

## External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Diana Míčková

### 'Translation, analysis and interpretation of texts of the inner side of the outer sarcophagus from the tomb of priest Iufaa at Abusir'

Submitted in 2023 at the Czech Institute of Egyptology

#### I. Brief summary of the dissertation

Diana Míčková (M.) presents in her PhD-thesis the *editio princeps* of the inscriptions found on the inner side of Iufaa's outer sarcophagus. The tomb of Iufaa in Abusir is a discovery that the mission of the Czech Institute of Egyptology made. Therefore, the dissertation pertains to the publication endeavour to present the mission's results. It is a sign of great trust on behalf of the Institute's senior members that M. got the subject. By this she has the opportunity to publish previously unknown material, as the selection of texts on the sarcophagus is an intriguing collection of both known, well attested and quite a few completely new compositions. They allow thrilling insights into the philological work of Egyptian scholars in the time around the turn from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. There is even a rare statement of aesthetic appreciation for texts that is attributed to Iufaa (p. 103, unfortunately the statement is concealed by a slightly inelegant translation), or a brilliant text assigned to Thoth in which the god explains to his fellow gods Atum's work, the creation (pp. 120–125), with a nice example of intertextuality as this text includes an adaptation of a CT-section.

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

The nature of an examiner's report on a PhD-thesis is to look at it critically. In what follows a number of suggestions for improvement will be found (I marked much more details in my printed copy that I am happy to hand over to M. for inspection, when she is going to rework the thesis for publication). At first sight, they may appear discouraging. However, I perceive it as my duty and responsibility towards a young colleague to provide as many suggestions as possible. Some of them might be put aside because they may go beyond the scope of a dissertation, some might be useful. Therefore, my criticisms are not meant to discourage the candidate nor to show off nor to lead to the conclusion that the thesis should not be accepted but meant as a help and constructive criticism that prevents the candidate from reading the critique when the publication is reviewed. The texts are difficult, about half of them are so far unparalleled and M. has done a pioneering work that should be appreciated. As a primary edition of those sources M. has achieved her goal, for which only some formalities (such as inconsistencies in the transliteration) should be polished. Personally, I would have wished more of a detailed commentary concerning the contents. What M. presents instead is rather a paraphrase. The reflection on what the texts communicate is also the basis for a correct translation. Sometimes the Egyptian wording and the graphematization are ambiguous in allowing for alternative interpretations, and that should also be discussed. If going too much into these details is beyond the author's basic objective, I would expect her to say it more explicitly in the introduction.

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

#### 1. Structure of the argument

The dissertation consists basically of four parts: The first is the introduction in which the most salient information concerning the sarcophagus' owner (here giving the time around which he lived would be helpful – only in the introduction on p. 10 'Saite-Persian Period' is given not in the summary of his life), his tomb and general aspects of the inscriptions (language, grammar, palaeography) are given. Then the edition follows as the main part. However, I would consider this main part bipartite: The first section are the 'new', *i. e.*, up to now unknown texts (pp. 36–153), the second contains the inscriptions that are new text witnesses of PT, CT, sometimes also BD spells (pp. 154–258). The first section of the main part is, as a matter of fact, the most interesting. However, in between the well-known spells that are edited in the second section still shorter spells are blended in for which no parallel has been found yet. The final, and shortest part are the conclusions (pp. 259–264) in which M. raises and briefly discusses issues concerning what one might call the texts' sociology and what they tell us about Iufaa's mind that coined the selection. She also briefly touches on questions of textual history.

The thesis is essentially an edition of all the inscriptions on the *interior* of Iufaa's *outer* sarcophagus, but sometimes parallel texts are found on the exterior that had to be included into the edition, if I have understood it correctly. The thesis does not provide a full photographic documentation of the sarcophagus nor a facsimile drawing. Thus, I have not gained a full image of the inscriptions' disposition on the sarcophagus. Given the subject, the text's layout on the object determines the structure of the thesis.

Still, an editor has decisions to make. M. has decided to strictly follow the sarcophagus' layout, starting at the head, proceeding to the 'northern' side (to the mummy's right whose head is oriented towards the east). Hereafter she moves to the 'southern' side. Firstly, she presents the 'new' texts, *i. e.*, texts that have no parallel elsewhere. Then the spells from the PT follow which cover the rest of the north, south, and west side as well as the bottom. The reader loses track where on the interior of the sarcophagus she or he is, despite M.'s mentioning it in the introduction to each text's edition. A schematic drawing that would have folded the walls of the sarcophagus outward and indicated the position of the texts on the surfaces of the sarcophagus would have been helpful to the reader here.

Although the general format is clear and well-structured, I would suggest presenting parallel texts in synopsis rather than repeating them again and again (pp. 37–42 and 46–49, 102–108 [for which the parallel of the exterior side is only provided through giving variants in the footnotes], 113–114 and, 151–153). This would prevent M. from inconsistencies in treating the essentially same texts. In turn, it would break up following the sarcophagus' layout, a disadvantage that could be counterbalanced by the schematic drawing that I am proposing. Following the system of temple publications such as *Esna* or *Athribis* that give a little sketch for each section presented marking where we are, would be a solution that I have in mind. However, M. did not apply her system most rigorously because she separated the already known texts from the edition of the yet unknown ones (PT and Offering Ritual follow on p. 154 ff.), and, therefore, the reader is taken back to the north side after having reached the end of the

south side in p. 153. Thus, there is no reason not to bring the parallels from the sarcophagus together.

Each section, defined by textual markers like *gd mdw in* or the script's writing direction is presented independently rigorously identically structured: short introduction, hieroglyphic transcription made in JSesh (that I could not collate lacking facsimiles or photographs), transliteration, translation, and finally a commented summary of the contents. The philological commentary is added to the translation as footnotes directly beneath the edited text. This is a convenient solution for the reader, which I have applied myself when using the author-year system. Thus, I cannot and will not criticize it, but must praise it. M. is, however, too sparing with her remarks on the language. Usually she does not contemplate or discuss alternative solutions which might also yield sense and thus leaves questions open (see my remarks, *e. g.*, on p. 48, 62, 87, 88, 99, 114).

The annotated appraisal of the contents following the philological edition is also something that I have already done myself (*e. g.*, in the edition of the Soknopaios ritual). M.'s paraphrases of the text just edited, however, are too detailed by introducing too little new information from other sources. They would benefit from more contextualization with known religious texts from ancient Egypt. A particularly striking example here is pp. 116–117: a spell that in itself is completely unproblematic, bringing standard statements about the use of *antiu*, is basically just repeated. Likewise on pp. 125–128 the way how the CT-version is adapted and the modes of textual transmission could have been discussed to illuminate ancient Egyptian philology at work. In the introduction M. mentioned that Iufaa's texts would give insights in that subject, but here the opportunity to research it has been left behind. Or was this remark meant as a perspective on future axes of research that others can follow on the basis of M.'s edition? Rather than paraphrasing the texts some more explanation on particular notions would be necessary, *e. g.*, for 'the cow whose calf cannot be found' (p. 124). Who's that? This would be done by drawing on evidence from other sources. However, the paraphrase pp. 125–128 does not provide any information on this kind of mythological statements. Or let's take the most intriguing text on Thoth – I wished the source would have been available when I wrote my book *Weiser und Wesir!* – that poses many difficult questions due to its seemingly contradictory messages (pp. 142–145). However, M. has only partially addressed them. Another striking example is that M. then does not take the path of investigation, which is virtually forced upon the reader by the naming of eight (!) Ptah manifestations (pp. 147–148) as an allusion to the Ogdoad. To be just: M. has also done this sort of exegesis eventually, *e. g.*, p. 137 second paragraph. I would wish more of that kind of commentary. Perhaps a detailed exegesis of the texts would also go beyond the scope of a dissertation.





The second section of the main part, the one with the PT spells I have not checked in such detail as the first one because I trust that M. has compared her transliteration and translation against the previous research. However, I noted that she did not cite very often Allen's translation (of which she used the first edition of 2005 but not the second edition of 2015), but drew more widely on Faulkner's and Mercer's interpretations. I would think that Allen is superior to both after his life-long occupation with the PT starting from his PhD-thesis on the

verb in the PT (which M. did not use concluding from the bibliography).<sup>1</sup> There is also much to be found in his grammar of the PT of which only the volume on the pyramid of Unis appeared.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, I noticed that despite the well-established research on the PT the transliteration is still inconsistent.

## 2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

As there is neither a photographic nor a facsimile documentation of the inscriptions the texts and their layout is hard to understand despite the description. It is furthermore impossible to collate and check M.'s transcriptions in JSesh hieroglyphs. The required documentation is promised for the publication but it is a major deficiency of the submitted PhD-thesis (which is why I have it mentioned here, I think, for the third time).

For publication I strongly recommend asking a native speaker to revise and polish the English. I observed a substantial number of clear mistakes (such as forgotten syntactical elements, typos, repetitions of identical expressions and phrases which make it hard to concentrate on the text), but also many expressions that do not sound like proper English. In some cases the constructions are misleading, such as 'for you + predicate + subject': At first sight it looks as if 'for' is a conjunction in the sense of 'because' followed by 'you' as subject, predicate, and a direct object, but 'for you' is in fact a prepositional phrase. The word order should be 'for you + subject + predicate' (p. 62, 76, 98). The adverb form of 'parallel' ('parallelly') is archaic and obsolete.<sup>3</sup> Quite often the nominalized participle is constructed with 'of' to attach the verbs object, but the nominalized participle can still take a direct object. Fixing this (M. would write 'fixing of this') would make the text more easily readable. The way how the author expresses herself could also be more varied, for similar constructions and phrases abound in one paragraph. The use of the definite and indefinite articles sounds odd in quite a few instances. I marked all that I found strange in my printed copy of the thesis. However, I am not a native speaker of English myself. Therefore, I repeat my advice to ask a native speaker of English for revision.

Transliteration is delicate because there are different policies, some varying only in details (significant though) and some fundamentally differing. If, however, in one and the same book transliteration is not consistent, this is to be criticized: Usually *k* is rendered as *q*, but eventually also as *k*. The author decided to transliterate  as *z* and  as *s*. However, she followed the lufaa's graphematization, *i. e.*, a text that has been written down in a period when no distinction was made anymore. This leads to transliterations that are historically wrong and thus awkward, *e. g.*, p. 102: The author transliterates  in lufaa's version as *mzn.t* 'harpoon', but historically it is *msn.t*. Directly the opposite is lufaa's  *sbiw* 'laugh' (so M.), which should be *zbi* in a historical transliteration! If in the transliteration as distinction is made between *s* and *z* it must be historically correct, otherwise I would recommend putting always *s*! The author transliterates the mostly unwritten masculine singular ending *w* in *Hr*

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Allen, *The Inflection of the Verb in the Pyramid Texts* (BAe 2; Malibu, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Allen, *A Grammar of the Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts I: Unis* (Languages of the ancient Near East 7; Winona Lake, Indiana, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See the timeline on <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/parallelly>.

'Horus', thus *Hrw*, (sometimes with, sometimes without dot – *Hr.w* versus *Hrw*) while *R* remains *R* rather than being *Rw* which would be required to remain consistent. For matters of consistency all masculine nouns ought to have it then! Why is the transliteration of *lufaa*'s name changed from p. 158 on? Before it is *iw=f-ʿ*, then mostly (but not consistently) *iw=f-ʿ*, while the *j*-transliteration is kept for all other words; later on she has again *iw=f-ʿ*. From p. 214 on M. seems to have decided to copy and paste the recurring phrase *ḏd-mdw Wsir 'lw=f-ʿ* for reasons of work economy. However, thus she repeated a typo (*wjsr* instead of *wsjr*).

The citation system is fairly coherent. M. uses author-year in-text-references which does not leave much space for being inconsistent. In certain cases, one might argue why there are footnotes after all (except for the philological commentary on the texts; these commentaries are also part of the main body although being in the footnote). Quite often I think the content of the footnote is worth of being integrated into the main body of the text. Inconsistency is observable as to the referencing to Edfu and Dendera. The publication *Edfou* is often wrongly given as *Edfu* and occasionally just as *E*. Dendera is referenced as *D*, but if *Edfou* is the choice (and indeed according to the IFAO to be preferred) then it should be *Dend*. (as recommended by the IFAO).

### 3. *Use of sources and/or material*

The dissertation's subject determines the use of Ancient Egyptian sources and Egyptological literature. The core source is well defined and thus ideal for a PhD-thesis. Apart from occasional Egyptological publications that have escaped her (which happens to anybody – a few I have mentioned above), further items are marked in my printed copy –, the thesis shows that M. has gained a profound overview of the research literature. She has identified the texts that find parallels in other funerary corpora which is already in itself an achievement.

### 4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

M.'s dissertation is certainly not merely a compilation of information. In the humanities the edition of a text is sometimes considered inappropriate for a dissertation because some think that it does not require much intellectuality and is not innovative in lacking theory. The present reviewer does not share this opinion at all! To present new, previously unknown textual sources is highly innovative because it brings the field much more forward than an analysis of well-known sources under the auspices of a trendy theory that might be outdated after a few years. Furthermore, to contextualize the edited material within the corpus of *lufaa*'s inscriptions and the corpus of Egyptian religious sources in general is highly demanding. To edit the previously unknown texts is an even more demanding task because no other text witness helps to detect textual corruptions and to decipher by varying writings. Thus, the publication of this thesis will be a major contribution for Egyptology and certainly be the basis for future research in Late Egyptian philology.

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

The creation myth that Thoth recounts is one of the texts that fascinated and thrilled me most, as well as – no surprise – the text that develops a Thoth theology (pp. 142–145). However, it

is – as often in Egyptian religious thinking – contradictory. How do you get the statements into one coherent system that Thoth is according to this text son of Ra, that he is Seth, but also emerged from Seth's head? And how do we deal with the situation that virtually the same is said about the four Thothes (p. 143) and the Ptah-Ogdoad (p. 147)? They 'complete/know/tie all things in the entire land'. (The same sentence has also been translated slightly differently.)

That 'new' texts that are blended in among the PT (pp. 154 ff.) is noteworthy. Assuming that Iufaa or the person who composed the inscriptions had access to more complete archives with a full pool of texts from which the PT in the pyramids were excerpted, one may speculate whether the Iufaa's sarcophagus provides us with new PT spells or whether they are innovations of the Late Period. M. does not address this question. What are her thoughts about that?

In other contexts retrograde writing has always a meaning, such as the tomb of Ahmose, son of Ibana, or the Hatshepsut's Red Chapel. We have also retrograde inscriptions on Iufaa's sarcophagus. Is there a specific meaning that can be ascribed to the decision to write these compositions retrograde and the others not?

## V. Conclusion

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed*.

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