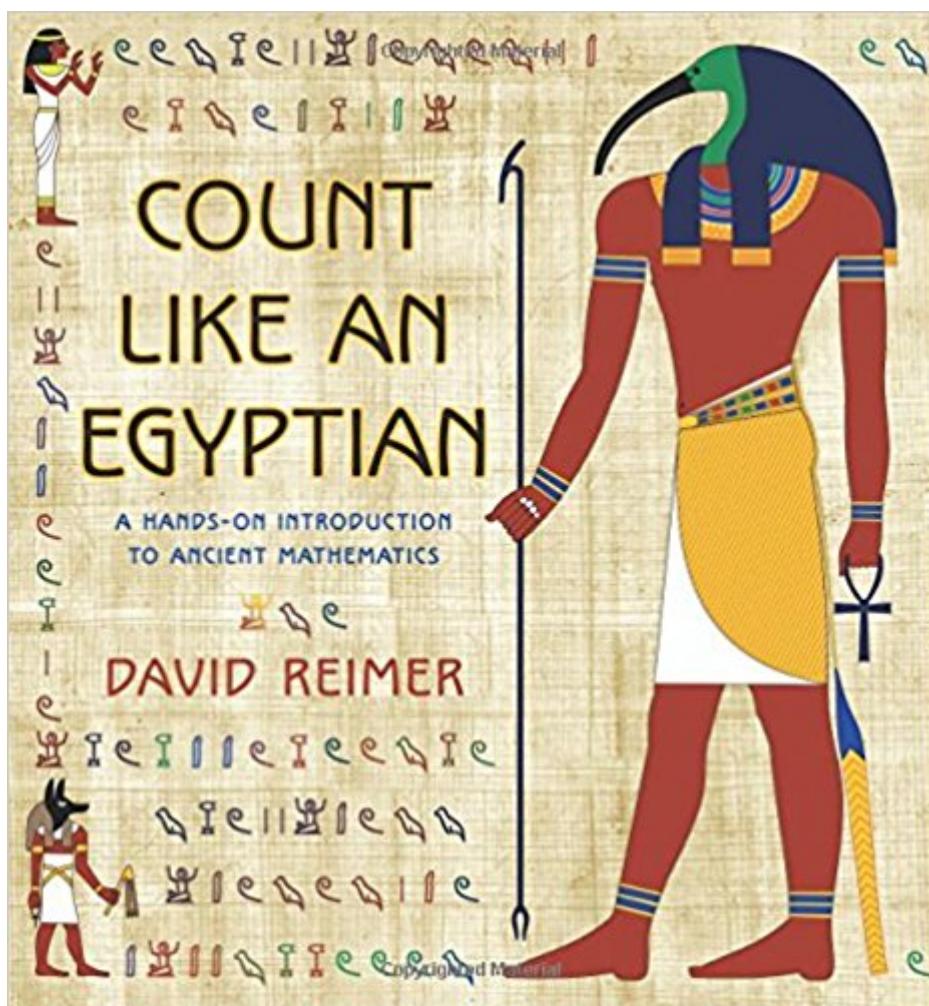


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Count Like An Egyptian: A Hands-on Introduction To Ancient Mathematics



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After the glowing reviews, I found this book, which I bought in the kindle version, disappointing and frustrating because it should have been really enjoyable. (For the hardcover review, skip to the update.) I am sure the course it is taken from would rate at least 5 stars. The book is well-written, the examples are well-chosen and the illustrations are clear and attractive. The author obviously knows his subject and enjoys sharing it with others. He occasionally over-explains, but his college's math entry standards may require that. I can only assume that the glowing reviews were written by readers who didn't try to work the examples and practice problems or that the hardcover edition, which 5 of 6 reviewers read, avoided the typographical problems of the Kindle edition. The problem is mainly the notation and some very poor proof-reading. The author uses the standard English lower case alphabet to represent fractions. I would have expected the Greek alphabet or, at least, a different type face. Instead the reader encounters the apparent word "as" (frequently) and each time has to decide whether that represents the English word or the Egyptian fraction, 1/12. (An example is the calculation example on page 56 "Use inches and feet to simplify 's h as feet". In this case the answer shows that 1/12 was meant.) Not to mention the expectation of those who still remember their algebra that it will mean the variable "a" times the variable "s". And maybe college students are more restrained than high school students, but I shudder to think how a class of tenth-graders would react to the statement on page 61 "We can think of h as being composed of two ass.

Despite its apparently limiting title "Count Like an Egyptian", this book delivers all that its subtitle "A Hands-On Introduction to Ancient Mathematics" promises. Besides presenting a comprehensive overview of the ancient Egyptian computing methods, Professor Reimer also introduces you to the Mesopotamian sexagesimal system, then compares these with the Roman numerals and Mayan counting glyphs, as well as with the modern decimal and even binary ways of expressing numbers. Yet, its main theme is ancient Egypt and goes far beyond mere counting. It teaches you in detail the unique and ingenious ways of calculating the Nile dwellers had developed, as well as an appreciation of the intellectual achievement they represent. Of course, acquiring the skill of working with Egyptian unit fractions may no longer have much practical value when inexpensive pocket calculators take the drudgery out of such reckoning. However, if you are curious about the mysterious realm of numbers, this book will help you to appreciate the differences between ancient and modern methods of dealing with these insubstantial entities that we can neither see nor touch nor smell but that we can nevertheless manipulate in many useful and precise ways and that also happen to govern many aspects of our lives. Reimer explains that our term "unit fractions" for the Egyptian way of handling partial numbers wrongly leads us to compare

their fractions with ours although they have much more in common with our decimal system. The latter is, after all, also a way of writing a sum of successively smaller fractions, from tenths to hundredths to thousandths and so on in open-ended strings of ever smaller parts.

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