

## Review

**Aidan DODSON, Salima IKRAM:**  
*The Tomb in Ancient Egypt,*  
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Rogério Sousa

This book follows quite naturally the remarkable work begun by this same team of authors in *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity*, published in 1998 under the auspices of the American University in Cairo Press. In this previous book the authors began a systematic and comprehensive approach to the study of the Egyptian archaeological contexts related to the afterlife. It seems now perfectly clear that these two books, although presented as independent works, are intimately connected in such a way that their contents are perfectly complementary. Given the fact that the book dedicated to the study of the mummy already included an approach to the funerary equipment related to it, such as sarcophagi, coffins, masks and amulets, the present volume is entirely dedicated to the characterization of the archaeological features of the Egyptian tomb, that is to say, to the wider archaeological context where the mummies were supposed to be buried.

In the present work the authors strived to follow the same methodological options successfully assumed in their study of the mummies: attention to a clear definition of archaeological categories of the monuments, explanation of its symbolic and ritual purpose, and detailed overview of its use through the Egyptian history. This method worked perfectly in the previous volume but, giving the immense scope of the present book, it was clearly more difficult to follow in the broader study of the Egyptian tomb. The goal of the authors was, to

say the least, a very ambitious one. As it is stated in the Preface, this work intended to present a different and very much needed integrated approach into the study of the Egyptian tomb. The fact is that the huge number of Egyptian funerary archaeological sites gave rise to the publication of specific funerary structures, such as the pyramids, the royal tombs of the Valley of Kings, or the mastabas, and so forth, losing out of sight the integrated vision of all these structures. It is precisely this holistic comprehensive vision of the Egyptian tomb that the authors intended to provide in this single book. As the authors say «royal tombs will be considered alongside their private contemporaries and similarities emphasized where they exist, rather than allowing the size and magnificence of the royal tombs to blind one to such areas of convergence» (p. 7).

The first part of the book is dedicated to the clarification of sociological, technical and religious aspects relevant to the understanding of the architectural and archaeological features of the tomb. Chapter one is dedicated to the «Egyptian mortuary beliefs and the nature of the tomb», chapter two is concerned with «The tomb and society», while chapter three is dedicated to «Construction and decoration». Chapter four is concerned to «The study of the Egyptian tomb». Notwithstanding the importance of all these aspects, the order of presentation of the chapters could be reversed, beginning with the study of the archaeological finds and evolving to the technical, sociological and religious aspects of the tomb, preparing the reader to the content of the second part, dedicated to the «Decoration of the Tomb» which indeed provides, to our point of view, one of the most interesting and innovative sections of the book, presenting a comprehensive approach to the use of the Egyptian extensive iconographic material on tomb decoration. This chapter is provided with useful information concerning the location of decorative compositions, its symbolism and ritual purposes but, above all, includes a very useful classification of scene types most commonly used in decoration of the tombs. Although clearly dependent on a long

scholarly tradition concerning the symbolism of Egyptian iconography, the text provides little information about it.

The third part of the book is entirely dedicated to the archaeological aspects of the tomb. The following chapters give an historical overview of the evolution of the Egyptian tomb beginning with the Predynastic Period (chapter 6) and evolving to the Old Kingdom (chapter 7), to the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom (chapter 8), to the New Kingdom (chapter 9, 10, 11), to the Third Intermediate Period (chapter 12) and to the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods (chapter 13). As a general principle, the authors avoid an individualized study of a single monument. Instead, royal tombs and private tombs of each period are analysed in almost a comparative way in terms of their superstructures and substructures, which indeed is an innovative approach that allows to trace the dynamism of tomb building in Ancient Egypt.

The fourth part of the book provides notes, bibliography, a chronological table and a glossary. It is especially interesting the inclusion of a list of the Egyptian main cemeteries and a few maps of the Sakara, Amarna, Abydos and Theban necropolis.