

Christine SEEBER, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Totengerichts im Alten Ägypten*. München-Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1976. 1 vol. in-4^o, (VIII)-271 pp., 80 figg., 32 figg. en pll. h.t., 3 tabl. (MÜNCHNER ÄGYPTOLOGISCHE STUDIEN, Heft 35). Prix : DM 65,—

Many people will take up with more than common interest a monograph by one of Hornung's students on the famous representation in the Book of the Dead of the judgment scene. The work rests upon an extensive collection of material comprising more than 400 depictions, catalogued on p. 200-239, and offers a well-considered, detailed and convincing explanation. This excellently written and hence agreeably readable book contains 32 carefully chosen photographs of the varying depictions of the judgment of the dead and 80 informative figures in the text, and may well be regarded as a model of iconographic research.

Only an incomplete impression can be given here of the book's copious contents. In the introduction the author sets forth that the Egyptian concepts of the hereafter are centred on the belief in a divine judgment, when everyone must render an account of his life upon earth and a place in the after-life is assigned to him according to the result of this examination. However, the representations of this court of justice reflect concepts current in the time of the New Kingdom and the Late Period « und noch dazu unter dem einseitig beschränkten Aspekt ihrer magischen Bestimmung » (p. 5).

The first chapter (p. 7-29) deals with the sources. From the first half of the 18th dynasty the depictions are found on papyri, in tombs, on sarcophagi (certain since the 21st dyn.), on mummy shrouds, mummy wrappings and exceptionally upon an ostrakon, shabti-box or temple relief.

The second chapter (p. 30-62) offers a typology which at first sight seems rather artificial, as is so often the case when material is classified, but on closer examination proves useful and enlightening. A (dyn. 18-21) a simple representation of the weighing; B (dyn. 19-20) division into several scenes, particularly the weighing and the dead being led before Osiris; C (dyn. 21) the various scenes grouped into a circumstantial composition, the centre being the announcement of the result of the weighing; D (dyn. 22-26) a simple strip showing the dead person between the scales and a row of gods; E (dyn. 22/25 until the Roman period) the by then canonical form, in which it is notable, int. al., that two gods instead of one now officiate at the weighing in the hall of the two Maat goddesses. Some abbreviated renderings of the scene are also found. It is remarkable that among the many depictions known to us hardly any are identical. Type E alone shows but little variation in its details.

The third and longest chapter, « Die Deutung » (p. 63-186) is undoubtedly the best and the most interesting. In the iconographical examination the author shows herself capable of profound investigation, while yet remaining prudent and reserved. An excellently arranged survey is given in successive paragraphs of : The hall of the two Maat goddesses where the judgment was held to take place, even if it was not so represented until type E; The iconography of the scales and the process of weighing, the heart being weighed against the feather, or the deceased against the heart, or the deceased against the feather, or the heart against the Uzat-eye, so that equilibrium and hence innocence may be established. Since the pap. Ani we sometimes — and in type E always — see the goddesses Meskhenet, Shai and Renenet, who are connected with man's birth, fate and course of life, and may have played an exculpatory part. Then the attitude of the deceased person is scrutinized, who is accompanied by one or more gods and who proclaims his innocence and formulates wishes. In type C we notice him holding his heart, mouth and eyes in his hand, that have been returned to him as a result of his justification, and also observe the gesture of justification : the arms raised with the palms turned outwards and feathers in the hands and wig. Rarely (in type D) do the

dead appear in mummy form as in the transitory stage before entrance into the kingdom of the dead. Usually the dead are represented in the costume of the living as if the verdict had already been given. In type C a crouching human figure is also shown, comparable to the crouching figure on the crook in type E : a symbol of renewing life ; the person himself in the stage of rebirth. The leader of the tribunal is Re, and especially Osiris, assisted by various gods, particularly the ennead. After the 21st dyn. the latter give place to the 42 judges of the dead, who at first accompanied the text of the negative confession of Book of the Dead 125 B in the hall of the two Maat goddesses. Separate paragraphs treat the role of Maat, Thoth, Anubis and Horus, whose function as investigators gradually becomes more that of protectors.

One of the most fascinating parts of the book is that, where « She-who-devours-the-dead » is described (p. 163-186 ; fig. 63-79). The developments in the depiction of the monster, her attitude, place and appellations are carefully traced. The iconographical model is the goddess Thoeris who is also composed of crocodile, lion and hippopotamus, and who on a funerary bed of Tutankhamen is even called Devourer of the dead (*ꜥm mt*). Like Nut the goddess of heaven, the sow who eats her farrow, this devourer of the dead is sometimes called sow (*Šꜥyt*). Being devoured might signify destruction for the damned, but rejuvenation for the justified.

An interesting detail is the expatiation on the *Šꜥy*-animal (p. 180-182) in the so-called enthronement scenes of Osiris. This animal, usually depicted as a ram, sometimes takes on the appearance of the 'devouress'. The translation « fate » is supported by the accompanying inscription *nb dꜣt rnnt* and *nb dꜣt šꜥy* on a sarcophagus in Cambridge. Quaegebeur promises us a special study devoted to the animal. It may be added that the *Šꜥy*-animal can also replace the ram in so-called Geb and Nut scenes (Rundel CLARK, *Myth and Symbol*, p. 3).

In an Excursus (p. 187-192) on the representation of the judgment in the Book of Gates, the author goes beyond her subject in the strict sense. The explanation of the details is less full here and also less convincing. Compare the article by Heerma van Voss on the judgment scene in the Book of Gates that appeared about the same time in the *Festschrift Beek*. All the same there are many good things in this excursus. In distinction from the vignette in the Book of the Dead, the Book of Gates is not concerned here with the justification of the individual, but with showing the separation between the justified and the damned. « Einer magischen Einflussnahme auf das Gericht scheint hier kein Raum gegeben » (p. 190f.).

Seeber's writing is crystal-clear. One word is used a good deal in the book though, in a way at which I must demur : magical. Now one might leave this word unread or replace it by a word such as religious. Perhaps it is less important for the knowledge and the insight offered by the book than the author may imagine. The vignette shows that the deceased has been justified in the Court of the Dead. The vignette serves to express a request, a profession, an attempt at persuasion that the deceased may

be justified as represented. That is how I understand what Seeber calls the « magische Bestimmung » of the judgment of the dead. It is a prayer, not in words but in a drawing. I do not see that the Egyptians believed in the possibility of autistically exercising a decisive influence upon the course of affairs in an intrinsically different manner (« magically ») by means of this drawing than might e.g. be done by prayer.

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