

## THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

GEOFFREY T. MARTIN

*In Memory of Lorenzo Baqués Estapé*

The study of Ancient Egypt by Spanish specialists has made tremendous strides over the past two decades, due in part, no doubt, to the foundation of the Asociación Española de Egiptología and to the loyal and enthusiastic support of its members. The present essay is written with the latter in mind, reflecting some of my observations and thoughts after participating in four productive seasons of archaeological excavation in the Valley in recent years, during which I had the opportunity of visiting all the accessible royal tombs as well as several uninscribed ones, normally inaccessible. The Valley is one of the richest, most celebrated, and most visited archaeological sites in the world, but it is vulnerable, as we shall see.

Almost without exception, excavators in this prime site have simply been looking for undiscovered tombs, and from the early nineteenth century onwards until 1922 there were spectacular successes. Yet, much evidence has been lost or remains to be published to a modern scholarly standard. Our comprehensive Egyptological source, the incomparable *Topographical Bibliography* of Miss Porter and Miss Moss, devotes almost 100 pages to the monographs and articles that have been published on the monuments and texts in the Valley over the years. One might therefore be forgiven for thinking that there is no more to know about the site. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is safe to say that not one of the major royal tombs (i.e. those with a full complement of inscriptions, paintings or reliefs) has been *exhaustively* or *definitively* published, and aside from the existing monuments there is still much else to investigate. In this paper I would like to highlight some of the facts that have contributed to our knowledge of this unique site, and to suggest a few methods of approach that might reveal even more of its history and potential for research in the

future. We should perhaps reject the idea that the only way to advance knowledge of the area is to look for undiscovered tombs, always supposing these exist, which is not improbable. In order to suggest what remains to be done it is necessary to give a brief overview of what has already been achieved. My observations are aimed not especially at experts – those who would have to undertake the various projects – but at the many who take an interest, often passionate, in everything relating to Ancient, or for that matter Modern, Egypt, like the members of the Asociación.

In preparing notes for this article I re-read a number of published studies on the Valley, both the primary evidence, such as the excavators' reports, and the more general or popular accounts. There are some good ones in the second category, such as John Romer's *Valley of the Kings* (1981), and C.N. Reeves' dissertation with the same title (1990), the latter a volume with a wealth of documentation on all previous work in the area. Useful though the secondary sources are, I feel there is a lack of emphasis on what I would regard as something of overriding importance: the concept of divine kingship. Although there are a few notable exceptions, often the approach of authors is a trifle antiquarian, with an emphasis on treasure, tomb robbery, the shunting to and fro of the pitiful remains of the rulers and their families, interesting and important though these matters are in the history of the necropolis. Writers are fond of antiquated words such as 'sepulchres', and air somewhat inappropriate concepts such as the pharaoh being 'laid to rest' or reaching 'his last resting place'. For me at least there are altogether too many allusions to 'corpses', giving the impression that the Osiriform body of the divine pharaoh was utterly inert. The royal tombs, their reliefs, texts and furnishings, as well as their architecture, are major sources for the study of divine kingship, a profound understanding of which is desirable in order to get to grips with Egyptian culture, religion and society. To enter the Gold Room of the Cairo Museum, ideally after six in the evening when most visitors have left, to confront the famed ritual and other objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun, not least the gold mask and the inner gold coffin, gives one more than an inkling of the centrality and importance to the Egyptians of their kings. These were frail creatures like the rest of humankind, but divine nevertheless. (There are, or were, modern parallels in Japan and elsewhere).

In the popular publications it is sometimes suggested that the richness of the equipment and furnishings in Tutankhamun's tomb, even in its robbed state, was exceptional, signalling his importance as the ruler who presided over the reinstatement of the old religion after the Amarna episode. This can hardly be the case. Tutankhamun's monument, which is not really a royal tomb at all in architectural and iconographical terms, gives an unparalleled insight into the fitting out of a divine pharaoh's tomb, with each category of object, whether inscribed or otherwise, having a part to play in the king's survival during his transition into the Underworld and thereafter, and to the maintenance of the concept of *maat*, 'truth', 'order', 'cosmic balance'. Tutankhamun's tomb enables us to visualize in a vivid way the organisation of a royal burial, carried out by the state and necropolis officials, remembering also the involvement of architects, masons, sculptors, painters, and labourers, not only in the case of a youthful and relatively minor ruler like Tutankhamun but also for more senior and longer-lived pharaohs such as Tuthmosis III, Amenophis II,

Tuthmosis IV, Amenophis III, Ramesses II, III, and VI. Shattered relics of their funerary objects have been found by archaeologists working in the Valley, but a comparative study of all such equipment and its ritualistic significance is lacking in the literature. Many of the objects found have yet to be published to a modern standard.

I referred earlier to 'popular' books on the Valley. Far more important are the fundamental publications: the excavation reports, catalogues of objects, studies on human remains and the like, as well as the publication of wall scenes and texts. These will never be totally superseded. Much of this work, however, is partial, even deficient, or at least does not come up to modern standards of scholarship. These remarks are not written in a spirit of carping criticism, but to emphasize how much work needs to be done before the scale, significance and importance of the Valley of the Kings and its monuments are fully comprehended. On the royal tomb walls, and to some extent on the sarcophagi, there is an unparalleled wealth of iconographical and inscriptional material, whole *libraries* of religious texts for example, illustrated with incomparable vignettes and paintings. By and large these have not been recorded in exact facsimile, but rather in hand copies or photographs. The latter are, of course, crucial, but are no substitute for accurate facsimile line drawings which show every minute detail, including traces of the original artists' outlines, mistakes, alterations, and much else. All these things are difficult to detect in photographs, even those of high quality. By contrast, the temples and private tombs at Thebes are rather well served epigraphically, the supreme examples being those published by the incomparable Epigraphic Expedition of the University of Chicago.

There are, however, many positive things to remark upon. For example, a notable lack until recently was a set of accurate plans and sections of the tombs in the Valley, with precise indications of their locations. This deficiency has now been remedied by the publication of a series of plans prepared by Dr Kent Weeks and his team working for The Theban Mapping Project. A most useful development of this would be an investigation into the stratigraphic relationship of the various tombs, i.e. where tombs are situated in the same area, the exact height of one above the other. Such a project could eliminate some misapprehensions in the publications, such as the assertion that when masons were cutting the tomb of Ramesses IX they risked accidentally breaking into the anonymous Amarna Period royal tomb, KV55. In fact, several metres of rock separate the two monuments in question. The problem needs to be examined in three dimensions. A valuable tool would be a so-called wire-frame diagram of the topography of the Valley, which could then be examined from many angles. The computer software is available to construct such a model, and much of the required data are available from the plans published by The Theban Mapping Project. The undertaking would, however, be time-consuming and expensive.

We turn now to a brief survey of the topography of the Valley. Viewed from above it seems vast, but in fact, once inside the Valley one can stride briskly through it in 15 to 20 minutes. Thus, in antiquity, it was relatively easy to protect from below as well as from above, where there was a network of pathways for itinerant guards. Protection was, of course, of paramount importance because of the extraordinarily rich contents of the royal tombs, the extent of which was known to the state and necropolis officials and to ordinary workmen, all involved in the task of man-

handling the equipment through difficult terrain and placing the objects in their allocated positions in the various chambers of the tombs. To my knowledge the network of paths above and below was never properly mapped and studied when the tracks were in their pristine state before the advent of modern tourism or indeed of archaeologists. When I first visited the Valley in 1962 comparatively few trudged along these pathways. Nowadays some of the tracks have been trodden almost out of existence and even new ones created, by tourists and by local people. Yet this network of paths, linking the site to Deir el-Medina, the village of the necropolis officials and labourers, was important in an understanding of the Valley and its administration in antiquity. The original trackways in the Valley proper have long since been altered and obliterated, mostly by archaeologists who over the past century have displayed a somewhat cavalier attitude towards the disposal of rubble and excavators' spoil. The Egyptian authorities now rightly insist that all debris from excavations be taken out and deposited well away from the Valley itself. The damage has been done, however. Yet, as I know from personal experience, this modern excavators' debris contains a great number of fragmentary artefacts, mostly pieces of royal tomb equipment including pottery, as well as ostraca. This material cannot therefore be moved out of the Valley by mechanical means.

The tremendous influx of visitors over the years has also meant that the Antiquities administration has had to provide easy and safe access to the entrances of the major tombs, resulting in a general 'landscaping' of the terrain. It is difficult to visualize what the Valley was like in the days of Belzoni in the early nineteenth century. Of course, tourism is not entirely a modern concept: graffiti in Greek and other scripts in some of the more famous monuments are clear evidence that tombs such as those of Ramesses VI and other Ramesside pharaohs were accessible in antiquity. It is noteworthy that such tombs, unlike those dating to the Eighteenth and into the early Ramesside period, were never hidden from view. On the contrary, their majestic doorways, hewn in the living rock and inscribed with the owners' names, signalled their presence. Security here relied not on superincumbent debris piled over the entrances but rather on hefty wooden doors and on the vigilance of the necropolis guards.

The only parallel is the short-lived royal necropolis at El-Amarna, where Akhenaten and some members of his family were interred and where I worked in 1980 and 1984 to record the royal tombs. The photographs of the terrain I took in those two brief seasons are now in a sense archival. Much has happened there in the intervening quarter of a century, and tourists can now visit Akhenaten's tomb and the unfinished tombs in the royal necropolis along a surfaced highway like the tarmac road that leads to the Valley of the Kings at Thebes.

Let us try to imagine the Valley in its untouched state when, at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, c.1530 BC, the authorities decided, for religious, or for security reasons, to separate the mortuary or cult temple of the deified pharaoh from his actual burial, the one at the edge of the cultivation, the other over the mountain, in the Valley. It is interesting to note the locations chosen by the royal officials and architects of the earliest tombs, those of Hatshepsut, Tuthmosis III, Amenophis II and Tuthmosis IV (the sites of those of Tuthmosis I and II, doubtless uninscribed, are problematic). We read in our popular sources that the officials avoided places

where, from the appearance of the terrain, there was a serious risk of a projected tomb being flooded, i.e. the ancient surveyors avoided 'waterfall'sites. The actual location of most of the Eighteenth Dynasty monuments gives the lie to this view: with a notable exception (Tuthmosis III) the entrances of most of these tombs are at the base of the high cliffs surrounding the Valley, veritable 'waterfall'sites. In this location it was simply a matter of removing scree and water-borne debris from the base of the rock so that the gang of masons could speedily begin to cut their way into the cliff face, an area having been selected previously by the surveyors, which, from their point of view, was free from major flaws in the rock. Serious rock flaws, or inaccessibility, must be two of the reasons why more tombs failed to be hewn in such places after the reign of Tuthmosis IV (c.1413 BC). Sometimes the surveyors were fooled or were simply unlucky, as in the tomb of Hatshepsut, where the workmen soon found themselves cutting through dangerous, shaly rock.

It is probable that flash floods were as rare in antiquity as they were down to modern times. The possibility of flooding in antiquity was not therefore a major consideration. In any case, after the royal interment, the deposit of debris from above after a flash flood would have given an additional source of protection over the tomb entrance. These matters have never been fully investigated, even though they are important from the point of view of the civil engineering aspect of the royal necropolis. Likewise is another problem: how were the tombs previous to the early Ramesside period disguised after the burials, a matter which has important repercussions from the viewpoint of necropolis inspections and the selection of a new site for an anticipated royal tomb, begun soon after a monarch's accession? During the cutting of a monument, huge amounts of chippings would have accumulated, not least in the case of large tombs such as those of Amenophis II, Tuthmosis IV, Horemheb and Seti I. What happened to the spoil? Logically, this would have been set aside until the burial – or burials in the case of a family tomb – were in place, and then used to fill the initial descent into the rock and approach corridor. This was the case in KV55, containing reburials of members of the Amarna royal family, and KV62 (Tutankhamun). It surely was the same in earlier and some later tombs. Almost all the monuments discovered previous to that of Tutankhamun were excavated hurriedly by modern explorers and archaeologists, and if any notes, detailed or otherwise, were made concerning traces of original blockings, such notes have not survived. This is regrettable. Security has always been a problem for the excavators and the Antiquities administration, with a pressing urgency to transfer the newly discovered objects to a safe place as quickly as possible. The almost intact tomb of Yuya and Thuyia, parents of Queen Tiy, was emptied extremely rapidly, as was KV55, and vital information was doubtless overlooked in the scramble. The former tomb would be worth re-examining in detail for small clues that might be rescued there, as was KV55 in the recent past. The great cache of royal mummies found near Deir el-Bahari, including some of the most famous personalities known to us from Ancient Egypt, together with many items of tomb equipment, suffered the same fate of hurried clearance. The loss to science was not negligible. Crucial evidence about blockings, re-blockings, sealing of doors and much else, including chronological clues, was inevitably overlooked. Keen eyes can still detect some fragile traces of ancient administrative activity in the accessible tombs, especially in that of

Tuthmosis IV. At this point we must salute the strength of purpose and superlative skill of Howard Carter, who did not emulate, if that is the word, his predecessors' record in the Valley. Even so, Carter's account of the clearance of the steps and approach corridor of Tutankhamun's tomb, where a number of objects lay scattered, is not as full as it might be.

It would be interesting to plot the positions of the various tombs from the topographical and chronological viewpoints, following in the footsteps of the ancient surveyors and others who had the responsibility for choosing a site for a new tomb. We can obtain a unique glimpse of official activity in this regard from an inscription commissioned by Ineni, a prominent architect of the early Eighteenth Dynasty: 'I saw to the excavation of the (cliff) tomb of His Majesty (Tuthmosis I) secretly, no-one seeing and no-one hearing'. Frustratingly, the royal tomb site he selected and in which he directed operations, has never been convincingly identified; there is more than one candidate. We can be certain that the work was not on a grand scale – the early New Kingdom royal tombs are modest – and it is impossible to believe in any case that the work was carried out in total secrecy. A fair number of masons and workmen would have been involved. The text is a nice example of official hyperbole, emphasizing Ineni's vigilance as a dedicated government administrator. The officials and others involved in preparing the tombs of the divine pharaohs over the following decades or even centuries would surely have remembered very well the location of individual tombs, if only approximately, the information being passed down from father to son in the close-knit community of Deir el-Medina, whence came the workforce for the royal tombs from the time of Tuthmosis I. I cannot see that any official sanction would have prevented this. Though no written evidence has yet emerged to prove it, I suggest that the necropolis officials must have kept some kind of record of the whereabouts of the 'hidden' tombs, those Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasty monuments for which there was no physical evidence on the surface. Since prime sites for new tombs were at a premium, especially those that were very developed architecturally – Seti I for example – such a record would have been necessary to avoid subterranean 'collisions' when work was in progress. Considering the amount of work that went on in the Valley over five centuries there are surprisingly few instances of these. Whether relying on an official record and/or collective memory, it seems clear to me that those responsible for checking the integrity of 'hidden' tombs knew rather well where they were sited, and would instantly have known if the ground above them had been disturbed. There is evidence for this in the famous Tomb Robbery Papyri and in the Valley itself, the latter in the form of rock inscriptions and graffiti, to which we must now turn.

Although I have lamented the lack of a full documentation of the Valley's history, in respect of the graffiti a triumph can be celebrated. The great German scholar, Georg Steindorff, was one of the first to realize their importance, and he initiated the facsimile recording of them at the end of the nineteenth century. He recognised their potential for the study of the administration of the royal necropolis, and much else. (The officials who scratched their names on the rocks are sometimes identifiable with people named in datable texts from Deir el-Medina). Howard Carter, in his early days in the Valley, started to make a record of them, but abandoned the project.

Other scholars, notably Jaroslav Černý, whose knowledge of the village site and its inhabitants was encyclopaedic, continued the work of recording, assisted later by a group of highly talented young Egyptian philologists and epigraphers. Over the years just about every inscription and drawing on the rock faces was meticulously drawn, positioned on maps of the area, indexed and published: a major scholarly enterprise. It is sad to record that since this crucial record was made, many of the rock texts and drawings have been mutilated, sometimes unwittingly, by modern visitors anxious to record their own fleeting presence in the Valley. Despite the full publication of the material it has yet to be exploited in full. For instance, from my own fairly cursory examination of some hundreds of inscriptions it occurred to me that official itineraries, presumably to check that no disturbance to the sealed tombs had occurred, could with patience be worked out. The visiting officials could also have written their names adjacent to certain tombs after reports had been received that attempts had been made to enter them illicitly. The title and name of the scribe Wenennefer, for instance, occurs in the inner and central parts of the Valley, adjacent to the tombs of Amenophis II and Horemheb, over the rims of the shaft tombs KV 56 and 58, and elsewhere nearby. These texts are Ramesside in date, though the royal burials, presumably still intact at the time, beneath the feet of the inspectors, were of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Far more can be coaxed out of these laconic texts, I am sure.

It is not possible in this short paper to give an overview of the work of every excavator who has worked in the Valley. Suffice it to say that it would be instructive meticulously to re-examine the tombs they cleared, and even to republish in more detail or to record for the first time the objects and other materials found, including human remains. The majority of the objects from the most famous discovery of all, Tutankhamun, remain unpublished, from the scholarly point of view, to this day, as does a full commentary on the decorative scheme in his burial chamber, available only in photographs. Work still needs to be carried out in the existing tombs, including that of Horemheb, one of the best preserved. Theodore Davis's team rapidly cleared the interior, including the shaft, but the dimensions of the latter are not recorded, neither are any details available of a room allegedly found at the base of the shaft. The Supreme Council of Antiquities has generously granted the writer a concession to carry out a thorough and final clearance of this important monument, and there are others awaiting similar treatment. The presence in the Valley of the tomb of Maheripra, found by Victor Loret, alerts us to the possibility that persons other than pharaohs were interred there. A problem still unresolved is the whereabouts of the tomb locations of a multitude of queens, princes, princesses, royal harim ladies (including those from foreign states), all members of the royal family and court, particularly of the Eighteenth Dynasty. It is possible that non-royal persons known to us by name through inscribed objects found in the royal necropolis had similar intimate connections with the royal family as, for example, royal wet-nurses and their husbands, royal tutors and the like. The matter awaits research.

The Valley floor has great potential for new information. Carter, and possibly Loret before him, discovered many simple hutments in the lower levels of the Valley, and it will be remembered that Carter, in excavating beneath the floor of one, made his major discovery. Recent work by archaeological expeditions has indicated

that large areas of the Valley floor, and to some extent the adjacent sloping escarpment, are covered with such humble dwellings, occupied by workmen and guards, no doubt during their tours of duty. The workers came, it can be assumed, almost exclusively from Deir el-Medina. Large quantities of inscribed and decorated ostraca (mostly limestone flakes), various classes of artefacts, datable pottery, cooking facilities, and food remains have been found *in situ* in the hutments. Many ostraca were found by previous investigators, mostly inside the royal tombs, such as that of Ramesses VI. It is clear that scribes and artists were trained in the Valley, and some of the ostraca produced by them must relate to texts and scenes subsequently carved and painted in the royal tombs. Perhaps the known Valley ostraca should be re-examined as an entity, illustrating scribal, artistic and administrative activity specifically related to the royal necropolis. The research potential is significant.

In this paper I have touched on just some of the possibilities for enhancing our knowledge of one of the major sites of antiquity. Earlier I mentioned the vulnerability of the Valley of the Kings. There are perhaps three main causes for concern: general wear and tear, the risk from flash flooding, and potential harm to the monuments by an increasing number of eager visitors. The first is self-evident (the monuments are, after all, upwards of three and a half millennia old), the second is ever-present, due to climate change. In the recent past a flood of massive proportions swept through the Valley, and water penetrated into certain tombs, including that of Horemheb. Earlier measures put in place by the Egyptian authorities averted a major catastrophe, but the flood waters swept out of the Valley across the plain, causing damage to the mortuary temple of Seti I, only recently restored by German scholars, and devastation to private property. Archaeological excavation and the indiscriminate dumping of debris within the Valley have completely altered its ancient topography. The accumulation of scree from the hills above has exacerbated the problem, so that the risk of destruction by water is a constant worry. The introduction of water into the tombs quickly destabilizes the rock, with a calamitous effect on the relieves, texts, and other features.

The third concern was recently highlighted in the press by Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities: the huge number of people pressing, quite literally, into the monuments, many thousands a day and the figures are expected to increase markedly. The increase in humidity, the fingering or accidental brushing up against walls bearing unique scenes and inscriptions, are but two of the hazards. Recently the Egyptian authorities have formed a committee to work out a long-term strategy for this unique site, one element of which will involve lowering the Valley floor to something approaching its level in antiquity, when the tombs were hewn. In this way, future floods will sweep past the entrances to the monuments rather than into them. This will be a long-term and mammoth task, that can only be undertaken by trained personnel because of the presence of fragmentary objects and other material in the ancient (and modern) landscaping debris: an exciting prospect.

Setting aside the possibility of the discovery of new tombs or caches of objects, which is not inconceivable, I have tried to indicate that there is an immense amount of material in and from the Valley of the Kings that awaits definitive treatment, work that would occupy qualified researchers for years to come.



# DE LOS NOMBRES DE EGIPTO: TRANSCRIPCIONES, CONTRADICCIONES Y ASPIRACIONES<sup>1</sup>

JOSÉ-R. PÉREZ-ACCINO

Birkbeck College, University of London

What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet

W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, acto II, esc.2 (1595)

Tradicionalmente el mundo académico español no había prestado demasiada atención al mundo egipcio faraónico hasta fechas relativamente recientes. Razones de diversa índole que sería largo e inapropiado tratar aquí previnieron el desarrollo de esta rama de nuestro saber antiguo. Entre las muchas consecuencias de este hecho se halla la falta de una tradición propia en la transcripción a nuestra lengua de los nombres (personales y de otra índole) del Egipto faraónico. Durante años, y como ha menudo ya se ha señalado, los autores en lengua española<sup>2</sup> que han produ-

---

<sup>1</sup> El presente comentario no habría podido llevarse a cabo sin la colaboración desinteresada de Jesús Urruela, Miguel A. Molinero, y Javier Alonso López, quienes pusieron a mi disposición diversos materiales necesarios para su elaboración. Asimismo, Juan Carlos Lara Olmo y Francisco Moreno Arrastio realizaron una serie de comentarios que han enriquecido la argumentación, señalando varios aspectos relevantes. Con todo, ello no les involucra en las deficiencias que el texto pueda ostentar, las cuales permanecen únicamente bajo la responsabilidad de su autor.

<sup>2</sup> En el contexto del presente comentario utilizo la expresión *lengua española* y *español* como sinónimos de *lengua castellana* y *castellano*, atento únicamente al hecho de la denominación de la lengua referida en Latinoamérica, entorno cultural en el cual las consideraciones que aquí se proponen son, probablemente, de similar aplicación que en nuestro propio suelo.