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The Development of the Royal Funerary Complexes in the Old Kingdom. A Structural and Historical Analysis of Ancient Egyptian Architecture

[“Die Entwicklung der königlichen Grabanlagen des Alten Reiches. Eine strukturelle und historische Analyse altägyptischer Architektur”]

(Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge, 10)

Hildesheim: Gebr. Gerstenberg Verlag, 1979; 189 pp., supplement with 20 plates

The present work is of interest from two points of view, the historical and the methodological.

Historical: The rulers of the Egyptian Old Kingdom (3rd–6th dynasties) were buried in the necropolis in the neighbourhood of the then capital, Memphis, in large burial complexes, which consist roughly of the burial area itself, the pyramid, together with extensive buildings known as the “funerary temple”. By contrast, the kings of the preceding Archaic Period (1st and 2nd dynasties) had two cemeteries, one at Abydos in Upper Egypt, the other at Saqqara, near Memphis, in Lower Egypt. Only one of these areas, of course, comes into consideration as a burial area. Which of the two was used as a burial ground is disputed; the present work decides in favour of Saqqara. Also disputed is the historical relationship, from an architectural point of view, of the two Archaic Period complexes to the single complex of the later period. Of paramount importance for the resolution of this problem is the funerary complex of King Djoser of the Third Dynasty, the first to have a pyramid (the so-called Step Pyramid of Saqqara) and the first also to have a tomb of the later, Old Kingdom type. The monument, however, is of such complexity, that a good deal of analysis and interpretation is necessary to determine to which stage in the development of architecture it belongs. As a result, analysis of the funerary complex is both the preliminary to, and the core of, the present work. As was to be expected, the difficulties of analysing and interpreting the complexities of this monument have produced highly controversial views; the present work attempts, by means of a structural analysis, to break up the Djoser tomb into the same elements as are to be found in the early tombs of Abydos and Saqqara, and in the later tombs of the Old Kingdom.

Methodological: The author bases his interpretation of the material chiefly on a structural analysis of the tombs, or, more precisely, on an examination of the room sequences in the tombs and their interrelationships. The attempt at structural analysis is not in fact

new, but it has encountered some resistance from Egyptologists. This is because the key to the understanding of this architecture was hitherto assumed to lie in the determination of the religious function of the individual rooms or groups of rooms (see for instance the analysis by Wolfgang Schenkel in *Göttinger Miszellen* 29, 1980, pp. 89–103).

In both respects the present work, like all modern studies of Egyptian architecture, is indebted to the pioneering work of Herbert Ricke (*Notes on the Architecture of the Egyptian Old Kingdom/Bemerkungen zur ägyptischen Baukunst des Alten Reiches I*, in *Beiträge zur ägyptischen Bauforschung* 4, Zurich 1944; II, *ibid.* 5, Cairo 1950, pp. 1–128). It is to be hoped that the present work may afford an additional impulse to the study of Egyptian architecture, following in the footsteps of Ricke, and that the continuation of the debate will further the clarification of a number of questions still unsolved, historical as well as methodological.

Three points of detail should be stressed:

1. The author recognizes four partial complexes in the royal tombs of the Old Kingdom, beginning with that of Djoser.

A – the complex for funerary offerings (“Totenopferkultanlage”);

B – the Sed-Festival complex (“Sed-Fest-Anlage”);

C – the complex for the cult of veneration (“Verehrungskultanlage”);

D – the solar-cult complex (“Sonnenkultanlage”).

The A-complex is derived from the Archaic-Period complexes in Saqqara, the B- and C-complexes from the Archaic-Period complexes in Abydos. The fourth, the D-complex, has not hitherto been clearly recognized; however, it can be shown, according to the author, to have existed from the time of Djoser and more or less continuously thereafter.

2. The key Djoser complex experienced two fundamental changes in arrangement. A knowledge of the resulting three planning stages facilitates the placing of individual findings within the different stages in the architectural development of the whole complex.

3. The analysis of the Old-Kingdom tombs given by Ricke (op. cit., vol. II) is modified in some details.

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