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THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOMB DESCRIBED ON O. BM 8505

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The tomb described on O. BM 8505 is generally believed to be KV 16, tomb of Ramses I. However, a precise reconstruction of the architectural elements described by the text and comparison with the modern surveys carried out by the Theban Mapping Project in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens suggest instead that the tomb described on this ostrakon is QV 51, tomb of queen Isis, built under Ramses VI.

Ostrakon BM 8505 (*recto* and *verso*) contains a short text which lists the various elements of a tomb accompanied by their dimensions.¹ The tomb, as it is described, consists simply of a first external corridor, a second passage, a burial chamber and two treasuries. Cerny suggested that the text referred to KV 16, tomb of Ramses I (fig. 1), because no other tomb in the Valley of the Kings corresponded to the description. However, he noted that the palaeography pointed to a later date and suggested that the survey might have been carried out later while the tomb happened to lie open for some reason.²

On a closer examination, however, KV 16 does not correspond exactly to the tomb described on the ostrakon for two reasons. First of all, KV 16 has three corridors, one external and two subterranean, while the ostrakon only mentions two passages, one external and one subterranean. Secondly, the proportions of the burial chamber and the treasuries, as described by the text, do not correspond to those of KV 16. Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the tomb described on the ostrakon, which respects the order in which the dimensions are listed in the text: first the length, second the breadth and third the height. The burial chamber, therefore, appears to be a narrow, long room only 4 palms (about 30 cm) larger than the second corridor.

These characteristics do not correspond to any tomb in the Valley of the Kings, but if the research is extended to the Valley of the Queens, the description fits very well QV 51, tomb

¹ S. Birch, *Inscriptions in Hieratic and Demotic Character in the Collections of the British Museum*, London 1868, pl. 6; J. Cerny and A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca I*, Oxford 1957, pl. 87, n. 3.

² J. Cerny, *The Valley of the Kings*, Cairo 1937, 25-6.

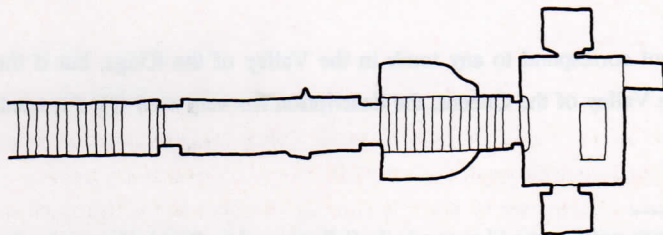


Figure 1: sketch plan of KV 16, tomb of Ramses I (re-drawn after N. C. Reeves, *Valley of the Kings*, London 1990, fig. 27).

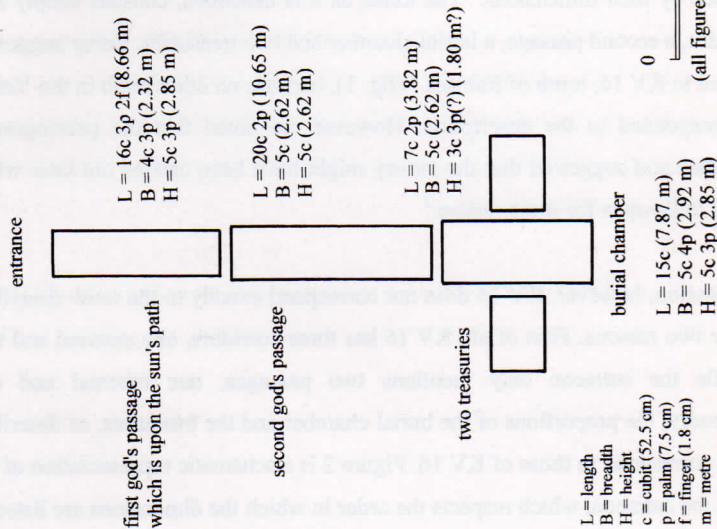


Figure 2: schematic reconstruction of the tomb described on Ostrakon BM 8505.

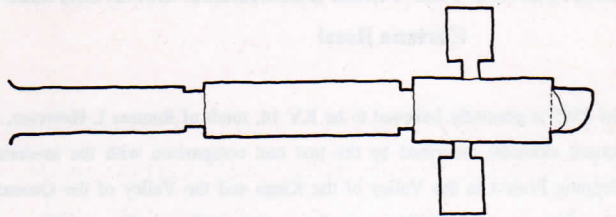


Figure 3: sketch plan of QV 51, tomb of queen Isis, built under Ramses VI (re-drawn after E. Thomas, *Royal Necropoleis of Thebes*, Princeton 1966, fig. 21).

of queen Isis, built under Ramses VI. This tomb consists of two corridors (one external and one internal) and a narrow, long burial chamber flanked by two treasuries (fig. 3).

In June 1999 I had the opportunity to consult the surveys carried out by the Theban Mapping Project in the Valley of the Kings and in the Valley of the Queens, and I was able to check the dimensions of QV 51 on their plan.³ There is a remarkable correspondence between the dimensions provided by the ostracon and those of the actual tomb, and it is even possible to reconstruct the way in which some of the measurements were taken by the ancient architects. The length of the treasuries, for instance, probably included the thickness of the entrances, and the length of the second corridor from step to step corresponds very well to the value given on the ostracon.⁴ The length given by the text for the burial chamber, however, is over 60 cm longer than the actual room measured from the step to the bottom, thus suggesting that the doorway might have been included too.⁵

The identification of the tomb described on O. BM 8505 as QV 51, dating to the time of Ramses VI, corresponds also to Cerny's interpretation of the palaeography. This is a further confirmation that modern and reliable surveys are extremely important in the study of ancient Egyptian architecture. A comparison between the ancient documents and the actual monuments is likely to provide interesting information on the planning and building process even of well-known monuments such as the tombs in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens.

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⁴ For the measurement of sloping corridors, see C. Rossi, "Dimensions and Slope in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasty Royal Tombs", forthcoming in *JEA* 87 (2001).

⁵ The irregular recess in the back wall was quarried by thieves looking for another chamber (E. Thomas, *The Royal Necropoleis of Thebes*, Princeton 1966, 223), and therefore is not mentioned in the ancient text.

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