

## The Tomb of Tutankhamun Back to Osiris in plan and decoration

### The Tomb of Tutankhamun Back to Osiris in plan and decoration

مقبرة توت عنخ أمون عودة لأوزير من حيث التخطيط والزينة

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#### Abstract

The architectural plan and the wall decoration of the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62) show differences in comparison to previous 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The reasons for these differences in view of the unusual political, religious and social circumstances at the end of the Amarna period as well as the importance of Tutankamun alive and dead are investigated.

An analyses of the unique architectural plan of the tomb in connection with the placement and directions of the main funerary equipment together with the carefully chosen scenes in the Sarcophagus Chamber reveal their collective role in reviving the Osiris cult and in giving the Egyptian people back their pre-Amarna Netherworld beliefs.

**Keywords:** Tutankhamun, architectural plan, decoration, king Ay, Osiris, Netherworld

#### المخلص

تظهر في مقبرة الملك توت عنخ أمون (رقم 62 بوادي الملوك) عند مقارنتها بالمقابر الملكية السابقة عليها من عصر الأسرة الثامنة عشرة بوادي الملوك اختلافات من حيث التخطيط والزينة. ويتحرى البحث أسباب تلك الاختلافات في ضوء الظروف السياسية والدينية والاجتماعية الاستثنائية التي واكبت نهاية فترة العمارنة وكذلك أهمية توت عنخ أمون أثناء حياته وبعد مماته.

كما يتم تناول البحث التخطيط الفريد للمقبرة وصلته بكيفية ترتيب عناصر الأثاث الجنزي الرئيسية في المقبرة ووجهتها وتكاملها مع المناظر التي تزين حجرة الدفن ليتضح دور كل هذا مجتمعا في إحياء العقيدة الأوزيرية والرجوع لعقائد العالم الآخر التي كانت سائدة وتتمتع بشعبية كبيرة قبل فترة العمارنة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** توت عنخ أمون، تخطيط المقبرة، زينة المقبرة، الملك آي ، أوزير ، العالم السفلي

## **Introduction**

The architectural plan and the wall decoration of the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62) show differences in comparison to previous 18th Dynasty royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The aim of this paper is the attempt to explain the reasons for these differences and changes and in what way they may be related to the unusual political, religious and social circumstances at the end of the Amarna period and accompanying the reestablishment of the Amun cult. The importance of Tutankamun alive and dead is investigated. Special attention is given to the role that Tutankhamun's tomb played in reviving the Osiris cult and in giving the Egyptian people back their Netherworld beliefs. A deeper analysis of the scenes in the Sarcophagus Chamber is conducted and their relation to the architectural plan, the directions and the funerary equipment is investigated.

Previous studies and writings about Tutankhamun and his tomb mostly provide short descriptions of the scenes in the Sarcophagus chamber and what they clearly represent at first glance<sup>1</sup> without providing more detailed explanations for the reasons of the choice of especially these scenes or details and what messages were related to them during this transition period in the New Kingdom.

### **1. Tutankhamun's importance**

Often in Literature Tutankhamun is still described as a pharaoh of minor importance or a mere marionette in the hands of the influential officials of his time, like the 'God father' Ay and the Generalissimo Horemheb<sup>2</sup>.

The archaeological remains from Tutankhamun's reign suggest something else and underline his importance in life and death.

#### **1.1 Tutankhamun's importance during life**

Tutankhamun assumes the rule of Egypt at approximately the age of nine and most certainly at the beginning must have been under the total guidance and influence of his councils. Ay as a tutor and a religious authority, Horemheb as Military Commander<sup>3</sup> and Maya as Treasurer<sup>4</sup>. Throughout his reign he seems to grow into his role as pharaoh of

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<sup>1</sup> Reeves, N., *The Complete Tutankhamun*, The American University in Cairo Press 2009, 72-74.

<sup>2</sup> Dodson, A., *Amarna Sunset*, The American University in Cairo Press 2009, 61-88.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, G.T., *The Memphite tomb of Horemheb, Commander in Chief of Tutankhamun*, Vol.1 Reliefs, Inscriptions and Commentary, Egypt Exploration Society, London 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, G.T., et al., *The Tomb of Maya and Meryt*, Vol.1 Reliefs, Inscriptions and Commentary, Egypt Exploration Society, London 2012.

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Egypt and as a teenager, approximately at the age of 15 must have started to have his own opinions about political and religious issues, which might not always have agreed with those of his councils.

Fundamental changes are related to his reign. Not only the reestablishment of the Amun cult and the restoration of temples and shrines of all gods & goddesses throughout the country but also giving the people back their ever so crucial traditional Afterlife beliefs.

It is often underestimated what it means that Tutankhamun ruled for about ten years. Nearly a decade of severe changes that seem to have happened in a surprisingly rather peaceful and smooth way, marking an important transition period in the history of Ancient Egypt in which Tutankhamun played a key role.

During his life the person of Tutankhamun himself is used to demonstrate at highest level that the god Amun has returned to previous power. The gilded armchair<sup>5</sup> that presumably was made for Akhenaton and altered several times<sup>6</sup> documents the change of the Name from Tutankhaton 'The living image of Aton' to Tutankhamun 'The living image of Amun'. It is noteworthy that both names appear on the gilded armchair, and that the name was not consequently changed to Tutankhamun everywhere on the throne. The marvelous gilded armchair itself with the Aton disk shining over Tutankhaton and his wife is yet a sign that the Aton cult must have been still quite stable during the first few years of Tutankhaton's reign in which the decoration of this gilded armchair was altered first for Tutankhaton before it was later altered again for him as Tutankhamun.

The restoration stela documents the drastic religious and political changes terminating the Amarna period "because good has come back into existence"<sup>7</sup>.

It is only fitting that Tutankhamun would be the one in whose reign the Opet festival scenes are supposed to have been carved on the west and east walls of the colonnade of Amenhotep III in the Luxor temple. At the time of Tutankhamun and his immediate

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<sup>5</sup> Eaton-Krauss, M., *The Thrones, Chairs, Stools, and Footstools from the Tomb of Tutankhamun*, London, 2008, 25-56.

<sup>6</sup> Bartos, I., "Tutankhamun's Golden Armchair: Its Original Owner and Shape Reconsidered", in: *Égypte nilotique et méditerranéenne ENIM* 14, Open Access Journal, 2021, 273-284.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, J., *The Restoration Inscription of Tut'ankhamūn*, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 25., No. 1, Egypt Exploration Society London 193 , 8-15.

successors the Opet processions must have been orchestrated with excessive grandeur and impressive festival acts to celebrate the triumphal return of the Amun cult.

### **1.2 Tutankhamun's importance dead**

In death the funeral of Tutankhamun, the funerary equipment and the decoration of his tomb must have been carefully planned to highlight his second great gift to the Egyptian people, namely the return to the Osiris cult and the Netherworld beliefs that they were deprived of in the time of Akhenaton.

The new religion of Akenaton had changed the Afterlife beliefs from west to east and abandoned the belief in an Underworld. The dead would no more rest in the Underworld, in which the sun would temporarily awaken them during its night journey. They would now rest in their tombs, which they leave each morning in the form of their Ba to accompany Aton and the king together with his family to the temple and have share of the offerings<sup>8</sup>.

The funerary procession of a king is depicted in no other royal tomb of the New Kingdom, neither before nor after Tutankhamun, even not in the Tomb of his successor King Ay.

Early on H. Carter stressed that king Tutankhamun in his various coffins was being shown as Osiris<sup>9</sup>. He also proposed that the linen wads and bandages placed upon the top of the head of the mummy in a conical form were representing the crown of Osiris<sup>10</sup>.

S. Ikram suggests that the mummy was prepared in a way so as to emphasize the identification of the king with Osiris. This included an exaggerated evisceration, restored by the mass of oleoresin that also transformed the color of his skin to Osirid black as well as the position of the arms that were found bent at the elbows roughly at right angles, and placed across his belly which resembles the image of the king as Osiris on the walls of the Sarcophagus Chamber and the 'Osiris bed'. Furthermore the penis was mummified erect, as opposed to lying flaccid probably to symbolize rebirth and resurrection. A

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<sup>8</sup> Assmann, J., *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Ägypten*, Verlag C. H. Beck München 2001, 285-299.

<sup>9</sup> Carter, H., 1983, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen* (Introduction by John Romer), Pimlico, London, 191–192.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/discoveringtut/>

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transformation of the body meant to ensure that Tutankhamun, Horus on Earth, was transformed into eternal Osiris<sup>11</sup>.

Still at the end after all the change that happened in his reign his name, like the ones of Akhenaton and Ay, was omitted from the king lists of Abydos and Karnak<sup>12</sup>. Maybe a remaining affection to the Aton cult, suggested by the maintenance of the scene of himself and his wife under the rays of the sun disk on his gilded armchair, was the reason for this omission.

### **2. The location of the tomb**

Eaton-Krauss suggests that KV 62 was already existent and came to the attention of the officials involved in the burial of the direct successor of Akhenaton in KV 55<sup>13</sup>. Earlier S. Tawfik had explained that the tomb was not a provisorium but was designed for Tutankhamun and that its architectural plan fits in the development of the style of the royal tombs towards the end of the 18th Dynasty<sup>14</sup>. Even the location of the tomb near the entrance and almost at floor level of the Valley, making it easy accessible for the funerary procession in comparison to other tombs in the valley, seems to have been chosen on purpose to demonstrate clearly the royal return to the pre-Amarna funerary rites and Underworld beliefs.

### **3. Messaging the return to Osiris**

The scenes decorating the burial chamber of Tutankhamun show clearly the return to the Osiris cult and to the Underworld beliefs. Messages that seemingly were supposed to be indirectly transmitted to the public by the artisans, who decorated the tomb, the carpenters assembling the gilded shrines inside the burial chamber and the funerary equipment carriers who placed all the furniture, boxes, statues, personal belongings and ritual objects inside the Antechamber, the Annex, the Treasury and the Sarcophagus

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<sup>11</sup> Ikram, S., "Some Thoughts on the Mummification of King Tutankhamun", in: *Études et Travaux XXVI*, Institut des Cultures Méditerranéennes et Orientales de L' Académie Polonaise des Sciences, Paris 2013, 291-301.

<sup>12</sup> Clayton, P.A., *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*, Thames & Hudson London 1994, 128-137.

<sup>13</sup> Eaton-Krauss, M., *The Unknown Tutankhamun*, New York 2016, 87-101.

<sup>14</sup> Tawfik, T., "Tutanchamuns Grab Provisorium oder kunstvolles Novum", in: *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens (Fs. W. Westendorf)*, F. Junge, Göttingen 1984, 1131-1139.

Chamber. It should also be kept in mind that the objects in the treasury had to be placed there before the four gilded shrines in the burial chamber could be assembled. Afterwards the west wall decoration was completed before the Sarcophagus Chamber was finally sealed. All of this work would have taken several days, which means that the tomb was certainly not closed and sealed on the day of burial.

The fact that proportions of the figures on the south wall in the tomb of Tutankhamun, that was evidently painted last, use the more common 18-square compositional grid and differ from those on the other three walls of the Sarcophagus Chamber that followed the Amarna canon of 20 squares<sup>15</sup> means that different artisans were at work here. This also indicates that it was intended to have many persons involved in the funeral, the burial and the completion of works in the tomb, so that the messages would find their way to the people.

The few remains of funerary equipment from other previous royal tombs of the 18th Dynasty, like those from the tombs of Amenhotep II (KV 35) and Tuthmose IV (KV 43) , don't indicate the same splendor and magnificence of the funerary equipment of Tutankhamun. Yet they show that much of the statuary in the tomb of Tutankhamun was of the kind previously used in Pre-Amarna 18th Dynasty royal tombs and that much of it was related to the Osiris cult and not to forget the 'germinating Osiris' or 'Osiris bed' that was placed in the so-called Treasury<sup>16</sup>. This allows the hypothesis that also the funerary procession of King Tutankhamun was planned well in advance to impress by all the gold and glamour and to inform the public that their previous Afterlife beliefs had been restored. Probably on purpose the funerary procession in the tomb of Tutankhamun resembles the funerary processions depicted in the vignette of the first chapter of Book of the Dead papyri. These papyri with very few exceptions, were non-royal. For example the vignette in the papyrus of Ani (BM 10470) shows two of the main elements of the funerary procession that were also present in the tomb of Tutankhamun: the mummy and Anubis on his shrine being dragged on sledges<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Reeves, N., *The Complete Tutankhamun*, The American University in Cairo Press 2009, 72-74.

<sup>16</sup> Hasaan, D.M., *Royal and Divine Statues in the Funeral Equipments of 18<sup>th</sup> Dyn.* From the Valley of the Kings, unpublished M.A., Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, Cairo 2015, 126-257.

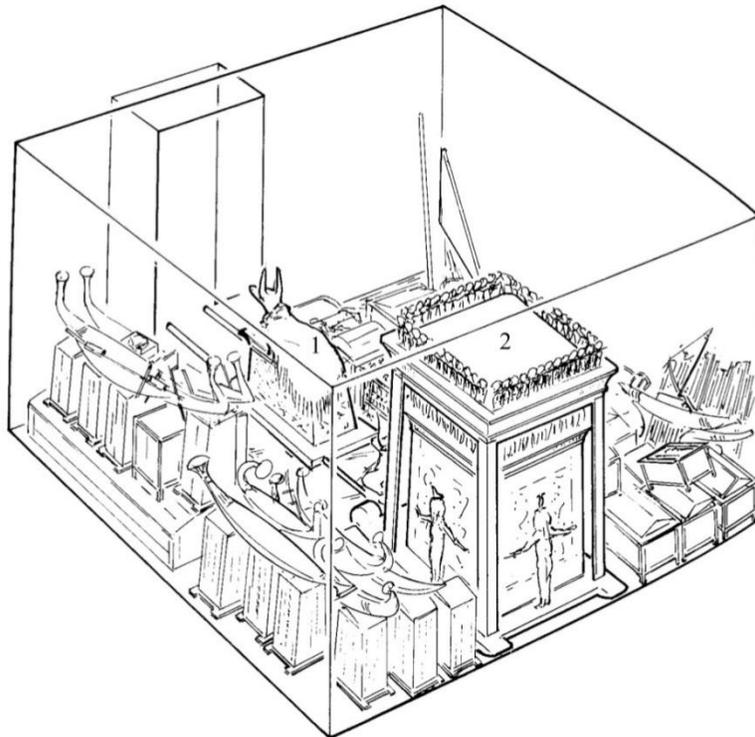
<sup>17</sup> Dondelinger, E., *Das Totenbuch des Schreibers Ani*, Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt Graz 1987, 67-68.

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### 4. The main elements of the funerary procession

These main elements are represented in the tomb of Tutankhamun by the mummy in its anthropoid coffins within the gilded shrines, followed by Anubis on his shrine (fig.1, nr.1) and then the gilded shrine for the canopic jars calcite box (fig.1, nr. 2). These elements were placed in the tomb in the same order as they were probably employed in the funerary procession. They were even placed heading in the right direction from east to west<sup>18</sup>.



(Fig. 1) Diagram of the so-called Treasury (after Reeves, 2009, 86 with additions)

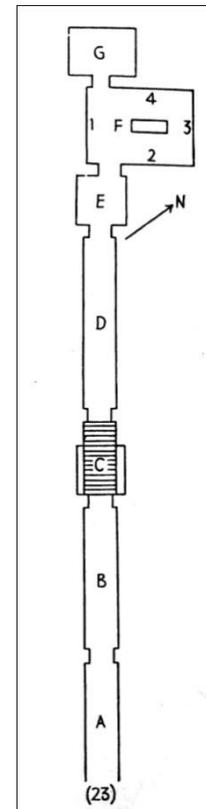
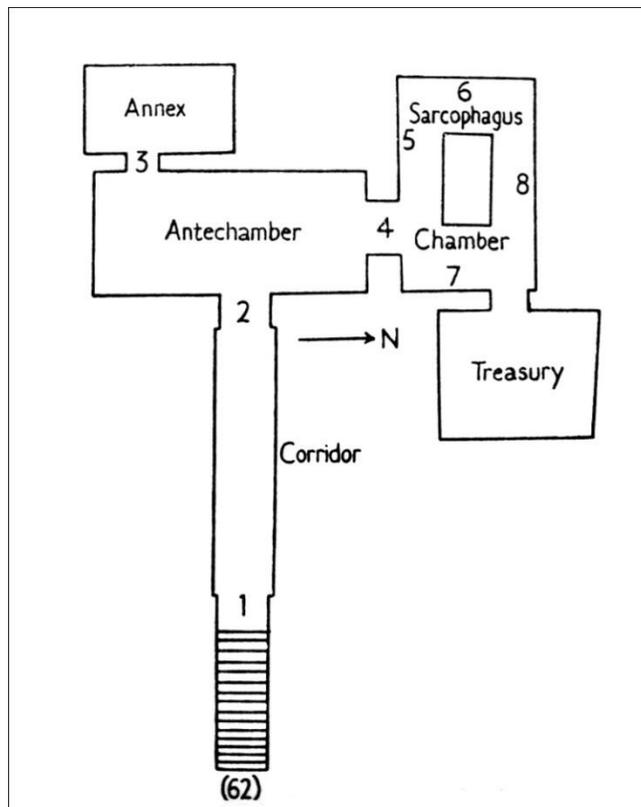
### 5. A unique architectural plan

This leads to another aspect regarding the architectural plan of the tomb of Tutankhamun (fig.2). It seems as if the typical pre-Amarna 18th dynasty architectural plan, that makes a 90 degrees turn once or twice, was modified to allow for the main procession elements to be placed in the tomb in their correct order.

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<sup>18</sup> Tawfik, T. S., Die Vignette zu Totenbuch-Kapitel 1 und vergleichbare Darstellungen in Gräbern, Bonn 2008, unpublished dissertation, forthcoming as Studien zum Altägyptischen Totenbuch publication, 45-47.

The entrance corridor leads to the Antechamber. There a 90 degrees change in the axis of the tomb happens towards the north entering the Sarcophagus Chamber which lies to the right of the Antechamber. The Sarcophagus Chamber opens up towards the east to the Treasury. No such Treasury or any equivalent side chamber located towards the east of the Sarcophagus Chamber exists in any earlier royal tomb of the 18th Dynasty. This suggests that this Chamber was added on purpose towards the east to accommodate two of the main elements of the funerary procession, the Anubis shrine and the canopic jars shrine, in order to reflect the actual procession coming from the east heading west. (fig. 1) The Annex contained mainly additional food and drink supplies as well as furniture for the Afterlife. It is located in the appropriate direction towards the west of the Antechamber ready for its content to be used by the deceased king after resurrection.



(Fig. 2) Plan of the tomb of Tutankhamun

(Fig. 3) Plan of the tomb of Ay

(Both plans after Porter & Moss, 1964, 528)

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There is no obvious resemblance to the architectural plans of the royal tombs of immediate predecessors Amenhotep III (WV22) and Akhenaten ((TA26). The tomb of King Ay in the West Valley (WV 23) is the one with most similarities to the tomb of Tutankhamun regarding the architectural plan and the decoration of the Sarcophagus Chamber. Although the plan of the tomb of Ay starts to straighten (fig. 3), the Sarcophagus Chamber still projects towards the north as is the case with the Sarcophagus Chamber of Tutankhamun. In the tomb of Ay an Annex opens up from the Sarcophagus Chamber towards the west (fig. 3 , G) and seems to have been for the canopic jars as suggested by a rare depiction above the entrance of the room showing the four sons of Horus as mummified royal figures holding flails<sup>19</sup>.

The decoration of the Sarcophagus Chamber has also lots of resemblance but one crucial scene is missing. The depiction of the mummy of the king being dragged to the tomb. This unique scene in a royal context was of great importance in the tomb of Tutankhamun and was related to the main elements of the funerary procession that were placed in the so-called Treasury. As a consequence of this scene not existing in the tomb of Ay there was no Treasury, no need for such a side chamber towards the east.

### 6. The Scenes in the Sarcophagus Chamber

The Osiris cult dominates the decoration of the Sarcophagus Chamber in the tomb of Tutankhamun as it does in the burial chamber of Maya, the treasurer of Tutankhamun, in his tomb in Saqqara. Also in the case of Maya the decoration of the burial chamber is uncommon for that time or necropolis<sup>20</sup>. It celebrates in bright yellow colored scenes the adoration of Osiris and the return to the Underworld beliefs.

The scenes in the Sarcophagus Chamber of Tutankhamun convey multiple messages on the religious and political levels. Their distribution on the walls according to the four cardinal directions was deliberately chosen. Although brief, as they are confined to only one chamber, they in principal form a continuation of the pre-Amarna royal tomb decoration in an abbreviated way with the addition of the depiction of the funerary procession, that is unique to the royal tomb decoration of the New Kingdom.

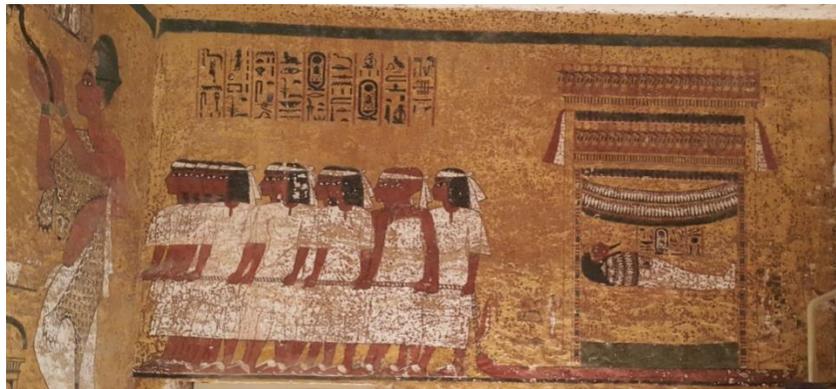
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<sup>19</sup> James, T.G.H., "The Tomb of Ay", in: Weeks, K. R. (edit.), *The Treasures of the Valley of the Kings, Tombs and Temples of the Theban West Bank in Luxor*, The American University in Cairo Press 2001, 172-175.

<sup>20</sup> Martin, G.T., *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis*, Thames & Hudson London 1992, 147-188.

### **6.1 The east wall**

This wall (fig. 4) is immediately to the right of a person entering the sarcophagus chamber. It shows a boat on a sledge with the royal mummy in a shrine decorated with garlands under two frizzes of cobras surmounted by sun disks. Furthermore there are two little figurines on the boat, one of Nephtis at the head of the mummy, and the other one of Isis at its feet, indicating the return to osirian funerary customs. Twelve men of high rank pull the sledge with a rope. The scene shows the last act of the funerary procession before the 'opening of the mouth ritual' that will follow on the adjacent north wall. After this ritual the mummy would be placed in the golden and gilded coffins and then in the quartzite sarcophagus, the final resting place. Probably on purpose this vignette of the first chapter of the Book of the Dead was chosen, that elsewhere does not appear in a royal context.



(Fig. 4) East wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (Photo by author)

Under the funerary procession scene is the entrance to the so-called Treasury which housed the other main elements of the funerary procession in the form of three dimensional actual objects (Anubis on his shrine and then the gilded shrine for the canopic jars calcite box). In this way the two dimensional scene on the east wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber is complemented three dimensionally by the actual main elements in the so-called Treasury to form the entire funerary procession culminating in the performance of the 'opening of the mouth ritual' and the mummy being actually placed in

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the sarcophagus<sup>21</sup>. The narrative is accomplished by the alternation and yet complementation between scenes and objects.

### 6.2 The north wall

The scenes (fig. 5) start from the east with Ay shown as king wearing the blue crown, in addition to the leopard skin of a sem-priest, performing the 'opening of the mouth ritual' for Tutankhamun depicted as Osiris holding the royal insignia in his hands. Two important messages are conveyed here in pictorial form clearly understandable for any artisan, carpenter, funerary equipment carrier or even simple worker. Firstly that Ay is performing the opening of the mouth ritual normally performed by the eldest son and heir. By performing this ritual Ay becomes legitimate heir to the throne and becomes entitled to the royal crown that he is wearing. So it is a legitimization scene for Ay to become Pharaoh. Secondly that Tutankhamun with his name written in front of his face is depicted as Osiris assuring beyond doubt that the Osiris cult has been reestablished.



(Fig. 5) North wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (Photo by author)

Next again a clear message is illustrated showing Tutankhamun heading like in pre-Amarna times towards the west to the realm of the dead where he is received by the

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<sup>21</sup> Tawfik, T. S., Die Vignette zu Totenbuch-Kapitel 1 und vergleichbare Darstellungen in Gräbern, Bonn 2008, unpublished dissertation, forthcoming as Studien zum Altägyptischen Totenbuch publication, 45-47.

mother of Osiris the goddess Nut<sup>22</sup> with the nini gesture<sup>23</sup> showing the hieroglyphic sign for water in both her hands.

The final Scene fittingly on the west side of the wall shows Tutankhamun closely followed by his Ka embracing Osiris the Lord of the Netherworld in an unusual rarely depicted intimate way, holding with his right hand the back of the head of Osiris and with the left hand touching his hip. Osiris also reaches out with his two hands to welcome Tutankhamun. So it's a mutual embrace messaging Tutankhamen's absolute return to the Osiris cult and his mergence with him.

### **6.3 The west wall**

The west wall (fig. 6) was reserved for the key message. An extract from the Amduat 'What is in the Underworld' is depicted assuring the return to the belief in the Netherworld. The twelve calmly sitting baboons of the first hour of the Amduat represent the silence of the night hours in the Netherworld. Right on top of the baboons a solar barque is shown with Khepri as beetle inside symbolizing the rising sun at dawn and the desired resurrection. Five deities proceed the barque in a separate frame.



(Fig. 6) West wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (Photo by author)

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<sup>22</sup> Bonnet, H., "Nut", in: Reallexikon der der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte, Walter De Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1952, 536-539.

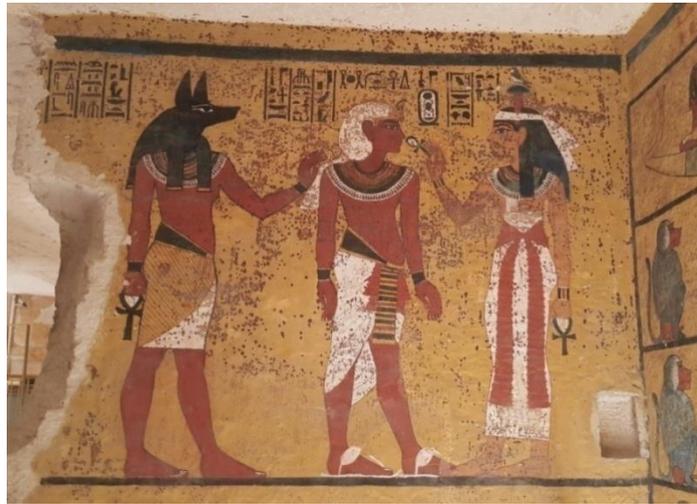
<sup>23</sup> Dominicus, B., "Gesten und Gebärden in Darstellungen des Alten und Mittleren Reiches", in: Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altägyptens 10, Heidelberger Orientverlag 1994, 48-58.

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### 6.4 The south wall

This was the last wall (fig. 7) to be painted and was being finished even after the gilded shrines had already been assembled inside the Sarcophagus Chamber. Like on the north wall the scenes head towards the west. The first scenes were on the plastered built wall sealing the entrance to the Sarcophagus Chamber. The wall that Carter had to tear down to be able to transport the objects out of the Chamber and the Treasury. The Scenes lost showed three deities of the Underworld sitting behind the goddess Isis doing the nini gesture. Still preserved is Anubis, who is depicted as a human figure with the head of a jackal accompanying Tutankhamun to Hathor, goddess of the west. This aspect of Hathor as goddess of the west, depicting her as a woman with the hieroglyphic sign of the west imentt on her head is chosen on purpose. She welcomes Tutankhamun pointing the ankh sign to his nose giving him life. Depicting Hathor in this manner again was a message that the whole funerary cult and the process of resurrection had turned back from heading east in the Amarna period to the way it used to be heading west to enter the Underworld.



(Fig. 7) South wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (Photo by author)

### Conclusion

The importance of the role of Tutankhamun on the religious and political levels is often underestimated. Certainly being guided and heavily influenced at the beginning he grows into the role of Pharaoh. With his person and image are related not only the reestablishment of the Amun cult and the restoration of temples and shrines of all gods

and goddesses throughout the country but also prominently the return to the Osiris cult and the Netherworld beliefs that the people were deprived of in the time of Akhenaton.

The location and architectural plan of his tomb, the placement of his funerary equipment and the choice of decoration in the Sarcophagus Chamber as well as the funeral must have been carefully and intentionally planned to convey and stress multiple messages.

The typical 18th Dynasty architectural plan of a royal tomb was modified so that the Sarcophagus Chamber and the so called Treasury could accommodate the main elements of the funerary procession to be placed in the appropriate direction heading from east to west.

The tomb of Tutankhamun is the only royal tomb to contain the vignette of the first chapter of the Book of the Dead depicting the funerary procession to highlight the return to pre-Amarna funerary rites. King Ay performing the 'opening of the mouth ritual' for Tutankhamun shown as Osiris demonstrated the legitimization for Ay to be Pharaoh and the assurance that the Osiris cult was reestablished. The scene on the north wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber showing the mutual intimate embrace between Tutankhamun and Osiris as well as the one on the south wall showing him being welcomed by Hathor, depicted as goddess of the west ascertain the return to the Underworld beliefs. The location of the tomb, its unique architectural plan and the carefully chosen decoration of the Sarcophagus Chamber were a deliberate and clear documentation of the crucial changes that were achieved in the time of Tutankhamun.

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