

## **External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of**

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**“Miniature and model stone vessels of the Old Kingdom – From typology to social and political background”**

**(submitted in 2021 at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University).**

### **I. Brief summary of the dissertation**

The dissertation presents results of research on a specific archaeological material, namely the miniature and model stone vessels from the burials of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2700-2200 BCE) in ancient Egypt. Described and analysed are almost one hundred recorded assemblages of such objects as well as vessels forming part of sixty five sets for the Opening of the Mouth ritual. Details of form and context, and established typology are the base for a thorough analysis of the social and political background of the use this particular category of objects. The author aims at restoring the rules of production and distribution, and deals with the function and symbolic of miniature and model vessels, compared to those of large-size stone vases. As a result, the thesis presents an overall picture of the role of this particular burial goods, which is important in a wider perspective of the Old Kingdom history, religion and social life.

### **II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**

The dissertation exactly fulfilled the promise given in the subtitle. The re-examination of the kind of material which has never been treated in a monograph, getting together the known evidence and applying modern theoretical approach, enabled the author to offer detailed analyses “from typology to a social and political background”. The miniature and model vessels have been described in every possible aspect: material, size, form, archaeological context, development, production and distribution, which was followed by analyses of their role and relation to large stone vessels and other burial goods. The author presented successfully the reasons for introduction of the assemblages of miniature vessels and their changing role, resulting in several phases of use during the Old Kingdom. This complex study, made on a high methodological level, is an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the history and social development of an early civilisation.

### **III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects**

”The main target of this thesis is thus a complex study of this kind of material culture. The assemblages of model stone vessels must be treated as a group with a specific function. In this respect, they followed a particular pattern concerning the typology of individual vessels. The approach of the author of this thesis thus dwell in detailed study of the typology of the

vessels and their material with regard to their purpose. If one keeps in mind that they were always considered as a set of vessels, which were substituting the large size vessels and were supposed to provide the deceased with all basic necessities for their well-being in the afterlife, the typology becomes much simpler than the one considered by previous researchers. At that point, one comes to the number of 10 basic classes ...” (pp. 6-7)

This citation is a good example of the clear argumentation of the author, who – contrary to a quite not rare manner of the scholars writing their theses – tends to clarify and simplify the typology rather than complicate it. This lucidity of the text is an overall impression of the reader. The dissertation is clearly and logically structured, and the questions posed and answered in an unequivocal way, which results in the achievement of the author’s objectives.

The dissertation consists of the main text (pp. 1-223), Catalogue of assemblages (Appendix 1, pp. 224-268), Catalogue of the Opening of the Mouth ritual sets (Appendix 2, pp. 269-290) and Bibliography (pp. 291-316). Bibliographic Harvard references in the text are supplemented with explanatory footnotes (not too numerous, which is, in this case, a merit).

The whole relevant archaeological evidence is presented and analysed in a proper way. Since the subject of the thesis is an almost entirely Memphite phenomenon, “the author worked with material coming from all the Old Kingdom royal cemeteries from Abu Rawash in the north to Dahshur in the south.” (p. 7); however, a special chapter is added to discuss the rare occurrences in provinces. The Opening of the Mouth ritual sets are treated separately, the logical reasons for which are clearly stated.

The work is based on a vast bibliography (which includes 334 books and articles, as well as a number of internet sources) and most of the relevant works are referenced.

One might suggest an addition to this corpus of B. Mathieu, “Les couleurs dans les Textes des Pyramides : approche des systèmes chromatiques (Enquête dans les Textes des Pyramides, 2)”, *ENiM* 2 (2009), pp. 25-52. The article deals with the issue of white and black stone appearing as complementary materials in the Pyramid Texts (e.g. PT 43 addressing vessels of white and black *menu* stone, identified with the eyes of Horus; according to Mathieu they bear symbolic related to the phases of the moon, but may also represent day and night, death and life). The issue of white and black stone, and rock-crystal and obsidian as materials for miniature vessels in the Opening of the Mouth sets, might be further discussed. “Eritrean origin” of obsidian (p. 73) points to Punt as the direct source. Fragments of obsidian brought from there were discovered at the port of Ain Sukhna, in the layer dated to the Sixth Dynasty (M. Abd el-Raziq. G. Castel, P. Tallet, *Ayn Soukhna III: Le complexe de galeries-magasins: Rapport archéologique*, FIFAO 74, Cairo 2016, 44-45). The black stone *kash kem* (obsidian?)

mentioned in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari, and the white stone *kash hedj* (rock crystal?), attested in the contemporary tomb of Puiemra, both coming from Punt, may bear symbolic meaning, possibly relevant for the Old Kingdom as well. Cf. F. Taterka, “Hatshepsut’s Punt Reliefs: Their Structure and Function”, *JARCE* 55 (2019), p. 195 and n. 49.

An important discussion of the distribution of burial goods on p. 202 underlines the location of the model vessels (“The most important deposit was, however, placed to the east of the sarcophagus (...) The face was supposed to be turned to the east as the place of sunrise. And the offerings were thus prepared immediately in front of it. As the assemblages of model stone vessels were connected with the offering ritual being involved both with its ritual and refreshment parts, their position in front of the face of the deceased in natural.”). One would perhaps like to add to this discussion a reference to the false door attached to the east side of the sarcophagus if Inty (Miroslav Bartá, “A new gate to the netherworld”, in: Z. Hawass ed., *Festschrift Ali Radwan*. Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte, Cairo 2005, 1–9).

The language of the dissertation is not only correct, but also very clear and unequivocal, which should be appreciated. Terms for stone types are precise, relevant and up-to-date (e.g. anorthosite gneiss, travertine), used consistently. The toponyms, transcriptions of ancient Egyptian names, and the transliterations of officials’ titles and other terms, are correct and consistent (with a small inconsistency with the king’s name occurring *passim* as Snofru, but appearing as Sneferu in basiliform private names (Snefruseneb: pp. 36, 37, 226 ; Snefrukhaf: p. 242).

Very few typos occur, a.o.:

p. 54 Minal-Gout → Minault-Gout

p. 128 quat jar → squat jar

p. 152 time spam → time span

p. 166 Kazimier → Kazimierz

p. 167 Deroches → Desroches

p. 202 in natural → is natural

Of course, these are small points, without any impact on the assessment of the work. In fact, they are so few that it only confirms the general impression that the dissertation was the object of a very scrupulous editorial work.

The text is very well illustrated, with colour photos wherever it is possible. The tables are very clear and not overloaded.

Stone vessels are objects considered the most characteristic ones for the ancient Egyptian civilisation, which reflects our impression by their number and variety as much as the attitude of the Egyptian themselves, who even made the hieroglyph representing the tool for making stone vessels a determinative for *hemet*, “art”, “craft”. Dealing with something so typical and, at the same moment, so complex as a phenomenon, is a difficult task, if one hopes to press from the material something more than only a typology. Such an ambitious aim has been achieved successfully in the reviewed thesis.

The author of the dissertation starts her work with necessary introductory paragraphs. A short chapter on Terminology and methodology (pp. 2-3) includes an important discussion of the terms “miniature and model stone vessels”; the distinguishing of the two groups and their precise definition is crucial for the rest of the work. According to the author “Most of the small size stone vessels belong to the group of “models” (“dummy”, symbolic vessels), others should be called “miniatures” (potentially functional) regardless their morphology which usually copies the functional vessels of larger size.” (p. 2). Next the History of the research is discussed (pp. 3- 6), starting from W. M. Flinders Petrie, through H. Junker, G. A. Reisner, S. Hassan, A. El-Khouli, B. G. Aston, followed by the proposed New Approach (pp. 6-9). Chapter 2 is devoted to a diachronic presentation of the occurrences of stone vessels in burials from the Predynastic Period through the reign of Khufu (pp. 10-26). A separate sub-chapter concerns miniature and model vessels before Khufu (pp. 27-28).. Chapter 3 presents the use of stone vessels in the Memphite necropolis during the Fourth to Sixth Dynasties (pp. 29-60). Next two chapters are concerned with particular aspects of the miniature and model vessels, namely with Materials (pp. 61-73) and Production process (pp. 74-84). Chapter 5 on Typology and chronology (pp. 85-123) is one of largest in the work. Its first part, with a detailed typology, is a core of a kind for the following analyses of composition of the assemblages (pp. 112-117), the relation to the Old Kingdom offering lists (pp. 118-122), and the discussion of chronological aspects (pp. 123-128). Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to synchronic issues: Stone vessels *vs* pottery and copper miniature and model vessels (pp. 129-141), and the model and miniature vessels in the provinces, which concerns the later Old Kingdom and the relations of the center and the periphery (pp. 142-185). Finally, the Opening of the Mouth ritual sets, distinguished as a particular group, are discussed in Chapter 8 (pp. 186-196).

The Conclusions (pp. 197-223) include the interpretation of the miniature and model vessels in the Old Kingdom burial context (pp. 197-198) and a general overview of the development of stone vessel production and distribution in the Old Kingdom (pp. 207-220).

The final conclusion is that the period may be divided into several phases, which are separated by particular turning points that mostly correlate with the political and social changes.

The dissertation is based not only on publications of excavations and archaeological research; for unpublished material the author consulted websites and personally examined museum materials. An important factor is the author's work with the Czech archaeological mission at Abusir, which gave her invaluable hands-on experience.

The dissertation, although dealing with something so "material", is also well based on theoretical grounds. Among others, one may note a reference (on p. 17) to Miroslav Bartá's concept of "punctuated equilibrium" (Barta 2015), which obviously had some impact on the final results, including distinguishing four turning points in the history of use of the analysed class of archaeological material: "The research (...) have shown that the major turning points in the history of production of model and miniature stone vessels were closely connected with the development in the political and social environment. The first milestone can be found in the reign of King Khufu, the second in the reign of King Niuserre, the third in the reign of King Teti and the fourth in the reign of King Pepy I." (p. 202).

It is noteworthy that the work is not only a presentation of well-arranged data and references to the literature, and the conclusions are well argued and convincing, but that, moreover, the author offers a number of original ideas and personal observations, some of which may be considered very clever and important. Such is e.g. the interpretation, which appeared already in an earlier article of the author (Jirásková 2016), of the short jars with concave sides as water-pots, placed in the burial as a symbol of a scribal position (pp. 38 n. 22; 42; 58; 149, 176). Another personal contribution, coming from meticulous observations of the pictures in publications and on web pages, is noting similar veins of travertine on various vessels, which may prove their common origin (p. 65). Appreciated should be also original illustrations, like fig. 85 on p. 201 ("Distribution pattern of burial equipment in the burial chambers of the Old Kingdom officials"), presenting fundamental schemes in a simple, clear and colourful way.

#### **IV. Questions for the author**

An issue that raised the reviewer's curiosity:

The periodization of the stone vessels production sets the crucial turning point (rise of assemblages of model vessels) in the reign of Khufu. "The "dummy" vessels and the diminishing number of large size functional vessels in the Third and early Fourth Dynasty mastabas and tombs might be understood as a "preparation" for the change that came with the time of Khufu." (p. 208). Many important changes in burial customs and related architecture and decoration occurred in

second part of the Third Dynasty and during the reign of Sneferu, in the royal mortuary complexes as well as in the non-royal tombs, e.g. vast underground magazines disappeared, large scale relief decoration appeared, as well as false door and offering formula (magical materialization instead of material supply). How all these changes might be related to the issue of miniature stone vessels and the possible politics of “economization” of burials? Is it possible that the material from Giza (excavated in large quantity and well published) overshadows the earlier evidence (from the later Third Dynasty and the reign of Sneferu)?

A second question to the author:

Among the materials noted are travertine, gypsum, limestone, rock crystal, basalt, obsidian. Why were not granite, gneiss or greywacke used for making the miniature and model vessels? Were these materials restricted for royal use or the answer is in their specific properties (colour?)?

## **V. Conclusion**

The dissertation of Mrs. Vendelová Jirásková is an excellent piece of scientific work, showing the careful attitude and mature approach to a complex issue. Its author deserves a Doctor of Philosophy title, and congratulations should go to the candidate and her supervisor Professor Miroslav Bárta. Hopefully the authorities will consider publication of the work as a monograph.

The thesis of Mgr. et Mgr. Lucie Vendelová Jirásková meets all the standards required for a doctoral dissertations and I provisionally classify it as *passed*.

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