

External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Věra Nováková

“Complexity of Ancient Egyptian Society during the First to Sixth Dynasty Based on Written Sources – The case of Egyptian households”

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I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The dissertation employed an interdisciplinary approach that evaluated primary sources (text and iconography) from mortuary contexts in the first six dynasties to establish the identified extended household of various males from different social classes, beyond kin, who were included in the tomb complex by the owner to ensure the named dependents also participated in the afterlife. This work utilises a relatively new innovative framework that incorporates the social and economic structure of the state, patronage relationships, which contrasts with more centralised state studies of ancient Egypt. However, the analysis of burial goods in the Early Dynastic period, while well explained is problematic due to the methodology and title stipulating analysis by textual inscriptions.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

This extensive dissertation, spanning eleven chapters, with the final chapter serving as an excursus, adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyse primary sources (text and iconography) from mortuary contexts in the first six dynasties. The aim is to establish the extended households of various social classes. The work introduces an innovative framework that incorporates the social and economic structure of the state and patronage relationships, departing from the more centralised state studies of ancient Egypt. The theoretical background is well explained within the context of the thesis's framework. It is well supported by secondary sources, anchoring the hypothesis within the current theoretical examinations of ancient Egypt.

The focus shifts from the well-known elites and their families to the dependents included in the tomb by the owner to ensure their participation in the afterlife. The dissertation structure was well executed and remained consistent throughout, supported by necessary figures and tables summarizing the households of each examined individual. Notably, the author's analysis includes the correlation of changes identified in the increasing and decreasing of households with the changing political environment of the Old Kingdom, demonstrating the dissertation's relevance to broader historical trends. While the introduction to the section analysing burial goods in the Early Dynastic period is well outlined, an issue arises as the methodology and title suggest that the thesis analysis was based on textual inscriptions. Numerous

technical issues, as noted below, detracted from the rigour of the thesis.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

The structure and methodology were very good and remained consistent throughout the thesis, except for the Early Dynastic Period evidence (discussed below). The explanation of the theoretical framework providing the background to the study was well explained and supported. The research included a very good selection of primary sources for both the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom. The analysis of the inscriptions and iconography remained consistent, allowing the opportunity for commentary on comparisons and contrasts throughout the dissertation. The author was successfully in achieving her objective to document the extended households of those examined, within the changing social and political landscape. The hypothesis was successfully argued.

Formal aspects of the dissertation

While I acknowledge English is not the author's first language, a great deal of work on the language, sentence expression, and paragraph structuring will be required if the thesis is to be published. There are many paragraphs that are longer than one page and several instances when the meaning of a sentence was incomprehensible (i.e., page 70: "Generally speaking, the evidence from the tomb of Hetepi (Bárta, Coppens, Vymazalová et al. 2010) belonged to first swallows foreshadowing the further development of the tomb decoration).

In addition, there were many technical issues noted. For example, inconsistency in transliterations/translations of names and titles, i.e. Senedjemib Inti / Senedjemib Inty, Ty / Ti, xnty(w)-S / xnti(w)-S. Regular inconsistencies in the formatting of in-text citations, i.e., sometimes written alphabetically, chronologically newest to oldest, and at other times oldest to newest. The different formats can be seen, for example, (Bestock 2009; Reisner 1936; Wilkinson 1999) on page 36, while on page 88 two different formats on the same page: Chronological (Helck 1954; Moreno Garcia 2013: 185–217; Bárta 2017: 1–17). Alphabetical (with error) (Bárta 2013: 85–151; Baer 1960: 300; Helck 1954: 58; Strudwick 1985: 321). Details of footnote 210 is missing. The footnote shows in the text but there is no corresponding footnote at the bottom of the page.

They are many inconsistencies noted in the formatting of the bibliography, missing references quoted in the text not in the bibliography, for examples see page 106: (Nováková and Dulková forthcoming), and page 143: (Abdou 2001). At other times incorrect dates of publication (i.e., Kanawati and Swinton in-text 2020 while

bibliography states 2018), or, as noted on page 192 missing citation when quoting Kanawati. On page 44 the final paragraph has inconsistent font colour. The captions need to be in the same location, above or below the image, consistently. At times the caption is not on the same page as the figure. A critical proofreading of the thesis before submission may have avoided many of these errors. A particular problem was noted in the description of Ankhmahor's tomb description, pages 177-78, where information finalising a sentence ... between which other tomb, and vital measurements and description are missing.

2. *Use of sources and/or material*

The Early Dynastic Section

As a researcher who started their career in the Early Dynastic Period, I appreciate the author's attempt to include this period in the thesis. However, the methodology and title denote that it is being examined "based on written sources". The author clearly defines the issue in achieving that methodology for this period and proceeds to evaluate Emery's incorrect translation of artists interred in the Saqqara burial based on their burial goods. This is well argued with evidence, then expands the investigation to other elite burials with subsidiary graves from different locations. I applaud the author's conclusion that the burial goods rarely could be associated with the occupation of the deceased. However, the author could have focused on the royal retainers (excursus) utilising the same methodology of textual inscriptions as the Old Kingdom, but to the different royal households of the kings and queen buried in the royal necropolis. In this way a consistent methodology would have been applied to all periods considered in the study that could provide new insights into the period.

In the excursus of the royal retainers, there were several data issues, particularly with the author's determination of gender and knowledge of the Early Dynastic titles. The author's identification of a female xnrt - stela 200 (page 61) belonged to a male that Martin translated correctly as a baker. There is no record of this title in the Early Dynastic, and it is problematic to apply retrospective applications of title meanings, as the author did with Bělohoubková New Kingdom evidence to Early Dynastic titles in this instance. Instead, possibly see Guegen's 2022 work on the Old Kingdom xnrwt.

Several titles that the author associated to males on page 62 are queen's titles (see Callender 1992, 2011) and the important female zxnw(t) iAx workforce (Kelly 2019) was overlooked. Due to insufficient independent research on the titles, the author missed a female sealer of the Hw.t (stela 282) and weaver (stela 189) and associated

a title to a 'priestess of Seshat' on page 60 that cannot be confirmed as this stela has no determinative, and thus, no way to determine gender. The author appears to apply outdated binary dichotomies to the evidence. For example, the suggestion that females without titles possibly occupied roles of "musical or dance performers, maidservants or nurses" applies anachronistic interpretations that have no basis. Moreover, disregards the vital queen-Meretneith-when discussing the non-royal stelae similarity to royal stelae "that were delimited by a pair of stelae displaying the king's [or queen's] name (Petrie 1900: 6)".

At times, the literature chosen for the Early Dynastic secondary sources required a broader scope of specialist researching in this period that would have improved this section. For example—on page 55—not only Bárta 2011, who is not known as an Early Dynastic specialist, but possibly Bryan 1982, Köhler 2008, La Loggia 2012, 2015, Engel 2013, Kelly 2016, 2019. In addition, the author's complete acceptance of sacrificed humans for the retainer burials (page 56ff.), based on Campbell's study, is problematic. There is far from a consensus on this issue. The thesis would have benefited for including a more balanced discussion on this phenomenon before declaring it as a definitive fact. For different viewpoints see: La Loggia 2012, Kelly 2016, 32-36. Regarding this issue, the author did not consider or explain that some of the women buried in the Abydene necropolis were early Queens of Egypt. Thus, based on the author's acceptance, these queens were sacrificed. Neither was there a required discussion on how the practice of the so-called royal right to take sacrificed retainers with them in the burial was granted to high elite officials (page 57).

Throughout this chapter, additional Early Dynastic secondary sources could have evidenced greater depth of knowledge and context on some of the subjects raised. For example, on page 41, when discussing the significance of the cow horns and boats found with the burials, the author could have utilised secondary sources, such as, Emery 1954: 7 finds of bulls' heads, modelled in clay with real horns, illustrated on Plates VI, VII; *Boat Symbolism in Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt: an Archaeological approach* by Vanhulle, to correlate the significance of the finds. Similarly, the discussion of animal burials on page 52 could have been extended to situate the topic by referring to the animal burials from Hierakonpolis: Van Neer, W., Linseele, V. and Friedman, R., 2017. More animal burials from the Predynastic elite cemetery of Hierakonpolis (Upper Egypt): The 2008 season. *Archaeozoology of the Near East; Mashkour, M., Beech, M., Eds*, pp.388-403.

Although several issues impacted the quality of the interpretation of the primary source material for this period, particularly for the royal retainers, it did not affect

the overall outcome of the analysis of the elite households that was the objective of the dissertation.

The Old Kingdom Section:

The author's analysis of the individual households was extensive and included comparisons and contrasts between the different social classes, incorporating temporal and spatial analysis. The engagement with Old Kingdom secondary sources was extensive but not comprehensive. It would have benefited to review some of the more recent scholarship in some areas, leading to some missed opportunities. For example, pages 363-5 mention the title *mitrt*; the author accepted the outdated translation 'lady, concubine' without researching the title (see Callender 2023), which provides a functional capacity to the title. Moreover, this recorded title should have been listed in the table of dependents for Wehemka.

The tables of the different households were mainly accurate and comprehensive; however, some errors were noted. For example, in the analysis of Khufukhaef I and, subsequently, the recorded household in Tab. 3, 'the treasures who brought the treasure' (see your Fig. 7) were not identified in the research. Also missing from Rahetep's household, Tab. 57, page 379, was the representation of the female Hm.t-kA, only listing the male transliteration although the author noted in the previous paragraph that they were equally represented.

Another notable concern was that the author could have provided, at times, a complete in-text citation for quoted work. For example, on page 166, in discussing the decoration of Mereruka's tomb, only one author's work is cited, instead of including earlier scholars' work, such as Duell's 1938.

Language, grammar, and typing errors affected the reading of this dissertation, especially at specific points. For example, contradictory statements:

- "When speaking about the pr-Dt, it is necessary to scrutinise another large group of dependents key for guaranteeing Pepiankh's cult – in particular priests. Altogether 17 individuals are recorded in the wall decoration represented mainly by kA-priests (7 individuals) and Hm-nTr priests (5 individuals). In both cases we encounter almost exclusively inspectors of priests, no ordinary kA-priests" page 210
- Page 275 "... almost 50 individuals, precisely 46 ...".

A discussion is missing on how the author determined how and when the title director of the dining hall was related to the mortuary role differently than for the official when alive, i.e., for the living or deceased patron. For example, on page 93: "Individuals who took care specifically of the food supply and beverages for the

household are also displayed, it was xrp zH “director of the dining hall”; page 95 “Persons involved in running the household ... director of the dining room”; page 108 “household servants”. Then on page 402: “hierarchy of the persons in charge of the funerary cult enumerate not only kA-priests of different hierarchy from inspectors, under-supervisors to ordinary priests but also “scribes of phyles” and **“directors of the dining hall” involved in the cult.**” While this title does cover both interpretations, especially for the large number of late Old Kingdom funerary priests who held the same title and whose duties included supervising the food supply for the official in both the house and tomb (Bárta 2011: 256–57), the determination should have been supported with an explanation.

Moreover, with multitudes of attestations throughout the dissertation, this title received various wording for the same title throughout. For example (many examples but not comprehensive):

- “director of the dining room” pages: 144/145/146/149/188/245/250
- “director of the dining-hall” pages 131/152/183/184/188/195/206/235/237/247/Tab. 30 & 31/280/286
- “director of the food-hall” 147/185 Tab. 18/21a/23

At times, even in the same paragraph as seen on page 188.

This inconsistency carried over into which category the title was categorised to in individual household tables. Primarily, it was classified as “household management”: Tables. 14/18/21A/23/24/29/30/31/37, at other times “food supply”: Food supply Tables. 12/19. The disparity in the title’s wording may reflect the different primary sources’ interpretation by the excavators instead of a standardised or the author’s interpretation.

The lack of standardisation could have been avoided by using Jones’ Index of titles that covers the period under investigation to reference each of the titles covered in the dissertation. Although most translations are included in “quote marks”, a citation is rarely offered, ie., Page 80: ‘At the head of the register stands an official with the title imy-rA DADAt “the Steward of the tribunal” who is followed by three scribes mentioned by their names Kaimeni, Kainebi and Khaa (see Fig. 7)’. Standardising the titles with Jones’ Index would have avoided errors such as, Page 182: imy-rA sna without the pr, for which there is no corresponding title in the Index and avoiding differentiation in the translation when on Page 380: imy-rA pr-sna is translated as overseer of the storehouse, instead of overseer of the storehouse/labour establishment/department of stores as per all the other instances.

3. *Personal contribution to the subject*

Most of the dependents of the households examined in the dissertation have been

known from primary excavation reports for a long time. However, the author's original contribution to the field is twofold. First, the inscription evaluation within an innovative theoretical framework based on the extended household provides a comparative analysis of the houses of various officials from different levels of social classes. These officials include those from the highest position of vizier to private individuals not necessarily associated with the central state administration apparatus. Secondly, unlike other title studies, this study focuses not on the officials who own the tombs but, on their colleagues, subordinates, and trusted, qualified associates. This shift in focus sheds light on these often less well-known people. The discussions and conclusions incorporate comparison and contrast between the different social classes across time and space. At times, cross references to other individuals examined in the thesis, found in other officials' tombs, drew significant correlations between the social and economic network. The discussions and conclusions offer insights into social complexity and political changes during the studied period, contributing to our understanding of the role of patrons and greater awareness of the socioeconomic structure of Pyramid Age Egypt.

IV. Questions for the author

- 1) What process did you follow regarding the interpretation of the titles, especially the Early Dynastic corpus discussed in the royal retainer's excursus? Did you undertake your own personal evaluation or relied upon previous scholars' interpretations?
- 2) Your identification that Ptahshepses employed 14 individuals employed in the body care sector, which aligns with his earlier career as a royal hairdresser, is extremely interesting and offers insight into the personality of the tomb owner. Although discussed in the relevant chapter, this finding was not discussed in your final conclusions. The individuality of the choice of the household is an interesting aspect. Did you consider developing this dialogue? It appears that the extended household consisted of not just what the tomb owner perceived he needed for a successful afterlife, but possibly those he wished to share his time with beyond his nuclear family!
- 3) I found your discussion of secondary titles in the tombs extremely interesting, one example, again for Ptahshepses discussed on pages 103-4. Was there a particular reason this phenomenon was not discussed in more detail in the conclusion? It is under their agency and not the patron's that

these additional inscriptions were added. Possibly, great article opportunity.

V. Conclusion

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as passed.

19/08/204

Susan Kelly