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REVIEW REPORT

on the PhD thesis of Ms. Nashwa Gaber

***The Relief Decoration of the Funerary Chapel of Shepsespuptah
in Saqqara (Late Vth Dynasty)***

**submitted to the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw**

The dissertation under review is important in two aspects: it presents a newly discovered and hitherto unpublished monument that, apart from being a unique work of art, contains several unusual and highly interesting scenes and inscriptions. Thus, the subject is not only of high importance, but it also entails a significant responsibility.

Ms. Nashwa Gaber is a representative of the new generation of Egyptian Egyptologists, a dedicated and enthusiastic scholar keenly interested in the historical heritage of her country. The thesis has been prepared under the supervision of prof. Karol Myśliwiec, whose excellent knowledge of ancient Egyptian art and, moreover, an enormous experience in the archaeology of the area where the tomb in question is situated make him the ideal supervisor for the subject chosen by the author.

The thesis comprises six chapters contained on 193 pages and is supplemented with three plans and 160 figures. Noteworthy is a clear and logical structure of the work; the chapters are precisely subdivided into sections that correspond to particular research problems in a well reasoned sequence. The structure is presented in a complex table of contents that includes up to five hierarchical levels.

The first chapter outlines the objectives of the research and presents general premises of the work, as well as explains several methodological problems that the author encountered in her research.

In the second chapter, the author presents the archaeological context of the research, that is the location of the tomb under research within the Saqqara necropolis and its specific part – Gisr el-Mudir cemetery, with their peculiarities. Also, the history of the tomb's exploration has been summarised here.

The third chapter focuses on the tomb owner and his family. When discussing the names of the owner, the author does not refer to the works of Ranke (*Die Ägyptischen Personennamen*, Glückstadt – Hamburg – New York 1935-52) or Scheele-Schweitzer (*Die Personennamen des Alten Reiches. Altägyptische Onomastik unter lexikographischen und sozio-kulturellen Aspekten*, Wiesbaden 2014). It is quite surprising, as the presented reading of the „great name“ (Shepsespuptah) is by no means obvious, Shepesipuptah being equally possible, based on the name's graphy. Thus, a discussion on the meaning of the two forms, with arguments in favour of the former (the one chosen by the author) would be appropriate here. The titles, on the other hand, are presented in detail with basic references to the literature; the same is true for the owner's family members, that is his wife, two sons and a daughter.

The fourth chapter presents the substructure of the tomb. It should be noted that in the case of the tomb under discussion, the distinction between sub- and superstructure is not exactly precise, as not only its funerary apartment, but also the funerary chapel are hewn in the bedrock, below the ground level.

Thus, it might be more accurate to distinguish here between burial (= substructure) and cultic part (that is, its 'functional superstructure') of the tomb. This issue is, however, obvious to anyone acquainted with peculiarities of the Gisir el-Mudir cemetery, as evidently is the author. The architecture and archeology of the substructure is described rather tersely, which results from the problems with documentation explained in the first chapter.

After the presentation of the structure itself, the author analyses in detail the decoration of the burial chamber. The analysis is conducted wall by wall, according to the compositional units of the decoration. A detailed description of each scene and numerous details is illustrated with excellent photographs contained in the final part of the thesis. When discussing individual scenes and inscriptions, the author refers to analogies in other tombs and to earlier discussions in Egyptological literature.

The most extensive chapter, 5, is devoted to the cultic part of the tomb. It is an exceptionally interesting structure, consisting of three parts hewn below the ground level and accessible through a single flight of stairs. It is here that a contentious issue is found in the author's interpretation. While the identification of the open court with two adjacent rooms and of the funerary chapel proper is obvious, the room found between them cannot be interpreted as a second court because of remains of a brick vault that was evidently constructed above it. Thus, it was rather a room, and definitely not a court, and its form closely resembles the construction of the tomb of Seshemnefer, situated not far from that of Shepsespuptah and of a similar date (A. Barsanti, 'Le mastaba de Samnofir', *ASAE* 1 (1900), pp. 150-160).

After a concise presentation of the tomb's architecture, there follows an impressively detailed description of the relief decoration, organised in a very clear and ordered way. As in the case of burial chamber, every scene is illustrated with very informative photographs, referred to in the text. The decoration of the chapel is exceptionally rich, encompassing numerous scenes of daily life, also several unique ones, as observed by the author.

Generally, the analysis presented by the author is very thorough and detailed. The scenes are described in a systematic way, all the inscriptions are quoted in transliteration and translated. However, if the thesis will be prepared for publication, it would be advisable – because of the richness and complexity of the decoration – to include key-plans, to facilitate the orientation in the relative position of particular scenes. The author put an enormous effort into describing and analysing the scenes. Slightly disappointing is, however, the lack of more extensive comments on some particularly interesting texts (as, e.g. that on the south wall of the burial chamber – p. 39, or that found above the entrance to the chapel, with its highly unusual line 4 – p. 46-47) and scenes. Also surprisingly, no reference is made to the canonical work of J. Settgast (*Untersuchungen zu altägyptischen Bestattungsdarstellungen*, Glückstadt 1963) in the discussion on funerary rituals depicted on the chapel's north wall (pp. 143-159).

The final, sixth chapter presents the author's conclusions concerning the tomb's architecture and dating. The latter is based on the location and form of the tomb, and – even more importantly – on the details of its decoration, including iconography and inscriptions. The iconographic repertoire of the tomb of Shepsespupthah has been compared to other, surely dated, non-royal monuments (with respect to form and distribution of particular motifs), which led to the only logical conclusion that the career of Shepsespupthah started under Djedkare, reached its peak under Wenis and ended under Teti.

There is one point in the final discussion that raises some doubts: on p. 160, the author mentions „a mastaba superstructure formed of bedrock and partly lined with masonry“. No base, however, has been given for this claim. While it is perfectly plausible, that a mastaba was built over the inner part of the tomb (comprising the antechamber and the funerary chapel), no material remains are shown to prove its existence. It may be supposed that mud brick (?) walls visible on Plan 1 in the southern part of the complex, enclosing an empty (?) depressed space visible on Fig. 1, 2 and 3 are to be interpreted as retaining walls of a mastaba, but if so, an explanation (also of its apparently irregular

shape) would be expected. Also, the confusion related to the interpretation of the vaulted room/second court is repeated here.

Nevertheless, the subject of the presented study is first of all the decoration of the tomb, and the imperfections listed above are related only to its secondary aspects.

A bibliography and a list of illustrations close the textual part of the dissertation, followed by an extensive collection of plans and photographs that complement the study.

In summary, the material presented is of high interest and importance, and the submitted PhD thesis contains original and valuable results of the Author's research and study. It therefore attests to the Candidate's research expertise and command of methodology. As pointed out above, the thesis contains some deficiencies, but it is, nevertheless, an important contribution to the study of ancient Egyptian culture, and of the history and archeology of the Old Kingdom in particular.

Based on my thorough examination, I believe that the PhD thesis under review meets the requirements defined by the Polish law and therefore I recommend that this thesis be accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and Ms. Nashwa Gaber be admitted to public defence of her thesis.

