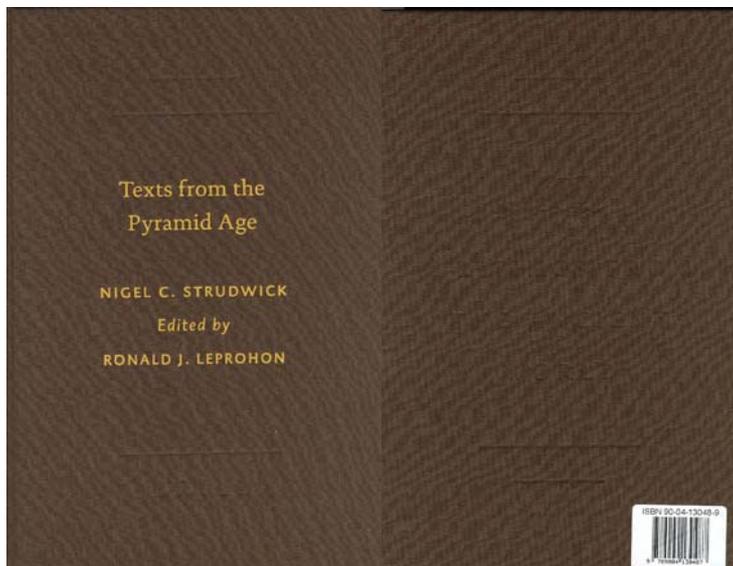**Strudwick, N.C. 2005. Texts from the Pyramid Age. – Leiden, Brill (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 16)**

Book review[1] by R. Nyord

The year 2005 saw the publication of two new volumes devoted to translations of ancient Egyptian texts in the 'Writings from the Ancient World' series. These two books, the one under review here and J.P. Allen's translation of Pyramid Texts (Allen, 2005) form a complementary pair, each containing translations of an important part of the written sources from the Old Kingdom.

Before the translations themselves, 'Texts from the Pyramid Age' contains a comprehensive (63 pp) opening chapter providing an introduction not only to the literature of the period, but also to more general questions such as chronology, language, and general issues of translation.

The selection of texts include all the major types known from the Old Kingdom, with the exception of the Pyramid Texts treated in Allen (2005) and the wisdom texts sometimes ascribed to this period. The omission of the latter is due both to the author's reasonable scepticism regarding their Old Kingdom date (the Shabaka stone once thought to originate in this period is omitted for similar reasons), and to the rather special nature of these texts, which has lead the author to the opinion that "they deserve treatment in volumes dedicated to this specific genre" (p. 2). Having discussed the selection of texts, the author moves on to give a brief overview of earlier translations and studies of Old Kingdom texts (section 2 of the introduction). The next section (3) deals with the historical context of the Old Kingdom, starting with an outline of the macro–history of the period and followed by a discussion of the problems involved in dating persons and events in the Old Kingdom, including discussions of cattle counts, *sed*–festivals and the Egyptian calendar. This section also contains a brief introduction to royal names. The fourth section deals with 'Literary and linguistic aspects of Old Kingdom texts' and starts with some notes on the importance of the nature of the sources in relation to their interpretation, including a brief discussion of the appropriateness of the term 'literature' in relation to Old Kingdom texts and some considerations of whether the texts should be considered to be written in prose or verse. A brief characterization of the language and writing of the texts follows. Section 5 discusses the general translation choices, including both the rendition of particular grammatical constructions and some remarks on the thorny subject of prosopographical titles of various types. The section also contains slightly lengthier remarks on the rendition of the particular words *imȝḫ* and *ḥm*, both of which cause problems when one attempts to reproduce their probable meaning in a translation. Here, the author has chosen to discuss the root meaning of the two terms at some length in the introduction and to rely on the conventional renditions "*imakhu*" and "majesty", respectively, in the actual translations for reasons of readability. Finally, brief introductions to the notions of offering formulae, nomes and pyramid names and the way these are rendered in the translations are given. Section 6 of this chapter is by far the longest and contains introductions to the "principal types of text translated in this volume". Apart from the characterization and number of extant texts of each type, this section also contains brief descriptions (with references) of the conceptual and practical background to each particular type of text.

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[1] Second version, updated 3 October 2006.

The slightly uneven nature of the introduction is likely caused by the relatively wide range of conceivable audiences for the book. As can be seen from the summary above, the comments and discussions range from the quite technical of mainly scholarly interest (*e.g.* the translation of cleft sentences on p. 25f or the specifics of Old Egyptian grammar p. 23f) to the much more general for the layman. Thus, the general reader should find a good and thorough introduction to the texts in the rest of the volume, though some of the discussions might be too detailed to be of interest for that particular audience. On the other hand, the up to date references and level of detail would also make the chapter well suited as a text book in Old Egyptian language and texts. As a scholarly reference work, on the other hand, the more detailed sections, such as those motivating various translation choices, are of great value.

The actual translations occupying the bulk of the volume are grouped into chapters with the headings 'Annals and Lists of Kings', 'Texts from Temples', 'Royal Decrees', 'Objects Bearing Royal Names', 'Rock Inscriptions of Kings and Expedition Leaders', 'Quarry and Constructional Marks and Phyle Texts', 'Graffiti', 'State Administrative Texts', 'Letters', 'Private Legal Texts', 'A Selection of Offering Formulae and Titles', 'Appeals to the Living and Warnings to Evildoers and the Uninitiated', 'Commemorative and Dedicatory Texts', 'Texts relating to Payment of Workmen and Tomb Acquisition', 'Biographical Texts from the Memphite Region', 'Biographical Texts from the Provinces', 'Texts of Women', 'Captions to Tomb Scenes', 'Miscellaneous Texts from Tombs and Objects in Tombs' and finally an 'Addendum' with a few texts included too late to be incorporated in the preceding chapters. The selection of texts provides a very good and representative collection of the written sources of the Old Kingdom. The only type of texts missed by this reviewer would be private mortuary texts, of which the only example so far is the one found on an imprint from a shroud from the mastaba of Medunefer at Balat (Valloggia, 1986: 74–78, pl. 62–63). While the contents of this text can, in its current state of preservation, hardly be characterised as very informative, its very existence is highly interesting for the question of the development of private mortuary literature (*cf.* for instance Mathieu, 2004: 254, and n. 59 for the possible dating of the Gardiner papyri to the 6th Dynasty).

There is a considerable degree of overlap between the categories, especially in the case of tomb inscriptions translated *in extenso* and thus including more than one 'type' of text. Often the indices (especially the index of personal names) are of help when one wishes to locate a particular text. In addition to the remarks on each type of text in the introduction chapter, many of the translated texts are preceded by introductory remarks on the particular import, difficulties or references pertaining to the text and its ancient and/or present context. These introductions usually mention any parallel or similar texts omitted from the translations in the volume (for instance, the existence and omission in the translation of parallel texts from the temple of Pepy II at South Saqqara is noted in the introduction to the texts from the temple of Sahure).

The translations themselves are both highly precise and very readable. The choice of a generally free translation (*e.g.* of cleft sentences, as explained on p. 25f) provides the texts with a natural, idiomatic flow enhanced by the generally spacious typographical layout of the longer texts. In some cases, this principle of translation might have been taken even further, *e.g.* by abandoning the conventional rendering of the enclitic particle *is* as indeed where it likely serves merely as a marker of syntactical subordination (*cf.* for instance Vernus, 1996: 179 n. 198 for this analysis) on p. 224, where *ḏd=ṯn ink is imȝḫw* (Edel, 1994: fig. 1, l. 7) is translated "May you say that I was indeed an *imakhu*".

The improvements that can be made to the understanding expressed in the translations are correspondingly few and minor, the more heavily debated passages generally being identified and discussed (with references) in the notes found at the end of each chapter. An example where the understanding might be improved is found in the phrase [*š*]*ms r iz=f n imnt m-ḫt ḫnt=f m* (*Urk.* I, 190, 16), translated on p. 215 as "Proceeding to his tomb of the West, having crossed over in the *weret* boat". Here, it is likely that the final word should be understood as a designation of the stretch of water upon which the deceased wishes to sail rather than the boat in which he sails. While the preposition *m* can have both meanings in combination with the verb *ḫni* (*Wb* III, 374, 4–5), the determinative seems to indicate a connection with the winding canal known from Old Kingdom depictions of funerary rituals often designated as the *wrt* (Junker, 1944: 11 and Settgast, 1963: 66f). This would also underline the parallelism with the opposite jamb of the inscription, reading *prt r tp ḏw n ḥrt-nṯr m-ḫt nmt š*, "Going forth to the top of the mountain of the necropolis, having traversed the pool (*or* canal)" (see Mariette, 1889: 195 for the layout of the inscription), which would in this case likely also refer to this stage of the funerary rituals.

The volume under review presents a highly accessible, sizeable and representative selection of texts from a period for which such a volume of translations have long been a *desideratum*. As such, it will be of great value to scholars who are specialised in the Old Kingdom who will find competent translations and cogent interpretations of its texts. It is however, equally valuable to scholars who do not work in this field and need an introduction to and exemplification of the types of texts extant from the Egyptian Old Kingdom. Finally, it is of

great interest to the general reader looking for a selection of very readable translations of some of the world's oldest written texts.

Like the other volumes in the 'Writings from the Ancient World' series, this book is also available in paperback from the Society of Biblical Literature.

Strudwick, N.C. 2005. Texts from the Pyramid Age. – Leiden, Brill (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 16). 522 pp. ISBN 90–04–13048–9. Price € 169.00/$ 219.00 (hardback).

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