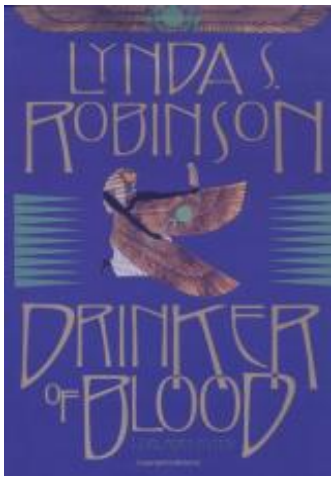
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Drinker of Blood

by Lynda S. Robinson



About the Book

With the top secret investigation of Queen Nefertiti's murder in full gallop, Lord Meren is suddenly called away to investigate the bizarre death of Pharaoh Tutankhamen's favorite groom.

Discussion Guide

In the sunstruck cities of Egypt? the terrifying Place of Anubis, place of embalming, to the gold-drenched royal court? Meren, confidential agent and advisor to the pharaoh Tutankhamun, hunts the enemies of order and harmony. With his adopted son Kysen, a commoner of the artisan class, and his precocious daughter, Bener, Meren peels back the secrets of nobles and slaves in his quest for truth.

Meren deftly winds his way through a morass of intrigue and betrayal that is Tutankhamun's legacy from his older brother, the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten. He must use all his power as the Eyes and Ears of Pharaoh, all his skills of deception and manipulation to protect the king, whose borders are threatened by Hittites, and whose priests have transferred their implacable hatred of his heretic brother to the young ruler.

Most disturbing of all is Meren's suspicion that murder has reached the throne of Egypt itself. He suspects that not long ago someone at court murdered Nefertiti, the beautiful and beloved great royal wife of the heretic former king.

THE LORD MEREN NOVELS

Murder in the Place of Anubis

Murder at the God's Gate

Murder at the Feast of Rejoicing

Eater of Souls

Drinker of Blood

forthcoming...

Slayer of Gods

CHARACTERS IN THE SERIES

Lord Meren The Eyes and Ears of Pharaoh

Kysen Meren's son, heir and assistant

Tefnut Meren's married eldest daughter

Bener Meren's precocious second daughter

Isis Meren's beautiful youngest daughter

Tutankhamun Young Pharaoh of Egypt

Ankhesenamun Queen of Egypt

Akhenaten Former heretic king of Egypt

Nefertiti Great Royal Wife of Akhenaten

Tiy Mother of Tutankhamun

Ay Vizier of the pharaoh Tutankhamun

Horemheb Commander of pharaoh's armies

GLOSSARY

Amun - king of the gods whose temple is in the city of Thebes (also called Amun-Ra)

Anubis - jackal god of the dead and mummification

Aten - solar god portrayed as a sun-disc with arm-like rays emanating from it

Book of the Dead - funerary text of spells to protect the dead

Cartouche - oval ring within which the names of royal persons were written

Delta - fan-shaped area formed by Nile tributaries, between Memphis and the Mediterranean coast

Devouress - demon that ate the dead should they be judged unworthy of the afterlife

Electrum - alloy of silver and gold used in jewelry and decoration of monuments

Faience - ceramic material composed of ground quartz and coated with glaze that varies between deep blue and green

Hieroglyphic - Egyptian pictographic script

Ka - a person's life force

Lotus - indigenous Egyptian water lily

Lower Egypt - the delta region of Egypt, one of the two ancient divisions of the kingdom the symbol of which is the

papyrus plant.

Natron - naturally occurring compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate used as a personal cleansing agent and in embalming to preserve a body

Obelisk - tall, slender stone monument with a pyramidal top associated with the sun god; usually the top or the entire monolith was encased in gold

Papyrus - marsh-growing reed from which paper was made; a written text on this material

Pylon - massive gateway in the form of a truncated pyramid often carved with images of pharaoh

Ra - the hawk-headed sun god

Sarcophagus - receptacle for a corpse or coffin, often of stone

Scribe - persons who were trained to read and write such as clerks, copyists and royal and temple officials

Stele - stone slab carved to celebrate persons or events

Upper Egypt - the Nile valley from Memphis (the capitol) to the first cataract, one of the two ancient divisions of the kingdom of Egypt, the symbol of which is the lotus

Uraeus - cobra symbol worn on the royal crown

Vizier - highest minister of pharaoh usually, overseeing government administration and the economy

EMPIRES, KINGDOMS AND PEOPLES

Hittite - expanding and warlike empire centered in what is now Turkey

Mitanni - powerful rival of Egypt in the area of the northern Tigris and Euphrates rivers

Assyrian - empire in northern Mesopotamia centered on the city of Assur on the Tigris River.

Greeks - of the mainland and eastern Mediterranean of the Mycenaean period, named for the city-state of Mycenae which held ascendancy during this period

Wawat - the area immediately south of Egypt bordered by deserts rich in gold

Kush - ancient Nubian kingdom below Wawat administered for pharaoh by the Viceroy of Kush

Canaan - area northeast of the Egyptian border in which were located such cities as Gaza, Jerusalem and Jericho; part of the Egyptian empire during the New Kingdom

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Lord Meren series takes place in the period of Egyptian history called the New Kingdom during the reign of Tutankhamun, who ruled from approximately 1334 B.C. to 1325 B.C.

The historical context begins with the family of Amunhotep III (whose reign began around 1386 B.C.) and his wife, Queen Tiy. Amunhotep ruled peacefully for almost forty years, resting on the foundation of his conquering ancestors who left him a far-flung and rich empire. His reign is known for its prosperity and great artistic achievements in building and sculpture. His chief wife, a non-royal lady named Tiye, had at least six children. The oldest, Thutmose, died before

he could inherit, leaving the second son, Amunhotep (Akhenaten), as the heir to the Egyptian throne.

This second son may have joined his father on the throne in a joint reign of some years, and it is this interpretation that holds in the Lord Meren series. Amunhotep IV changed his name early in his reign to Akhenaten, signaling a shift in religious emphasis the nature of which is still being debated today. What is certain is that within a relatively short time, Akhenaten withdrew royal support from Egypt's king of the gods, Amun (also known as Amun-Ra), in favor of a minor deity called the Aten, the sun-disk through which life-giving light entered the world.

Around the same time changes in artistic style appear in Egypt? so-called "revolution" that is hard for the modern reader to understand. In Egypt as in the rest of the ancient world art, religion, politics and economics merged. There were no separate categories such as those we use for convenience today. Thus, when Akhenaten ascended the throne, and possibly before, he favored a new freedom and realism in artistic style that contrasted significantly with the old formal precepts of previous reigns. Many believe that this new style was a deliberate departure, perhaps Akhenaten's way of distinguishing himself and his god from all that came before.

As his reign progressed, Akhenaten seemed to grow more and more fanatical in his opposition to Amun. The king of the gods had benefited from royal patronage since under the god's banner Akhenaten's ancestors overthrew foreign rule and established the New Kingdom. The temple of Amun was rich beyond imagination, even owning foreign cities and slaves by the tens of thousands. Such a rich temple had to have been a rival to pharaoh's power. When a new god threatened Amun's position, perhaps the priests who benefited from that power fought back.

Whatever the reason, Akhenaten decided to uproot the royal court and government from the ancient capitol of Memphis. He moved it away from the old gods, to a barren site between Thebes and Memphis, and built a new city? of the Aten. And there he remained, growing more and more adamant in his persecution of Amun, until he died.

Akhenaten's chief queen was the fabulously beautiful Nefertiti. This young woman played as prominent a role in the reliefs of her husband's reign as did her predecessor, Tiy. In fact, Nefertiti may have wielded a great deal of actual power. However, we do not know this for certain. She bore the king six daughters, and it is the affectionate scenes of the royal couple with their children that are among the most poignant in Egyptian art.

After the twelfth year of Akhenaten's reign, Queen Nefertiti's figure mysteriously vanishes from royal monuments. The reason for her disappearance is not certain. It could be that she died, but her status may have changed in some other way. Whatever the case she was buried in the eastern desert in the royal tomb at Horizon of the Aten.

Akhenaten followed his beautiful queen to the land of the dead a few years later. The pharaoh Smenkhare, who was either the son of Amunhotep III or Akhenaten, may have ruled briefly, but history knows the reign of the next king far better? of the boy king Tutankhamun. Again it is uncertain whether Tutankhamun (first known as Tutankhaten) was Akhenaten's younger brother or his son. The boy succeeded to the throne of Egypt when he was between the ages of nine and sixteen and soon began a complete reversal of Akhenaten's policies. Under Tutankhamun the royal court and government moved back to Memphis, and Amun and the old gods were restored. Tragically, Tutankhamun died young, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six after a reign of ten years, leaving his successors to carry out the changes he began.

The bare recital of historical facts given above only hints at the real mysteries facing Egyptologists to this day. Who

were Tutankhamun's parents? Why did Akhenaten become such a revolutionary? What really happened to Nefertiti? With so many questions, so many enigmas, a novelist has a wealth of material with which to weave a historical mystery. I suspect, however, that what I have created may not be as strange and exotic as the truth? that might be.

*RULERS OF THE LORD MEREN SERIES

Amunhotep III (Amunhotep the Magnificent) 1386 - 1349 B.C.

Akhenaten (Amunhotep IV) 1350 - 1334 B.C.

Smenkhare 1336 - 1334 B.C.

Tutankhamun 1334 - 1325 B.C.

*Akhenaten may have ruled jointly with his father Amunhotep III for a period of time (this chronology does not reflect the possibility), and Smenkhare is thought to have done the same with Akhenaten. Egyptology has yet to discover whether Tutankhamun was Akhenaten's son or not.

THE CULTURE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

We are proud of the achievements of our own western civilization, it's advanced technology, great literature and arts, the social institutions that provide relative peace and provide opportunity to its citizens. What many take for granted is that these achievements rest on a foundation thousands of years old. Ancient Egypt, one of the world's first complex civilizations, played a vital role in the development of such aspects of our culture as agriculture, writing, governmental organization, monumental architecture, astronomy and medicine, to name a few. Culture is cumulative, and without these early advancements nothing we have today would exist.

AGRICULTURE: THE BLACK LAND (ancient Egyptian kemet)

The Egyptians divided their year into three seasons: Inundation, Emergence, and Drought. Each year the Nile slowly began to swell over its banks (around mid July), reaching a climax in October when the kingdom became a vast shallow lake. The water deposited a rich layer of black soil, the fertile source of Egypt's abundant agriculture. Once the flood receded, Egypt's vast system of canals and dykes channeled water and fed fields of wheat and barley. The season of Emergence marked the harvest, while Drought bought the searing heat that parched the fields once more, burning leftover stalks of vegetation and cracking the soil. Then the cycle began all over again. The relative dependability of the inundation helped make Egypt the ?breadbasket? of the ancient world. However, if the Nile flood fail to reach its height, fewer crops resulted and famine threatened.

THE DESERT: THE RED LAND (ancient Egyptian deshret)

The barren, sun-seared desert always threatens to encroach on the Nile Valley. To the Egyptian this was the place of chaos, danger, a wilderness filled with demons and the place where one found the entrance to the netherworld. To the east and west of the river Nile lie vast barren stretches of stony waste. Where the water stops, the desert begins? cliffs or expanses of stone and sand. To be caught in the desert far from water was to die, but the danger concealed many of the sources of ancient Egyptian wealth. In the desert (in Egypt, the Sinai, and Nubia) lay the quarries from which came red and black granite, limestone, alabaster (calcite), quartzite, diorite, turquoise, malachite, jasper, amethyst, porphyry and steatite. In addition the desert provided the vast amounts of gold for which Egypt was famous, also copper, lead, and galena.

FOOD

The staples of most Egyptians were bread and beer. Egypt produced wheat and barley in vast quantities during years of good harvest. These were sometimes supplemented with a variety of foods?, game birds, pork, onions, garlic, leeks, lettuce, legumes, dates, figs, melons and berries. Those who were better off such as the nobility and higher ranks of the priesthood could add to this diet such foods as roast ox, antelope, ibex, gazelle, ostrich, deer and poultry. To this can be added such delicacies as honey, pomegranates and a variety of domestic and foreign wines. Honey (for the rich) and figs were used as sweeteners, and the Egyptians made many types of bread and cakes using spices along with these.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

The division of Egyptian society into three broad classes forming the shape of a pyramid is well known? the base, the peasant farmer, in the middle, a small educated middle class, and at the top, the nobility with pharaoh at the pinnacle. Pharaoh was the son of the king of the gods, Amun, and thus he was the incarnation of the god on earth. The harmony and order of life depended upon his intercession with the gods.

This classification of Egyptians into broad groups doesn't give one a clear idea of the rich variety and complexity of Egypt's social structure. Among the commoners were herdsmen, fishermen and well to do farmers who might aspire to be called middle class, had such a term been known. The list of occupations is fascinating: doorkeepers (in a land without locks) stoneworkers, boat-builders, weavers, sculptors, goldsmiths, perfumers, physicians, priests, musicians and charioteers. Scribes (literate persons) worked in the vast bureaucracies of temples and royal government and provided much of the organizational skills that kept the kingdom going. The nobility served as royal ministers, at the head of government departments, in the army and in the temples as high priests. Yet despite this complexity, it was upon the skills and produce of the simple farmer that the Egypt depended for her life's blood.

WOMEN IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Ancient Egyptian women were probably the most free in the ancient world. They could own and inherit property, execute contracts, testify in court and own businesses. If a woman got divorced she was entitled to a settlement of property, and widows got one-third of their husband's estate with the children sharing the remaining two-thirds.

However, the overwhelming majority of women in Egyptian society didn't hold government office or work in professions. Their major responsibilities lay in the domestic sphere? rearing, food preparation, etc.

There are many reasons for these limitations on women's activities. Until well after the industrial revolution, the work that women did was labor intensive and time consuming, unrelieved by such modern inventions as sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, frozen food and mass production of staples such as bread. In addition, without modern science, pregnancy and childbirth were extremely risky, resulting in high mortality rates for both mother and infant. As with other species, a low survival rate necessitates a high birth rate, thus further risking women's health. All of these factors restricted the time Egyptian women could spend away from their duties, curbed their mobility, and limited the length of their lives. It is common to read of an Egyptian man having to remarry because his wife died in childbirth.

Nevertheless, these limitations shouldn't obscure the vital role of women. In ancient Egypt, as in all societies until recently, there was no Social Security. Social Security came in the form of one's children. Offspring worked alongside their parents to support the household and later took care of the older generation. The children women bore and raised weren't luxuries; they were indispensable to survival.

Finally, the role of women in the royal family is continually being re-evaluated. Recent studies have pointed out that there have been quite a few women who ruled either as regent or as queen-regnant (pharaoh) or who wielded vast power in the kingdom?, Sobekneferu, Ahotep II, Ahmose Nefertari, Hatshepsut, Tiy, and Nefertiti.

RELIGION

Most people know that the Egyptians worshiped a bewildering variety of gods, goddesses and other supernatural beings. Some of the major ones are:

Amun, the king of the gods, the hidden one
Anubis, jackal god of the dead and mummification
Ra, the hawk-headed sun god
Montu, the god of war and conquest
Mut, consort of Amun
Min, ithyphallic god of fertility and male potency
Osiris, the god who died and was reborn, ruler of the netherworld
Isis, wife of Osiris and mistress of magic who made Osiris live again
Horus, the falcon, son of Osiris and Isis, god of the sky and of divine kingship
Toth, god of knowledge, wisdom and writing who takes the form of a baboon or ibis
Set, god of chaos and confusion depicted with a human body an the head of an unknown animal, brother and murderer of

Osiris

To these may be added ordinary ?household? gods such as Bes, a dwarf god of grotesque appearance who nevertheless protected the family and was associated with sexuality and childbirth. Another such deity was Taweret, who took the form of a female hippopotamus. She protected women during childbirth and was a prominent and benevolent figure in household shrines.

The Egyptians' beliefs in the supernatural were complex and included magic as a technique for manipulating people, events and even gods. However, magic never precluded a common sense explanation of the world based on observation. An eminently practical people, Egyptians were quite capable of using complex technologies along with extra insurance in the form of magic. Still, there is a difference in worldview. For example, what would a potter about to start his morning work do first? his tools and materials around the potter's wheel? Stoke the kiln? No, he'd say a prayer to Ptah, god of artisans so that his work would go well, and perhaps a magic spell for good luck.

Egyptian temples were a part of a vast redistribution system and played a large part in the economy. Many held jobs as priests, often part-time, in addition to other duties such as scribe. However, being a priest wasn't like being one in a religion with which most of us are familiar. One didn't have to have a ?calling?. If one were to ask an Egyptian priest about his service in the temple, he'd probably say something like, ?It's just a job, you know.? That's what it was? job serving the god in order to maintain the harmony and order of existence. That job was carried out in a sacred precinct into which few ordinary Egyptians were allowed to go. Only the highest priests and pharaoh were admitted into the sanctuary that housed the god. However, ordinary Egyptians communicated with the gods and special places by the temple walls where they left votive statues and prayers.

A great deal of activity went on inside the temple walls. The House of Life contained ancient texts, the accumulated knowledge of the ancestors on such subjects as astronomy, mathematics, religion, law, magic and geography. It was also a school for scribes and young people destined for elite professions.

In addition to housing the innermost shrine of a god or goddess, the temple functioned as an on-going economic institution with, in many cases such as Amun's temple, vast resources allocated by the crown. Temples owned property all over Egypt. Such items as grain, cattle, produce, gold from mines in the desert, stone quarries, and tribute from foreign possessions flowed into the temple. These were dedicated to the god, and in many instances, were then redistributed to the priests. Since many priests were ordinary citizens, some of this wealth was shared rather than kept for the elite.

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Author Bio

Lynda S. Robinson (aka Suzanne Robinson) is the author of novels in two widely varying genres--historical romance and mystery. Taking advantage of her background in ancient cultures, she writes in periods extending from ancient Egypt to the Victorian period. She has a doctoral degree in anthropology with a specialization in archaeology from the University of Texas at Austin. She has done field work in both the Middle East and the United States, as well as museum research and work in exhibits of ancient art.

A native Texan, Robinson met her future husband in Houston when they were both nineteen, thus spoiling her plans for a freewheeling single career. After obtaining her degree Robinson burned out on academia. Then her husband pestered her into trying to write because he'd enjoyed her notes and letters. Suzanne sat down one day, wrote the first five pages of a novel, and-with a jolt of revelation-realized that was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. She is grateful to her husband, for an artistic career is a rare and precious gift.

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