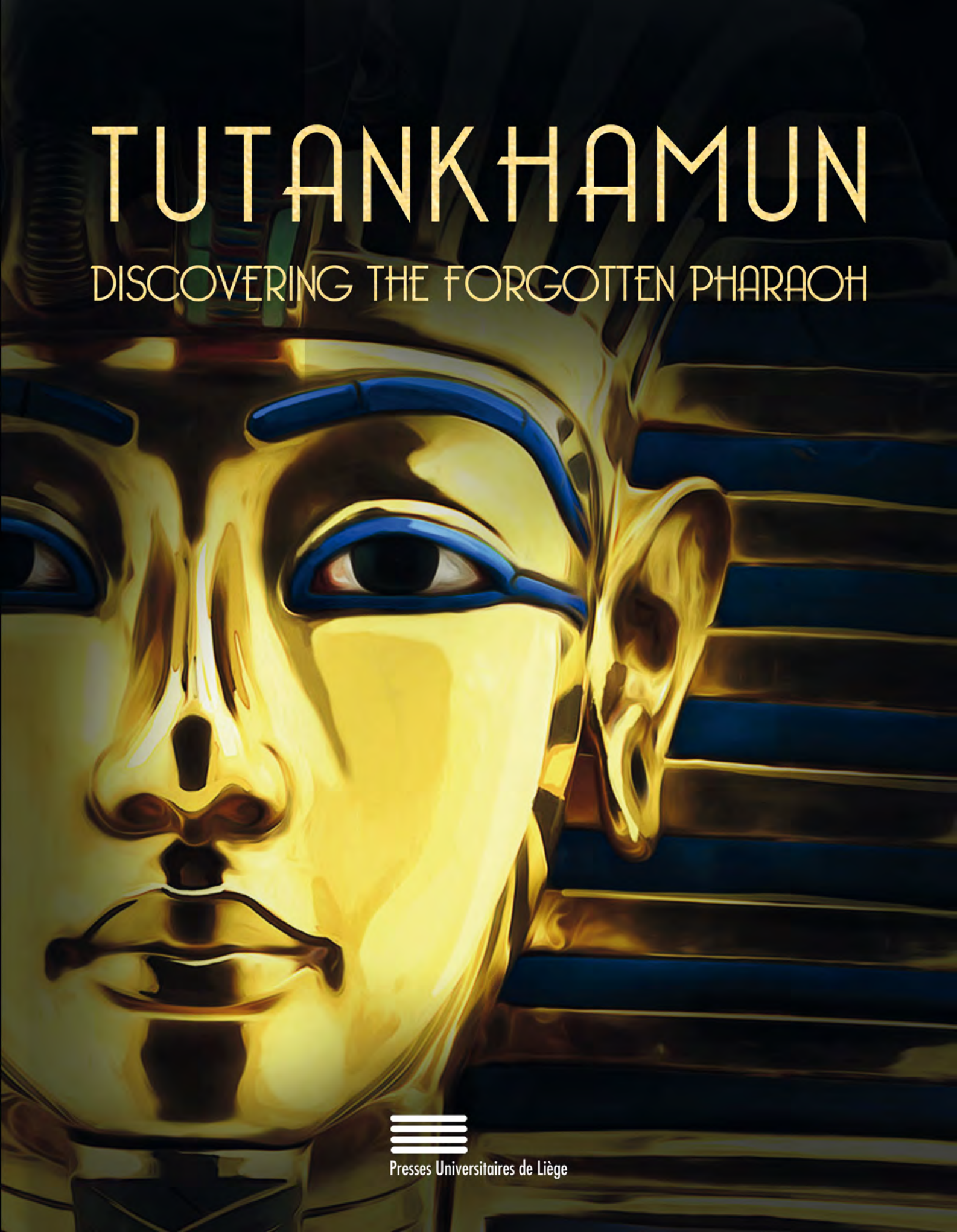


TUTANKHAMUN

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH



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Collection *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 12

TUTANKHAMUN
DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH

Catalogue edited by

Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY

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Jean-Lou Stefan

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Agostinho da Cunha, untimely seized by the Abductor, as ancient Egyptians called it.

Table of Contents

THE EXHIBITION	15
Tutankhamun. Discovering the Forgotten Pharaoh [Simon CONNOR, Dimitri LABOURY, Alain MAGER and René SCHYNS]	16
Behind the Scenes: How to Set up an Exhibition [ALIX NYSSSEN].....	22
Replicas on Display [Simon CONNOR and Eid MERTAH].....	24
THE CARTER ADVENTURE	31
The Discovery of Tutankhamun’s Tomb [Dimitri LABOURY]	32
Carter’s Palette [Hugues TAVIER].....	38
Tutankhamun’s Tomb: The Exception or the Rule? [Dimitri LABOURY]	42
Reconstructing the Tomb: Copying as a Method of Technical and Scientific Learning [Hugues TAVIER].....	48
Photography and the Media at the Tomb of Tutankhamun [Christina RIGGS]	52
Carter’s Papers and the Archaeological Record of Tutankhamun’s Tomb at the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford [Francisco BOSCH-PUSCHE, Elizabeth FLEMMING, Cat WARSI and Anne-Claire SALMAS]	62
Buying and Selling Tutankhamun [Tom HARDWICK]	68
THE TREASURE	73
A True Icon: Tutankhamun’s Gold Mask [Katja BROCHAT and Christian ECKMANN]	74
The Artist Who Created the Most Famous Funerary Mask in the World? [Dimitri LABOURY]	76
The Throne of Tutankhamun [Dominique FAROUT]	78
Beauty in Detail. Glass from the Tomb of Tutankhamun [Katja BROCHAT].....	82
Boxes and Coffrets [Christian LOEBEN]	86
Sticks and Staves [André J. VELDMEIJER and Salima IKRAM].....	90
Brothers-In-Arms. The Two Daggers of the Tomb [Katja BROCHAT, Eid MERTAH and Christian ECKMANN]	94
Weaponry [André J. VELDMEIJER and Salima IKRAM].....	98
Chariots [André J. VELDMEIJER].....	102
The Gold-Sheet Appliqués of Tutankhamun’s Tomb [Katja BROCHAT and Christian ECKMANN]	106
Almost Friends. The Ancient Near East in the Tutankhamun Era [Vera E. ALLEN]	110
Tutankhamun and the Land of the Bow. Egyptian-Nubian Relations during the Eighteenth Dynasty [Faïza DRICI].....	116

THE PROTAGONISTS 121

Amenhotep III [Christian BAYER]	122
Tiye [Christian BAYER].....	122
Akhenaten [Dimitri LABOURY]	124
Nefertiti [Dimitri LABOURY].....	124
Meritaten [Dimitri LABOURY]	125
Ankhesenamun [Dimitri LABOURY].....	126
Tutankhamun [Dimitri LABOURY]	127
Ay [Dimitri LABOURY]	128
Horemheb [Dimitri LABOURY]	129
Focus: Plaquette Featuring Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Two of Their Daughters [Dimitri LABOURY]	131

AMARNA OR THE KING'S CHILDHOOD..... 133

The City of Akhetaten: Amarna [Robert VERGNIEUX]	134
Focus: A Fragment of Face, Royal Museums of Art and History [Héloïse DEPLUVREZ].....	137
Focus: Head of a Princess, Fitzwilliam Museum [Dimitri LABOURY]	138
<i>Talatats</i> Blocks [Robert VERGNIEUX].....	140
Focus: A Royal Behind [Tom HARDWICK]	143
Focus: A <i>Talatat</i> Block Showing a Group of Royal Nurses [W. Raymond JOHNSON]	144
Statuary from the Great Aten Temple [Harsha HILL]	146
Focus: A Statue Torso, University of Tübingen [Dimitri LABOURY].....	148
Focus: Fragment of the Face of a Statue of Akhenaten [Dimitri LABOURY]	150
Focus: Arm Fragment of a Colossal Statue of Nefertiti [Dimitri LABOURY]	152
Focus: Wrist Fragment of a Royal Statue [Dimitri LABOURY].....	153
The Reproduction of an Amarna Palace Room [Hugues TAVIER]	154
The Workshop of the Sculptor Thutmose: “In the Studio of an Artist” [Dimitri LABOURY]	156
The Reconstruction of a Sculptor’s Workshop [Hugues TAVIER]	161
“The Beautiful One Has Come.” The Creation of Nefertiti’s Perfect Portrait [Dimitri LABOURY]	162
On Atenist “Realism”. Virtual Reality, the Ancient Egyptian Way [Dimitri LABOURY]	166

LIVING AT THE COURT OF TUTANKHAMUN.....171

Life at Pharaoh’s Court [Claudia VENIER]	172
Focus: Mechanical Toy in the Shape of a Dog, Metropolitan Museum of Art [Dimitri LABOURY].....	176
“Show Me Your Chair, I’ll Tell You Who You Are.” Palace Furniture [Claudia VENIER]	178
Tutankhamun’s Pottery [Tom HARDWICK]	186
Focus: Two Mycenaean Greek Pottery ‘Stirrup Jars’, Manchester Museum [Claudia VENIER].....	190
Focus: Two Fragments of Ceramics with Hathoric Figures [Alisée DEVILLERS].....	191
Glass Production in the Amarna Period [Paul NICHOLSON]	192
The Basketry [André VELDMEIJER and Salima IKRAM]	196
Focus: Lot of Baskets [Alisée DEVILLERS].....	199
Eating at the Court of Tutankhamun or Feasting with the King. What Did Tutankhamun Eat? [Salima IKRAM]	200
Tutankhamun’s Wine Cellar [Pierre TALLET]	204
Tutankhamun’s Linen [Nagm HAMZA]	208
Tutankhamun’s Gloves [Dominique FAROUT and Amandine MÉRAT]	214
Sandals and Shoes [André VELDMEIJER]	218
Looking Good in the Time of Tutankhamun [Guillemette ANDREU-LANOË]	222
Enchanted Trumpets [Sibylle EMERIT]	228
Some Musical Peculiarities of the Amarna Era [Sibylle EMERIT].....	232

RELIGION AND POLITICS.....237

Aten vs Amun. Religious Politics and Political Religion under Tutankhamun and His Father, Akhenaten [Dimitri LABOURY].....	238
Focus: Two <i>Talatats</i> Representing Nefertiti Praying [Jacquelyn WILLIAMSON].....	244
Popular Devotion in Amarna [Alisée DEVILLERS]	246
Focus: Two Moulds for Amulets Showing Dwarfish Figures [Alisée DEVILLERS].....	248
Focus: Mould for an Amulet in the Shape of Taweret [Alisée DEVILLERS]	249
The Spectrum of Belief. Amulets in the Time of Tutankhamun [Tom HARDWICK].....	250
The Life, Lives, and Death of Images [Simon CONNOR]	254
After Amarna. Restoring the Cult of Amun [Marianne EATON-KRAUSS].....	260

DEATH COMES AS THE END	269
The King Is Dead! CSI Biban el-Moluk [Angelique CORTHALS].....	270
Suffering from Malaria in the Age of Tutankhamun [Bernard LALANNE]	273
Mosquitos in Egypt [Stéphane POLIS].....	275
The Chromosomes of Tutankhamun [Marc GABOLDE].....	276
The King’s Funeral [Alisée DEVILLERS]	282
Tutankhamun’s Tomb, or the First Botanical Reference Collection in Egyptology [Gersande ESCHENBRENNER-DIEMER]	286
Reconstructing Tutankhamun’s Floral Collars. Some Lessons from an Experiment in Flowers [Jean-Lou STEFAN]	289
The Looting of Tombs in the Valley of the Kings [Susanne BICKEL]	290
Papyrus Leopold II-(Amherst). An Ancient Investigation into the Plundering of the Theban Necropolis [Stéphane POLIS]	294
Focus: A Funerary Deity in Gilded Cartonnage [Tom HARDWICK].....	298
Focus: Canopic Vases with the Name of Ipy [Dimitri LABOURY]	300
RESURRECTING TUTANKHAMUN	303
“King Tut” and the Worldwide <i>Tut-mania</i> [Jean-Marcel HUMBERT].....	304
A Queen, an Egyptologist and a Pharaoh [Jean-Michel BRUFFAERTS]	310
Welcome to Tutankhamun’s! A Belgian Touch of Egyptomania in the Roaring Twenties [Jean-Michel BRUFFAERTS].....	314
Belgians Cursed by Tutankhamun [Jean-Michel BRUFFAERTS].....	318
Tutankhamun and Akhenaten at the Musée du Cinquantenaire [Luc DELVAUX].....	322
Tutankhamun. The Man behind the Mask [Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY]	326
BIBLIOGRAPHY	328

Hieroglyphic text at the top of the scene, including symbols for the goddess Isis, the goddess Hathor, and the goddess Neith.



Death Comes
as the End

Stéphane POLIS

Papyrus Leopold II-(Amherst)

An Ancient Investigation into the Plundering of the Theban Necropolis

Papyrus Leopold II is an exceptional document both because of its incredible history, with its fortuitous rediscovery in Belgium at the beginning of the 20th century, and by virtue of its content. It is related to a group of papyri that directly inform us about the plundering by the ancient Egyptians of the royal (and related) tombs of the Theban region at the end of the New Kingdom. In the words of Jean Capart, this papyrus sweeps us into a “double detective novel” (“*double roman policier*”).

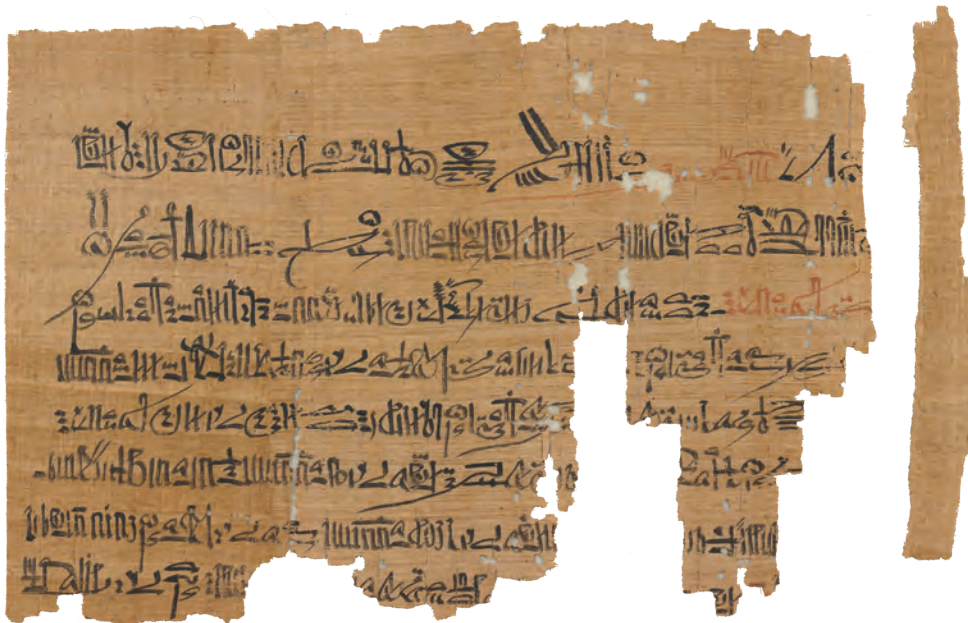
HISTORY

The Duke of Brabant, the future Leopold II, brought back from his journeys in the Mediterranean that took him to Egypt (in 1854–1855 and 1862–1863) a series of Egyptian artifacts — “monuments” as they said at the time — that seem to have interested

him only very moderately (except as ostentatious reminders of his trips and, on occasion, for their market value). Some of these objects were entrusted, along with other gifts of Egyptian origin, to the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels at the liquidation of his estate in 1914, while others did not enter the collections until 1935, at the initiative of Leopold III. Among these objects was a Ramesside-style Osiride statuette brought back from his first voyage, inscribed for a man named Khay, overseer of works and royal scribe of the (funerary) temple of the king.

Capart began a study of it in February 1935. He noticed that a flap of cloth protruded from an opening under the feet of the figure whose base had disappeared: the scientist quickly suspected that he was dealing with one of the hollow wooden statuettes that often contained a funerary papyrus (usually the

Col. 1 [H. 22 cm; W. 34.6 cm]. Photograph © MRAH.



famous *Book of the Dead*), sometimes surrounded by this type of cloth. His expectations were not disappointed since he found in this “papyrus case” a roll about twenty centimeters high. But you can imagine his surprise when, beginning to unroll it, he found out that the text was not of a funerary nature. Written in an elegant chancery script, it opened on the date of year 16 of King Ramesses IX, while the cartouche of Pharaoh Sobekemsaf II (king of the late Seventeenth Dynasty) appeared a little further down. This was enough for the head curator of the Royal Museums to realize that he held in his hands the upper part of the famous Amherst papyrus, kept at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, which contained the remnants of an official investigation into the looting of the burial of this Sobekemsaf II.

Chance had therefore allowed the reconstruction in its entirety of a document now known as Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst, which had been deliberately cut in half and had thus ended up in two separate collections. The precise timing of the cutting is not easy to establish with certainty. The most likely hypothesis is that this papyrus scroll was unearthed during clandestine excavations in the Theban region (probably in one of the caches in the eastern cemetery of the village of Deir el-Medina) in the middle of the 19th century, shortly before its acquisition by the future Leopold II, and was divided into two equal parts in order to command greater profit on

the antiques market. Such a practice was widely documented and other papyri relating to tomb robbers have suffered the same fate. It is surprising, however, that this document was found in a wooden statuette, but the explanation is probably simple. It could be a convenient and safe hiding place for this fraudulent find, which would enhance the market value of the Osiride figurine purported to contain a scroll, while the original funerary papyrus, probably illustrated and therefore easier to command high value on the antiquities market, would have been sold separately. Another hypothesis, however, cannot be ruled out, namely, that the scroll was cut in two in antiquity and its upper part slipped into the wooden statuette (perhaps on the occasion of reburial) because of magical beliefs attached to writing in Egypt: even if the text is not likely to help the individual’s post-mortem destiny, an inscribed papyrus, whatever its content, would always be welcome to accompany the deceased in his wanderings in the afterlife. Such a case is certainly attested with the main witness of the *Teaching of Amenemope*, a famous Egyptian wisdom text, discovered in an Osiris figurine several centuries older than the unexpected scroll it contained. The almost simultaneous appearance of the various papyri linked to the plundering of tombs does not make the case for this second solution. The two parts of Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst were probably discovered at the same time. This kind

Col. 2 [H. 22.1 cm; W. 34.8 cm]. Photograph © MRAH.



of incongruity (and related interpretive difficulties) is not uncommon. Recently, a papyrus — used as a diary by a scribe of the Theban necropolis of the same period called Djehutymosis — was found in a terracotta jar from Lower Egypt, housed in Vienna and containing the mummy of an ibis. The history of Egyptian sources never fails to surprise!

CONTENT

Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst belongs to a group of documents from the late Ramesside period (around 1100 BC) known as the “Great Tomb Robberies” after the name used by their main editor, the English Egyptologist Thomas Eric Peet. This is a batch of papyri from the region of Luxor that informs us about the investigations of and judicial proceedings concerning the tomb robbers of the Theban necropolis (the Valley of the Kings and its surroundings) and other nearby temples. Most of the said papyrus had most certainly been archived together since antiquity, as the Ambras papyrus tells us. The latter indeed contains an inventory of the contents of two jars (purchased by officials after being stolen from the funerary temple at Medinet Habu during the troubled period in the Thebaid at the end of the Ramesside period), in which we recognize the description of several sources related to our case.

Along with other pieces kept in the British Museum — such as Papyrus Abbott, presumably written by the same scribe — Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst reports a trial that took place in year 16 of Ramesses IX, which followed an initial wave of systematic looting west of Thebes, specifically in the former royal necropolis of Dra Abu el-Naga (not far from Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple) and in the Valley of the Queens. The misdeeds, “very serious crimes that cannot be ignored,” which dated to year 13 of the same pharaoh, were reported to the authorities by two scribes from the craftsmen community of Deir el-Medina, Horisher, son of Amennakhte, and Pabes, who were involved in preparing the decoration of the tomb of pharaoh and his family. As these robberies began to generate buzz in the region, the scribes of the institution of the Tomb clearly wanted to protect themselves by reporting these acts punishable by death.

The text of Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst records the statement of a quarryman from the domain of Amun called Amunpanef, a member of a gang that had plundered the tomb of the pharaoh Sobekemsaf II, as well as the subsequent charges and convictions. To appropriate the riches of the necropolis’s burials, the looters did not hesitate to completely dismantle funerary furniture, or even the mummy of the deceased, in order to take metal,

Col. 3 [H. 22.3 cm; W. 42.6 cm]. Photograph © MRAH.



stones and other precious materials. Amunpanefer's statement concerning the desecration of the tomb of Sobekemsaf II and his wife is most illuminating in this sense (2, 12–19):

“ We opened their sarcophagi and coffins (...); we discovered the noble mummy of this king, equipped with a *khepesh* [a kind of sword], with a large number of gold amulets and jewels around his neck and wearing his gold funerary mask; the noble mummy of this king was entirely covered in gold; his coffins were encrusted with gold and silver inside and out and adorned with all kinds of precious stones. We collected the gold we found on the venerable mummy of this god as well as his amulets and jewels that were around his neck and were on the coffins in which he rested. We found the royal wife in exactly the same state. We took everything we found on her as well and set fire to their coffins. Then we took their (funerary) equipment, which we found with them, whether it was gold, silver or bronze, and divided it all among ourselves. ”

Perhaps the most incredible part of this statement is that, as Amunpanefer recounts in all candor, this was not his first arrest for this offence (3, 2–3, 6):

“ One day, the police of Thebes learned that we were busy plundering the necropolis, and they arrested me and imprisoned me in the building of the governor of Thebes. I then took twenty gold deben [more than 1.8 kg!], which came to me as part of the loot, and I gave them to the scribe of the wharf Khaemopet. He freed me. I met with my accomplices and they gave me a (new) share. Then I stole again from the tombs of the nobles and others from the area who rest in the west of Thebes up to this day with the other thieves who accompanied me, a very large number of people from the area plundering there in bands. ”

Clearly, many organized “gangs” roamed the necropolis in search of wealth, taking advantage of an impunity bought from the representatives of the authorities with the fruit of their larceny. Is it still necessary to stress the current relevance of Egyptian texts?

FURTHER READING

Peet 1930; Capart & Gardiner 1939; Raven 1978–1979; Vernus 1990, 11–74; Claus 2016.

Col. 4 [H. 22.2 cm; W. 43.2 cm]. Photograph © MRAH.

