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Review: *Egyptology from the First World War to the Third Reich: Ideology, Scholarship and Individual Biographies* edited by Thomas Schneider and Peter Raulwing (Brill) £29.00 ISBN: 978-90-04-24329-3

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Within the last two decades, particularly since the publication of Bernal's *Black Athena* in 1987, there has been an increasing awareness of the influence that scholars' own social and political backgrounds and views have on their work. Egyptology, however, still lacks thorough examinations of earlier scholars' views and their impact on explanations of Egyptian history and culture. This book, edited by Schneider and Raulwing, attempts to remedy this situation by examining how Egyptology and Egyptologists were affected by the political upheavals of the early Twentieth Century, focussing on Germany. Originally published as a series of articles for a themed issue of the *Journal of Egyptian History*,[1] it has been republished by Brill as a book with an additional article, written following the death of Manfred Mayrhofer, an Indo-Aryan specialist, added solely for the book. The articles have been published as they were in the themed issue, with no adaptation or modification between the two versions.

The book begins with an introduction by Edmund Meltzer, who not only introduces the chapters that follow, but also provides a justification of the importance of the reviews of the scholars' socio-political viewpoints and the purpose of producing such a book. As Meltzer himself notes, the intention of the book, and particularly Schneider's chapter is to examine 'the involvement of Egyptologists with the Third Reich and its so far largely unexamined consequences for the discipline itself'.[2]

The first chapter, by Lindsay Ambridge, is the only one to examine the effect of the political and social views of a non-German Egyptologist, James Henry Breasted. As

[1] JEH 5/2012
[2] Meltzer 2013: 3.

such this chapter provides an important reminder that the impact of now-questionable political views was not limited solely to German Egyptologists who joined the Nazi party, but was felt in other centres of Egyptological research including America. In Breasted's case, these views centred around a strong sense of the importance of colonialism and warfare in the progress of humanity. Ambridge chooses to examine these views not through Breasted's academic work, but instead through his textbook *Ancient Times*, explaining this as a more productive way of examining how Breasted's interpretations, influenced by his political outlook, and had an impact on the wider population. Ambridge sees racial categorisation less as a result of straight racism but rather a product of his political views regarding the progress of mankind through achievements in cultural spheres. As a result, his use of the term 'white' was less a description of skin colour and instead a reflection of achievement and control i.e. developing writing, monumental architecture, centralised government etc.

There are issues with this interpretation, however, which are apparent in Breasted's academic writings. This is perhaps clearest in his description of the Sea Peoples' assistance for the Libyan invasions of New Kingdom Egypt as bringing 'over the white race whom we know as the Libyans.'[3] This statement not only ignores the previous existence of the Libyans, but also describes a culture which has none of the cultural achievements that Ambridge sees as connected to Breasted's use of the term 'white,' indicating that her interpretations of Breasted's attitudes towards race may need further investigation.

The next two chapters form the core of the book, and are both in German. Peter Raulwing and Thomas Gertzen provide a detailed biography of Friedrich Wilhelm von Bissing and his political activities. This is followed by Thomas Schneider's chapter, in which he provides short biographies of German Egyptologists who collaborated with or resisted the Nazi regime.

Raulwing and Gertzen's chapter provides an extensive analysis of von Bissing's political activities from before the First World War through to the rise of the Nazi Party

[3] Breasted 1937: 467.

during the late 20s and 30s. Von Bissing is a somewhat obscure Egyptologist, but published a (then) influential Art History of Egypt and was a member of the committee that produced the *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*. The authors selected him over other more prominent Egyptologists of the time, however, because he associated himself both publically and privately with right-wing political causes. In particular they note his political activities as part of the German occupation of Belgium under his Father General von Bissing during the First World War. The authors also make clear his use of anti-Semitic language to describe academic rivals and his strong dislike of the British (He went so far as to suggest a plan for Germany to attack Egypt, in part to restrict British, French and Italian Egyptologists ability to work in the country).[4] Their examination of von Bissing's career does, however, reveal that his very public political activities appear to have cost him his Professorship at Utrecht, and possibly also his previous job at the University of Munich, in stark contrast to what Schneider demonstrates with regard to the politicisation of German academia under the Nazis. By showing the strength of von Bissing's political views, Raulwing and Gertzen demonstrate the importance of understanding a scholar's background and views when examining his works.

Throughout the chapter there is only limited assessment of the effect that von Bissing's political views had on his academic work, bar a short mention of his dedication of his Art History of Egypt to Rudolf Hess and his use of quote of Adolf Hitler's in another book. This lack of assessment of the effect of von Bissing's political views on his work is a significant absence, as a key aspect of research into scholars' socio-political views is to help clarify how they affected individual scholars' understanding and interpretation of Ancient Egypt. To the credit of the authors they acknowledge this deficiency in their final paragraph as an area for future research.

Schneider's chapter, instead of focussing in depth on a single Egyptologist, provides mini-biographies for a significant number of German Egyptologists from the 1920's until after the Second World War, again focussing on their political views and activities. Schneider has selected his subjects primarily from a list compiled by Georg Steindorff in a letter to John Wilson, held in the collections of the Oriental Institute, Chicago. The

[4] Raulwing & Gertzen 2013: 50.

letter was written in response to a request for a list of German Egyptologists who had been members of the Nazi Party. The main purpose of Schneider's article is to test the validity of Steindorff's accusations support by examining the scholars under the two headings that Steindorff used in his letter; 'Men of Honor' and 'I accuse...',[5] as well as the three scholars who Steindorff included at the end of his letter. This leads to a series of sections detailing the activities of the various scholars during the rise of the Nazi Party, through the Second World War, to the post-war denazification of German academia. Schneider also includes two extra sections. In the first, he examines some of the victims of Nazi influence (including Steindorff), which serves as a useful reminder that the political activities of some of the other scholars had significant impacts on individual lives, not just on the discipline. In the second he discusses scholars who qualified during Nazi rule and thus continued to have a role within the discipline long after the regime itself had disappeared.

Schneider's mini-biographies provide clear insight into the role that many Egyptologists played under the Third Reich, not only in appointing 'inferior' scholars as a result of their political connections, but also in actively supporting the removal of Jewish and politically unreliable colleagues. Additionally, the biographies often make clear these scholars' use of Nazi ideology in their interpretations of Ancient Egypt and their use of those interpretations to support the Nazi regime. They also show a clear split in post-war German Egyptology between those who had been victims or opponents of the Nazi Regime and those who had been associated with it, shown particularly clearly in the fact that Grapow's Festschrift contained contributions only from the latter group. Unlike Raulwing and Gertzen, Schneider offers demonstrations of how individual scholars' political views are apparent in their academic work, most notably for Walther Wolf who used a Nazi slogan of 'Blood and Land' ('*Blut und Boden*') to describe the principles of Ancient Egyptian Culture.[6] This examination of the effect of scholars' views is, however, limited to single, brief comments. This lack of a comprehensive assessment is also acknowledged by Schneider in his concluding paragraph and he notes that this chapter is a first step in examining the effect of the political ideologies of the period on Egyptology.

[5] Schneider 2013: 145-146
[6] Schneider 2013: 206-207.

The final chapter is part-biography of Manfred Mayrhofer and part-subject overview of Indo-Aryan/ Indo-European linguistics. As a result it provides a general overview of Mayrhofer's career as well as discussions about how the terms of Indo-Aryan and Indo-European were stripped of their original (and current) linguistic definitions and used to describe elements of ethnology, particularly under the Nazis. This chapter was not part of the original issue and this is evident as the content is much less securely tied to the theme of Egyptology during the 20s, 30s and 40s (Mayrhofer received his PhD in 1949). Nevertheless, it does show how related disciplines suffered similar, if not stronger, effects as a result of Nazi control of academia and misuse of academic research.

Overall, this book takes an important step in examining how Egyptology as a discipline was affected by the political turmoil of the early Twentieth Century and in particular the rise of the Nazi Party. All of the authors make excellent use of primary sources, particularly of previously unpublished private letters and journals, often making use of long quotes to provide important insights into individual scholars' thoughts. The book has a strong German focus, perhaps understandable considering the subject matter, but as the opening chapter by Ambridge shows there were similar influences in Egyptology departments across the world and so it would have been nice to see more on the impact on Egyptologists outside Germany. The only other issue is the lack of analysis of the impact of scholars' political activities on their academic work, but in order to include such details would have meant that the depth of research on each scholar would have to been reduced and it is difficult to see how this would have improved the quality of the book. Despite these relatively minor issues this book makes a significant contribution to exploring a dark chapter in Egyptology's history as a discipline and an important step in understanding the effect that period had on the academic community.

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