BOOK REVIEW

Troche Julia: Death, Power, and Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt: The Old and Middle Kingdoms

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What happened to people after they died in ancient Egypt? How did some mortals become gods when only the king was supposed to have this privilege? Why did the deification of some people occur, and what were the political, social, and religious impacts of this phenomenon during the Third Millennium BCE in ancient Egypt? These questions form the *file rouge* of Julia Troche's book, which focuses on the social and political impact of the dead in ancient Egypt during the Old Kingdom (c. 2650–2150 BCE) and the Middle Kingdom (c. 2050–1650 BCE). Furthermore, she analyzes the phenomenon of apotheosis and how the dead were mobilized to negotiate social, religious and political power during this chronological period (c. 2650–1650 BCE). This book is an excellent contribution to Egyptology and sheds light on a field still debated by the scientific community.

A thorough Introduction opens the book, where Troche clarifies the objectives of her work and the subject matter. Beginning with a broad description of three crucial concepts of ancient Egyptian civilization, "death," "power," and "apotheosis," Troche delves into the social, political, and economic consequences in ancient Egyptian society of these concepts. Furthermore, Troche outlines the historical and historiographical narratives of the chronological period under consideration, spanning from the end of the Old Kingdom to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom.

The book is structured into two distinct parts, with the first section titled "Death and Power." This first part is further divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive examination of the mortuary culture in Ancient Egypt. Troche traces the rituals and practices associated with death and provides a chronological survey of burials, funerary complexes, and funerary literature, including "Pyramid Texts" and "Books of the Netherworld." The chapter interconnects archaeological and literary examples with religious beliefs, offering an in-depth analysis of the two supernatural aspects of the dead: the *ka* (spirit) and *ba* (soul). Additionally, the social function of the dead is explored in detail, resulting in a comprehensive and informative overview.

Chapter 2 explores one of the supernatural elements of the dead, known as *Akhu*, a term still debated among scholars. Troche translates *Akhu* as "effective dead one," believed to be the social aspect of the dead and a supernatural entity that can influence the living. Troche supports the interpretations of Harrington (2013) and Janák (2013), emphasizing that *Akhu's* existence is only effective in its interactions with the living. Additionally, Troche suggests that *Akhu* was closely linked to the concept of *Maat*, which refers to the world order. To support this claim, Troche meticulously analyzes an array of sources, including Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, as well as tomb inscriptions named

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"Appeals to the Living" and "Letters to the Dead." Through examining the category and unique examples of these textual corpora, Troche demonstrates that interactions between the living and the dead in the form of *Akh-iqer* were part of social behavior. These networks with the dead were predominantly part of people's intimate daily lives, relating to matters such as illness or fertility, rather than being connected to admission into the afterlife.

In Chapter 3, Troche deals with the complex and multifaceted concept of "power." To fully understand this idea, Troche draws from various scientific disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, and religious studies. Throughout their analysis, Troche emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fundamental opposition between power and violence. One notable conclusion Troche reaches is that power cannot be viewed as an individual possession. Rather, it is a dynamic process that involves negotiations between a range of different entities, including the Egyptian elite, the dead, the deities, and the king. To illustrate their argument, Troche takes a closer look at sources dating back to periods when the king held exclusive control over mortuary access. Troche builds a compelling case to support her assumptions by carefully examining various temple and funerary inscriptions and texts from funerary literature, such as the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and Book of the Dead.

Part 2 of the book, titled "Apotheosis," comprises three chapters. In Chapter 4, Troche discusses the existence of social inequality among the dead in ancient Egypt. The living typically called upon the esteemed dead during significant moments, while the average dead, referred to as *Akhu*, were only invoked during personal moments of uncertainty. While during the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1069 BCE), apotheosis is more frequently attested; Troche notes that apotheosis was rarely observed during the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom and therefore not extensively studied by scholars, likely due to its perceived rarity among the scientific community. Troche then explains the methodology used to identify deified dead in the chronological dataset's textual and archaeological records, as some were not explicitly marked as deified people. Troche outlines eight markers, which provide evidence of a peculiar status of the deceased or apotheosis. Through this analysis, Troche concludes that apotheosis was more prevalent during the Middle Kingdom, while during the Old Kingdom,

markers primarily identified individuals as above-average dead or "distinguished dead."

In Chapter 5, Troche presents three case studies that focus on notable individuals who were highly respected by their communities but not worshipped as gods. These individuals, referred to as "distinguished dead," include Hordjedef, the son of King Khufu during the Fourth Dynasty; Ptahhotep, an official who lived during the Fifth Dynasty and authored the *Instruction of Ptahhotep*; and the governors of Ain Asil in the Dakhla Oasis, who were revered as local leaders in their *ka*-chapels. Troche analyzes all available onomastic and archaeological evidence related to these figures to support her argument. By including these individuals in the so-called *imakhu-kher* ("favored by") formula, Troche suggests that the living communicated with the distinguished dead to ensure their admission into the Hereafter. However, Troche notes that this inclusion could potentially threaten the king's authority because he held this role exclusively as the sole mortuary benefactor.

Using the markers extrapolated from the documentation in Chapter 4, Troche highlights in Chapter 6 three individuals who lived in the Old Kingdom who underwent apotheosis: Diedi, Mehu, and Kagemmi. They were buried at Saqqara's and Giza's necropolis and were likely deified during the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. The analysis of sources related to these examples suggests that during the Old Kingdom, the practice of deifying the deceased was more limited in scope than in the Middle Kingdom. Moreover, apotheosis during this era was connected to the funerary realm and mortuary-based power structures in the capital.

The end of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period is characterized by a shift from the central royal power towards regionalism. This shift can also be observed in the emergence of new cult forms for the esteemed dead. Chapter 7 of the text delves into this topic, examining three case studies of individuals who underwent apotheosis: Heqaib, buried at Elephantine; Isis, buried at Edfu; and Wahka, buried at Qau el-Kebir. The evidence suggests that during the Middle Kingdom, apotheosis was limited to the provinces, initially on a very local scale and closely tied to regional temple power. As regionalism grew in importance towards the end of the Old Kingdom, so did these cults' power. Troche notes that Middle Kingdom rulers incorporated Heqaib's temple

into their own temple-building projects in an effort to curb local influence and cult power, thereby avoiding threats to their authority.

The book's conclusion highlights the significance of Troche's interpretation, which argues that the phenomenon of apotheosis can be traced back to the Old Kingdom. Troche's research demonstrates that during the transition from the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom, political, cultural, and religious changes created power gaps that allowed local communities and nomarchs to acquire power and develop alternative ways to access the afterlife. By challenging the traditional view that power was exclusively held by the king, Troche shows how both the king and non-royal dead negotiated power together. The book also sheds light on how Middle Kingdom kings responded to new systems of political power.

Overall, Troche's work provides a fresh perspective on the ancient Egyptian belief system of the afterlife and a new understanding of the social and political impacts of the deceased. The accessible writing style makes it an ideal resource for students, and it is highly recommended for anyone interested in Egyptology or ancient religion.

References

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