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Detail from Lid of Painted Sarcophagus: Tomb of Dehuti-Nekht

The Tomb of Dehuti-Nekht and His Wife

About 2000 B. C.

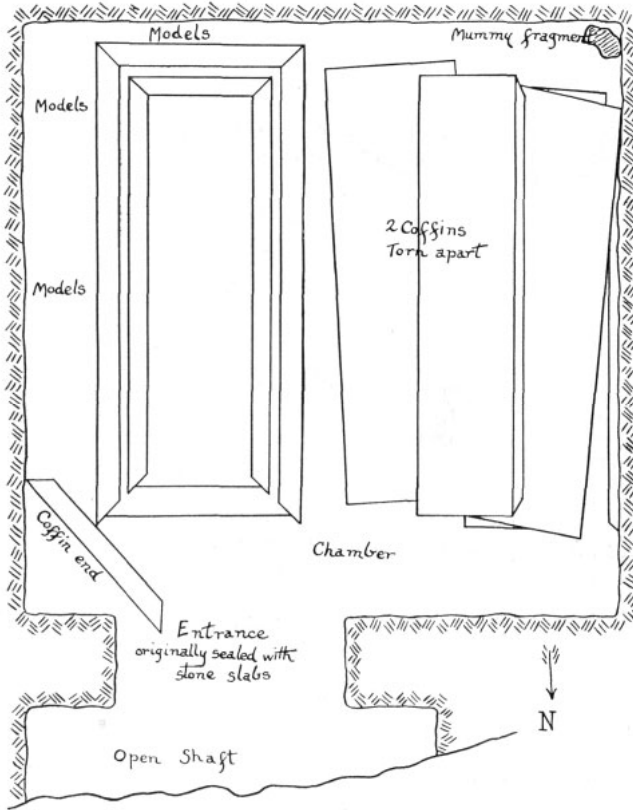
IN the spring of 1915 the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Egyptian Expedition excavated a rock-cut tomb in which were found two painted wooden sarcophagi, recently placed on exhibition in the Middle Empire Room.

Near the modern village of Deir-el-Bersheh on the east bank of the Nile, about 175 miles south of Cairo, lies a group of rock-cut tombs, high up on the desert cliffs which overlook the valley. These are the burial places of noblemen of the Egyptian Middle Empire (2100-1700 B. C.). When originally cut in the living rock they consisted of an entrance portico and one or more rectangular chambers hollowed out of the hill, and of a vertical shaft descending to a small room below, in which the mummy rested inside one or more sarcophagi. The chamber was intended for the use of the living, who there made offerings to the deceased, and its walls were decorated with scenes from his life, and with charms and prayers for his welfare in the underworld. The shaft and burial room were never visited after the funeral, but were carefully sealed up, and the entrance to the shaft made as invisible as possible to prying eyes. Modern archæologists have examined many of the offering chambers, and have published the inscriptions and paintings on their walls, but the site had never been fully examined because of great falls of rock which had occurred. These falls were due in the first instance to extensive quarrying operations in ancient times, which so weakened the whole that earthquakes brought down great masses of rock which crushed and concealed many of the chambers and shafts. This seeming catastrophe has proved a blessing in

disguise, for it effectively prevented the earlier discovery of the shaft from which our sarcophagi came.

The story of the almost miraculous preservation of these treasures is quickly told. After the burial was made (about 2000 B. C.) the tomb remained inviolate for two thousand years or more, when it was entered and partly robbed by the Romans. On leaving the burial room the robbers had set fire to a mass of mummy wrappings and wood, with the intention of destroying the contents, but by a fortunate accident the fire went out before any appreciable damage was done. Subsequently a fall of rock effectually protected the tomb from further violation, and so it remained until our Expedition, by careful and laborious blasting operations, laid bare the entrance to the burial shaft.

The accompanying rough sketch will give some idea of the condition of the burial room and its contents. Upon removal of the stone slabs from the entrance (these had simply been pried out at one corner by the Romans), the first sight that met the eye was a great sarcophagus of cedar imported from Lebanon, the cover still in place, but the end taken off by the plunderers, revealing the smaller case within. To the right of this lay the dismembered pieces of another sarcophagus, an outer and an inner case, which had been taken apart by the plunderers in their search for gold. All four of these cases bear the name of the hereditary Prince Dehuti-Nekht, the feudal ruler of the province of Hermopolis, in which these tombs are situated. One contained the mummy of his wife, and the other that of the nobleman himself. A fragment of one of these mummies was found thrown aside in one corner of the room; the rest had either been destroyed by the plunderers or had since fallen to dust. A large number of wooden



Sketch plan of Burial Chamber showing Coffins as found

models of ships and their crews, and of servants engaged in different occupations, had originally been set out beside the sarcophagi, and these were found piled up in inextricable confusion against the walls.

It is important for an understanding of these objects, especially the painted scenes on the sarcophagi, to explain briefly the purpose which they were intended to serve. The paintings on the walls of the sarcophagi were not intended for decoration; they are on the inner surfaces where they could be but poorly seen before the sarcophagus was put into use, and were quite invisible once the lid was put on. These paintings, as their position implies, were designed for the use of the deceased. They served a magic purpose somewhat difficult to define, whereby a picture or a potent written phrase became instinct with a shadowy reality for the use of the shadowy being, or *ka*, that the Egyptian imagined the soul to be. This *ka*, residing in the body within the coffin, could draw sustenance from the pictured food depicted in the principal offering scene, or could make use of the various other objects painted on the surfaces surrounding him. Similarly, the wooden models placed in the tomb permitted the soul to enjoy the fruits of the labors performed by the miniature servants who worked perpetually for his benefit. For to the ancient Egyptian the life of the soul in

the next world was essentially a repetition of the life to which he had been accustomed on earth; its pleasures continued to satisfy him; its needs — food, drink, clothing, shelter — were the same; and its dangers must be guarded against by the use of charms and magic incantations. Prayers to the gods formed an important part of man's existence, for by this means their favor was enlisted and their protection against the abounding evil spirits, both in this world and the next, was assured. Long before the time with which we are here concerned a complete set of appropriate prayers and incantations had come into use to ensure the safe passage of the soul through the underworld, and these texts form what is known as the "Book of the Dead."

Space does not here permit a detailed description of the paintings and inscriptions on the inner surfaces of the great outer case, but an indication of the general scheme of decoration may be of interest. The mummy lay on its left side facing the elaborately decorated doorway painted on the inner face of the main side. Beside this is a large figure of Dehuti-Nekht seated in front of a great pile of food-offerings: meat of many kinds, vegetables, and jars of beer and wine. Beyond are attendants bearing yet more offerings, while the colored texts consist of prayers to the gods to provide for the deceased. The opposite side



The Great Sarcophagus as found: the end removed by ancient plunderers



The Rock Tombs at El-Bersheh: General View

deals with needs of the Prince other than food and drink. Here are displayed the objects of his personal equipment: his bed, toilet requisites, clothing, and jewelry, his weapons, and such tools as he might find useful in the next world. The head end of the outer case is devoted largely to his supply of ointments and perfumes, contained in a row of sealed jars, while the foot end bears only the small incised texts from the "Book of the Dead." The massive lid has two bands of painted hieroglyphs on its lower face, a portion of which is reproduced at the head of this article.

The Museum is most fortunate in possessing this supreme example of the painter's art in Egypt; such delicacy of drawing and beauty of coloring are rarely met with, and the good preservation of the surfaces enables the observer to appreciate these qualities to the full.

The inner case and the two cases of the second sarcophagus, which have been reassembled, are decorated in the same general manner, but show a more summary treatment and less artistic merit.

Associated with these sarcophagi were a large number of wooden models portraying the nobleman's retainers engaged in various pursuits. These were destined for the satisfaction of his needs in the next world, which, as we have already seen, were similar to those of the earthly life. Prominent among these little groups was a collection of about forty ships with their crews. These were intended to transport the deceased along the Nile of the underworld, upon which he would spend much of his time, not only for pleasure — hunting and fishing — but in travel between his various estates. Of these boats one of the largest is the princely barge, fitted with a spacious cabin having doors fore and

aft. At the forward end the cabin roof is extended to form a sort of porch, under which is a table, stowed against the wall, and a small traveling trunk. Beneath the porch sit three men singing and clapping their hands, while a fourth squats near by, enveloped in a white cloak. A fifth man stands at the entrance looking forward. Originally the helmsman sat upon the cabin roof at the rear and swung the great steering oar, while in the bow a man was stationed to sound the river with a pole and give warning against hidden sand-banks. On long journeys the barge was accompanied by the kitchen boat, on which the cook may be seen sitting over his work in front of the cabin, while the helmsman squats on the roof and steers. Another model represents an armed despatch boat, long and narrow, with eighteen rowers, helmsman and bowsman, the spears and shields stowed amidships, and the mooring stake (together with the mallet for driving it into the bank) ready on deck. To the right may be seen the nobleman's pleasure barge, rowed by six men, and with a couch on which the owner might recline in the shade of a canopy. The bow and stern are modeled and decorated with rosettes. Other boats show the crew at the sweeps, rowing down stream against the prevailing north wind, the mast and sails unshipped, while yet others represent ships sailing up the Nile before the wind, the sail set and the crew hauling on the ropes.

Of all the models the finest represents a procession bringing offerings to the tomb. A priest with shaven head leads, bearing a tall vase on his shoulder, and is followed by three women, two of whom balance baskets and trays on their heads and carry live birds in the hand, holding



Some of the Wooden Models as left by the ancient plunderers

them by their fluttering wings. This group is beautifully modeled and delicately colored, and is on a larger scale than the others. Finally, two other models are of special interest. One shows two husbandmen plowing with a yoke of oxen, and the other represents brick makers at work. In the latter two men bring the materials slung from a pole between them; two more mix the mud with water, one bending over the water jar and the other wielding a hoe. The fifth man presses the mixture in a wooden mould and lays out the cakes in a row to dry in the sun.

DUNHAM.

Lectures and Conferences, 1921-1922

The Development of Artistic Insight. Saturdays at 10.30. Ten lectures, beginning October 8. Fee, \$5. Miss Alicia M. Keyes, Lecturer at the Museum.

The aim of this course is to increase the power of seeing a few works of art in the Museum, special attention being given to artistic quality. As the number is limited to twenty-five, early application should be made.

MUSEUM SCHOOL COURSES

In connection with the work of the School of the Museum the following courses of lectures will be given in the Museum. While they are intended for regular students in the School, they will not be

too technical to benefit others who are interested in the subjects presented.

Artistic Anatomy. Tuesdays and Fridays. Twenty-four lectures, beginning October 7. Fee, \$15. Mr. Philip L. Hale.

The History of Design. The History of Sculpture and Painting. Two courses of thirty lectures each, beginning shortly after the opening of the school year, October 3. Fee, \$10 for each course. Mr. Henry Hunt Clark.

SIMMONS COLLEGE COURSE

The following course, under the auspices of Simmons College, will be given at the Museum and be open to students who obtain the consent of the instructor. Fee, \$20.

The Appreciation of Art. Four times a week for the ten weeks beginning March 27. Miss Blanche L. Morse. For application forms address the Registrar of Simmons College, 300 Fenway, Boston.

WEDNESDAY CONFERENCES

During the coming winter the departments of the Museum will give in succession a series of three conferences each on Wednesday afternoons from 2.30 to 4.30, in the Department Rooms or Galleries. The conferences will aim to study the cultural sources of the various branches of art represented in the Museum. They are planned as informal meetings without previously announced subjects, and will be open to all up to the capacity of the room used.

The first series will be given by Mr. John E. Lodge, Curator of Chinese and Japanese Art, and Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, Keeper of Indian Art, on November 9, 16, 23, in the Japanese Study.

The succeeding series will be announced later.

War Portraits by American Artists

AN exhibition of portraits of soldiers and statesmen prominent in the Great War, painted by American artists, was opened in the Renaissance Court during July and will remain until the middle of August. The portraits have been painted on commission from a committee constituted for the purpose and are eventually to be presented to the Government as the nucleus of a National Portrait Gallery like that in London. A number of cities have assumed the expense of different groups of the portraits. The artists represented are Cecilia Beaux, Joseph De Camp, Charles Hopkinson, John C. Johansen, Jean McLane, Edmund C. Tarbell, Douglas Volk, and Irving R. Wiles. The portraits are twenty in number and the collection includes also Mr. Johansen's "Signing the Peace Treaty, June 28, 1919." The exhibition is circulated under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts.