

BRUNNER, HELLMUT

The South Rooms of the Luxor Temple

[“Die südlichen Räume des Tempels von Luxor”]

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The most imposing monumental remains of Ancient Egypt are sometimes the very ones which are the least adequately treated by science. The most interesting things have been made known again and again by generations of Egyptologists. A systematic treatment of the whole could thus produce only a comparatively small number of new discoveries. The general architectural form is probably always of interest; but it can be described with relative brevity. Also of interest are parts of the decorative arrangements, i.e., individual illustrations and inscriptions. The greater part of the illustrative and written elements, however, merely repeat in unending detail the same ideas. And one practical point: an exhaustive documentation of the monumental remains would pose problems with regard to both personnel and finances.

Of course, neither an unsatisfactory state of publication nor problems of organization should deter scholars from publishing a comprehensive description of the great monuments. But it is worth while asking whether a complete publication of elements which are repeated again and again is worth the expense. Furthermore, priority must be given in treatment to those monuments which have most information to offer within the smallest space. Yet it must be granted that the very material which is characterized by repetition allows us glimpses into the mind of Egypt which are nowhere else to be obtained with the same clarity. The repetition of the elements is coupled with variations in the way they are arranged. And a large number of examples with a small number of variations is an ideal foundation for a study of structures. We may expect, therefore, that the comprehension of material of just this kind allows us glimpses into the mind of the ancient Egyptians, glimpses which would not be so clear if we had them through individual, single witnesses. As a general rule, we may be sure that the Egyptians would not have let themselves be carried away by repetitions of this kind unless they had considered the thoughts they embodied to be essential.

It will not, of course, be possible, in editing and publishing this material, to embark on the minute reproduction of every single detail. It will be sufficient to maintain a medium degree of accuracy in reproduction, which allows variation in repetition to be distinctly recognized in all its details, without either recording in

minute detail the minutiae of a single style or noting every fortuitous detail of execution and preservation. Such limitations must be freely accepted when the elucidation of the sources begins.

A large monument of this kind is the Temple in Luxor, which no traveller to Egypt can ignore, and yet which remains to this day virtually unpublished. It is with the aim of correcting this deficit that the present publication makes an important step, by publishing a record of the southern rooms. The decision to begin with the southern rooms of the temple, which is orientated North-South, is not a random one. These rooms form an inner part of the shrine more sharply marked off than in other temples. The shrine is characterized by an offering-hall at right angles to the main axis of the temple, accessible not by the usual entrance in the main axis, but from the side, by a side passage. This hall, orientated East-West, has the same function as an offering-hall in front of the central sanctuary, but symbolizes, both in architecture and decoration, the East-West path of the sun.

Professor Brunner understands the problems inherent in the publication of material which is characterized by its uniformity and which could, at first sight, seem rather uninteresting. He purposely limits himself to the above-defined medium standard of accuracy in documentation – the greater part of the reliefs is reproduced as straight forward line-drawings. A representative selection of photographs of details illustrates the style. He also sets himself considerable limits in his commentary, since most points will be clear to the specialist at first glance, and because a systematic analysis of the standard elements of temple decoration should really be made in the context of an analysis of corresponding material in other temples. Such comparative material is, however, hitherto only partly available in published form.

The conciseness of the commentary seems overwhelmingly convincing. However, in spite of all reservations concerning repetition, it might have been defensible to have abandoned the principle in the case of the following point: since the work is a collection of illustrations it is readily accessible to the non-Egyptologist. However, it would have been even more accessible if the captions to the pictures, or at least to the most important of them, had been rendered intelligible by means of simple translations.

Particular care has been devoted to the documentation of defacing and restorations, which the reliefs have undergone in the course of time, e.g. hacking out of theologically undesirable matter in the time of Echnaton and restorations in the age of the counter-reforming Ramessides. A marginal note: the dating of the stylistically anomalous central gateway (between offering-hall and central sanctuary) to the time of the Ptolemies, and the explanation of the

defacements and restorations to be found there as "imitations" of similar defacements and restorations, is unnecessarily complicated (p. 40 ff.). Stylistically, the gateway recalls the gold embossed work of e.g. the Tutenchamun treasure, which is only slightly later in date. On the whole these embossed works are more detailed than the stone reliefs. They contain the remarkably detailed script-forms of the gateway, and the other details too, such as that of the toes on the back foot (hitherto known only from later examples) can be referred to this original. The imitation of gold work could well have been motivated by the cultic importance of the gateway. However, Professor Brunner has fortunately not allowed his principle of self-limitation to become fossilized. He gives occasional comments which arise from the material and results which were worked out for one reason or another. For instance, the recurrent interpretation of the Egyptian name of the temple as "Harem of Amun" is firmly rejected. Another example: the gods that appear in the reliefs are discussed as an integral group. Or again: the function of the rooms is studied. And so on. To sum up: the method chosen by Professor Brunner to present his material is a practical solution for the publication of material of this kind. It would be most welcome if all the temples of Egypt were recorded in this manner.

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