

A Quiet and Desolate Plateau, Once Bustling with Life

1.1 Theme, Rationale, and Scope of This Book

This book is the first comprehensive monographic treatment of the New Kingdom (c. 1539–1078 BCE; Table 1)¹ necropolis at Saqqara,² the vast archaeological site c. 15 km south of present-day Cairo (Fig. 1).³ The site is named after the modern town, سقارة, located at the south end of the North Saqqara plateau.⁴ The modern place name, Saqqāra, was adopted in the 19th century to refer to the adjoining archaeological site located on the elevated desert plateau on the west bank on the Nile.⁵ The ancient Egyptians employed a range of toponyms

-
- 1 For the New Kingdom, the absolute dates used throughout this book follow Gautschy (2014), table 8 (P₁). Note that the chronological table published in Hornung et al. (2006), Part IV.2, contains outdated views regarding the length of the reigns of Horemheb (the 'long reign' of 27 years) and Seti I (11 years), and includes Smenkhkare as an independently reigning king, succeeding Akhenaten. There exists discussion about the end of the Amarna period and the precise line of succession after Akhenaten, see e.g., Dodson (2018); Gabolde (1998). This book adheres to the view posited by Van der Perre (2014), who deems it highly unlikely that Akhenaten's co-regent Smenkhkare (who married the king's daughter Meritaten) had an independent reign beyond the reign of Akhenaten (i.e. he passed away before Akhenaten). Van der Perre established that year 16 was the highest documented regnal year of Akhenaten (documented in a graffito in the Deir Abu Hinnis stone quarry near Tell el-Amarna), and that Nefertiti was still alive at that point in time. The queen ascended the throne as king Ankh(et)kheperure Neferneferuaten, possibly as regent and tutor of Tutankhaten. When she died after at least three years on the throne, Tutankhamun, then 8 years old, started his own reign, although the actual power lay with a small group of officials, including Horemheb and Maya, who built their tombs at Saqqara. For the length of the reigns of Horemheb and Seti I, see Van Dijk (2008); (2011), respectively.
 - 2 For an earlier, popularising treatment of the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara, focusing on the results of the first 15 years of the joint Egypt Exploration Society, London, and National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, see Martin (1991).
 - 3 According to a measurement taken from Google Earth, the distance between the city centre of Cairo (the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir square) and the northern tip of the North Saqqara plateau is 17.9 km 'as the crow flies'.
 - 4 Saqqara is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1979, forming part of 'Memphis and its Necropolis—The Pyramid Fields from Giza to Dahshur', see: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/86/>, last accessed on 29.12.2021.
 - 5 It has been suggested that the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821–1881) should be credited for being the first to use the name of the nearby village, Saqqara, to also refer to the

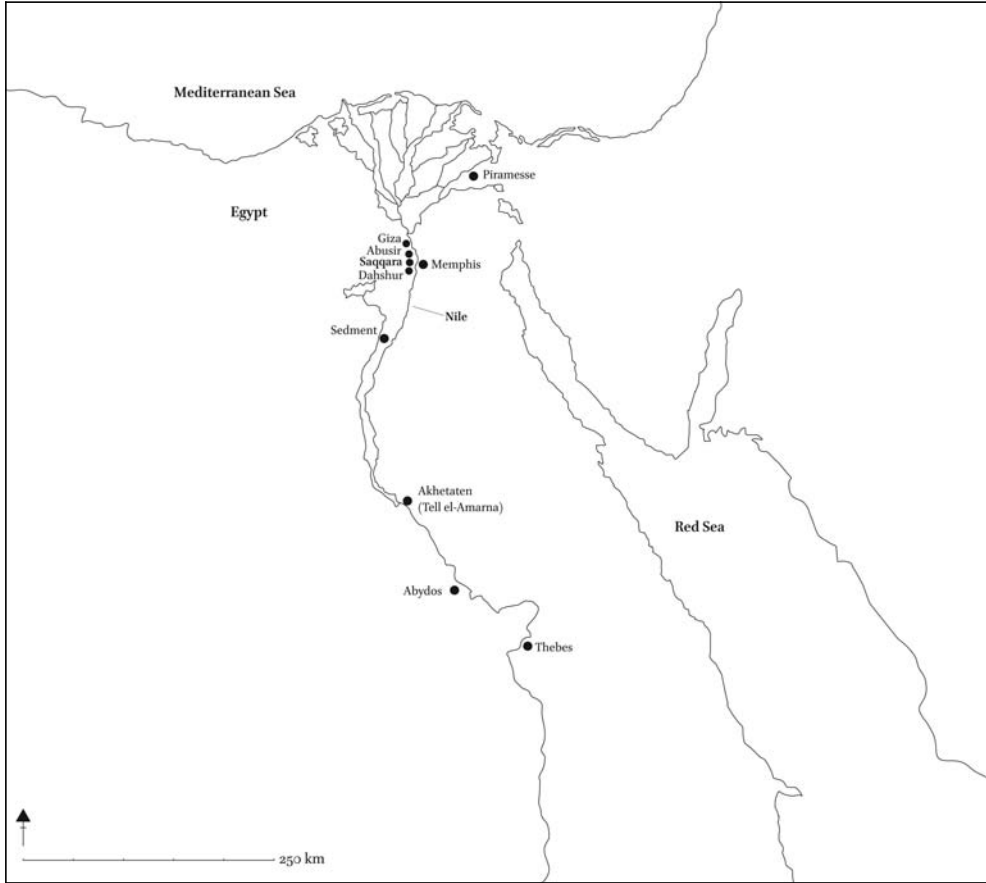


FIGURE 1 Map of Egypt
IMAGE BY THE AUTHOR

to refer to the specific locations on this plateau.⁶ *ḥr ḫmn.tt Mn-nfr*, ‘on the west of Memphis’, was often used to refer to the site in the New Kingdom.⁷

adjacent necropolis site. If we follow the words of Ahmed Zéki (1924–1925, 41), Mariette was not too impressed by the village, as he described it as “*une misérable bourgade, jetée aux confins de désert libyque, avec une maigre population qui végétait autour de quelques palmiers*”. For the most recent discussion on the etymology of Saqqara (the village), including arguments for rejecting the suggestion that modern Saqqara derives from the name of the ancient Egyptian god, Sokar (cf. Haarmann 1995, 894–1895), see Van der Vliet (2017), 167–171.

6 The archive of Memphite *choachytes* offers more detailed information about the local toponymy in the later periods of Egyptian history, see: Martin (2009).

7 Staring (2015a), with further references. In the New Kingdom variously referred to as *Mn-nfr* (‘enduring of beauty’), *Ḥn.w-ḥd* (White Walls), and *Ḥwt-k3-Pth* (Ka temple of Ptah). In

TABLE 1 Chronology of the New Kingdom

NEW KINGDOM	c. 1539–1078 BCE
<i>18th Dynasty</i>	<i>c. 1539–1290</i>
Ahmose	1539–1515
Amenhotep I	1514–1495
Thutmose I	1494–1483
Thutmose II	1482–1469
Hatshepsut	1468–1447
Thutmose III	1468–1414
Amenhotep II	1414–1388
Thutmose IV	1388–1378
Amenhotep III	1378–1339
Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten	1339–1322
Neferneferuaten (Nefertiti)	1322–1319
Tutankhaten/amun	1319–1310
Ay	1309–1306
Horemheb	1305–1290
<i>19th Dynasty</i>	<i>c. 1290–1190</i>
Ramesses I	1290–1289
Seti I	1288–1279
Ramesses II	1279–1213
Merenptah	1213–1204
Seti II	1203–1198
Amenmesse	1203–1201
Siptah	1197–1193
Tawosret	1192–1190
<i>20th Dynasty</i>	<i>c. 1190–1078</i>
Sethnakhte	1190–1188
Ramesses III	1187–1157
Ramesses IV	1156–1150
Ramesses V	1149–1146

medieval times, topographers referred to the desert edge as Abu Harmis or Deir Abu Harmis, after the abandoned Monastery of Apa Jeremias. In early medieval and late antique sources the latter is described as 'the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah in de desert of Memphis'. See Abu'l-Makarim in Evetts (1895), 199.

TABLE 1 Chronology of the New Kingdom (*cont.*)

NEW KINGDOM	c. 1539–1078 BCE
Ramesses VI	1145–1137
Ramesses VII	1136–1130
Ramesses VIII	1129–1128
Ramesses IX	1127–1110
Ramesses X	1109–1107
Ramesses XI	1106–1078

The place name brings the urban context of the cemetery in focus, emphasising that the site was viewed as a component of the *lived* urban environment.⁸ A network of paths and tracks, more and less formal, connected habitation areas in the east to the extra-urban city of the dead in the west.

For more than three millennia, Saqqara had served as the main place of burial for the inhabitants of Memphis, Egypt's metropolis in the north. Memphis was a centre of major political and religious importance throughout Egyptian pharaonic history, and sat among the most important capital cities of the ancient world in the 2nd millennium BCE.⁹ The living inhabitants of Memphis shaped the necropolis over many generations,¹⁰ and so the life histories of both the city and its necropolis were closely intertwined.

8 Cf. Stevens (2018). Anna Stevens (2018), 104, rightly argues that “[u]nderstanding the built, natural and conceptual components of urban landscapes collectively is central to writing effective biographies of ancient sites.”

9 For the problematic nature of the term ‘capital’ in the ancient Egyptian context, see e.g., Hagen (2016). Moeller (2016), 15–16, argues that from as early as the Old Kingdom, the national capitals “held a permanent seat for the central government—that is, the royal court closely linked to major economic and religious institutions such as temples dedicated to nationally worshipped gods and goddesses.” Quite similarly Martin (2000), 101, defined the main ‘Residence City’ or ‘capital’ as ‘the place where the king and his courtiers and chief officials made their more-or-less permanent headquarters, necessitating an extensive complex of palaces, administrative buildings, storehouses and the like’. Ahmed Badawi, in his study *Memphis als zweite Landeshauptstadt im Neuen Reich* (1948), was the first to recognise Memphis's prominence in the New Kingdom.

10 For the living inhabitants of Memphis, see Herzberg (2022, in press). A selection of the individuals are also discussed in Auenmüller (2013) in relation to the territoriality of ancient Egypt's elite. For Memphis in the subsequent Third Intermediate Period, see Jurman (2020).

The city's eminent position in the New Kingdom affected the nature of its desert-edge necropolis. The latter's prominence is underlined by the fact that some of the kingdom's most influential priestly, administrative, military, and court officials chose to construct their tombs¹¹ in this cultural landscape which, at the time, was already ancient. It also used to be a very *lively* place, one where ancient people worked, lived, and moved through.¹² In the past, it was not just a place for the dead. Rather, or perhaps first and foremost, it was a place frequented and shaped by the living.¹³ The living are at the heart of this study, asking how they, as individuals and in groups, shaped, perceived, and experienced this cultural landscape through time, and how, *vice versa*, their actions were shaped by the (ever changing) landscape.

1.2 The 'Walking Dead' at Saqqara

This book is the outcome of a study conducted within a four-year research project, entitled 'The Walking Dead at Saqqara: The Making of a Cultural Geography', funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO), and hosted by the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS).¹⁴ The overarching research project seeks to answer the question of how religion was appropriated by individuals and groups at Saqqara. This question emerges from the long-held view that Egyptian religion is essentially static; a view which contrasts sharply with the

-
- 11 In this study, 'tomb' refers to a burial that is marked above-ground with a built structure, whether it be a small mud-brick chapel of less than 50 cm high (e.g., 087/USC, tomb of NN), or a temple-shaped monument measuring 65 m from entrance to cult chapels (046/USC, tomb of Horemheb). Burials not marked above ground are not the subject of this study, even though these are also found in the study area. A proper analysis of the 'simpler' graves requires a separate research project. A large quantity of 'simple' burials were excavated by early (20th century) Egyptologists, such as James Quibell, and their study requires research in the unpublished archives of the excavators.
- 12 Pretty much like today, it should be noted. Saqqara still is a place where people work (the local and international excavators, inspectors of antiquities, tour guides, guards, water and souvenir vendors, etc.), live (the workmen's village built for Cecil Mallaby Firth's (1878–1931) specialist excavators is still inhabited to this day by their descendants, located just beyond the pyramid of Teti on the edge of the plateau), and move through (tourists and all others just listed).
- 13 On this topic, see also Staring (2021b). With regards to the premise of the necropolis as a place for the living, one is also reminded of the oft-quoted words of Prehistorian Mike Parker-Pearson (1993), 203: "the dead do not bury themselves".
- 14 For a more comprehensive outline of the research project, see Weiss (2021); (2019b). The subject of the present book builds forth on my doctoral thesis, submitted to Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia: Staring (2015b).

archaeological and textual evidence derived from cemetery sites throughout Egypt. The case study of Saqqara is exceptionally well-suited to analysing long-term changes and traditions, because of the time depth represented in the archaeological record.

The term ‘cultural geography’ is meant to cover the full range of activities, religious and non-religious, performed by groups and individuals at Saqqara (or elsewhere). It is used as a neutral term that covers the various adjectives commonly practiced in Egyptology to classify landscapes. Necropolises are often referred to as ‘religious landscapes’, for example.¹⁵ An Egyptian necropolis surely was a place imbued with religious significance. Such is implied by one of the words Egyptians used to refer to such sites, *hrt(y)-ntr*, to be translated as ‘that which is under (the charge of) the god’.¹⁶ Yet not all activities that took place there were religiously motivated or of a strictly religious nature. Equally common classifiers of cemetery landscapes, such as ‘ritual’,¹⁷ ‘sacred’,¹⁸ and ‘cultic’,¹⁹ fail to fully account for the multiplicity of meanings a necropolis site potentially had, and the pluriform nature of activities that took place in them. For example, the ancient site of Abydos in the south of Egypt, according to David O’Connor, “is best understood as a sacred landscape (...), *albeit* one with important administrative and economic dimensions as well” (emphasis NS).²⁰ The clause of this observation suggests that sacred landscapes have usually no administrative or economic dimensions. The case of Saqqara, so well documented for the later periods of pharaonic history,²¹ emphasises that these realms were fused and that their boundaries were extremely fuzzy. In addition, all the above adjectives hold predominantly Western ideas that are projected onto non-Western contexts, which is problematic.²² ‘Cultural geography’ thus serves as a more neutral umbrella term to help detect the manifold ways in which in landscapes “meaning and social understandings are constructed, contested and negotiated”.²³

15 E.g., Bács (2018).

16 Ockinga (2007), 139.

17 E.g., Sullivan (2020); Willems (2020); Williams (2018); Rummel (2018); (2013); Effland/Effland (2010); Ullmann (2007).

18 E.g., Jiménez Higuera (2020); Regulski (2019); Bickel (2016); Pischikova (2015); Dorman/Bryan (2007).

19 E.g., Pasquali (2011).

20 O’Connor (2009), 71. For the ‘administrative and economic dimensions’ of Abydos, see the town of Wah-sut, e.g. Picardo (2015).

21 See e.g., Cannata (2007); Smith (1974).

22 Michaels (2006), 275.

23 Atkinson (2005), xv.

The *Walking Dead* project holds that the formation of a cultural geography can be traced through the analysis of three overlapping fields of human action. These are identified in relation to this study as the three main expressions of ‘religious agency’, namely ‘religious practices’, ‘transmission of images and texts’, and ‘landscape’. In the landscape, religion can be ‘instantiated’ (a term signalling the (material) form and content which the actions of (religious) agents can take)²⁴ through a virtually endless range of different media like gestures (e.g., voice offerings, *pr(i).t hrw*), objects (e.g., offering pottery, votive stelae, graffiti), monuments (e.g. memorial chapels, tombs), and images and texts (e.g., Book of the Dead spells and vignettes).²⁵ Within the framework of the *Walking Dead* research project, the religious practices at New Kingdom Saqqara are studied by Lara Weiss,²⁶ and the transmission of religious texts (taken from the Book of the Dead corpus) by Huw Twiston Davies.²⁷

1.3 Problems and Research Questions

To the modern-day visitor, the North Saqqara plateau might seem like a quiet and desolate place. It is difficult for the non-specialist, and, admittedly, for many trained Egyptologists also, to make much sense of the site now dotted with countless ruins of structures, sandy hills, and pits both deep and shallow (Fig. 2). The present-day situation differs little from that witnessed by some of the early European explorers of the site. Take, for example, Georg Erbkam (1811–1876), the surveyor and architect of the four years long Prussian expedition to Egypt led by Carl Richard Lepsius (1810–1884). Two days after Erbkam had set foot on the terrain (on 13 February 1843), he penned down the following account that leaves little to the imagination:

Ich orientiere mich heut zuerst von dem Pyramidenfelde, indem ich zuvörderst auf die größte der hiesigen Pyramiden steige, dann nach dem

-
- 24 Albrecht et al. 2018, 5–7. ‘Instantiation’ is comparable to views expressed by Samuels (1979) in the context of urban geography, although employing different terminology. He argues that the ‘landscape of impression’ is a layer of ideologies and cultural representations of space and place (incl. planning concepts), which forms the context of the actual creation or making of landscapes, a ‘landscape of expression’.
- 25 Gasparini (2020), 309. The space in which religious agents are embedded, is “the situational result of the entanglement of landscape and ‘things’”.
- 26 Weiss (2022).
- 27 Twiston Davies (forthcoming).



FIGURE 2 The early-19th century excavations transformed the surface of the North Saqqara desert plateau into a moon-like landscape
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR, 2019

äußersten, sehr entfernten Punkt des Feldes wandre (...).²⁸ Das Feld ist öde, wüst und langweilig, nichts als Schutthaufen und Brunnen; fast nirgends hat man einen Überblick als auf der Pyramide. Knochen, Schädel, Thiergebeine, Mumienfetzen, Alles liegt umhergeworfen rings um Einen, ein trostloser Anblick, zumal die Wüste selbst weder Formen noch Farben darbietet; dieses Todtenfeld hält gegen das von Ghize keinen Vergleich aus.²⁹

Lepsius's team had just travelled south from Giza, the site that had served as the expedition's first base camp, from where countless monuments were explored and documented. Giza had a lot to offer, certainly to the eyes of an architect. Saqqara, on the other hand, was less impressive, to put it mildly. Erbkam describes the desert-edge archaeological site as a "barren, desolate, and boring" place that offered "nothing but piles of rubble and pits"—certainly no great advertisement.

28 The Step Pyramid of Netjerikhet Djoser.

29 Erbkam (1842–1843), 149, see: https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/erbkam_tagebuch01_1842?p=149, last accessed on 26.01.2021. For more on Erbkam and his experience with the Prussian expedition to Egypt, see e.g., Freier (2013).

Erbkam's observations touch upon two major problems that have, in the past, affected the study of Memphis and its necropolis and which modern scholars are also facing to this day:³⁰

1. *Saqqara as a scattered necropolis existing virtually outside the Memphite necropolis*

The New Kingdom necropolis of Saqqara exists largely in public and private collections around the world.³¹ The large-scale and uncontrolled excavations of the (early-) 19th century resulted in the unparalleled dismantling and (partial) removal of tomb structures (Figs 3–4). These early stages in the exploration of the Memphite necropolis were often poorly documented (if at all). Moreover, the sale of the large collections gathered by prominent collectors (European diplomats and businessmen) led to the dispersion and worldwide distribution of tomb elements and funerary objects. These activities, again, are generally poorly documented. It goes without saying that these activities cumulatively led to the loss of information about the archaeological context and architectural setting of the scattered tomb elements and objects, which has ultimately detracted from their scientific value.

2. *A biased view of Memphis in Egyptological literature*

There is a scarcity of surviving, standing monuments at Memphis (e.g., the temple of Ptah) and its necropolis. The comparatively favourable situation at Thebes has created a bias in the Egyptological literature. The 'Southern City' and its necropolises have long been the main sources of information for studies on a range of aspects of New Kingdom society. The idea has long persisted that Thebes functioned as the administrative capital of Egypt during the entire New Kingdom, and that its temple complexes represented the country's most important sacerdotal centre.

These observations are taken as the main thread of this study, and by setting the living users of the necropolis in focus, the two-fold aim of this book is formulated as follows.

First, it is meant to serve as a companion to the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara. Surprisingly, to date no complete overview of tombs in the Mem-

30 Staring (2015b), 1–3.

31 The first comprehensive attempt at reconstructing the Saqqara New Kingdom necropolis on the basis of the dispersed tomb elements now held in collections around the globe, is Jocelyne Berlandini's unpublished PhD thesis (1973). At the time of writing her thesis, no New Kingdom tombs were accessible at Saqqara. The first archaeological expedition with an exclusive focus on the New Kingdom, the EES-Leiden expedition, started work only in 1975.



FIGURE 3 The mud-brick 'skeleton' of the tomb of Ry (o38/usc)
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR, 2013



FIGURE 4 Buried courtyards of New Kingdom tombs in the Unas South Cemetery
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR, 2019

phite necropolis built in the New Kingdom exists.³² This study endeavours to fill this gap in the Egyptological literature. Academic research hitherto has focused mainly on the study of individual tomb structures (e.g., archaeological tomb publications), usually detached from their spatial setting. Yet, any monument is meaningful only within the larger landscape that provides its context.³³ Without knowledge of the landscape setting, we cannot answer questions pertaining to the choices underlying tomb location, or make statements about a cemetery's growth over time. Thus, the research questions that guide the analysis of this study, include:

- Why were certain areas of the necropolis selected for burial in certain time periods?
- How were tombs accessed from the distant habitation areas?
- What were the tombs' spatial relations to contemporaneous and older monuments?
- What effect did earlier structures have on the positioning of tombs and structuring of the necropolis in later times?
- How was access to (certain parts of) the necropolis managed? Was access restricted? If so, to whom, and who decided?

Second, this book aims to introduce landscape biography³⁴ as a useful conceptual tool to study the long-time interaction between people and landscapes in the shaping of a cultural geography.³⁵ Writing a biography of any landscape is all about examining how a landscape and its dwellers created and 'reshaped' each other in one continuous movement.³⁶ It also involves producing a (not *the*) story about the landscape, and, as an "explicit act of remembrance", this story produces an account of life and dwelling in the Memphite region in the 2nd millennium BCE for present-day society.³⁷ This makes the study itself a

32 There exists no reference work comparable to e.g., Kampp (1996) for the contemporary Theban necropolis. Even recent studies such as Sullivan (2020) take note of only a small selection of the tombs that were built during the period under study.

33 Cf. Holtorf (2015), 179.

34 The concept of landscape biography has been extensively described by Kolen/Renes (2015), who applied it to Northwest European (pre-)history to modern times. Landscape biography also influenced the ERC Consolidator Grant-sponsored *DiverseNile* project (2019), led by Julia Budka and hosted at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, see Budka (2020); (2019b). See also Polkowski (2015) for its application to the study of rock art in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis.

35 For a definition of cultural geography, see e.g., Cosgrove (1994), 111: "patterns and interactions of human culture, both material and non-material, in relation to the natural environment and the human organization of space".

36 Kolen/Renes 2015, 21.

37 Roymans et al. (2009), 352.

form of heritage practice, which also enables one to critically evaluate heritage practices at the Saqqara archaeological site.

1.4 A Few Notes on Landscape Archaeology

Studies focused on landscape are numerous in archaeology.³⁸ It is therefore surprisingly difficult to find a clear and satisfactory definition of what is meant by this “fuzzy and ambiguous”³⁹ term. Traditionally, scholars have struggled in particular with the dichotomy between nature and culture in defining what a landscape is, who dwells in it, and who is responsible for its construction. Because of the difficulty of defining the term, it is useful to start with a very brief historic outline of ‘landscape’.

At its origins, the term landscape denoted a communal, collective work. The English word derives from Dutch *landschap* or German *Landschaft*. In its early, 16th century usage, ‘lantschap’ indicated “an area carved out by axe and plough, which belongs to the people who have carved it out”.⁴⁰ It was “an area of cultural identity based on tribal and/or blood ties”. In today’s popular usage of the word, landscape signifies the specific arrangement or pattern of “things on the land”, and refers to “the *look* or the *style* of the land”,⁴¹ by which is meant the social or cultural significance of the observed order or make up. For geographers, landscape is understood as a built morphology. To them, landscape refers to the shape and structure of a place. Landscape also refers to a form of representation, a usage heavily influenced by the genre of landscape painting.⁴² This view of landscape has been adopted in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2018), in which two definitions are presented for landscape: (1) “a picture of natural inland scenery,” and (2) “a portion of land that the eye can see in one glance.” The landscape, then, is conceptualised as the backdrop to human action. This

38 An earlier version of this section was published in Staring et al. (2019), 12. For an excellent and concise introduction to landscape archaeology and Egyptology, the reader is referred to Jiménez Higuera (2020), 17–22, also published in Brill’s CHANE series. There is no need to repeat the introduction in the present study. Kluiving/Guttman-Bond (2012), 11–30, serves as a solid historiography of landscape archaeology. The breadth of the discipline of landscape archaeology was yet again emphasised in the wide range of subjects presented at the latest Landscape Archaeology Conference (LAC 2020+1), held (online) in Madrid, 8–11 June 2021.

39 Michaels (2006).

40 Olwig (1993), 311.

41 Meinig (1979).

42 Antrop (2007), 23–26.

view, drawing on 1960s environmental archaeology, is not how landscape is understood in the context of the study presented in this volume.

Landscape is related to, but not identical with nature. This view is perhaps best articulated by cultural geographer Donald Meinig, who argues that

the idea of landscape (...) begins with a naive acceptance of the intricate intimate intermingling of physical, biological, and cultural features which any glance around us displays. Landscape is, first of all, the unity we see, the impressions of our senses rather than the logic of the sciences.

Landscape can be found all around us. Yet while the landscape may be contemporary to its dwellers, glimpses of older landscapes always remain visible, and these potentially continue to be meaningful. The past endures, and therefore, as Tim Ingold has noted, “the landscape is never complete: neither ‘built’ nor ‘unbuilt’, it is perpetually under construction”.⁴³ In other words, landscape has an important temporal aspect.⁴⁴

In the proceedings of the first international conference on Landscape Archaeology, published in 2012, the editors note that in today’s scholarship there are, essentially, two approaches to the topic. The first, ‘landscape as territory’ definition, is used by processual archaeologists, earth scientists, and most historical geographers. Post-processual archaeologists, new cultural geographers and anthropologists, on the other hand, “favour a more abstract definition of landscape, based on how it is perceived by the observer”.⁴⁵ The present study adheres to the second of these perspectives.

1.5 Landscape Biography

This study adopts a biographical approach to understanding the shaping of the Saqqara cultural landscape. The notions of landscape and the analytical concepts drawn from the biographical approach as adopted in the present study are further detailed in Chapter 2.⁴⁶ The present section is meant to briefly introduce the concept. At the core of the term ‘landscape biography’ lies the

43 Ingold (1993), 162.

44 The temporality of landscape has been explored in-depth in Kolen (2005).

45 Kluiwing/Guttman-Bond (2012), 11–30.

46 See also Staring (2019), 208–209.

premise that it is useful to conceptualise the history of a landscape as a life-history.⁴⁷ The concept of ‘life-history’ was introduced by anthropologist Ruth Tringham,⁴⁸ interested in the transformation of spatial structures (houses) in a historical context.⁴⁹ The analytical value of the concept is aptly illustrated when she writes:

the house has to be considered as an individual, as a dynamic entity whose every month of life is significant for the men and women who act in and around it. It seems to me that the concept of life-history of the house has a more historical and humanistic significance than the term *use-life*. It concerns the time aspect—the duration of the house, the continuity of its next generation (its replacement), its ancestors and descendants, the memories of it that are held by its actors, the ghosts that are held within its walls and under its foundations. In other words, I become interested in its biography. In this respect, I am interested not only in its appearance of external wall and bounded interior space, but its appearance on the broader landscape through time.⁵⁰

A biography as the written history of a person’s life provides a comprehensive description of the life of an individual, but it involves more than just the summing up of notable events or moments in their life. A biography presents a life *story*, it narrates not every detail, but highlights various aspects, and aims to grasp the broader picture of one’s life journey. All is situated in the historical,

47 I am aware of the critique of the ‘life’ metaphor in e.g., contemporary urban studies with respect to book titles such as ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’ (Jacobs 1961), and ‘City Life-cycles and American Urban Policy’ (Norton 1979). Such notions of cities as natural entities can be traced back to Darwinian ideas about evolution (cf. Roberts 1991). The underlying premise is that, much like humans, cities evolve, and that they all undergo the same developments, involving a natural curve of growth and decline in the time between birth to death (cf. Eisinger 1993). Clearly, in conceptualising the ‘lives’ of cities in terms of *human* life cycles, death is seen as the unavoidable consequence of life. Such views of decay and death of cities have, in urban studies, somewhat fallen out of fashion by now. It is therefore important to stress at the start of this book that the biography metaphor adopted in the present study is strictly *not* seen in this evolutionary manner. For critique on the ‘life’ metaphor in relation to the ‘cultural biography of objects’ (cf. Gossen/Marshall 1999), see: Joy (2009).

48 Tringham (1995). For a recent example of the life history approach to ancient Egyptian tombs, see: Gnirs-Loprieno (2021).

49 The concept leans on geographer Allan Pred’s concept of place: Pred (1990); (1984).

50 Tringham (1995), 98.

social, and/or geographic context in which that life takes place. Along the same lines, in the social sciences, the biographical method as a research methodology is understood as

The collection and analysis of an intensive account of a whole life or portion of a life (...) Rather than concentrating upon a 'snapshot' of an individual's present situation, the biographical approach emphasises the placement of the individual within a nexus of social connections, historical events and life experiences (the life history).⁵¹

Human biographies are notably limited and closed, because humans have more or less finite life cycles with a fixed beginning (birth) and end (death) with distinguishable life stages in between. Biographies of landscapes have no clear-cut beginning or end. To borrow the words of archaeologist Tim Ingold, the landscape is 'always in the nature of "work in progress"'.⁵² A landscape's life-history or biography can be seen as a never-ending process of growth and aging. The making of a cultural geography may thus be viewed as a cumulative process. Landscapes play a part in the closed biographies of the individuals dwelling in them; the biographies of landscapes, on the other hand, far outlive those of their dwellers. The significance of studying the changing landscape and its interaction with humans in order to understand the formation of a cultural geography is perhaps best captured by Jan Kolen and Johannes Renes, when they state that

as an essential part of human life worlds, landscapes have the potential to absorb something of people's lives, works and thoughts. But landscapes also shape their own life histories on different timescales, imprinted by human existence, affecting personal lives and transcending individual human life cycles.⁵³

The relationships between the life histories of landscapes and people have in the last two decades attracted growing scholarly interest. This has resulted in the creation of landscape biography as a new approach to landscape history. Landscape biography as a 'research strategy'⁵⁴ was developed by archaeolo-

51 Miller (2003).

52 Ingold (1993), 162.

53 Kolen/Renes (2015), 21.

54 Roymans et al. (2009).

gists, geographers and historians in the Netherlands in the mid-1990s.⁵⁵ While the approach they developed was new, its foundations were not. The landscape biography approach is rooted in theories borrowed from the disciplines of social anthropology and geography. It combines insights from anthropological studies of material culture—object biography (also known as ‘the social life of things’)—as proposed by social anthropologists Igor Kopytoff⁵⁶ and Arjun Appadurai,⁵⁷ with those of cultural geographer Marwyn Samuels’s ‘biography of landscape’.⁵⁸ Current landscape biography also integrates insights from philosopher and cultural historian Michel De Certeau,⁵⁹ who is interested in the idea of the city as a locus of everyday life and the people who are actively engaged in the continuous production of living space. The views of Samuels and De Certeau with respect to ‘landscape authorship’ are further explored in Section 2.5.

Finally, the notion of biography which is meant to conceptually ground this study is aptly formulated by Christopher Ratté, curator of a 2018 Kelsey Museum exhibition focused on ‘urban biographies’. In his explanation of what is meant by ‘urban biographies’, the word ‘city’ may well be replaced by ‘necropolis’ to fit the case study of the present book:

Just as the biography of a human being is the story of what makes that person unique as an individual, so the biography of a city is the story of the unique experience of an urban community over time. How do cities come into being? How do they change and evolve?⁶⁰ How do urban communities create and articulate individual identities through development of their built environments, through the layout of streets, for example, or the construction of “signature” buildings? We can all conjure up images of modern skylines that simultaneously say “I am a city” and “I am dif-

55 For a comprehensive outline of the landscape biography approach and its place within the history of landscape studies, the reader is referred to: Kolen/Renes (2015); Roymans et al. (2009). For the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the approach, see Kolen (2005).

56 Kopytoff (1986).

57 Appadurai (1986).

58 Samuels (1979). He foregrounded the human element in the shaping and reshaping of landscapes, arguing that the latter “cannot be conceptualised without taking into account the life histories of individuals and groups that have shaped them over time”, asking “How is it that the *who* behind the image and facts of landscape, or the “biography of landscape,” no longer grips our attention?” (Samuels 1979, 53).

59 De Certeau (1984).

60 See n. 47 above for reservations regarding the use of this term. I would rather say ‘grow’ or ‘accumulate’.

ferent from other cities,” and most contemporary cities also bear clear witness to passage of time, from historic buildings to suburban developments.⁶¹

1.6 Structure of This Study

Chapter 2 engages with the theoretical and methodological concepts underlying landscape biography. The concept (cultural) landscape is elucidated by describing a number of its main characteristics, such as ‘layerdness’ and ‘temporality’. The chapter discusses ‘landscape authorship’, presumed ‘desired life-paths’, and consequences for heritage practices.

Chapter 3 introduces the data sources underlying the present study, and the methodology employed. The Saqqara New Kingdom necropolis is set in its environmental setting, and the corpus of tombs (both reconstructed and excavated) listed in the catalogue at the end of this study is elucidated. The analysis of the spatial and diachronic distribution of tombs in the necropolis (chapters 4 and 5) combines information pertaining to the natural environment with landscape phenomenology (e.g., visibility, accessibility, location, interrelation, etc.) in a diachronic perspective and augmented with corroborated data including prosopography (i.e. titles, filiations, professional association, etc.).

Chapters 4 and 5 form the core of this study, and describe the development of the two clusters of tombs (‘cemeteries’) located on the North Saqqara plateau through the New Kingdom. Chapter 4 focuses on the Unas South Cemetery, and dwells largely on material gathered by the former EES-Leiden and current Leiden-Turin archaeological expedition to Saqqara (1975–present). Chapter 5 aims to draw together the scattered results of roughly 200 years of excavations in the Teti Pyramid Cemetery.

Chapter 6 aims to answer the question why the tombs were located where they are, and why the necropolis developed as it did. In so doing, the study draws on the limited textual evidence available on the topic, and situates the cemeteries, studied ‘in isolation’ in Chapter 4 and 5, in their wider landscape setting.

Chapter 7 constitutes a conclusion to this study.

61 Kelsey Museum (2018), 4. Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan, *Urban Biographies, Ancient and Modern*, see: <https://exhibitions.kelsey.lsa.umich.edu/urban-biographies>, last accessed on 29.06.2021.