

Report on Hana Navrátilová, *Egyptian historical thought: the visitors' graffiti of the New Kingdom at Saqqara and Abusir as a case study*, dissertation submitted for the doctorate at Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, Czech Institute of Egyptology, May 2006

1 *General; overall recommendation*

This dissertation is constructed as a progressive approach to detailed textual evidence for Egyptian historical thought or uses of the past – both terms are used and both might apply to the material – in the New Kingdom. The first chapter ('The "shadow of the past"') deals with approaches to the theme in general, cross-cultural historiography, and theory of history, while including a little Egyptological material. The second chapter ('The uses of the past') addresses comparable themes through a survey of some what has been written in its area in Egyptology, ending with general schemas deriving from theoretical work on history. The third chapter is a general survey of 'The elite uses of the past in the New Kingdom', using a few key passages in texts and posing some basic questions. As elsewhere in the thesis, almost no use is made of archaeological and art-historical sources. There follows a short 'Excursus: The schooling of scribes', after which the author turns to the main body of material treated, the visitors' graffiti of the Memphite area. These are introduced in the next three chapters and analysed in the chapters 'Evidence and context' and 'Interpretations'. The concluding chapter of synthesis is followed by a 'Catalogue of the visitors' graffiti', which is confined to Abusir and Saqqara. A certain number graffiti are illustrated with scans from the Griffith Institute archives. Tables of graffiti are provided for a rather larger range of sites than is treated in the catalogue and for some specific questions. The dissertation concludes with a bibliography and list of abbreviations.

The dissertation covers a significant, if relatively small body of material. It uses this to address the more general issue of uses of the past. While the theoretical overview of the first two chapters does not lead smoothly into the consideration of the corpus, the concluding chapters provide some useful ideas and a synthesis and show that the author has had some success in marrying the two aspects of what she does. The use of a broader perspective improves the dissertation, but one could have wished for greater depth in the analysis of the graffiti themselves.

As received, I understand that the dissertation is a draft intended for correction and defence in a slightly more polished version. My recommendation is that the dissertation proceed for defence after revision. In the next section I give both requirements for revision and points that would improve the text and are desirable but are not required. I estimate that a month's work should be sufficient to create a version of the dissertation for the defence that can take account of the requirements set out below. After the detailed recommendations, I review other aspects of the content (section 3). Only the points made in section 2a–b below are necessary for the defence; the less specific points under 2c are not formal requirements.

2 *Detailed recommendations and comments on format*

At present, the two most defective parts of the dissertation are the catalogue and the bibliography. I therefore start with recommendations for these.

a Catalogue

The author gives strong requirements for what would constitute a proper treatment of inscriptional texts on pp. 53–6 ('Epigraphy'), but in the catalogue she does not implement her guidelines even to the extent that would be practicable in the dissertation. The following should be done as a minimum:

All graffiti should be presented in their original hieratic, if available. Where this is done from accessible archival sources, the scans should be large enough to be legible; at present, in a

number of instances this is not the case (e.g. pp. 233, 235 [note that two pages are numbered 234]). Some scans are placed within the text while others are in a section of plates at the end. All should be consistently in one or other location. Where possible, pairs of scans for a single graffito should be merged into one image.

There must be a hieroglyphic transcription of all graffiti, followed by a transliteration, as well as a translation into English of all texts for which some coherent context is present. At present, there is some confusion between the author's translations and those by others that she reproduces (this applies also to the dissertation text, as against the catalogue). Sometimes the renderings are of slightly different versions of the graffiti, because of loss of material between one copy and the next etc. It will be best to translate the fullest possible text, indicating in notes to the translation where parts of them are taken from evidence that is no longer extant or from readings by particular scholars.

The transliterations contain many typing errors. They must be reviewed carefully. (The same point applies to citations of Egyptian texts in the body of the dissertation.) Some transliteration is inconsistent, for example initial *i* or *j*. Another instance is the table of material from Dahshur, where one finds the word for regnal year transliterated *rnpt ḥsbt* and *rnpt sp/ḥ3t sp*, whereas in the body of the dissertation it is read *ḥ3t sp*. A single reading of this group should be used. Some words are wrongly transliterated, such as *r^c*, which is quite often written where the context requires *hrw* 'day'.

At present the information given about archaeological context is rather minimal. With loose blocks, little more may be available, but for inscriptions that were discovered in situ, the precise location should be given, to include position along a wall if the information can be found. If possible, a plan of the area should be included; this can be a simple outline and will take up little space; several graffiti may also be placed on a single plan. The height above ground at which a graffito is located is also important as evidence for the state of the ancient building at the time. This information is nowhere given; if it is not available for any of the graffiti so that it would not be meaningful to mention the point, the author should say somewhere that this is the case. My memory, however, is that some graffiti in the Djoser complex at Saqqara are accessible in situ, so that something relevant could be said. For the defence, the author should review what is said about the archaeological context of each graffito and supplement it as far as possible.

Personal names. At present, references are given to Ranke, but this is now very out of date. It is difficult to gather more recent discussions, but some attempt at filling out the information is desirable; the author should at least indicate that Ranke is only a rough-and-ready source.

Bibliography for each graffito should give the precise pages on which they are published (where applicable). General publications that mention the findspot but do not treat the particular graffito should be excluded; this will eliminate significant numbers of references. The author may wish to add a paragraph site by site that gives the generally relevant bibliography; this could come before the treatment of the individual graffiti.

At present, each catalogue entry has separate pages. This is unnecessary, and many pages would be saved if they were run continuous.

The catalogue uses a highly elaborate numbering scheme that makes it difficult to move between it and the text. This is especially awkward because the catalogue covers only some of the sites treated. I suggest that at the beginning of the catalogue the author add a list of the graffiti treated with the pages on which the relevant entries occur.

b Bibliography

The bibliography is not done according to an identifiable house style. The author should apply a house style rigorously, so that features such as capitalization, use of quotation marks around article and chapter titles, amount of information given about each item, punctuation, etc., are made consistent. This point applies both to the list on pp. 338–52 and to citations in the footnotes throughout the dissertation.

It is not for someone outside the candidate's institution to identify the house style that should be adopted. Instead I give the following as minimum requirements for all entries in

footnotes and bibliography: Author's name with initials; date; exact title of contribution (whether article, chapter, or book etc.); names of any editors given on a book's title page; place (best given in English because at present several languages are used for the same place). The style of citation of page ranges should be consistent; I suggest that 'ff.' be replaced by precise page ranges. I recommend that series details be given for all publications that are in series; at present this is done only irregularly. Books should be cited by the date of their first edition unless a later printing is a genuine reworking. Authors' name forms must be consistent: on p. 60 the same author is named Möller in one footnote and Moeller in the next.

Word for word repetitions in the dissertation text must be eliminated. See next section.

c Other remarks on presentation

The balance of material between text and footnotes is often awkward. Significant points are made in the footnotes but not in the text. I would advise reducing the footnotes to the essential and so far as possible placing all material that is worth retaining in the text. Occasionally something worthwhile would interrupt the flow too much, but the author should then ask herself whether it would be better placed elsewhere; only if that is not the case are footnotes a suitable place for discussions.

There is a fair amount of repetition in the text. This should be eliminated as far as possible. An extreme example is where the same passage, word for word together with its footnotes, comes on pp. 106–7 and 121–2. There is also significant repetition on pp. 119–20. Where repetition occurs, it is a signal of a problem of organization: the author should seek to eliminate it and to bring all the relevant discussion together at the most appropriate point, wherever it may be.

As a whole, the dissertation contains too large a number of typing errors. I have marked some of the errors on the copy I was sent and shall return it so that they can be noted.

At times the coverage of secondary literature is less than it should be. Two references, on literacy and on uses of the past, that should be included in any discussion, are:

Janssen, J. J. 1992. 'Literacy and letters at Deir el-Medīna'. In Robert J. Demarée and Arno Egberts (eds), *Village voices: proceedings of the symposium "Texts from Deir el-Medīna and their interpretation"*, Leiden, May 31 – June 1, 1991, CNWS Publications 13 (Leiden: Centre of Non-Western Studies) 81–94.

McDowell, Andrea G. 1992. 'Awareness of the past in Deir el-Medīna'. Ibid. 95–109.

3 Broader points

The author takes the New Kingdom as the point of departure for developments in uses of the past and of 'history', and in so doing follows writers such as Jan Assmann without questioning whether this is a plausible position. Yet by the beginning of the period she treats, dynastic Egypt had a past of 1500 years with a written culture. Through that time kinglists and annals had been kept. Ancient monuments had been restored no later than the Middle Kingdom, while other forms of archaism are observable within the third millennium. It is therefore necessary to make a case for the appearance of new attitudes to the past in the New Kingdom, not simply to take it as given.

This difficulty relates to a general lack of regard for material culture in its artistic and archaeological aspects. Although the dissertation is focused on texts, it would have been wise to set them a little more against the broader cultural record, not least because such a large proportion of the labour that went into Egyptian high culture was expended on 'works of art'. By visiting monuments, the scribes who made the inscriptions were involving themselves with ancient material culture. In the case of the Step Pyramid, the monument seems not even to have borne the name Djoser, with whom they identified it, so that they must have been relating records and information existing elsewhere with the physical monument, not reading the identification in situ. Moreover, there exists a significant literature in general archaeology

on uses of the past; the author would have benefited from using it. In more recent history, certain monuments, notably ruined ones, have become heavily laden with graffiti through their cultural status, with the result that the graffiti are a positive feature of the environment rather than a defacement. A case in England is Kenilworth Castle, which was famous under Elizabeth I, becoming a ruin two generations later.

Another problem relates to the treatment of the texts themselves. The graffiti include examples that have fairly evident parallels in the 'stream of tradition'. Two obvious instances are: mentions of royal military campaigns, which owe much to standard royal inscriptions; and formulas among graffiti in the Step Pyramid complex that request offerings for the deceased king Djoser, which are strongly reminiscent of the tales of P Westcar. If these are taken together with the graffiti which disparages those placed there by other scribes (pp. 248–50 of the dissertation), the sense that a literate or lettered culture is being displayed and negotiated is strong. The author hardly exploits this promising evidence.

The author discusses at several points whether 'piety' is a good explanation for the phenomenon of the graffiti and is rightly critical of the approach of Dietrich Wildung. A difficulty, however, is that some of the literature is not cited specifically. While Jan Assmann has discussed these issues in many publications, a reference to what he says in at least one particular book and/or article must be given.

At many points the author says, perfectly correctly, that her results are preliminary and that the material is incomplete. This stricture, however, applies to all historical scholarship, and it should not be used as a reason for not attempting analyses unless the evidence is altogether insufficient in a particular case. In several places the author refers to work of her own that is closely relevant to the dissertation but is not included in it (e.g. p. 137 n. 571). Since the dissertation is not very long and one misses this material, it would have been better to include it in the text.

I end with some valuable points that I noted in the dissertation. The first is the division in character between 18th and 19th dynasty graffiti (e.g. p. 145). This observation parallels others that are made about the change between the two periods and it is valuable to have it brought out in this group of material. Second, the author addresses the important question of audience, notably on pp. 140, 161. It is necessary to ask this question, but it would be good also to consider that for the person who sets up an inscription like a graffiti, part of the purpose may be to leave something of himself in that spot rather than to think about who might read it: the action is almost 'performative'. Third, the discussion of motivations on pp. 160–1 is quite illuminating; these points could be related to ones like those made above in this report about a lettered culture. The graffiti have a cultural status that is very different from those which the word designating them tends to evoke in the modern world.

4 *Conclusion*

In conclusion, my recommendation for the dissertation of Hana Navrátilová is that the existing text be revised in accordance with the requirements explained in section 1 above and laid out in more detail in sections 2a–b. When those revisions have been made, in a process that should not occupy more than a month, a defence can be held. As an external assessor, I do not need to see the text again before the defence.



John Baines, 8 September 2006