time, and along the way you'll learn firsthand how mathematics is an expression of the culture that uses it, and why there's more to math than rote memorization and bewildering abstraction.

Reimer takes you on a lively and entertaining tour of the ancient Egyptian world, providing rich historical details and amusing anecdotes as he presents a host of mathematical problems drawn from different eras of the Egyptian past. Each of these problems is like a tantalizing puzzle, often with a beautiful and elegant solution. As you solve them, you'll be immersed in many facets of Egyptian life, from hieroglyphs and pyramid building to agriculture, religion, and even bread baking and beer brewing.

Fully illustrated in color throughout, *Count Like an Egyptian* also teaches you some Babylonian computation--the precursor to our modern system--and compares ancient Egyptian mathematics to today's math, letting you decide for yourself which is better.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Count Like an Egyptian* would make an excellent addition to math classrooms at many different levels. Reimer includes problems in the text and solutions in the back of the book, so the reader can practice techniques and get a feel for exactly how the system works as they go through the book. The mathematics is basic enough to be helpful for children learning fractions or multiplication for the first time, but it's also different enough from the methods most of us know that adults will get a lot out of it as well."--**Evelyn Lamb, *Scientific American***

"History lovers will gain much more than just insight into the Egyptian mind-set. The author interleaves mathematical exposition with short essays on Egyptian history, culture, geography, mythology--all, like the rest of the book, beautifully illustrated. . . . For a lively and inquiring mind the book has a good deal to offer. It is well written, lavishly illustrated, and just awfully interesting. The book is a pleasure to hold, to browse, and to read."--**Alexander Bogomolny, *Cut the Knot***

"You get the feeling that David Reimer must be a pretty entertaining teacher. An associate professor of mathematics at the College of New Jersey, he has taken on the task of explaining ancient math systems by having you use them. And though it's not easy, he manages to lead you, step by step, through a hieroglyphic based calculation of how many 10-pesu loaves of bread you can make from seven hekat of grain."--**Nancy Szokan, *Washington Post***

"An interesting combination of history, ancient literature and mythology, arithmetic puzzles and mathematics, and lavishly illustrated with numerous colour diagrams, this engaging book is unusual, thought-provoking and just plain fun to read."--**Devorah Bennu, *GrrlScientist, The Guardian***

"*Count Like an Egyptian* is a beautifully illustrated and well-written book. . . . Reimer's overriding goal is to demonstrate that Egyptian fraction arithmetic is fascinating, versatile, and well suited for whatever calls fractions into existence. . . . By working through the material Reimer patiently and gently presents, the reader will have a more thorough understanding and appreciation of how Egyptian scribes made the calculations needed to administer an empire bent on building pyramids and granaries, surveying flooded riverside property, digging irrigation basins, and rationing or exchanging bread and beer supplies amongst its gangs of workers. . . . This book should find a home in libraries used by middle school and high school mathematics teachers. It also provides a good resource for mathematics education professors and their students on the college level as they explore historical beginnings of mathematical ideas, make cultural comparisons, and develop interdisciplinary connections."--**Calvin Jongsma, *MAA Reviews***

"An interesting combination of history, ancient literature and mythology, arithmetic puzzles and mathematics, and lavishly illustrated with numerous colour diagrams, this engaging book is unusual, thought-provoking and just plain fun to read."--**GrrrlScientist**

"This amusing popular introduction to an uncommon subject is a mental adventure that sheds new light on the thought processes of a lost civilization and will appeal both to those who enjoy mathematical puzzles and to Egyptophiles."--**Edward K. Werner, *Library Journal***

"In general I really like this book and believe it is, if not necessarily a must for all Egyptophiles, then

definitely one to put on the wish list as an interesting addition to your bookshelf. . . . It is fun way of working through complicated and yet practical mathematics which makes the Rhind Papyrus come alive and gives an insight into the logical brain of ancient Egyptian scribes."--**Charlotte Booth**, *charlottesegypt.com*

"Reimer succeeds very well in transferring his enthusiasm for the Egyptian system to the reader. The reactions from his students who were used for a try-out are claimed to be positive. But even if you do not want to graduate as an Egyptian scribe, you may be charmed by the witty Egyptian system and you will be delighted by the colourful illustrations and Reimer's entertaining account of it all."--**A. Bultheel**, *European Mathematical Society*

"*Count Like an Egyptian* takes the reader step-by-step through the ancient Egyptian methods, which are surprisingly different from our own, and yet, in the capable hands of author David Reimer, surprisingly understandable. This lovely book has fun illustrations to demonstrate the various operations, basic geometry, and other tasks faced by the scribes. . . . This book is a pleasure to read and makes Egyptian math a pleasure to learn."--**Gretchen Wagner**, *San Francisco Book Review*

"The book is intended to be used as a teaching tool and includes practice examples for the student. It would be difficult to imagine a work that more effectively covers this aspect of the ancient civilization."--**JPP**, *Ancient Egypt*

"David Reimer succeeds in keeping the mathematics in *Count Like an Egyptian* clever and light, raising this book into a rare category: a coffee table book that is serious and fun."--**Robert Schaefer**, *New York Journal of Books*

"This volume is ideal for anyone, and I truly mean anyone, young or old, mathematician, student or teacher, who wants to learn how the ancient Egyptians did mathematics. . . . This book has all the Egyptian mathematics a general mathematician, teacher or student could ever want to learn. In particular it would be a perfect resource for a schoolteacher, elementary through lower division college. The material is presented in a direct and accessible manner."--**Amy Shell-Gellasch**, *CSHPM Bulletin*

"Overall this is a didactic and well written book, with many important illustrations, with some incursions in the mathematics of other ancient cultures."--*European Mathematical Society*

"With Reimer's guidance, motivating stories, and lighthearted remarks, readers can become facile with Egyptian algorithms and the insights they reveal. . . . Valuable for all readers looking for a guided of an alternative to traditional school arithmetic and the torpor that algorithmic training causes."--**Choice**

"[T]his book is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in seeing exactly how ancient Egyptians dealt with mathematics. It will help put our present algorithms into perspective as simply one of many possible algorithms one could use to perform arithmetic operations."--**Victor J. Katz**, *Mathematical Reviews Clippings*

"[Reimer] . . . set himself to understand and explain the ancient methods, and the result is an approachable, thorough and lavishly-produced book."--**Owen Toller**, *Mathematical Gazette*

"*Count like an Egyptian* is a beautifully glossy and colourful book; the presentation of hieroglyphs is particularly well done, and fully interated into the surrounding text. . . . This book has given me a new perspective on day-to-day arithmetic."--**Christopher Hollings**, *Mathematics Today*

"This is a wonderful book, very well written, filled with illustrations on every page, witty, addressing anyone interested in grade school arithmetic."--**Victor V. Pambuccian, *Zentralblatt MATH***

"*Count Like an Egyptian* is important for anyone interested in alternative algorithms. . . . If you want to roll up your sleeves and learn some new mathematics, this is the book for you."--**Michael Manganello, *Mathematics Teacher***

"An engaging and beautifully illustrated book that deals with the basics of ancient Egyptian mathematics, set in the wider context of other ancient mathematical systems."--**Corinna Rossi, *Aestimatio***

"A great approach and a dedicated effort. One hopes the book will reflect that persistence and it does. . . . This is a book that comes recommended, for anyone who wants to know where our current basis of mathematics comes from through to those with an interest in maths and history."--**Gordon Clarke, *Gazette of the Australian Mathematical Society***

From the Back Cover

"Reimer gives us a detailed introduction to the mathematics of the ancient Egyptians--from their arithmetic operations to their truncated pyramids--in a beautifully designed volume that is so much easier to read than a papyrus scroll."--**William Dunham, author of *The Calculus Gallery: Masterpieces from Newton to Lebesgue***

"This book is by far the best presentation of Egyptian math I have read. In an age of overpopularized and sensationalized science reporting, Reimer's crisp prose and concise exposition earned my unqualified admiration. *Count Like an Egyptian* is destined to become a classic."--**Eli Maor, author of *e: The Story of a Number***

"*Count Like an Egyptian* is well written and entertaining. This book fills a void in popular science writing on Egyptian mathematics."--**Annette Imhausen, section author of *The Mathematics of Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, India, and Islam: A Sourcebook***

About the Author

David Reimer is associate professor of mathematics at The College of New Jersey.

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