

The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance: With a Focus on the Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I. Karl Giehlow. Trans. Robin Raybould. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 240; Brill's Texts and Sources in Intellectual History 16. Leiden: Brill, 2015. viii + 352 pp. \$175.

The present edition is the first translation into English of the monograph *Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance*, or *Hieroglyphenkunde*, of Karl Giehlow, first published in 1915. The monograph is seen as a pioneering work in proposing that Egyptian hieroglyphics had an important influence in the literature of allegory and symbolism in the Italian Renaissance and in Renaissance art. It was described as a "monumental study" by Walter Benjamin, "magnificent" by Anthony Grafton, and a "masterpiece" by Rudolf Wittkower. Giehlow, who studied art history at the University of Berlin, discovered what is believed to be the first Latin translation of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo (written in the fifth century) in the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. The text was illustrated by Albrecht Dürer, and the illustrations are included in the present volume.

The first Latin translations of the *Hieroglyphica* were published in 1515 and 1517, and many more followed. Other key texts that Giehlow analyzes are the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) of Francesco Colonna, the *Emblemata* (1531) of Andrea Alciato, and the *Hieroglyphica* (1556) of Piero Valeriano. Giehlow explores a variety of Renaissance writings on the subject of hieroglyphic, allegorical, and literary symbolism, by figures such as Marsilio Ficino, Annius of Viterbo, Filippo Beroaldo, Fra Urbano, Pietro Crinito, Desiderius Erasmus, and Leon Battista Alberti. He discusses references to Egyptian culture by earlier humanists such as Niccolò de' Niccoli, Ciriaco d'Ancona, Flavio Biondo, and Francesco Filelfo. Giehlow also analyzes the famous woodcut of the *Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I* (1515), designed by Albrecht Dürer and influenced by the 1512 Latin translation of Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* by Willibald Pirckheimer, which Giehlow discovered in Vienna.

Giehlow uses the term *hieroglyph* to describe all visual symbols, emblems, imprese, epigrams, or rebuses that were thought to have stemmed from Egyptian hieroglyphs, because "there was at the time no perception of the difference between a hieroglyphic system of a phonetic type and one of enigmatic characters" (195). Robin Raybould makes it clear in the introduction that this was not completely the case. Of course Egyptian hieroglyphs were not translated or discovered to be a phonetic system or alphabet until 1822 by Jean-Francois Champollion, which is recognized by Giehlow. Hieroglyphs were described as "nondum adhuc comperta" ("not yet deciphered," 214), although Marsilio Ficino was able to guess what they were. Hieroglyphs were instead seen in the Renaissance as pictorial symbols that had the ability to transcend language itself in revealing the mysteries of being. Hieroglyphs contained "a wisdom that amongst other things could illuminate any natural mystery" (196). Valeriano, for example, made no attempt at any translation or literal interpretation of hieroglyphs, leaving the role of

hieroglyphs “as ‘divinarum humanarumque, rerum naturam aperire’ [‘to reveal the nature of things both human and divine’], revealing thus for initiates the most obscure truths in a comprehensible form” (229). Of particular importance was the revelation of the nature of the divine, leading humanists like Marsilio Ficino to see hieroglyphs as predecessors to Christian scripture, thus playing an important role in the Neoplatonic project of synthesizing the pagan and Christian: “An understanding of hieroglyphics had the added benefit of contributing to an understanding of the Scriptures thus reinforcing the true faith” (229).

Giehlow makes the ambitious claim that the “fortuitous discovery of the Horapollo translated by Pirckheimer and illustrated by Dürer therefore demonstrates a trend that seems to have influenced the artistic development of humanism in the same way that the entire Roman cultural universe was influenced by the conquest of Egypt” (29). The claim is unsustainable, as pointed out by Raybould. Giehlow does little to demonstrate the influence of the interest in hieroglyphs on Renaissance art, beyond saying that it “would be reasonable to say yes” to the question “whether this intellectual trend found an echo in works of art of the time” (215). There is some discussion of the role of emblematic symbols in the work of Mantegna or Pinturicchio. Subsequent scholarship has shown Giehlow’s treatise to be a pioneering work, and hopefully this publication will inspire further investigation.

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