

dr hab. Anna Wodzińska
Zakład Archeologii Egiptu i Nubii
Instytut Archeologii
Uniwersytet Warszawski



Review of the dissertation thesis

The relief decoration of the funerary chapel of Shepsespuptah in Saqqara (Late Vth Dynasty)

submitted by Nashwa Gaber

at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures

Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2019

Presentation of the thesis

The manuscript entitled *The relief decoration of the funerary chapel of Shepsespuptah in Saqqara (Late Vth Dynasty)* is prepared by Nashwa Gaber supervised by Prof. Karol Myśliwiec, at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It has 286 pages including text and illustrations – plans and photos.

The text contains acknowledgements, six chapters (1. Introduction, 2. The tomb of Shepsespuptah, 3. The tomb owner, 4. The substructure of the tomb of Shepsespuptah, 5. The superstructure of the mastaba of Shepsespuptah, 6. Conclusions); list of abbreviations and bibliography; and illustrations.

Aims of the thesis

The main aim of the thesis is to describe the tomb of Shepsespuptah with detailed account of its architecture and decoration. Such formulated goals are not well defined for a doctoral thesis. However, the main text proves that it is not only a description but also an analysis of the architecture and the tomb decoration in comparison to known tombs of the late 5th and beginning of the 6th Dynasty. Chapter 6 is in fact very systematic examination of the tomb features regarding much wider context.

Contents of the thesis

The thesis shows a unique rock-cut tomb of Shepsespupthah located to the south-west of the Netjerykhet's funerary complex. It includes information about the tomb owner – his name and titles; and his family, also portrayed in the tomb.

The main part of the text is devoted to the account of the tomb structures and their decoration. It is very well organized according to the tomb architectural division – the substructure including shaft leading to the burial chamber and the burial chamber, and the superstructure containing the staircase, two courts, and the chapel.

The thesis has some weak points, which are outlined below.

It is very difficult to follow the description of the tomb structures and arrangement of the decoration without numbering the architectural elements and particular walls. It would look better if the plans of the tomb (Plans 1–3) contained the numbering, which would correspond to the description in the text.

The thesis does not include facsimiles of the tomb decorations. All the decorated walls are photographed (see Figs. 1–160), nevertheless it is sometimes very difficult to recognize the described motifs. The reader has to trust the author distinguishing particular scenes and motifs. I recommend adding drawings of the tomb decoration to the manuscript in order to improve the overall appearance of the thesis before its final publication.

It would also look better if the manuscript included a plan of the Saqqara necropolis with location of the tomb of Shepsespupthah marked, even if its position is not well fixed in the overall grid of the necropolis.

It is not clear how the decoration of the tomb was exactly made. I propose adding a paragraph describing the process of decoration making – i.e. cutting relief in the limestone, covering the walls with thin layer of plaster (visible in the photographs) and painting. What colors are characteristic for the decoration?

There are two very useful tables, pages 164 and 167, which outline decoration themes in the burial chamber and the chapel. Perhaps the author could add more of them showing the decoration scheme in the courtyards as well.

The title of chapter 6, the conclusions, is a bit misleading. The chapter can be easily divided into two further chapters, first: The tomb of Shepsespupthah in context (containing comparative

studies of the architecture and decoration scheme), and second – the actual summary – The conclusions.

One can have an impression that the text ends up without further analysis of the decoration – in terms of not only chronology but also general motifs, depicted objects, their sizes. It leaves a small feeling of being unsatisfied.

Overall, the thesis has many strong points, which predominate the weak.

The manuscript is very well structured – the material is systematically described in the right order – starting with the substructure followed by superstructure with particular chambers defined one by one. It gives an impression of a complete picture of the tomb. The criteria for the chronological study are well chosen. They seem very detailed and satisfactory.

The author is very knowledgeable and familiar with the archaeology of the 5th and 6th Dynasties, especially the funerary material. She effortlessly describes the given material, particularly in the context of the architecture and decoration schemes of the tombs from Saqqara, specifically from the end of the 5th and beginning of the 6th Dynasty.

It is worth mentioning that the author knows not only the tombs in terms of their architecture and decoration but she is also very skilled in the Egyptian language. The tomb of Shepsespupthah contains a number of texts, which encompasses information about the owner, his titles and family. There are also offering lists, funerary formula. All of the texts are very well translated by the author and adequately commented.

The doctoral candidate very well knows the published material associated with the funerary architecture and decoration motifs. It is manifested by the thesis bibliography, which seems to be complete and sufficient.

Formal structure of the manuscript

From formal point of view the thesis has a very clear structure. Its elements are well organized, in a logical and methodical way.

Nevertheless, a number of flows with the text have to be mentioned.

There is a number of problems with spelling and the right spacing in the text, e.g.:

page 6 – “Conclusons” when it supposed to be “Conclusions”;

page 11 – “structuresuncovered” instead of “structures uncovered”;

page 16 – Spepsespupthah – name of the tomb owner is misspelled;

page 20 – “*xntmay*” – it supposed to be “*xnt may*”, and “sonsare” – when it should be “sons are”;

page 21 – “wallof”, which should be “wall of”;

page 25 – Figs. 4 – it should be rather Fig. 4;

page 31 – “*Trpgoose*” supposed to be “*Trp goose*”;

page 32 – “Thenorthern” is in fact “The northern”;

page 33 – “thirdregister” – “third register”;

see also page 164 “oflower”, which should be “of lower”;

page 165 – “shosn” when it supposed to be “shown”;

page 167 – “mentinong”, which most probably meant to be “mentioning”;

page 171 – “canonicaloffering” supposed to be “canonical offering”,

etc.

The manuscript is generally well written although some minor grammar mistakes are also visible – e.g. page 39 – “are a number” when it should be “is a number”.

Some sentences might have been rephrased. For example, sentence: “Economic importance show the functions associated with the House of Gold, the Treasury (Two Treasuries) and the Granary (Two Granaries) but also the house of linen and in workshops” would sound better as “The functions associated with the House of Gold, the Treasury (Two Treasuries) and the Granary (Two Granaries) but also the house of linen and in workshops show economic importance.”

I have a small remark concerning the format of the bibliography. I would recommend writing last name first followed by author name (or the name initial) – e.g. Altenmüller H., Badawy A., Daoud, K., etc.

However, the bibliography is very well constructed, also the footnotes. The thesis also contains list of illustrations.

It seems necessary to add indices to the text before is published, which can better illustrate the studied tomb. I propose to add the following:

Index of names (royal and non-royal)

Index of titles

Index of royal domains

Index of the scenes depicted in the tomb.

All the above listed problems can be, however, easily corrected in the process of editing before the final publication.

Final remarks

The tomb of Shepsespuptah is characterized by a unique structure well outlined by Mrs. Gaber presented in her thesis. The manuscript is very modest and concise; nevertheless, it is very well organized and written, despite some problems with spelling. I recommend publishing the manuscript, after some necessary editorial corrections. It would also be good adding more tables summarizing the decorative motifs; and numbering of the tomb chambers and walls; also indices.

In conclusion, despite some flows, the present dissertation is a valuable contribution to studies on tombs of the 5th and 6th Dynasties.

I can affirm that the work presented to me for evaluation fulfils all requirements appropriate for a doctoral dissertation. I recommend that the doctoral candidate be admitted to subsequent stages of the doctoral procedure.

Warsaw, 29. 05.2019

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Anna Hobisles", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.