

Zacharie Cochin

Intro :

Here is a short synthesis of the Master's thesis I've made at University of Lille (France) with Pr. Didier Devauchelle & Pr. Ghislaine Widmer. Basically, I've made 22 files about every tomb or catacomb where Late Period remains has been found, mostly thanks to Bruyère's publications, and wrote an analytic synthesis from my descriptive files. Four major chronological groups have been identified : remains of the brotherhood, the occupation of the clergy of Amun, the late collective burials (7th BC-2nd AD) and coptic presence.

I/ Last brotherhood remains

At the end of the New Kingdom, the craftsmen gradually abandoned the village and stopped building new tombs. But they did not abandon the necropolis altogether: the last members of the brotherhood and their close descendants continued to maintain the tombs, as did the Royal Scribe Butehamon. A lot of graffiti from him, his father and his children remains in the Theban Necropolis, including Deir el-Medina, some of them attesting of their interventions to preserve private tombs. Butehamon died few after the end of the New Kingdom, at the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period, and according to a graffiti made by his son Ankhefenamon, have been buried in an abandoned tomb of 18th dynasty. This is the last known burial of a village member in Deir el-Medina, it seems his son have been active also in Theban Necropolis but not his own children. Perhaps other craftsmen have been buried after in family graves but the site has suffered so much looting and damage, nobody knows... The chance we have with Butehamon is that his son was also a royal scribe, and his coffins are actually preserved (conserved in Turin and Brussels). But this is however the only known funerary furniture of Butehamon.

II/ Occupation of the Clergy of Amun

After the craftsmen and their descendants had abandoned the necropolis for good, members of Amun's clergy began to re-use the tombs.

It seems that these new occupations were made for individual burials, such as that of the lady Nesykhonsu, singer of Amun-Ra. Buried in the tomb of Qaha (TT360), she did not appropriate the entire hypogeum, and probably did not exhume the previous occupants. In fact, a small square vaulted room measuring 2.50 m on each side was dug for her, accessed via a corridor in

the south wall of the chamber. There is no decoration and the walls are painted white. Her mummy and coffin have not been found, but fragments of Nesykhonsu's cartonnage have survived, mentioning her functions as a singer of Amun and "milk pot bearer of the domain of Amun". Between 800 and 1,000 pale blue ouchebtis were also found, mainly in her burial chamber. They are modestly made, mass-produced, with the details crudely outlined in black ink. Most are anepigraphic, but some bear this short text: Wsir Nsy-Ḥnsw m3c-ḥrw, or "the Osiris Nesykhonsu, justified".

A large number of blue ouchebtis bearing the name of Padiamon were found in TT1123. The mummy have disappeared, but this modest piece of furniture is reminiscent of that found at Nesykhonsu. In TT1443, around twenty ouchebtis bearing Padimut's name were found, but his mummy cannot be associated with them either. Similarly, TT1060 contains more than 500 ouchebtis published by Dominique Valbelle, who dates them to the Third Intermediate Period. Once again, no mummies can be associated with this tomb, as many bodies were buried in the same place in Graeco-Roman times. In catacomb III of the corpus (tombs 2B, 299 and 1057), several dozen ouchebtis were found, either complete or in fragments. Dating from the Third Intermediate Period, they are made of white-painted terracotta or blue earthenware and bear the names of three individuals: Pacherihathor, Mouthotep and Djedmontouioufankh. Once again, no mummies, as the hypogeums were filled with bodies in the Greco-Roman period after they had been linked together. There are two possibilities: either these burials, probably linked to the clergy of Amun, were modest or, on the contrary, the quality of the furnishings was such that looters were able to steal them methodically (I don't think so). I must pass the exception of the two god's wives ankhnesneferibrê and Nitocris.

III/ Collective burials at late periodes

From the 7th century BC, burials appear to have become collective.

This is particularly true in TT336 and TT337. These are tombs that were reused several times during the Third Intermediate Period by individuals, and then used during the Saithe period as collective burial vaults. During the Late Period and the Greco-Roman era, most of the mummies were embalmed with bitumen, which is why they are often referred as "black mummies". Some of them are distinguished by the presence of geometric motifs in gold leaf on their bodies, although it is not possible to say that they belonged to a much higher social category than the other deceased, and some also had their names inscribed on their funerary linen. The best-preserved tomb is TT336 : 74 similar mummies were discovered, preserved from looting by a

partial collapse of the ceiling. It can be seen that the bodies, fitted with wooden coffins, were buried in several superimposed rows, with their heads to the west. The coffins are almost all identical: anthropoid, painted black, the only anatomical detail is the face, and there are no decorations or inscriptions. There are exceptions, however. Very few are double, or have a yellow or polychrome goddess Nut painted on a white background on the inside of the lid, and only 2-3 mention the name of the deceased, such as that of a Lady Mouthotep. Numerous fragments of coffins similar to the first, all identical to each other, have also been discovered in TT1200. No other funerary objects were found with these mummies: no ouchebti, no amulets, not even ocular prostheses, which were frequently placed under the eyelids during embalming.

From the Greco-Roman period, catacombs came into widespread use. Several hypogeums near one another were connected by means of breaches dug more or less carefully into the corners of some vaults. The catacombs thus formed were subsequently filled with summarily embalmed mummies. In all, I have identified at least 6 catacombs, with no logical layout throughout the site. Several demotic inscriptions were found on some of the walls of TT214, serving as funerary dedications for some of the deceased buried there. The same type of inscription can also be found in tomb 216, but with a date: "year 3 of Tiberius Claudius" Most part of the mummies was modestly buried, with a demotic mummy label, sometime a headband bearing the name (ex. ΠΑΜΩΝΘΗΣ (Pamonthes)), golden traces and red shrouds. As various forms of looting have deprived us of a substantial part of the original archaeological data (through theft, displacement and destruction), we are once again unable to attribute mummies with traces of gilding or a wooden coffin to a social category that is clearly higher than bodies simply buried in shrouds. Apart from the bodies, the only objects found from this period are 8 shoes, all made of leather. In other words, almost all the mummies had no funerary furnishings. According to Bernard Bruyère, the number of mummies found was such that it was impossible to count them (hundreds), which, given the size of the catacombs, indicates that the burial site of Deir el-Medina was used for mass burials, as confirmed by the modest quality of the embalming and the absence of furnishings.

There was, however, an exception in Roman times : several mummies had a stucco mask and/or a shroud painted with a fishnet or a representation of the deceased. Only one bears a text and a name: that of a Neferhotep. Fragments of few terracotta coffins decorated with black ink have also been found.

IV/ Coptic presence

Coptic monks settled in Deir el-Medina, probably from the 3rd century, transforming the temple into a monastery. They occupied all the site, including burial places.

In many of the tombs, fragments of Coptic ceramics have been found, as well as a cavity in the floor designed to hold an amphora upright, and a fire pit. It seems that the monks simply moved the mummies to the bottom of the tombs so that they could live there. Other concrete elements of habitation were present, such as fragments of chairs, a bed, and ostraca.

However the Coptic monks preferred other places for their burials. Some of the monks were also buried in the enclosure of the temple of Deir el-Medina. It should be noted that over the 5 centuries of presumed presence, only around 20 Coptic mummies have been found there, possibly some of the community's leaders. Some of the monks were buried in the courtyard, in masonry tombs resting on the Ptolemaic paving, while others were buried along the north wall, in pits dug into the rock. Here, the mummies are accompanied by an epitaph, above their grave. All the mummies are dressed in priestly vestments with a turban around their heads, wrapped in shrouds of unbleached cloth, the last of which is covered with a leather apron, the whole being encased in a fishnet. No decoration has been found, except crosses embroidered on the garments. There is no furniture with the deceased, except for a small terracotta vase in the largest tombs in the courtyard.

CONCLUSION

Of all the objects and mummies found from the late periods, only a very small number are known to us, the rest probably being scattered throughout the site's storage places, which have yet to be studied. Their rediscovery would be very useful given that Bruyère's descriptions of late-period artefacts are often brief, and would enable us to study an era that is relatively unpublished.