

QURNA, the main private cemetery in the center of the Theban necropolis (25°44'N, 32°36'E). The name is an abbreviated version of the toponym Ilwet el-Sheikh Abd el-Qurna ("the hill of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna") that refers to a sheikh of the modern village, which still covers an unknown number of tombs on the hill. The term *Qurna* seems to be a derivation of el-Qurn ("the peak"), which may refer to the mountain that is 482 meters (1,450 feet) above sea level, overlooking the Theban necropolis. In older terminology, Qurna referred to the area in the northwestern part of the necropolis, around and including the mortuary temple of Sety I (the Temple of Qurna), which is now occasionally called "Old Qurna," as opposed to Qurna ("the hill") or New Qurna (the modern village designed and built by the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, some 3 kilometers [2 miles] east of the necropolis and close to the Fadiya Canal).

Qurna is the central part of the New Kingdom private necropolis in Thebes. It consists of the hill proper and the plain east of it, which is defined as the area southwest of Khokha and north of the mortuary temple of Ramesses II (the Ramesseum). In the hillside and the plain, there are far more than 150 decorated tombs, more than half of which date to the eighteenth dynasty. Of the remaining tombs, between twenty and thirty date to the eleventh and

early twelfth dynasties, with the rest dating to the Ramesid (nineteenth and twentieth dynasties) or to the Saite period (twenty-sixth dynasty). Many of the tombs of Qurna were known to early travelers, and selected tomb-wall scenes and inscriptions had been copied by members of the Napoleonic expedition (1798–1799).

Today, exact figures or statistical analyses of the spatial and chronological distribution of the tombs in Qurna are still difficult to determine, since the majority of them have not been investigated thoroughly. In addition, since their original construction and decoration, many tombs had been extensively remodeled, redecorated, or otherwise reused. Yet the immense importance of the tombs in Qurna is based on the large number that still have substantial parts of their original decoration (painting on plaster, or relief, or both) well preserved. The decoration has provided abundant information both on aspects of daily life and on religious ceremonies, allowing for detailed studies of the development of style and iconography. The tomb inscriptions have shed light on theological conceptions, social stratigraphy, administration, and the family relationships of those buried in the tombs.

Studies have revealed that, contrary to previous conclusions, there are patterns by which the site for a tomb was chosen, the manner in which it was decorated, and the way that the burials were equipped. At times, especially during the eighteenth dynasty, certain areas were used for the construction of tombs by members of the same social class. Sometimes elements of decoration and/or the textual program of one tomb were slightly remodeled and used in another. Generally speaking, the private tombs in Qurna belong to the elite of the eighteenth dynasty. Among the tomb owners are viziers (the highest nonroyal position in the administration), high priests of Amun and other high-ranking members of the clergy, overseers of the granaries of the Two Lands, mayors of Thebes, high-ranking military officers, and royal stewards. The Qurna hill has yielded some of the best-known private tombs of Western Thebes and thus of ancient Egypt.

The tomb of the vizier under Thutmose III, Rekhmire (tomb 100 in Western Thebes), is halfway up the hill. It is considered to be the best example of the T-shaped tomb type and is the most completely decorated extant tomb of the eighteenth dynasty. It also shows the general distribution of the wall scenes and texts of the time most clearly: the broad hall (corresponding to the horizontal stroke of a T) mainly contains the daily life scenes, which depict various activities in which the vizier was involved during his lifetime. The scenes and texts of the passage, or transverse hall, are mainly devoted to topics of the netherworld, oriented toward representations of gods and goddesses, which are depicted on the western end of the hall.

The subterranean burial chamber of the tomb of Sennefer (a mayor of Thebes during the time of Amenhotpe II; tomb 96) is well known for its unique ceiling decoration, of vine leaves. The tombs of Nakht (tomb 52) and Menna (tomb 69) were built for middle-class officials under the reign of Thutmose IV and are vivid examples of smaller tombs with painted decoration.

Another vizier and mayor of Thebes at the end of the eighteenth dynasty, Ramose (tomb 55), had his tomb built in the plain of Qurna during the reigns of Amenhotpe III and Amenhotpe IV. His tomb contains one of the finest examples of wall decoration, in raised relief, in New Kingdom times. It also shows the drastic change of style that took place after Amenhotpe IV changed his name to Akhenaton and moved to his new city at Amarna. Some of the walls in Ramose's tomb were decorated in the new, Amarna style.

Today, the Qurna hill remains one of the primary targets of Egyptological investigation. Since the end of the nineteenth century, numerous projects were dedicated to the excavation, recording, and documentation of the tombs of Qurna. To a certain extent, the history of archaeological and epigraphic research in the tombs of Qurna parallels the history of Egyptology; and every major Egyptological institution has, one way or another, contributed to their investigation. This part of the Theban necropolis is still far from being thoroughly investigated, however. Almost every year, new tombs have been discovered and long-known tombs have been reinvestigated under the new, scientific-scholarly approach.

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