

# BULLETIN

*Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*



Linen Shroud from the mummy of Tuthmosis III with fine cursive hieroglyphic text from Book of the Dead., ca. 1450 B.C., 7½ x 9 in. *Gift of Horace L. Mayer 60.1472*

A PARTICULARLY fine example of Egyptian calligraphy is to be found in the portion of a Book of the Dead illustrated here. It is in a cursive script which retains the same sense of form displayed by the more elaborate hieroglyphs in monumental inscriptions carved in stone or painted on a plastered wall. This is not the abbreviated shorthand form of Hieratic used for correspondence and business documents, but represents the Egyptian scribe as a deft draftsman who preserves the essential characteristics of each little figure with an economy of means. Ordinarily we find such texts written with a reed pen on papyrus, a kind of paper manufactured from the crushed stems of the plant. In rare cases the spells for the protection of the dead in the Underworld were inscribed on a large piece of fine linen laid over the mummy, in this case that of the great Pharaoh Tuthmosis III when he died about 1450 B.C. after he had extended the Egyptian Empire to its widest extent in a long series of foreign campaigns. His two names Men-kheper-ra and Djehuty-mes (from which is derived the familiar Greek form Tuthmosis) appear several times surrounded by the oval frame called a "cartouche." There is the closest relationship in style between this writing on linen and the religious texts and quaintly abbreviated figures illustrating them which cover the walls of the cartouche-shaped chamber in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes where Tuthmosis III was buried under this shroud. We should not be surprised because in this period the artists conceived the decoration of the royal tomb as though the walls were covered with huge papyri unrolled upon them.

During the widespread tomb robberies of the close of the New Kingdom, which created a well-recorded scandal in Thebes, many of the royal mummies were removed to a safer place. It was in a carefully concealed spot known as the Deir el Bahari Cache that modern tomb robbers discovered the body of the great conqueror which now reposes in the Cairo Museum with the largest portion of his Book of the Dead. There is not space here to recount the exciting story of the succession of curious incidents that accompanied this extraordinary discovery. It has been told many times in the older books about Egyptian antiquities. The portion of the Book of the Dead which is partly illustrated here was discovered in Europe by Mr. Horace L. Mayer in a collection which he acquired. Many of these objects have been loaned to our Department where they have been exhibited for some thirty years. Now this beautiful example of ancient writing has been presented as a gift to the Museum as one of the many examples of friendly generosity which we have long owed to Mr. Mayer. It is not only a fitting monument of one of the greatest figures in Egyptian history but should recall to the observer one of the most romantic episodes in early archaeology.

W. S. S.

