OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Maya Dimitrova Vassileva, Ph.D.

Department of Mediterranean and Eastern Studies, NBU

Scientific field 2.2. History and Archaeology, Discipline: Egyptology

Ph.D. Candidate: Mrs Svetla Ilieva Ilieva

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Subject: ***"Ritual Practices in the Funerary Literature of Anicent Egypt"***

Egyptology in Bulgaria marked a significant progress in the last couple of decades, a proof of this being teaching Ph.D. students in a new scholarly field in our country.

The subject of the present dissertation is important both for Bulgarian and for the international scholarship as there is no general study on the topic. The candidate faces an extremely difficult task. All Egyptologists faces the same challenge: to classify and study terms, notions and ideas which were interconnected and inseparable in the minds of the ancient Egyptians. Modern ideas about religion, magic, rite and ritual did not exist in ancient Egypt. The attempt however to arrange and classify the available information is justified in view of acquiring a better knowledge about life and thought of the ancient Egyptians.

The goals and tasks of the thesis are well defined in the Introduction. Bearing in mind the importance of the speech, of the written word in Egypt, it is natural to consider the three major corpora of funeral texts: The Pyramid Texts, The Coffin Texts and The Book of the Dead in order to reveal the funeral ritual components which they contain. It is correctly stated that the largest set of evidence is provided by The Coffin Texts.

Mrs Ilieva masters well ancient Egyptian language as can be seen throughout the entire dissertation but mostly so in the Third Chapter which offers transliterations, translations and commentaries of the texts. This makes her capable of presenting new readings and interpretations of terms and phrases, as well as to challenge older translations and opinions. She is well acquainted with modern bibliography on the subject as demonstrated not only by the list of titles but also in the review sections in the First Chapter and the discussions on particular terms.

Logically, the First Chapter considers the major terms used in the study and provides characteristics of the three corpora in view of the data about ritual components offered by them. One can immediately notice the difficulties in defining ritual, rite and ritual activities even in modern theoretical literature. The Egyptian examples on the other hand display the polysemantics of the terms and phrases, as well as their strong dependence on the context. The candidate well argues in favour of the meaning "ritual" for two of the phrases common in the funeral texts. She also adds several technical details in the shaping of the texts (writing in red ink) and explanations of terms used by modern Egyptology (the rubrics).

Chronology and peculiarities of the three groups of texts are successfully outlined, as well as their interconnections in order to reveal a tradition or its absence. Attempts at discovering traces of oral speech in the writings are welcome.

The Second Chapter is the main text of the dissertation, being the largest as well. The analyses of the texts are presented here, mainly of The Coffin Texts, in order to reveal the ritual components. I find defensible the setting of sections devoted to ritual time and space, to ritual participants, to the requirements and restrictions in its performance, to the used objects and materials, as well to the type of the ritual practices. The narrative demonstrates how interwoven these ideas, notions and activities are, and their separation gets meaning only for the sake of studying. This is also obvious in the numerous cross-references to previous or subsequent commentaries throughout the dissertation. The dead person could be both object and subject of the ritual according to the Egyptian notions; the priests were identified with some of the gods referring to the mythological precedent.

I think however that it is better here to call "the simple ritual activities" "обредни действия, обреди" (rites, as in English, regardless of which theoretical definitions one would accept).

I would like to specifically note in this chapter the discussion on the requirement of keeping secret and acquiring knowledge – either in life or in the Netherworld. The ritual practices of recitations, repetitions and writing are instructive for the character of the Egyptian society. The candidate accentuates rightly on the power of spoken, written and many times repeated word. Because of the peculiar type of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, inclusion of vignettes and images in the texts is also very important and considered in detail. The numerous figurines, statuettes, amulets and other objects placed next to or around the dead can be added here. The

candidate scrutinizes all materials, plants and pigments mentioned in the funeral texts, and interprets their symbolism and magical power.

When considering the role of the objects in the funeral rites the inscribed headrests and the four bricks in the tombs (a fifth one in Tutankhamun's tomb) deserve special attention. The author has already published an article on the latter practice.

Mrs Ilieva successfully joins the discussion on the evidence about a mystery cult related to the funeral ritual and argues against some previous opinions in the literature. Her attempt however at differentiating between ritual practices transferred from the world of the living to the Netherworld from those intended only for the dead lead merely to hypothetical suggestions.

The Third Chapter consists of a valuable catalogue of the texts analyzed in the dissertation in transliterations, translations and commentaries.

The Concluding Chapter summarizes the results achieved by the analysis and interpretations of the texts and properly reflects the contributions of the work. Well selected images supplement the dissertation: 44 figures.

Gathering of the texts from the three corpora of funeral literature which reveal the components of the burial ritual is a contribution by itself. The new translations and interpretations of passages, terms and phrases which lead to well-grounded thesis and hypothesis are also contributions of the author. The work provides a basis for future studies. One direction of future investigations that I would suggest is finding parallels in ritual practices and cults of other ancient Mediterranean cultures.

The candidate has published four articles on topics of the dissertation, the last one – forthcoming. The summary adequately and exhaustively reflects the contents of the work, as well as its contributions.

Presenting the dissertation in English is welcome as this would facilitate its easier and quicker publication, which I recommend after the respective editing, and thus enable its appreciation by the international scholarship.

All the above said, I strongly recommend to the Jury to award the Ph.D. degree to Mrs Svetla Ilieva Ilieva in the Scientific field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

Sofia

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Assoc. Prof. Maya Vassileva, Ph.D.