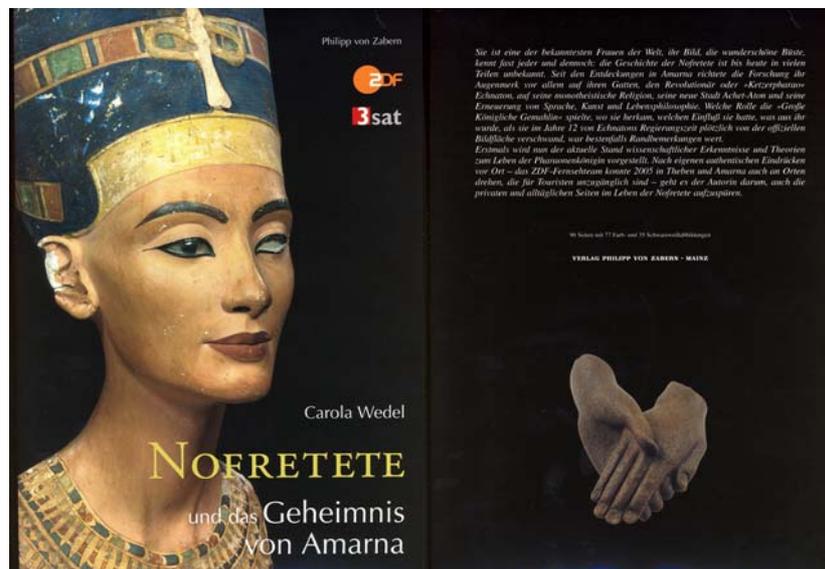


Wedel, C. 2005. *Nofretete und das Geheimnis von Amarna*. – Mainz am Rhein, Philipp von Zabern
(Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie)

Book review by A.J. Veldmeijer



One of the most brilliant pieces of art known from Egypt is the bust of Nefertiti, wife of Akhenaten. Akhenaten, during whose reign the art and religion of Egypt were marked by revolutionary change, founded a new city in his fifth regnal year: Akhetaten ('Horizon of the Aten'), at the place nowadays known as El-Amarna in Middle Egypt. The new capital however, was soon after Akhenaten's death (he reigned for about 18 years) abandoned.

Amarna is one of the best preserved examples of an Egyptian New Kingdom settlement, but unlikely to have been a typical Egyptian city (Shaw & Nicholson, 1997: 26). Various excavators worked at the site among which Flinders Petrie and Leonard Woolley. The British Egyptologist Barry Kemp works since the 1970s at the site (extensively published, among others the Amarna reports; see 'Cited literature' below).

Nefertiti's bust, the topic of Wedel's book, was found in 1912 by the German excavator Ludwig Borchardt in Thutmose's workshop and clearly shows the high skills of the craftsmanship at the time. But besides this bust, many other pieces of sculpture was recovered, among which many unfinished examples. The book is about the history of the find, with short excursions on the history of Amarna, the life of Nefertiti and her family, the first years before moving to Akhetaten and the founding of Akhetaten and the chaotic period after Akhenaten's death. Finally, a short chapter ('Nofretetes späte Reisen') deals with the history of the bust after it came to Berlin. The last chapter by Hassan Selim gives a short guide to the two best preserved tombs of Amarna: the tomb of Huya and Meryras I.

In general, the book is very interesting to read, even though there are some strange mistakes: Barry Kemp is not American as is stated at p. 34 but British and Dorothea Arnold *works* in New York, but is German rather than American (p. 71). Also there are quite some cases of repetition (for example the phrase on p. 19: "Die offizielle Geschichtsschreibung hatte den <<Frevler>> Echnaton (Abb. 13), den Mann, der radikal eine eigene Religion, eine neue Sprache, eine neue Stadt gegründet, alle alten Werte auf den Kopf gestellt und die trostreichen Götter und Göttinnen abgeschafft hatte, und seine ganze Familie aus den Annalen getilgt", the information of which is given at various pages). Zahi Hawass is *always* mentioned as "der Direktor des ägyptischen Antikendienstes", but referred to one time as "der Direktor der ägyptischen Antikenbehörde". The one or two (?) editing errors and one wrong reference (p. 55, reference to illustration 11a, b, p. 19 is not correct) can easily be forgiven; it is however, less easy to overcome the lack of references to literature. Although this is often so with publications by Philipp von Zabern, it is now ever so strange because Wedel constantly cites scholars. So, why not include the reference?

Perhaps a more personal point of criticism is the annoying, poetic way of describing the bust (or any piece of art). The paragraph on page 36 is a good example: "Sie wirkt unschuldig, aufgeschlossen, interessiert an der Welt, gleichzeitig aber auch bei sich. Selbstgewiß, dennoch fragil, fast ein wenig verträumt", another one on page 57: "Est ist das Gesicht einer Herrscherin (Abb. 54): der Blick nach vorn gerichtet, die Haltung stolz und entschieden, kein Hauch eines Zweifels, nicht die Idee eines Möglichen Scheiterns. Zuversicht, Sicherheit, ruhige Gelöstheit. Kein Strahlen eines Siegers, eher ein Mensch in seiner Mitte, eins mit sich und der Welt".

True, this is often seen in art history, but it lacks objectivity: what the author describes is what *she* sees, not what is generally visible. Clear from this remark, I am sure, is that I am not an art historian...

Although the book gives an overview of Nefertiti, her husband and everything related, I think the strength of the book is the history of the find and what happened after the discovery. The division of the objects by French Egyptologist Lebevre, at that time inspector of the Antiquity Organisation, was source for some controversy at the time. During World War II, archaeological objects were stored elsewhere and sometimes did not survive the war. Another strong point, as always with publications of Philipp von Zabern, is the large number of, in general, exquisite illustrations (exceptions are illustrations 30, p. 37; 63, p. 63; and especially 70, p. 67).

In conclusion, the book is certainly worth buying, especially if you are interested in the history of the find. Moreover, the book gives a short overview of this intriguing episode in Egypt's history.

Wedel, C. 2005. Nofretete und das Geheimnis von Amarna. – Mainz am Rhein, Philipp von Zabern (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie). 96 pp. ISBN 3-8053-3544-X. Price € 29.90 (hardback).

Cited literature

Kemp, B.J. Ed. 1984–1995. Amarna Reports I–VI. – London, Egypt Exploration Society (Occasional Publications).

Shaw, I. & P.T. Nicholson. 1997 [1995]. The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt. – London, British Museum Press.