A topographical catalogue of the private tombs of Thebes

Gardiner Alan Henderson
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A Topographical Catalogue of the Private Tombs of Thebes

by

Alan H. Gardiner, D.Litt.
Reader in Egyptology at Manchester University

and

Arthur E. P. Weigall
Inspector-General of the Service of Antiquities

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INTRODUCTION.

BY

ALAN H. GARDINER.

The site of Ancient Thebes boasts so many vast and historically important monuments, that its lesser antiquities run the risk of being neglected beyond their deserts. This has undoubtedly been true, until quite recently, of the Private Tombs, which, although unable to vie with the great temples in magnificence, or with the Tombs of the Kings in their romantic situation and their imaginative appeal, yet possess features of interest and beauty hardly, if at all, inferior to these. By the Private Tombs are meant the rock-cut funerary chapels of high dignitaries scattered irregularly along the main frontage of the western hills amid and above the straggling village of Gurnah. Their extent from end to end is about two miles, and being very numerous, and varying greatly in their degrees of attractiveness, they disclose their charms to the tourist less readily than the more generally visited ancient ruins. To those, however, who have leisure to spare and have made the necessary inquiries as to what to seek and what to disregard, a rare intellectual and artistic feast can here be confidently promised. It does not belong to the scope of this book to serve as a guide to visitors, but a few prefatory remarks and hints addressed to such readers will probably not be considered out of place.

It is only by an excusable looseness of language that the painted and sculptured chambers with which this book is concerned are described as tombs. In idea and purpose they are quite distinct from actual burying-places. It is true that in very many cases an oblique or vertical shaft descends from the innermost room to the sepulchral chamber where the mummy rested; but in other cases, the burial lay wholly apart from what is here called the tomb. This had a double purpose to serve; the Egyptians conceived of it as the “eternal habitation” (ἀἰών οἰκία) of the dead, and in practice, it was employed as a chapel for the celebration of the funerary cult. Herein lies the difference between the Private Tombs and the Tombs of the Kings, the latter being true sepulchres, elaborated and richly adorned developments of the simple theme of shaft and burial chambers. The real Royal counterparts of the Private Tombs are the Funerary Temples of the Kings near the cultivation, Dër el Bahri, Gurnah, the Ramesseum and Medinet Habu. The difference in character between the Tombs of the Kings and the Private Tombs is reflected in their internal decoration. At Bihân el Mulûk the paintings and sculptures either concern the Divine Cult—for the obligation of service to the Gods did not terminate with death—or depict the Netherworld, a mysterious region of gates and passages, peopled with monstrous and uncanny beings.1 The Private Tombs, on the other hand, resemble the Funerary Temples in that their scenes are drawn from life, and form an illustrated record, as it were, of the earthly existence of the deceased up to the very moment that his mummy was lowered into its last resting-place; with the Beyond, except in so far as that Beyond was itself earthly, they have nothing to do.2 Thus the interest of the Private Tombs is essentially of a human and living kind; here we may study the manifold occupations, recreations and incidents of the lives of the Theban aristocracy, together with the funeral rites and ceremonies which in those days were deemed the crown and consummation of every successful career.

1 A few private sepulchral chambers, as those of 61, 82 and 87, are similarly decorated; none of these are accessible to the public. No. 968 is a subterranean tomb-chapel of an ambiguous and exceptional character. No. 240 has a typical burial-chamber of Old to Middle Kingdom date, inscribed with excerpts from the Pyramid-texts.

2 The banquet scenes in the tombs appear to be partly retrospective, partly prospective. Such pictures as that in which a soul in the shape of a bird is seen drinking water from a garden-pool certainly refer to a future earthly existence.
INTRODUCTION.

It is a particular advantage of the Private Tombs that their owners occupied very different ranks and stations in life, from the proudest priesthoods and administrative dignities down to the comparatively humble posts of scribes and minor officials. Some idea of the variety of the functions represented in the Theban Necropolis may be gathered from Index II at the end of this book. It is true that many of the scenes in the tombs are of a general and stereotyped character, such as the pictures of banquets and the favourite pastimes of fishing, fowling and hunting, as well as the funeral processions. Nevertheless, there are but few well-preserved tombs that do not possess many individual traits throwing light on the personal activities of their owners. Thus, a Vizier is represented in his Court of Justice, the forty parchment-rolls of the Law lying before him and his assessors squatting in long rows on either hand (100). The nurse or tutor of the King’s children is depicted with one or more of his Royal charges upon his lap (64, 93, 226). The Royal Butler is seen busy with the preparation of the beverages to be consumed in the Palace (92). In the tomb of a second prophet of Amün, priests are arriving at the temple-gates where they are met and welcomed by priestesses (75). In a humbler walk of life, the head-gardener of the Ramesseum is beheld attending to the temple-gardens (138). Elsewhere, it is the military life that we are called upon to view (78, 85, 90, 91); and there are twenty-four tombs in which foreigners and their tribute are delineated. It is impossible to enumerate all the sides of life on which these ancient tombs throw light; they are, in short, the principal source of our knowledge of the conditions of life under the Tuthmoside and Ramesside Pharaohs.

From the purely artistic side, the Private Tombs are equally attractive. Few tourists have not marvelled at the gaiety and freshness of the paintings in the tombs of Nakht (32) and Menna (69); and the exquisite delicacy of the reliefs in the chapels of Ramöse (55) and Khaemhêt (57) seldom fail to evoke their full measure of admiration. These are undeniably the show-places of the Necropolis, but they by no means suffice to illustrate the variety and versatility of Theban art. Now that so many tombs are accessible to visitors, individual or successive styles of workmanship may be comparatively studied. The Old Kingdom, of course, is far better represented at Gizeh or Saqqarah, but this period is exemplified in 185, 186. The tomb of Antefoker (60) is a finely-planned tomb of the XIth dynasty, of special interest as having been a favourite resort of sightseers at the beginning of the New Kingdom, whose satisfaction is recorded in many hieratic scribbles upon the walls. Of rather earlier date is 103, once a magnificent structure with very fine coloured reliefs, little of which now remains. Coming down to the XVIIIth dynasty, the earliest period is but poorly represented (12, 15, 59). It is hardly before the time of Hatshepsouet that the really fine tombs begin (67, 73, 125, 179). The reign of Tuthmosis III is represented by many admirable tombs. To the early portion belongs 81, where, however, the delicate and brightly-coloured paintings have been badly scratched and disfigured. Towards the middle of the reign the choice becomes so great as to be embarrassing. I would counsel a visit to 85, 86, and especially to 82 on the hill of Sheikh Abd el Gurnah, and to 39 near the American House on the north side of the Khökîkah. Under Amenophis II some princely tombs were executed. That of Kenamün (93) contains, unfortunately much blackened and mutilated, paintings in which the minuteness of the detail is little short of marvellous. The Tomb of the Vines (968) is especially noticeable for the clever treatment of its irregular roof, which is painted to imitate a vineyard. From the reign of Tuthmosis IV 64 and 65 are fine, though damaged, specimens. Under Amenophis III a considerable change of style becomes noticeable. The reliefs of 48 are not a whit inferior to those of Ramöse and Khaemhêt already named. As an instance of the fresco-painting of this reign the Semites and Negroes in 226 are unsurpassed. The peculiar contours of the Akhenaten period are to be seen not only in 55, but also in 188. The tomb of Huy (40) in Gurnet Murrai is of extreme interest, and its scenes have a marked individuality. The XIXth dynasty is distinguishable by another change of style. None should omit to visit 51, in which the representation of Userhêt, seated under a fig-tree with two women, is of rare beauty. The tomb of Neferhotpe (50) just opposite is famous for its hieroglyphic texts; artistically, its
ceiling is worthy of note. The pictures in the tomb of another Neferhotpe (49) are now recognizable only with the greatest difficulty; were they still as perfect as in the days of Wilkinson this would be the most attractive tomb of the entire Necropolis. Of exquisite quality are the paintings in 19, which, however, is somewhat out of the beaten track. The larger tombs of the XIXth dynasty differ from those of the XVIIIth in their architectural features; a hypostyle court is now in vogue, good examples of which are 23 and 41. The underground vaulted tombs of Dér el Medineh, especially 1 and 3, are vivid in their colouring, and interesting from many points of view. To the end of the XXth dynasty belong the well-drawn but monotonously coloured scenes of 65; the ceiling decorations of the neighbouring tomb, 68, are deserving of attention. The Saite period was characterized by tombs of huge extent, often with vast brick superstructures (examples near both ends of the road to Dér el Bahri). The largest of all (33) is said to be a perfect labyrinth of chambers, most of which are adorned with magnificently carved hieroglyphic texts; it is now closed on account of the myriads of bats that live there. On a smaller scale, 36 will be found thoroughly typical of the work of Saite times.

The above cursory remarks on individual tombs are as much as can here be permitted. The immediate purpose of this Catalogue is to introduce to students the first relatively complete numbering of the tombs, and to constitute a permanent record of their position; its compilation was a necessary preliminary of the extensive work of Conservation now in progress in the Necropolis. It is not very long ago that the large majority of the tombs lay half-buried and entirely neglected; few scholars would have been able to locate more than a few, and the attempts to number them had proved abortive and unsuccessful. It is but late in the day that the Egyptian Government has awaked to the necessity of safe-guarding and restoring its ancient monuments, and, but for private enterprise, the Private Tombs of Thebes would probably still be awaiting their turn. Sir Gaston Maspero, the energetic Director of the Service of Antiquities, has achieved a great work in protecting the temples of Egypt and Lower Nubia, as well as the Tombs of the Kings. While displaying a lively interest in the work on the Private Tombs, he has here been content to leave a free hand to his lieutenant in Upper Egypt. It is partly due to the initiative and enterprise of Mr. A. E. P. Weigall, until recently Inspector-General of the Antiquities Department for Upper Egypt, and in large part also to the personal endeavours and enlightened liberality of Mr. Robert Mond, that the Theban Necropolis is now, on the whole, well protected and in a satisfactory condition.

In order to convey a correct impression of the work of Conservation that has been, and is being, carried out in the Theban Necropolis, it is necessary to go back some ten years. At that time only eight tombs were protected by iron doors. The credit of having taken this first step in the right direction belongs to Mr. Howard Carter, the first Inspector-General of the Department of Antiquities, to whose energetic régime belongs the protection of the Royal Tombs, as well as much other important work of the kind. A considerable number of the tombs had been cleared, and were known to a few Egyptologists, but in the absence of any published list no really methodical supervision was possible. In 1903, at the suggestion of Mr. Percy E. Newberry, who had made the study of the Private Tombs his special province, and had been very successful in stimulating interest in them, Mr. Robert Mond started upon extensive investigations upon the site. His excavations in the spring of that year, and in the following season, resulted in the opening up of many interesting tombs, reports upon which were published in the Annales du Service, tome V, pp. 97–104, and tome VI, pp. 65–96. Subsequently Mr. Mond was forced to discontinue his personal researches, and for a year or two the protection of the Necropolis made no great progress. It was not until about the end of 1906 that Weigall, still new to his post, had begun to recognize to the full the importance and urgency of the work that here lay before him. By the spring of 1908 the Necropolis already presented a new and comparatively well-tended appearance. The most important tombs of the Hill of Sheikh Abd el Gurnah were cleared and protected by iron doors; several native families that had taken up their abode in tombs had been expropriated thence; paths connected the various tombs and made access to them easy; the service
of ghafrir had been reinforced and reorganized. A particularly important measure was the construction of a low stone wall around the largest group of tombs, which had the effect of rendering trespassers within the enclosure liable to far severer penalties than hitherto. Lastly, a new numbering of the tombs was commenced, which was published in the Annales du Service, tome IX, pp. 125–126. As yet but fifty-five tombs had been definitely located, but within a short time the number was increased beyond one hundred; see Weigall, A Guide to the Antiquities of Upper Egypt, London [1909], pp. 182–183. Mr. Mond, in the meantime, had not abandoned all interest in the Theban work, and although unable to devote his personal time to it, contributed generously to the heavy expense. Various liberal subscriptions were also obtained by Weigall from other sources, and special mention must be made of the assistance thus rendered by the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and by Prince Djemil Pasha Toussoun. With these funds much restoration and protection was able to be effected, and many more inhabited tombs were expropriated. Weigall was fortunate in possessing in his Native Inspector, Mahmud Effendi Rushdy, a most capable and energetic assistant, whose services have proved particularly valuable in conducting the delicate negotiations for the purchase of tombs used as dwelling-places. In the late summer of 1909, Weigall obtained some new co-operation; a young Oxford graduate, Mr. Jelf, was sent out by Mr. Mond to continue his excavations, and the present writer joined Weigall as a volunteer. By our united efforts the work proceeded apace. Many new tombs were added to the list, which was simultaneously corrected and revised. In the autumn of 1911, Weigall was compelled to leave Upper Egypt through ill-health, and I, who had gone out to help him a second time, was obliged to continue my investigations alone. My third stay in Gurnah, early in the present year, has added thirty to the number of located tombs, bringing the total up to two hundred and fifty-two, one hundred and sixty-one of which are now adequately protected.

Last March saw the inauguration of what will probably prove to be a new era in the history of the Theban Necropolis. By the great liberality of Mr. Mond the Conservation of the tombs has been placed on a new and secure basis. That his far-sighted scheme is in course of realization is due to the cordial support given to it by Sir Gaston Maspero, and it is to be hoped that equal facilities will long continue to be granted. The services of Mr. Eric Mackay, for many years Professor Petrie’s chief assistant, have been obtained, and throughout the summer he has been engaged on the systematic protection and restoration of the tombs. Mr. Mackay’s duties comprise the clearing, mending and safe-guarding of the tombs located in the course of the preparation of this Catalogue; further, in arranging expropriations; and, lastly, in making photographic records and assisting students anxious to work on the site. At the same time, Mr. Mackay should be able to exercise an unofficial supervision over the already protected tombs, and so materially to lighten the heavy responsibilities of the Inspector-General for Upper Egypt, whose province extends from Abydos to the Sudan frontier.

The wisdom of opening up so many tombs has sometimes been called in question, and certainly it is a policy that needs justification. It is undeniable, I think, that excavation has of recent years absorbed too much of the activity of Egyptologists; the demands of Science have tended to be subordinated to the demands of the Museums, and the acquisition of antiquities has become the primary object, and the acquisition of knowledge concerning the Ancients a secondary consideration. There remain in the temples and tombs countless important inscriptions and scenes that clamour for attention, and the number of students engaged in copying them is wholly insufficient. Why then, it may fairly be asked, add to the number of the standing monuments, while so many that are already accessible are still in need of study? The answer to this question is that the peculiar conditions of the Theban Necropolis make it necessary to exhume and safeguard all tombs the existence of which is known to the natives, if it is wished to save them from utter destruction. The inhabitants of Gurnah are inveterate and incorrigible tomb-robbers; they are by no means content with searching for portable objects, but will, with equal readiness, cut fragments of painting or sculpture from the tomb-walls for sale to any Europeans who are Vandals enough to purchase them. The greater National Collections, one is glad to record, refuse to traffic in goods of this kind; but there have been glaring and disgraceful exceptions. The native methods of extracting such fragments are clumsy and unintelligent in the
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extreme, and almost invariably three times as much is destroyed as is actually carried away. The extent of the damage done during the last thirty years is well-nigh incredible, and it is certain that neither Egyptologists nor the public at large have fully realized it. There is hardly a good tomb in Thebes but has been marred and disfigured in this fashion. Recent mutilations, whether owing to the use of new tools or to some other reason, have a quite unmistakable appearance, so that it is impossible to maintain that the damage here alluded to is of ancient date or even belongs to an earlier stage in the history of Egyptology.\(^1\) The chief object of Conservation as now practised is to arrest such depredations on the part of the natives, or at least to retard them as far as possible.

There are only two possible modes of Conservation. The one consists in rendering monuments inaccessible by closing and burying them; the other consists in opening and clearing them in such a way that they can be systematically inspected and controlled. On some sites the first mode may perhaps be adequate or even preferable; it has the advantage of dispensing with a continual supervision by ghaffirs and inspectors, which entails a great deal of expense. It is conceivable that this is the right method to be employed, for example, at Saqqarah, where sand accumulates more rapidly than at Thebes and is less easily removed, where landmarks to indicate the exact position of a buried monument are fewer, and where natives do not live in the very midst of the Necropolis. At Thebes the second mode of Conservation is the only one possible; Weigall's investigations have proved this point up to the hilt, and we feel ourselves able to speak dogmatically on the subject. It must be remembered that the natives of Gurnah are for the most part born and bred to the habit of tomb-robbery; there is no hole so small that a native will not creep into it, undeterred by darkness, dirt, or lack of air. A considerable part of the site is so honeycombed with underground passages and chambers, that if the position of a painted tomb has once become known it is usually possible, either with or without a little tunnelling, to force an entrance from some neighbouring cavern apparently devoid of interest. Thus it was found that Hasan Ahmed el Gurni had borrowed from the back of his house into no less than four painted tombs (245-248), from each of which fragments had been cut. The futility of merely blocking the entrance of a tomb is indicated in the case of 198, a Ramesside tomb that I discovered on the south side of the Khâkhâh. This was found more than half-filled with sand, and could be entered by crawling under a low ledge of rock. Pending complete excavation and protection, I had the entrance cemented up. Some weeks later, a lad to whom I owe information concerning a number of valuable tombs—for what purposes he had gained an acquaintance with them can easily be guessed—offered to show me a decorated tomb which he thought to be unknown to me. Starting from a hole on the north side of the Khâkhâh we crawled on all fours and with considerable difficulty through a winding and irregular tunnel, until at last we emerged into the very tomb that I had so carefully sealed up a short time previously. It is just such tombs that are the easiest and chosen prey of the natives. Here, in the darkness, and with a minimum risk of detection, they can destroy and plunder at their leisure. Conversely, a tomb is very much safer when it has been completely cleared and is accessible alike to Europeans and to natives. If, in addition, locked iron doors make intrusion a matter of some difficulty, if ghaffirs are placed in charge to whose interest it is that no damage should be done, and if, finally, there is always a chance that a resident European inspector may present himself at any hour of the day or night, then it may be claimed that all that is humanly possible in the way of Conservation has been accomplished.

And, indeed, the policy adopted has already justified itself. During the past few years the damage done in protected tombs has been very slight. We are under no illusions as to the imperfect protection afforded by the iron doors; it is inevitable that from time to time particularly

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1 Sculptured limestone walls are now scooped out in slabs about two feet square, while paintings on plaster are removed in similar square or oblong pieces. As will be seen below, the tombs that have suffered most are those that have been opened comparatively recently and left unprotected.
daring natives should break into tombs in order to injure them. There have recently been only three serious cases where this has happened, so far as I am aware; these were in tombs 15, 39 and 90 (the Tomb of the Vines). There is reason to think that in each instance spite was the cause of the outrage; it is not clear in any of the cases whether the _ghaffirs_ were implicated. However this may be, occasional acts of wilful destruction to satisfy a grudge are a very different thing from the systematic plundering that was formerly an everyday occurrence; this appears to have ceased, so far as protected tombs are concerned, altogether.

It follows from what has been said that an important part of the task of Conservation consisted in discovering _all_ the tombs that are known and accessible to the natives, so that these might by degrees be protected and systematically watched. The present Catalogue summarizes what has been hitherto achieved in this respect. Undecorated tombs and tombs without interest have been ignored and left unnumbered.

Some errors of judgment have occurred: thus 180 does not deserve a number. A large number of tombs seen and noted by Champollion, Lepsius and others have not been rediscovered, and no mention of these will be found in this book. It is intended later on to publish a larger volume giving a full account and bibliography of all the Theban Private Tombs, whether these have been located or not, and to this further work the reader must be referred for whatever he misses here. In the interests of accuracy it has been sought to exclude such tombs as could not be investigated and verified; the gradual way in which the list has been compiled is responsible for the retention of a few tombs that form exceptions to this rule, such as 34, 47 and 146, none of which has been entered by me. Certain other tombs, the exact location of which is known, have been omitted for the reason that I have been unable to visit them. Thus in the same court as 19 is the tomb of Pjay discovered by M. Gauthier (_Bulletin de l'Institut français_, VI, pp. 148-162); this is at present blocked up.

The numbers employed in this Catalogue are the same as will be found marked outside the actual tombs; it is greatly hoped that these will meet with general acceptance. It will be noted that the numbering follows no topographical order. It will pain the pedantically-minded—I confess it is not wholly pleasant even to myself—that, for example, tomb 42 should adjoin 110, and access be had to 145 from 17. Such incongruities are for the most part due to the succession in which the tombs were discovered; in practice they do not in any way impair the utility of the numbering. The purpose in assigning numbers to the tombs is to provide a series of abbreviations to be used in quotation, and so long as the numbers given are easily referred to in a printed Catalogue it matters little what order they follow. Any attempt to modify our numbering at the present juncture would introduce serious confusion into the already somewhat chaotic literature of Egyptology. Scholars are therefore begged to make shift with it, whatever its imperfections.

Doubtless the natives know of a good many more tombs than have been included in our list, and the latter will have to be supplemented from time to time. It is of vital importance, as I have already said, that all the tombs with which the natives of Gurnah are acquainted should be discovered and removed from the danger and probability of wilful destruction.

At the same time it is highly undesirable that any hitherto undiscovered decorated tombs should be unearthed; we have already so large a number to cope with, that it is far better that a halt should now be called to excavation and that we should concentrate all our energies upon the study of what has been rescued. That Egyptologists in the past should have been permitted to dig out tombs to satisfy a mere caprice, and without giving any undertaking to protect and publish what they found, is in the highest degree deplorable. It would be easy to point to a dozen tombs that have thus been excavated, and, after a few inscriptions had been copied, abandoned to their fate without a thought. It is just such tombs as these that have suffered to the greatest extent. When attention has once been called to a tomb, the native will begin cutting out fragments as soon as the excavator's back is turned, unless the latter has performed the obvious duty of safe-guarding his discovery.