

Lacher-Raschdorff, Claudia M.: 2014 *Das Grab des Königs Ninetjer in Saqqara. Architektonische Entwicklung frühzeitlicher Grabanlagen in Ägypten*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 295 pp., 14 large loose plans, 44 plates, 74 figures [Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 125].

Book review by Jaromír Krejčí

The Second Dynasty is one of the least documented and the least clear parts of ancient Egyptian history. It is the period of experimentation, when the basic principles of the pharaonic state were still fluid. This is demonstrated not only in the matter of the succession of kings (cf. Wilkinson 1996 and 1999) but also in the form of their tombs. The material culture connected with this period, even though it belongs mainly to the reigning elite, is not very well documented. One of the reasons for these circumstances is the complex situation at Saqqara, which became a place of the last repose of the Egyptian kings for a substantial part of the Second Dynasty. The tombs of these kings were substantially destroyed by later monuments. This why the discussed monograph is so important.

The author of the book, architect Claudia Lacher-Raschdorff, defended her Ph.D. thesis with the same title at the *Technische Universität* in Berlin in 2012. Her monograph presents the results of a thorough archaeological and architectural study of what remains of the Saqqara tomb of the third king of the Second Dynasty, Ninetjer. Moreover, the book also represents the first detailed publication on the architecture of an Early Dynastic royal tomb. The archaeological work in the area of the monument was led by Günter Dreyer from the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo*, and by the present volume's author from 2003 to 2010. The monograph describes architectural and construction features of the tomb and its position within the development of ancient Egyptian architecture.

In the first chapter of the book (pp. 33–45), Lacher-Raschdorff describes not only the aims of the research of the tomb but also the methodology used in the fieldwork and in the subsequent analyses. These two sub-chapters are followed by a brief resume of known information on Ninetjer and a commented summary of the history of the monument's research. It started with the excavation carried out by Selim Hassan in 1938, followed by the work done by Peter Munro in the 1980s and 1990s (Munro 1993). The second chapter (pp. 47–52) is concerned with the morphology and spatial distribution of the archaeological monuments and the history of Saqqara as an archaeological site, with special attention paid to the Second Dynasty period.

The following seven chapters are devoted to the Ninetjer's tomb itself. The third chapter (pp. 53–68) offers a description of the king's tomb complex consisting of a very poorly preserved superstructure and a north-south oriented rock-cut substructure comprising 192 spaces. It consists of tunnels, passages and rooms which Lacher-Raschdorff divides into four (and, more specifically, eleven) major parts and described them in a thorough and detailed manner. An interesting fact is that the subterranean part of

the tomb is smaller (ca. 77 × 50.5 m) in comparison with earlier royal tombs of this dynasty.

The fourth chapter (pp. 69–77) discusses the construction methods applied during the building of the tomb. A major and challenging issue, as the author states, is the changing quality of the rock in which the substructure of the tomb was cut out. This caused errors in the hewing out of the corridors. Mud bricks were used on a smaller scale in the tomb, and this type of masonry is also described in detail. In this context, it should be mentioned that the author apparently did not consult one of the most important accounts concerning ancient Egyptian mud brick architecture published by Alan Jeffrey Spencer (1979).

Lacher-Raschdorff dedicates chapter five (pp. 79–86) to the description of the construction phases of the tomb, distinguishing three building stages that can be traced, albeit some of them with a degree of uncertainty. The ambiguity of detail in this respect is due to the poor preservation of the tomb.

The tomb inventory is discussed in the volume's sixth chapter (pp. 87–93). Besides the architecture of the tomb, it represents an important addition to our knowledge of material culture of the period's courtly elite and one of the most significant results of the archaeological work in Ninetjer's tomb. The items were found mainly in the northern section of the rock-cut part of the tomb, a fact that is accentuated by Lacher-Raschdorff herself. She explains it by the complex history of re-usage of the underground part of the tomb's substructure during later epochs of Egyptian history as well as with by supposed shifts in the importance of the tomb's spaces towards *false* architecture (see below). The inventory consists of pottery, mud stoppers, stone vessels, stone implements and other types of finds. Interesting finds include a fragment of a wooden post possibly coming from a kind of canopy similar to that found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres (another possibility is that it represents a part of a tent support) or the find of a collection of baskets. The tomb inventory is to

be discussed in more detail in the planned second volume of the monograph.

The re-usage of the area of Ninetjer's tomb – mainly represented by secondary burials – is an extremely complicated issue discussed in chapter seven (pp. 95–102). The author was able to distinguish several stages covering a long period stretching from the Old Kingdom through the Middle and New Kingdoms and the Third Intermediate Period to the Late Period. It is apparent that the original superstructure started to be demolished as early as the latter half of the Old Kingdom, in connection with construction of Unas's causeway, the mastabas of Akhethotep/Nebkaur Idu and Nyankhba, and other monuments. As was the case with many other Egyptian sites, secondary burying was intense in the area of the tomb. It is documented by numerous secondary burial shafts dated to the New Kingdom and especially the Late Period, which penetrated the tomb's underground corridor system.

Lacher-Raschdorff is an architect and building historian with an extensive knowledge of practical issues concerning the construction of historical monuments. She is thus the right person capable of dealing with the complex issues of the planning and directing of the cutting out of subterranean spaces and corridors in the rock. In the eighth chapter of her volume (pp. 103–135), the author thus discusses not only surveying and logistics of the construction works but also ways the workers might have oriented themselves while hewing out subterranean spaces. Lacher-Raschdorff connects it with hemispherical indentations and bulges that have been detected scattered on the rock walls of the substructure's spaces, explaining the bulges as measuring aids or billing markers. She also examines other attestations of this practice. In the following discussion, she tries to recreate the approximate duration of the work, taking into account various written sources dated mainly to the New Kingdom (lists of tomb measurements, plans, documents concerning the progress of the work) and also data from other Mediterranean sites with conditions similar to the construction of the tomb (Samos or Bologna, the sixth century BC and the first century AD). The author concludes this discussion with an assumption based on her calculations that the tomb (including the superstructure) was built in about ten years. Unfortunately, these extrapolations remain speculative, as they take into consideration primarily much later textual (and other) sources.

The core of the volume's discussion certainly lies in the ninth chapter (pp. 137–152) devoted to the analysis of the subterranean part of the tomb. While earlier published accounts connect early Egyptian mortuary architecture with the idea of the tomb as an image of the house of the deceased, the author proposes an even more complex notion of Ninetjer's burial premises. In her view, the substructure of Ninetjer's tomb was entirely constructed as pseudo-architecture. In this way, she recognizes four major parts – magazines, a model residence, a model palace and model cult places in the subterranean complex corridor system. This conclusion is a key to her understanding of the architecture of the whole complex.

Another major issue – the question of the appearance of the tomb complex's superstructure – is discussed in

the tenth chapter (pp. 153–197). Due to the very turbulent history of the monument's secondary usage, no major discovery concerning the appearance of the tomb's superstructures was made during the archaeological excavation, and only faint remains of the substructure's masonry have been preserved. The author proposes five different reconstruction options based on a meticulously made study of five groups of monuments or individual structures: First Dynasty royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab, elite non-royal tombs in Saqqara, the Southern Tomb in Netjerykhet's pyramid complex, non-royal tombs of the early Fourth Dynasty and the mastaba of King Shepseskaf in South Saqqara, giving rise to five proposal schemes. Lacher-Raschdorff believes that the proposal connected with Netjerykhet's Southern Tomb and the Mastaba Faraun are more probable, mainly because of their functional and religious setting.

This discussion continues in the eleventh chapter (pp. 199–227), which is dedicated to the sequential analysis of the development of tomb architecture from the First to the Third Dynasties, relating not only to the rulers of Egypt but also to persons of non-royal origin. Both royal and non-royal necropoleis (Abydos, Saqqara, Zawiet el-Aryan, Helwan, Tarkhan, Giza, Abu Rawash, Lake of Abusir, Abu Ghurab, Naqada, Mahasna, Beit Khallaf and other sites) are presented in a brilliant outline not only textually but also in the form of plans, visually appealing and clearly comprehensible. The author presents and discusses previously published literature (*cf.*, for example, Stadelman 1991 and Jánosi 2006), but tries to reinterpret the topic in a new way and redate some mortuary monuments of the period. Lacher-Raschdorff discusses the entire Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods with an emphasis on the mortuary architecture of the Second Dynasty. She shows that there was a significant leap forward in the innovation of these royal tombs contrasting with the First Dynasty royal monuments in Umm el-Qaab. The tombs no longer consist of burial pits covered by tumuli but are hewn in the rock. The tomb complex of Ninetjer represents the culmination of the process of the development of a royal tomb from a model house to a model residence with model cult places. Another interesting break occurred in the late Second Dynasty: as the kings returned to Abydos, the layout of the royal tombs reverted back to the First Dynasty type. The volume's author believes that this was not only because of the development of the ideology of kingship but also due to practical reasons such as the quality of subsoil.

Chapter twelve (pp. 229–249) presents further results of the analysis of mortuary architecture development in the above-mentioned period. In the author's opinion, the Second Dynasty showed a tendency to create interior types of false architecture. Lacher-Raschdorff does not answer the question why the advanced concept of pseudo-architecture of Ninetjer's complex was not pursued further. Nevertheless, it is well known that a rather extensive underground corridor and room system in the substructure of Netjerykhet's monument tomb seems to document that this idea did not vanish altogether.

Analogically to some later periods, the author discusses the interaction between royal and private mortuary

architecture, finding a rather strong parallelism in their development until the middle of the First Dynasty. The author perceives the first major break in this parallelism in the architecture of Adjib's tomb. The king's north-south oriented burial chamber is in contradiction with the east-west orientation of earlier royal burial chambers. Lacher-Raschdorff interprets this change as a weakening of the royal office. This hypothesis, based mainly on the architectural analysis is stimulating but not supported by other types of sources, especially by written data. Attention is also paid to the development of "anti-theft systems" from the time of the Naqada I culture to the Third Dynasty.

The final, thirteenth chapter (pp. 251–254), is devoted to the discussion of the transformation of ideas connected with the other world and the mortuary cult practices. The predominant focus on the architecture and the idea of the grave as a dwelling place for the dead created by Alexander Scharff (1947) are again in the core of the author's argumentation. Lacher-Raschdorff postulates the most important steps in the tomb development from early simple pit graves to the monumental complexes of the Third Dynasty. She emphasizes this-world orientation of early graves. It was not until Netjerykhet's reign, according to the author, that the astral aspect was expressed in the architecture of the tomb superstructure. In her opinion, the character of the burial equipment of these tombs shows a strong connection between the tombs and their concept as dwellings for the dead kings. This is documented by the royal tombs in Umm el-Qaab, however (together with *Talbezirken*) their orientation towards the nearby wadi, which was supposed to be the entrance to the afterlife (O'Connor 2009), had a pivotal role. It means that already at that time, the king no longer lived his eternal life in the tomb, but the tomb represented a kind of gate to the other world.

The final chapter of the book is followed by two appendices (pp. 255–273) with a tabular list of the working hours needed for the construction of the individual spaces of the tomb following the author's calculations and the construction schedule.

The volume extensively discusses the period mortuary architecture and shows that architecture can be used as an important source in the interpretation of the development of early epochs of ancient Egyptian society. On the other hand, it also shows the limits of such approach, within which this type of analysis is used as a major source for discussions and the ensuing hypotheses. The developments in ancient Egyptian society need to be discussed in a multifocal manner incorporating not only an architectural analysis but also the examination of archaeological finds, historical records and overall cultural changes of the country.

Despite some criticism, Claudia Lacher-Raschdorff has created a very important account on Ninetjer's tomb complex and the mortuary architecture in the long period

covering the Protodynastic and Early Dynastic Periods as well as the early Third Dynasty. The style of the work is sober, and it provides an excellent overview of the matter discussed. Being an architect, the author's very detailed building descriptions form the very heart of the volume. She also tries to answer very significant questions concerning the practical side of the construction of an Early Dynastic tomb complex. The pictorial part of the book is important, particularly the fourteen excellent large plans not only depicting Ninetjer's tomb but also illustrating the overall development of the mortuary architecture of the period. This makes them a very descriptive and, in a way, independent part of the monograph with an essential information value in themselves. In an effort to look at the matter in a fresh way, Lacher-Raschdorff has created a methodologically instructive volume. I believe that the discussed monograph should become a part of the library of every institution dealing with Egyptology or focused on the development of ancient Egyptian architecture.

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