

Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the study of some particular funerary structures of the Theban necropolis, commonly called “cliff tombs”. These are graves with attached ritual elements (*stelae* and niche-chapels) located on hills and served by artificial paths in the Theban necropolis. In the texts of the New Kingdom and Late Period, these structures are often linked to the term *K3y* “top, hill, high” (Wb.IV.4.6); the use of “Kay tombs” is attested at Thebes from the beginning until the middle of 18th dynasty; at the end of 20th Dynasty, some structures were reused as royal caches.

The thesis’s primary goal is to draw up an exhaustive analysis of known cliff tombs of the 18th Dynasty and establish their essential archaeological and architectural features. Based on these data, it will be possible to isolate and compare the evidence for post-interment activity at the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period. Currently, there is no exhaustive study on the cliff tombs in the Theban Necropolis; the only contributions available are articles and research reports made on various sites since the beginning of the 20th Century.

The experience gained by the candidate as director of the Italian Archaeological Mission in the Theban necropolis from 2008 has made it possible to start research to classify these structures and to identify the different stages of the building life cycle through the study of its original features and subsequent transformations; thus, the results of the research on the so-called “cliff tombs” of the Theban necropolis flow into the present thesis.

The thesis consists of a general introduction to the Theban necropolis, the history of the studies of the cliff tombs, on the current situation on the royal tombs and those intended for queens, princes, and princesses at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty as a valuable documentary context for subsequent analysis during treatment; there follow three sections dedicated to the three main areas of the Theban necropolis where the cliff tombs are attested: the Southwestern one, that of the eastern slope (Deir el-medina-Deir el-Bahari) and that of the Valley of the Kings with the relative wadis (Valley of the Pits and Western Valley).

Each section deals with known rock tombs and those identified by the author during his archaeological investigations from 2008 to the present. The final considerations will highlight what emerged from the study carried out to trace a line of development of the cliff tombs and the motivations behind their creation and modification; finally, the use of these tombs in the 21st Dynasty as special hiding places, given their structural peculiarities will be highlighted. The thesis concludes with the bibliography, the list of abbreviations, and an appendix that contains the graffiti of the scribes of the necropolis in the 20th and 21st Dynasties, as responsible for the reuse of the cliff tombs as caches.