

ARTS AND ECONOMICS

Book Notes and Abstracts

ABITZ, FRIEDRICH

King and God. The Representations of Gods and the King in the Egyptian Royal Tombs from Thutmosis IV to Ramses III

[“König und Gott. Die Götterszenen in den ägyptischen Königsgräbern von Thutmosis IV. bis Ramses III.”]

(*Ägyptologische Abhandlungen*, Band 40)

Wiesbaden: Verlag Otto Harrassowitz, 1984; XI, 318 pp., 53 ill.

The author is one of the scholars best acquainted with the Egyptian royal tombs in the valley of the kings. He has dealt in two previous works with specialized subjects: the religious significance of the so-called tomb-robber shafts (1974, *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen*, 26) and the statuettes in shrines as funerary equipment (1979, *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen*, 35). In the present work, his latest, Abitz examines the scenes in which the king is shown in communication with the gods. The author sees the significance of this material as lying chiefly in the fact that from them, conclusions can be drawn about the king's position vis-à-vis the world of the gods and about the king's divinity. The scenes are distributed over various parts of the tomb area, with the result that the arrangement of the tomb area as a whole is frequently discussed.

The tomb areas show a pronounced dichotomy. They fall naturally into upper and lower tomb areas, which consist of mutually analogous sequences of rooms. In the upper tomb area, the king is still regarded as a personage of the real world, ruling from the throne of Egypt. In the lower area the identification of the king with a number of gods emphasizes his divine nature.

Large portions of the work are soberly descriptive. This is in keeping with the nature of the study, since the aim in many respects is to begin by listing the facts. In spite of their being so well known, only some of the royal tombs have been dealt with in publications, and then often but poorly; in some cases – e.g., the tomb of Ramses II – they have not even been cleared of debris. Indeed, we may be grateful for drawings of certain scenes, and for hand copies of hieroglyphic inscriptions.

The texts, especially the books of the underworld, are employed systematically. As usual when dealing with the sources, the author makes use of the latest secondary literature in Egyptology.

The work deals with the following themes: after a brief introduction (I) on the arrangement of the tombs and their development, chapters II and III give a description and analysis of the decoration of the "first hall of pillars" (which forms the end of the upper tomb area) and of the "anteroom to the sarcophagus chamber" (which is the end of the lower tomb area); both are treatments of material which had not been sufficiently worked up for the author's purposes. In chapter IV the scenes are classified systematically, according to the divinities which appear in them. Chapter V is an examination of the overall arrangement of the tomb area, taking account, not only of the representations of gods and the king, but also of a large part of the remaining material of the "decoration", both in pictures and in written texts. Here, of course, the "sarcophagus chamber", which is the centre of the tomb, is treated only briefly: this theme alone could be the subject of a complete book. Chapter VI uses the preceding analysis to throw light on the question of the king's divinity. A brief summary is followed by an extensive appendix containing plans of tombs and copies, made by hand, of hieroglyphic texts (these are translated in the main body of the book).

To sum up, this is a thorough and useful production, which will increase our knowledge and understanding of the royal tombs in the valley of the kings.

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