

Tutankhamen and Other Essays

CHAPTER I

THE VALLEY OF THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS

THE famous Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, or *Bibân-el-Malûk*, as the natives call it, in which the tomb of Tutankhamen has recently been found, was first used as a burial-place for the Pharaohs of Egypt during the sixteenth century B.C. Previous to this the kings were buried in various parts of the country, according to the position of their capital; and sometimes a Pharaoh had two tombs prepared for him, though it is not known whether, in such cases, it was intended that the body should lie for a time in each of the sepulchres, or whether one of the two was simply a sort of extra residence for the royal *Ka*, or spirit. At any rate, we must understand that an ancient Egyptian burial was not, as with us, a means of disposing of a dead body, but was a method of preserving it and providing a comfortable home for it and the spirit which still dwelt in it.

The kings of the earliest dynasties, B.C. 3600 to 3100, were buried in large brick tombs in the western desert behind the city of Abydos in Upper Egypt. Mena, the first Pharaoh of a united Egypt, B.C. 3520, seems to have had two tombs, one at Abydos and one at Nakâdeh. King Zeser, B.C. 3100, built for himself the great Step-Pyramid at Sakkâra, near Memphis, his capital; but he seems also to have had a sepulchre at Bêt Khallâf, near Abydos. Sneferu, who reigned shortly after this, was buried in a pyramid-like tomb at Meidûm, some miles above Memphis; but he also appears to have erected another pyramid-tomb for himself at Dahshûr, near Sakkâra.

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Then came Khufu (Cheops), B.C. 3020–2997, who built the Great Pyramid at Gizeh as his sepulchre. His successor, Dedefra, made his tomb at Abu Roash, a few miles to the north of this ; but the next king, Khafra (Khephren), B.C. 2989–2923, returned to Gizeh and erected the Second Pyramid there, his successor, Menkaura (Mykerinos), building the Third Pyramid close to it. The Pharaohs Sahura, Neferarkara, and Nuserra of the Fifth Dynasty, B.C. 2863–2811, were buried in pyramids at Abusir, between Gizeh and Sakkâra ; but King Unas, B.C. 2775–2745, was buried at Sakkâra, as were also the kings of the succeeding dynasty, down to B.C. 2595.

Then followed the first of Egypt's two "dark ages," and when the light returns, in B.C. 2280, we find the reigning house—the Eleventh Dynasty—living at Thebes, and burying its kings in the western desert opposite that city, an area which was to become the famous Theban necropolis. The Pharaoh Nebhapetra Mentuhotep of this dynasty caused himself to be buried at Dêr el-Bahri, in a pyramid surrounded by temple-like buildings, at the foot of the great cliffs which faced the city of Thebes ; and not far away he caused a rock-cut tomb to be made for him as a second sepulchre. Other Pharaohs of this period erected brick pyramids for themselves in another part of this necropolis.

King Amenemhet II, B.C. 2058–2023, of the Twelfth Dynasty was buried in a pyramid at Dahshûr, near Sakkâra ; and his successor, Senusert II, chose to build his pyramid at Illahûn, at the entrance of the Fayûm. The great Senusert III, B.C. 2007–1969, had two tombs, the one a pyramid at Dahshûr, and the other a rock-cut sepulchre, discovered by Prof. Petrie and myself in the desert behind Abydos, not far from the tombs of the earliest kings. The site chosen for this latter tomb was a stretch of open desert near the foot of the western hills. A pit was excavated in the sand, and when bed-rock was reached a tunnel was made sloping down for some 650 feet into the rock. The sides of the internal chambers were cased with quartzite sandstone, granite, and limestone ; and there was a magnificent sarcophagus of red granite. It was the first of the great tunnel-

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tombs of the Pharaohs, and served as the prototype for the royal sepulchres of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Amenemhet III, B.C., 1969-1921, also had two burial places, both pyramids, one at Dahshûr and the other at Hawâra, near Illahûn. The second "dark age" followed, and when the story of the Pharaohs is able to be resumed the city of Thebes is once more the capital and the Pharaoh Ahmose I, B.C., 1580-1557, the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty, is on the throne.

Thebes, it should be mentioned, was situated on the east bank of the Nile, some 450 miles above Memphis and the later Cairo; and on the west bank stood the pyramids of some of the earlier kings, grouped at the foot of the desert hills which here come forward in a magnificent range to within a mile or two of the river.

Now, it was the Egyptian custom to bury a large amount of rich funeral furniture and jewellery with their illustrious dead, in order that the spirit might have at hand those comforts and luxuries which the body had enjoyed in life; and the mummies themselves were adorned with valuable necklaces and other personal ornaments, while the coffins were often decorated with gold. There was thus always a great temptation to rob these tombs, and in the chaotic period previous to the foundation of the Eighteenth Dynasty, some of the Pharaonic pyramids had been plundered and the objects of value stolen. It became necessary, therefore, for the kings to consider a new method of burial which would secure some measure of safety for their bodies in the years to come. If the mummy and its resting place were destroyed the spirit would be rendered homeless, and if the tomb-stone inscriptions were broken up the name of the dead monarch might be lost; and thus his ghost would have to wander about, untended and unsustained by the pious prayers of the priests of the necropolis. This fear led to much thought being given to the question; and we can easily understand that the method of burial in a conspicuous pyramid had to be abandoned as being almost an invitation to robbery.

The trouble was, however, that if the Pharaoh's body

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was to be hidden away in some remote spot in order to secure its safety, the ancient custom of placing funeral offerings and saying prayers at the tomb would have to be given up, for these offerings and ceremonies would reveal the position of the hiding-place. In the earliest times such offerings had been placed at the east side of the tomb, that being the side on which the spirit came out to greet the rising sun, and in the age of the pyramids this custom had led to the erection of a temple on the east side of each pyramid, where the mortuary services on behalf of the dead monarch were held. Here food and drink for his spirit were placed ; and thus it had not to make a ghostly journey of any distance in search of its material needs.

In the case of the tomb of Senusert III at Abydos, the mortuary temple had been erected about half a mile to the east of the rock-cut sepulchre : the temple stood at the edge of the fields, but the tomb was up in the desert at the foot of the cliffs. There was, however, a little shrine under the cliffs where special services were perhaps conducted and offerings made. The concealed entrance of the royal sepulchre was surrounded by the conspicuous tombs of the chief nobles of that reign ; and at the fall of the dynasty thieves had thus found their way in and had broken open the sarcophagus.

Ahmose I saw the destruction which had been wrought, yet wished to be buried near his great predecessor, more especially since Abydos was the burial place of the earliest Pharaohs, and was a city sacred to Osiris, the God of the Dead. He, therefore, laid his plans so that the tomb itself should be absolutely concealed and yet that the offerings to his spirit might be made close to it.

He carried out his scheme in the following manner. In the open desert, less than a mile south of the tomb of Senusert III, he caused a long tunnel to be excavated in the rock which underlies the sand of the surface. From a small and rough entrance this tunnel wound its way down to a large eighteen-pillared hall, and thence passed on to a rough chamber deep in the bowels of the earth, wherein he was to be buried. The mouth of the tomb was insignificant, and

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could easily be hidden and lost under the sand of this open plain ; nor did he allow any of his nobles to be buried near him, lest this might give a clue to his whereabouts. Close to it, at the foot of the cliffs, he erected a terraced temple wherein his spirit could receive its food and drink. Then, to deceive possible robbers, he carried all the chippings from the tunnel down to the edge of the fields, the best part of a mile away, and enclosed them in a dummy-pyramid which would, of course, be mistaken for the actual tomb.

Whether he was ever buried here is not known. His mummy was found in a hiding place at Thebes, whither it had been carried several hundred years later by pious hands ; but whether it was taken there from Abydos or elsewhere cannot at present be decided. This tomb at Abydos contained several fragmentary pieces of gold when it was discovered some years ago by Mr. C. T. Currelly ; but, on the other hand, there was no trace of a stone sarcophagus. The place had been entirely plundered, for its secret location had become known by a circumstance which the king had left out of his calculations : the roof of the underground hall had fallen in, thereby leaving a gaping pit in the sandy plain above.

The successor of Ahmose I was Amenhotep I, and to this Pharaoh occurred the novel idea of hiding his body away on the top of the cliffs of Thebes when he should come to die. He chose for the site of his tomb, therefore, a dip or shallow ravine in the undulating surface of the summit, just behind that part of the necropolis now known as Dêr el-Medineh. The entrance, cut in the slope of the hill, was a rough pit in which was a steep flight of steps leading down to a tunnel in the hillside, which brought one first to a small chamber and thence to a fair sized burial-hall and a further chamber.

On the edge of the fields, rather over a mile due south of the tomb, he erected his mortuary temple, at a place now called Medinet Habu. This was a long way for his spirit to go to receive its offerings of food and drink ; but this disadvantage was evidently considered worth enduring in

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order that the secret of the position of his tomb might be kept and his body might thus obtain immunity from pillage.

Amenhotep I appears to have constructed a tomb for his mother, Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, and this has recently been found by Mr. Carter in Dra-abu'l Negga, a part of the necropolis further to the north. The tomb was situated on the top of the hills, and was entered by a pit from which a passage led to a well or shaft some 30 feet deep. This well served both to deceive and baulk possible robbers, and also to carry off any rainwater which might percolate through the filling of the entrance pit. Beyond it the passage continued, leading to a burial hall, the ceiling of which was originally supported by one pillar. In this tomb Mr. Carter found numerous fragments of vases, three of which had the cartouches of Ahmose I on them, eight had the name of Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, that monarch's wife, and nine were inscribed with the name of Amenhotep I. Another fragment bore the name of King Ausserra Apepi of the Seventeenth Dynasty and his daughter Herath, which may perhaps indicate that the tomb had been usurped by Amenhotep I from this earlier king. It is not likely that Amenhotep I was buried with his mother: he was far more probably buried in the tomb on the top of the cliffs; but he did not thus escape the robbers, for the place was plundered in ancient times, and now it lies open, and is generally called simply No. 39, being regarded as the tomb of an unknown person.

My reasons for identifying it as that of Amenhotep I are rather interesting, and may be mentioned here. It is certainly a royal tomb, judging by its size and shape; and the absence of a well or shaft in it, as will presently be seen, dates it to some period before the reign of Thutmose III. In the Abbott Papyrus an account is given of the inspection of certain royal tombs in the time of Rameses X, which had been said to be plundered. The first tomb on the list is that of Amenhotep I, the reference reading as follows:—"The Tomb of King Amenhotep I, which lies 120 cubits down from the buildings (?) belonging to it

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which are called 'The Height,' north of the temple of 'Amenhotep of the Garden.'"

Now the temple of "Amenhotep of the Garden" may well be the later name of the king's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, which is known to have had a garden, the site of which, with its artificial lake, can still be seen. If we take a line due north of this, as the inscription tells us, we come to the well-known pathway leading over the hills behind Dêr el-Medineh; and at the highest point of this track there are the ruins of a number of ancient huts, once occupied by watchmen, which may have been appropriately called "The Height." From this eminence one commands a striking view of the king's temple at Medinet Habu; and if we measure 120 average cubits of 20/63 inches, which is the regular cubit of the period, down the hill westwards from the near side of this group of buildings, we find that the tape brings us exactly to the mouth of this tomb No. 39. Mr. Carter thought that the tomb which he found at Dra Abu'l Negga as mentioned above, was the sepulchre referred to in the Abbott Papyrus, but the 120 cubit measurement cannot be made to tally with it, except by means of some very improbable calculations, nor do the other directions agree.

The next Pharaoh was Thutmose I; and he decided to make a tomb for himself close to that of his father.* Going a few yards westward from No. 39, that is to say into the desert, away from Thebes, one drops down into the southern corner of the great valley which is now famous as the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, but which was at that time a remote and desolate ravine. It is a magnificent amphitheatre surrounded by precipices or steep hillsides, dominated to the south by a mountain which rises up like a pyramid into the sky. This valley passes behind the great barrier-wall of the cliffs which face Thebes, and, with many twists and turns, comes out at last amongst the low hills at the extreme north end of the necropolis. It had been created by some long forgotten prehistoric torrent which

*Its proximity to No. 39 is a further indication that the latter is the tomb of Amenhotep I.

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had here rushed down from the heights of the Sahara ; and in the time of Thutmose I its whole length was strewn with water-worn boulders and stones, nor was there any pathway along it.

There was not a blade of grass nor a trace of scrub in this deserted valley. The sun beat down on its lifeless rocks all through the morning, and in the afternoon it lay in deep shadow, utterly silent except for the sighing of the wind and the occasional cry of a jackal. Although shut off from the necropolis and the Nile Valley by no more than a single wall of cliffs, it seemed to be infinitely remote and unearthly : a sterile, echoing region like a hollow in the hills of the Underworld.

Here, in the cul-de-sac at its south end, close to, and, below, the tomb of Amenhotep I, the Pharaoh Thutmose I caused his tomb to be excavated in the cliff face at the foot of a precipice. The idea of cutting the tunnel straight into the face of a cliff was new, for in the case of the tombs of Senusert III and Ahmose I, described above, a pit in the level ground had led down to the entrance ; but the tomb of Amenhotep I (i.e. No. 39) gives the link between the old and the new type, for, as has been said, it is cut into the sloping side of a gully.

This tomb of Thutmose I had, for the sake of secrecy, an entrance which was small and roughly hewn—a mere hole, just high enough to admit a man standing upright. A flight of steps led down to a square room cut out of the rock, and thence a second flight led on to the burial hall, the roof of which was supported by one central column, as in the tomb of his grandmother, Ahmose-Nefertari, described above. The walls of this hall were smoothed over with plaster, and a small sarcophagus of quartzite sandstone was dragged down and placed here for the reception of the king's coffin.

This tomb was made for the Pharaoh under the direction of a great noble named Anena, who was Overseer of the Granary of Amon, Superintendent of the workmen in the Treasuries of Karnak, and Superintendent of the Royal Buildings ; and in the mortuary chapel of this personage

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an inscription was found in which occur these significant words : " I arranged for the hewing of a rock tomb for his majesty, alone, no one seeing, no one hearing." Thus we are able to realise that the burial of the Pharaohs of this period was conducted in absolute secrecy, so that their bodies might escape the attentions of the robbers. When Thutmose I was buried here in B.C. 1501, the funeral must have been conducted in the greatest possible privacy, the workmen and priests being sworn to silence by the most terrible oaths. The mouth of the tomb was filled in with stones, and boulders were probably placed over the surface so that the site might have a natural and undisturbed appearance. The chippings from the interior were dumped at some distance, and were likewise covered with rocks and gravel.

The mortuary services for the king's spirit were conducted in the temple erected by Amenhotep I at Medinet Habu, that building being enlarged and newly decorated for the purpose. It must have been thought, however, that the spirit's daily journey down to the temple to receive its food and drink imposed considerable inconvenience upon it ; and thus we find at about this period the custom of placing embalmed joints of meat in the tomb, each joint being enclosed in a separate box. Food had been placed in earlier tombs in small quantities, but originally the main supplies of this kind had been left outside the sepulchre, and, as we have seen, in more recent ages they had been deposited in the mortuary temples.

The next Pharaoh, Thutmose II, had a tomb made for him close to that of Thutmose I, at the bottom of the cliffs.* A rough flight of steps led down to the entrance of the tunnel, which sloped downwards to a small chamber and thence to a curious oval hall, the ceiling of which was

*Tomb No. 42. It has no inscription and is therefore generally regarded as an unidentified tomb ; but the following facts show pretty certainly that it was made for Thutmose II :—It is close to the tombs of Thutmose I and Thutmose III, and is similar in style to the latter, which is the only other tomb having an oval burial-hall. Like the tombs of Thutmose I and Hatshepsut, it has no well, but those of Thutmose III and his successors all have wells, so that it seems to be earlier than Thutmose III. It is evidently a king's tomb, by its size and shape.

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supported by two pillars. The walls of this hall were plastered and tinted a sort of drab colour to represent papyrus; and at the far end was a plain sarcophagus of quartzite sandstone, which, like the sarcophagus of Senusert III and other early kings, was uninscribed. Thutmose II added his name to the inscriptions on the wall of the temple of Amenhotep I and Thutmose I at Medinet Habu, and did not erect a new building as his mortuary-temple.

So far only these two tombs, those of Thutmose I and II, were situated in the afterwards famous valley, and there was thus no thought as yet of this place being a regular royal necropolis. It was simply a hiding place for the bodies of these two Pharaohs, just as the summit of the cliff above had been the hiding-place of the mummy of Amenhotep I; and we are to picture the valley, therefore, as still being a wild and desolate spot, apparently untrodden by the foot of man. All this part of the desert was dedicated to the goddess Hathor, who was visualised as a spotted cow living somewhere inside these western hills; and in order to discourage persons from entering this particular valley it was probably said to be an area sacred to the goddess, upon which no man must on any account trespass. In some such manner, at any rate, the hiding-place must have been kept inviolate.

Thutmose II was still alive when the power passed into the hands of Queen Hatshepsut; and she, knowing that she had many enemies in her own family, and fearing both them and the robbers of some future date, decided to hide her tomb in a far more remote part of the desert. A distant valley, deep in the hills to the west, was selected as the site; and here she caused her sepulchre to be hewn out of the rock high up in the precipitous face of a cliff, over 200 feet above the bed of the valley below, and some 137 feet down from the top. A flight of steps and a long tunnel led down to the burial-chamber, and here a fine sarcophagus of quartzite sandstone was, with infinite labour, hauled and dragged into position. It is the most astonishing tomb in Egypt; and its clearance a few years ago was due to the skill and daring of Mr. Carter.