

External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Giacomo Cavillier

"The 'Cliff Tombs' in Theban Necropolis: Study of a Funerary Structure in the XVIII Dynasty"

Submitted in 2024 at the Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The submitted PhD thesis aims at a comprehensive study of ancient Egyptian so-called cliff tombs of the early 18th Dynasty at Western Thebes, located in remote places in the valleys of the desert mountains, high up in precipitous cliffs or close to the cliffs' sole. It investigates (1) the placement of these structures and potential spatial patterns; (2) their rock-cut designs and possible architectural concepts and developments, and (3) the preserved archaeological evidence from the tombs' construction and/or subsequent uses, with a particular interest in the identity of their intended primary users, apparently only kings and other high-ranking individuals of royal descent. In a fourth track, the PhD candidate explores the potential of graffiti and dipinti left by scribes and other personnel related to the administration of the necropolis at the end of the New Kingdom and the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period on cliff rock faces as implicit archaeological markers of hidden royal tombs.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

The candidate's endeavour to present a comprehensive study on the topic chosen, based on the published evidence and discussions as well as on his own surveys in the necropolis during the years 2011-2015 and 2017-2019 (information gained by reading through the thesis) has been realized in so far as the thesis comprises all the tombs usually considered cliff tombs in our field, with some potential additional candidates (possible openings of shafts) identified by the author, still awaiting excavation (his numbers WN B, VP Nos. 1 and 2, and WV No. 1). The thesis discusses the tombs, their geological environment as well as their known and/or alleged owner(s) in greater detail; its level of novelty, however, appears rather limited when compared with previous studies. The author quite often fails making clear which information is based on his own research and ideas and which has been adapted from the existing publications. This concerns, in particular, the cliff tombs located in the Kings' Valley and in the Deir el-Bahari region as they have not stopped raising debates among archaeologists and experts in New Kingdom royal tomb architecture. The thesis also misses a number of relevant publications on the subject. A third point concerns the scope of the study. Although the author emphasizes the relevance of Middle Kingdom funerary culture as a point of reference for the founders of the 18th Dynasty, he eschews any attempt of analysing possible ideological concepts and pragmatic issues related to the placement and the design of the New Kingdom cliff tombs in the light of earlier royal tomb architecture. Cliff crevices facilitating water cascades during strong rainfall events are identified as important landscape feature for the placement of hidden tombs. A more comprehensive approach would therefore have been valuable regarding the lithostratigraphy, hydrology,

rock falls and other types of landslides, and – also related to the latter – the changing geomorphology of the investigated mountain valleys over time. Given that the candidate has been engaged in an archaeological-epigraphical project for years (the Italian Butehamun-Kay Project), certain flaws in his transliterations and translations of the graffiti come as a surprise. To conclude, I would like to point out the lack of a methodological approach in the introductory part is as another conceptual weakness. Overall, the presented thesis does not appear as a well-conceived and accomplished scholarly work, but shows aspects of an intermediary stage.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

The individual case studies (in Sections I-III) follow a consistent pattern, but discussion parts are confusing when they alternate observations and hypotheses made by the author with those drawn from publications. One misses a clear presentation of former research results and opinions separated from the author's own gained insights and reflexions (as, for instance, done by Willockx 2010, 2011a-b) to make his personal contribution to the research subject more comprehensible.

It is not easily understandable in which way the author's elaboration on „The tomb in the Theban Necropolis in its conceptual formulation as sacred space“ in the Introduction is later applied in his interpretation of the studied funerary monuments, most of which do not provide any textual or representational evidence. It seems as if the author has stringed together excerpts and statements of various works on mortuary religion, see for instance:

„The tomb is no longer a private structure but part of a collective funeral complex representing the royalty on Earth and hereafter. The figure of Osiris is particularly vivified at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty by Amenhotep I in Thebes in the Valley of the Kings and becomes part of the country's social, economic, and political structure. Each tomb can be considered an essential 'piece' of the Necropolis, as well as more generally, according to Beinlich (1984), the Nomoi 'districts' symbolically are the disiecta limbs of the body of Osiris reinstated during the rites of embalming in the month of Choiak.“ (p. 9)

Apart from the mentioned subsection, the Introduction lacks a conceptual approach nor does it provide a methodological part, which explains how the archaeological information and data have been retrieved (from publications, during surveys), which technologies were applied (how were the elevated cliff tombs accessed, photos and measurements taken, use of geoelectric tomography), and the criteria used to reevaluate the assembled material.

2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

The graphically well-formatted dissertation is mainly written in a fluent scholarly English, but occasionally contains some sentences or passages that show syntactical flaws or are not clearly formulated. The acronym of the University of Basel Kings' Valley Project is not correct

in some captions. Concerning the numbering of the tombs adopted in the thesis, it would have been advantageous to use the system developed by the Theban Mapping Project.

3. *Use of sources and/or material*

It is surprising that a number of relevant publications, some of a recent date, have not been integrated into the thesis (Litherland, *The Western Wadis*, 2014; Id., EA 63 on tomb Wadi C-4; Bickel's, Bunbury's or Dorn's contributions to the *Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings*; Lukovic et al., *Natural Hazards* 110, 2021; Casini, *EVO* 40, 2017; Bickel, BSFE 197, 2017; Rühli, Ikram, Bickel, *BioMed Research International* 2015; Eaton-Krauss, GM 234, 2012; ...). It can also be noticed that in the thesis similar results or conclusions published by colleagues are not always referred to by name/in a bibliographical note; in other cases, publications are quoted with incorrect page numbers. Moreover, quite a number of illustrations and maps are only referenced as "drawing web", without any further indications of the digital source. It is also not comprehensible why in certain cases, the author reproduces his own schematic or older plans instead of using an (authorized) copy of the more recent high-quality tomb plans and sections published on the website of the Theban Mapping Project. A lack of scholarly thoroughness can be observed throughout the thesis.

In addition to the maps borrowed from the CEDAE *Collection Scientifique* and the Theban Mapping Project, those created by the author from the environment of the tomb sites showing the spots of graffiti/dipinti are very useful, also to understand the topography of the natural landscape chosen for the placement of a tomb. Photos of the tombs' larger environment are not always provided; they are included in the discussions of the paths passing by near tomb locations (often only small-scale) or in the paragraphs on the geology of the valley regions.

The thesis comprises a map of the western Theban mountains and valleys (Fig. I.1) in the introduction of Section I, then again at the beginning of Section III (Fig. III.1); in this case, the areas of Section II and Section III are marked. One misses, however, a general map showing the locations of all the tombs studied in the thesis presented in the Introduction.

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

The most obvious result achieved by the author is his observation of alterations of cliff rock faces near tomb locations: reshaped natural niches above the access area in the crevice and irregularly shaped artificial recesses of the rock at the base of the cliff, the latter interpreted as intended geometrical features expressing an ideological concept (false door, Section I.1.1). These recesses have, however, already been noticed and published by the New Kingdom Research Foundation (NKRF). According to the interpretation of the Egyptian-British mission, the rock at the base of the cliff has been undercut to prevent any attempts to climb up to the tomb after the interment. The team also observed the partly removal of accumulations of rock material (conglomerate, from ancient rock material and sediments washed down the cliff) in front of the rock face, apparently after these had been used for easier access by the tomb builders (Litherland 2014, not included in the thesis). The thesis lacks a discussion of these observations and hypotheses.

Although the relevance of the large royal funerary complexes dating to the Middle Kingdom (Valley of the Colours, Deir el-Bahari) is emphasized (pp. 82-85), the thesis does not include kings' and queens' tombs of the same period into the analyses of early 18th Dynasty royal tombs.

Besides providing a preliminary documentation of those structures that have only been briefly reported or not investigated by modern archaeologists (Section II.1-3, 5 and III.3), the author includes plans and sections of the undecorated tombs excavated by the University of Basel KV Project as well as of tombs in the Queens' Valley to refine his typological analyses. With his suggestion to locate the tomb of Amenhotep I in the Wadi en-Nisir or identify it even with WN A (Section II.1), he adds a new perspective to the discussion on the original funerary site of this king. Otherwise, his analyses and conclusions are often close to those detailed by Aston (2015) and Willockx (2010, 2011a-b). It should also be mentioned that some overlaps with Willockx' published work have apparently been overlooked.

IV. Questions for the author

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V. Conclusion

In its present form, I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *failed*.

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Audrea Loprieno-Geritz