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Amenophis I. A Portrait of the Reign of an Egyptian Sovereign of the Early 18th Dynasty

[“Amenophis I. Versuch einer Darstellung der Regierungszeit eines ägyptischen Herrschers der frühen 18. Dynastie”]

(Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge, 6)

Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1978; XIII, 273 pp.

To state it at the outset: this book is not a biography. Even if the title arouses expectations of this kind, the author nowhere claims to have compiled a biography. A number of turns of phrase, however, allow us to surmise that he might have enjoyed doing so; for instance, he defines his task as being a description of his subject's “life and work” (p. 2); or he uses the word “sovereign” in general, instead of the usual expression “king”, thereby making clear his desire to compose the “portrait of a sovereign” (see, e. g., page 1).

The book cannot be a biography, inasmuch as the Egyptian sources portray Amenophis I (and indeed other kings) less as an individual than as the representative of the institution of kingship.

Our interest in the personality of a sovereign is clearly not identical with that of an Egyptian in a king. Furthermore, Amenophis I was not one of those kings who "by spectacular undertakings or independent decisions influenced the course of Egyptian history" (p. 2). Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible to take an interest in the personality of an Amenophis I, whose achievement lay in consolidating the relationships overturned by the warfare waged by his predecessors – an achievement which amounts to nothing less than the consolidation of the "New Kingdom". However, biographical details are not entirely missing; for instance, the writer elicits a number of them in his treatment of the royal likeness (pp. 131 ff.).

In passing: some of the ruler's officials are easier to get to know than the ruler himself, as a result of their "autobiographical" reports concerning their careers and the campaigns they served in. In accordance with the material, the book is principally a collection and working-up of the source-material from the reign of Amenophis I, material which gives more information on the period than on the "sovereign" (as the author himself admits, e. g. page 154). As is usual and undoubtedly necessary, the greater part of the argumentation is taken up with assessment of the sources, a task which forms the basis of every scientific investigation. The author examines authorities and lists of monuments, the chronology of the period, the genealogy of the royal family, and finally sketches of the holders of the highest offices. The following subjects are treated: titles, dated monuments and the mummy of Amenophis I (Ch. 1); problems in the chronology of the early 18th dynasty (Ch. 2); the family of Amenophis I (Ch. 3); building activity (Ch. 4); the likeness of the king (Ch. 5); Steles from the period of Amenophis I (Ch. 6); home policy and administration (Ch. 7); foreign policy (Ch. 8); the identification of the tomb (with a new interpretation of the tomb-robber accounts; these refer to the so-called cachette, or secondary resting-place of the mummy) (Ch. 9); and a summary (Ch. 10).

As a comprehensive assessment of Amenophis I, the account by Erik Hornung in the "Lexikon der Ägyptologie" is still worth reading. However, for those who are interested in the individual sources and in the material as a whole, the present work will prove a helpful guide.

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