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Temples' Representations in Theban Private tombs: Location Significance

Ahmad Sayed¹, Rasha Omran², Ayman Waziry³, AbdelRihim Abdel Mohsen⁴

Abstract

Ancient Egyptians paid attention to choose the scenes to depict on the tomb walls. They believed that these scenes, which commemorated their life's accomplishments, would help them in the afterlife. The distribution of the scenes upon the walls of the tomb made was not random but systematic and ordered. This paper investigates whether ancient Egyptian artists placed images of temples on tomb walls with reference to their actual locations. It also examines the relationships between the tomb owners' titles and the temple representations in their tombs. A survey was conducted of temples' representations in the New Kingdom Theban private tombs. Moreover, tomb owners' titles and their relationship to the represented temples are studied. This was done to compare the location of the temples' representations upon the tombs' walls and their actual locations, examine the symbolism of their locations, understand their significance and contribution to the overall function of the tomb.

Keywords

Location Symbolism; Topography; Iconography; Noble tombs; Temples

Introduction

The scenes on the walls of tombs may have been intended to assist the deceased's journey to the afterlife or to commemorate his life achievements.⁵ Lise Manniche⁶ and Dimitri Laboury⁷ studied the iconography of the scenes depicted in tombs, their function in relation to the tomb chapel, and their significance as an imaginative tool to present the everlasting life and rebirth of the deceased.⁸ Other scholars, including Roland Tefnin⁹ and Jan Assmann,¹⁰ have examined Theban tomb iconography as a complicated semiological structure, which depicted the tomb owner's existential life in the hereafter.¹¹ Theban tomb painting and iconography show the

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⁵ Naguib Kanawati. *The Tomb and Its Significance in Ancient Egypt*. (Guizeh: Ministry of Culture, Egypt, Foreign Cultural Relations, 1999):19. 135-136.

⁶ L. Manniche, *City of the Dead: Thebes in Egypt* (Chicago, 1987), 31

⁷ D. Laboury, 'Une relecture de la tombe de Nakht (TT 52, Cheikh 'Abd el-Gourna),' in R. Tefnin (ed.), *La peinture égyptienne ancienne: Un monde de signes à préserver, Actes de Colloque international de Bruxelles, avril 1994*, Monumenta Aegyptiaca 7 (Brussels, 1997), 49-81.

⁸ The tomb known as "house of eternity" (*Hwt n nHH* or *pr Dt*). See, Erik Hornung, *Idea into image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, translated by E. Bredeck (New York, 1992), 175-184; John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (London, 2001), 31.

⁹ Laboury, Monumenta Aegyptiaca 7 (Brussels, 1997), 49-81.

¹⁰ J. Assmann, 'Hierotaxis: Textkonstitution und Bildkomposition in der ägyptischen Kunst und Literatur,' in J. Osing and G. Dreyer (eds.) *Form und Mass: Beiträge zur Literatur, Sprache, und Kunst des alten Ägypten, Festschrift für Gerhard Fecht*, ÄAT 12 (Wiesbaden, 1987), 18-42.

¹¹ M. K Hartwig. *Tomb painting and identity in ancient Thebes, 1419-1372 BCE. Vol. 2. (2004).*

influence of the social, political, cultural, and artistic conditions during the time when the Theban tomb iconography was created and allow a glimpse into what the ancient Egyptians respected and what would guarantee their eternal existence in the next.

These tombs display some of the finest artwork in all of ancient Egypt; many tomb owners were from influential families and served pharaohs; others were members of a growing middle class of craftsmen, grain scribes, and temple suppliers. The temple elite, particularly those who served the god Amun-Re in his temple at Karnak, were also well represented in the necropolis.¹²

The tombs scenes have been classified according to modern bias, divided into “scenes of daily life” or “ritual scenes,” for instance, groupings that were not shared by the ancient Egyptians. Many studies¹³ have investigated such scenes and determined that the best approach is to examine the nature and meaning of tomb scenes relative to the overall role of the tomb, both as artistic tool to enable the resurrection of the dead and as a memorial to commemorate the deceased’s life. The meanings of Egyptian tomb scenes can be examined using this schematic.¹⁴ However, this work is restricted to temple scenes in the private Theban private tombs during the New Kingdom period, examining the symbolism of their location inside the tomb and clarifying their significance and contribution to the tomb’s overall function.

Temple scenes are found in the Theban necropolis during the New Kingdom period.¹⁵ Overall, about 33 scenes in 23 tombs have been found in this group (Fig. 1).¹⁶ These scenes were first attested during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut. Of the total, 39% are from the 18th Dynasty of all temple scenes; of these, half were created under the reigns of Amenhotep III and Thutmose IV. A majority (57%) of the scenes were created during the 19th Dynasty, most from the reign of Ramesses II; a large majority (78%) are from the first half of the 19th Dynasty. Only one was painted during the 20th Dynasty, under Ramesses III. These representations depict religious and mortuary Theban temples and are valuable for the important information they impart for restoring Theban temples.¹⁷

¹² Hartwig, *Tomb painting and identity in ancient Thebes*, 3.

¹³ R. Tefnin, ‘Discours et iconicité dans l’art égyptien,’ *Annales d’Histoire de l’Art et d’Archéologie* 5 (1983), 11-12; Claudio Barocas, “La décoration des chapelles funéraires égyptiennes,” in G. Gnoli and J.P. Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, (Cambridge, 1982), 429-440.

¹⁴ Hartwig, *Tomb painting and identity in ancient Thebes*, 50.

¹⁵ A. Badawy. *A History of Egyptian Architecture; The Empire (The New Kingdom) from the Eighteenth Dynasty to the end of twentieth Dynasty 1580-1085*. Vol. III. (Los Angeles: UCP, 1968), 170; Ahmad Sayed. *Structures Scenes in the New Kingdom’s Private Tombs at Western Thebes* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Fayoum University, Fayoum, 2020), 50.

¹⁶ P.M. mentioned there is a temple scene in TT 106, but there is no other temple scene in TT 106 according to Sävve-Söderbergh, the publisher of the tomb (TT106); Torgny Sävve-Söderbergh. *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs*. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957):11-21.

¹⁷ Badawy, *A History of Egyptian Architecture*, 172.

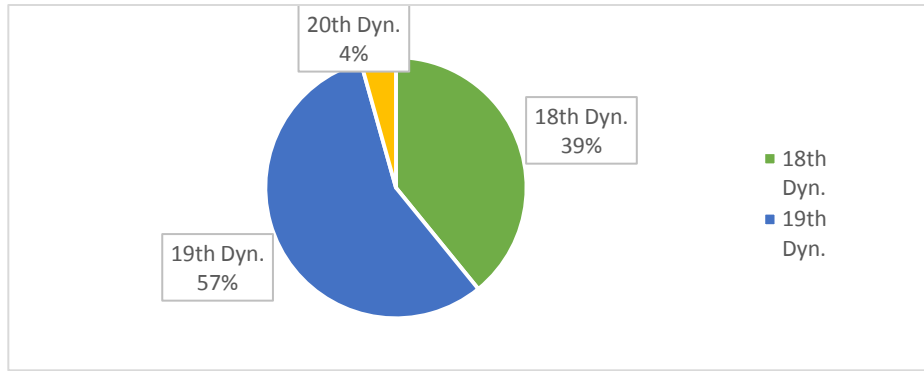


Fig. 1. Source period of temple scenes in tombs during New Kingdom Dynasties.

Location of Temples' scenes Inside Tombs

To interpret the location of these scenes inside the tombs, the authors examined all 33 known temple scenes in 223 tombs. The distribution of the scenes upon the walls made by the artist was not random but systematic, organized, and ordered. Here, the locations are examined to help determine the purpose and symbolism of a given scene. The authors examined religious and mortuary temple scenes separately, as such temples were separate during the New Kingdom, to understand what relationship the depictions' locations had the actual temple (religious/mortuary).

Representation of Religious Temples

Representations of religious temples account for just over half of all temple (Fig. 3.1). The large majority (85%) of these scenes are found in the transverse hall (48% and 37% are on the east and west side of the transverse hall, respectively). A minority of the scenes were equally (5%) in the elongated hall, shrine, or façade of the tomb.

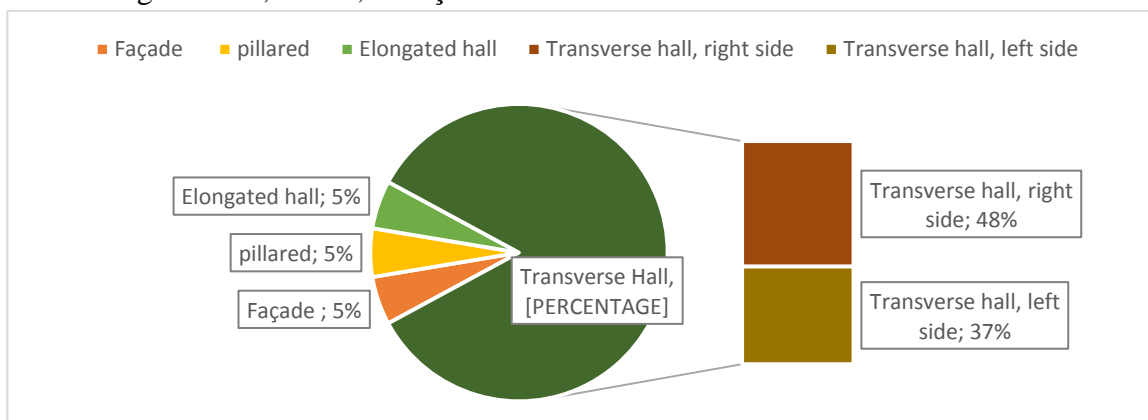


Fig. 2.1 Distribution (location) of the representation of religious temples.

Most of these scenes are found on the east wall of the tombs, and only one scene was found on the west wall (Fig. 3.2). In the transverse hall, the majority were on the east wall, and only one scene was on the west wall. In the pillared hall, one scene was on the north wall, and all scenes in the elongated hall are on the south wall.

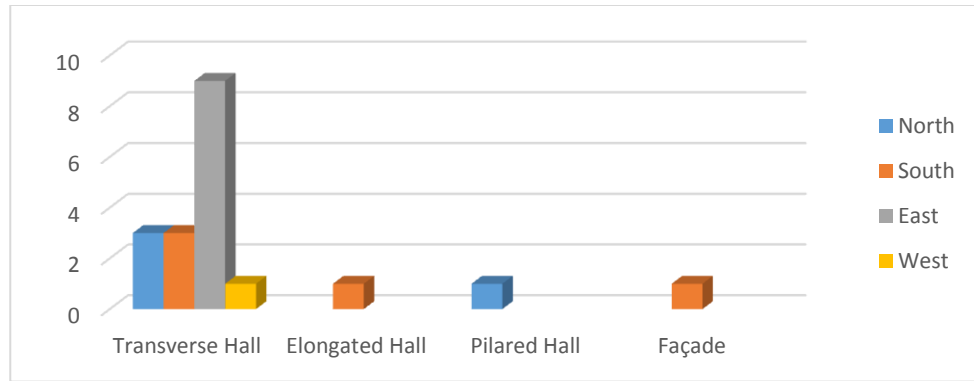


Fig. 2.2 Location distribution of religious temples' representation.

Ancient Egyptians associated the right with life and the left with death.¹⁸ The authors propose that the artists tend to reflect the location of religious temples to the east side of the Nile River, as the majority of the temple scenes represented upon the right side of the transverse hall. Furthermore, most of the religious temple scenes are represented upon the eastern wall of the transverse hall. Only is represented on the west wall. It is rare to find a temple scene upon the wall of the elongated hall or the shrine of the tomb.

Mortuary Temple Representations

Representations of mortuary temples are found mainly (92%) upon the walls of the transverse hall of the tomb, as indicated by Fig. 4.1 (25% and 75% on the east and west sides of the transverse hall, respectively). A tiny minority (8%) are on the shrine wall.

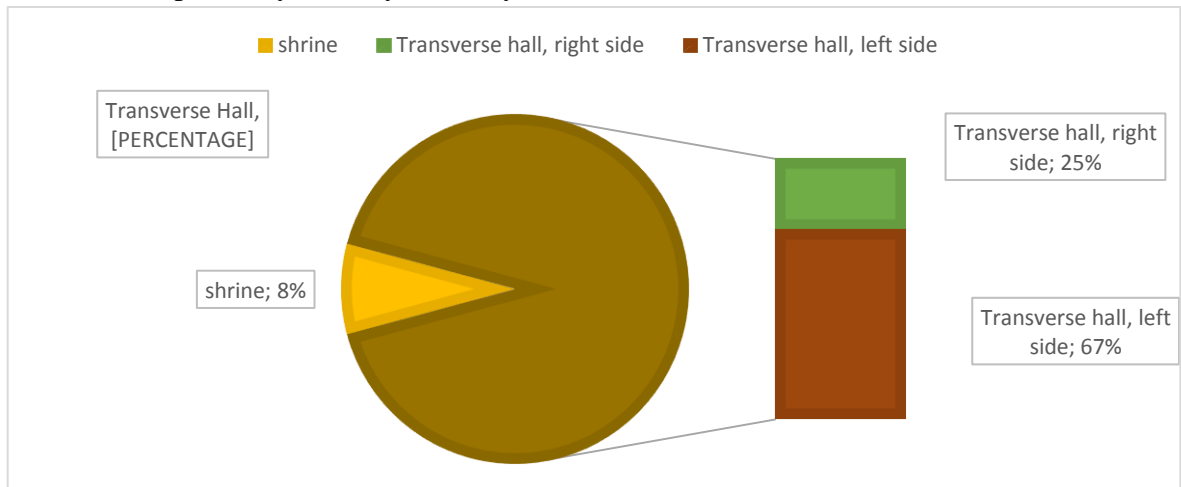


Fig. 3.1: Mortuary temple location inside Theban private tombs.

¹⁸ For further information about the concept of right and left in ancient Egypt. See Mohamed Abdel Haleem. Directions and its Usages in ancient Egypt until the End of the new Kingdom (Unpublished Thesis, Cairo University, 2009), 34.

Locations of representations of mortuary temples within private Theban tombs.

Thus, most temple scenes are represented upon the walls of the left side of the transverse hall. Only a minority are found on the transverse hall's right side. Most of these scenes are found on the western walls (Fig. 4.2), which may indicate that the artists took into account the actual locations of mortuary temples (the west bank on the Nile). This may also indicate an intention to imitate Theban topography, a hypothesis that can be confirmed by the fact that the majority of the representations of mortuary temples are found on the left side of the transverse hall.

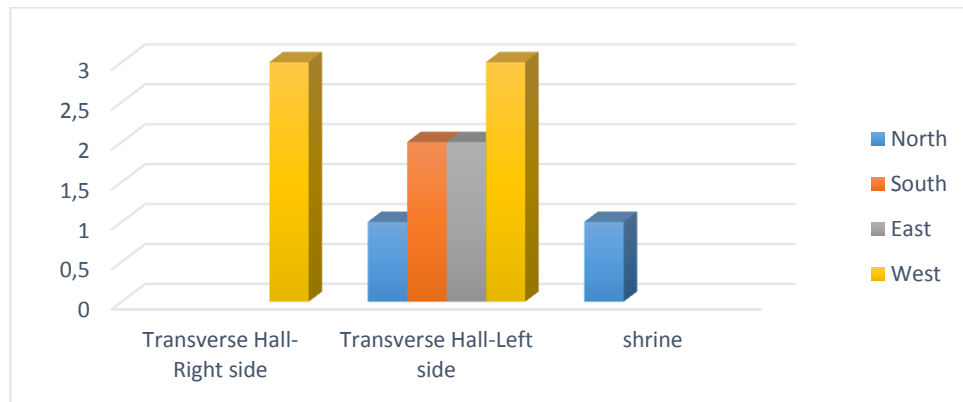


Fig. 3.2. Mortuary temple locations inside the Theban private tombs

Temple Representations and Theban Topography

Theban topography is much like that of other important cities in ancient Egypt. The Nile divided Thebes into western and east banks. The east side was the living city (wAst), including the religious temples and administrative buildings, and the left side was the city of death (imntt wAst) including all tombs (whether private or royal in addition to the mortuary temples. The western side is characterized by mountainous cliffs and narrow valleys, forming a contrast with the other side, which seemed to be a single large, wide valley. A central question in this paper is whether the location of the tomb within the necropolis affected the selection of temple scenes or vice versa. Sheikh Abd El-Qurnah has the highest density of tombs with temple scenes. Additionally, is the only site in the Theban necropolis to feature temple scenes from the entire New Kingdom period. The necropolises of Qurnat Marrai, by contrast, have no discovered tombs with temple scene from the New Kingdom period.



Map 1.: Map of Luxor (Thebes). After “Luxor map,” Fantastic Egypt, 2017. http://www.fantasticegypt.com/images/Luxor_Map_Egypt003.gif. Accessed on 11.03.2019.

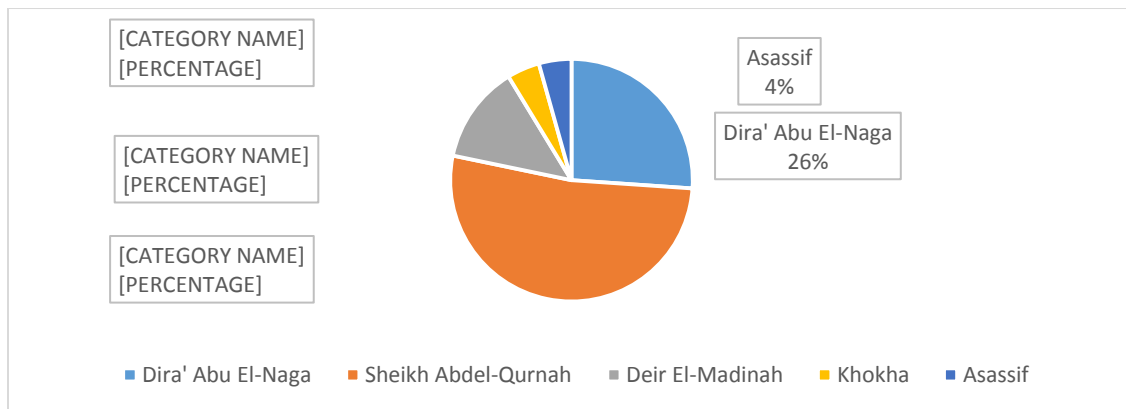


Fig. 4.1. Distribution of tombs with temples' scenes over the Theban necropolis' regions.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of representations of the Karnak temple are found in the necropolis of Sheikh Abd El-Qurnah. The remaining amount, over a quarter (28%), of the total representations are divided between Dira Abu El-Naga (14%) and El-Khokha (14%). It is worth noting that, representations of the Karnak temple are only found in four regions of Theban necropolis: Sheikh Abd El-Qurnah, El-Khokha, Dira' Abu El-naga, and El-Asassif, all of which are opposite the location of the Karnak complex. The Aten temple (gm pA itn) at the Karnak complex was represented inside TT 55 at the Sheikh Abd El-Qurnah necropolis,¹⁹ which it is also opposite the Karnak complex. The Mut temple is represented at Deir El-Madinah (TT2), nearly

¹⁹ this scene considered as the only representation of Aten temple at Karnak complex upon the walls of the Theban necropolis tombs during the New Kingdom up till now

opposite to its real location, and the tomb's owner had the title *sS nsw m st mAat, royal scribe in the place of truth* (Deir El-Madinah) (Fig. 4.2).

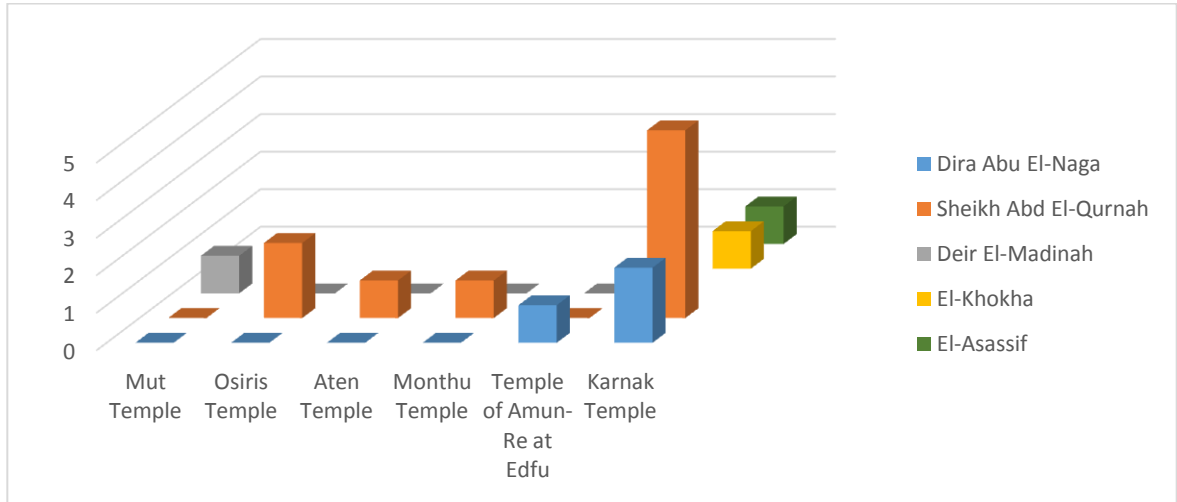


Fig. 4.2. Distribution of religious temple scenes, organized by site

Scenes from the Osiris temple (two scenes) are interesting; one is found in TT 147, located at Dira' Abu El-Naga, in a very interesting location, represented upon the southern wall of the longitudinal hall. It is rare to find a temple scene represented inside the longitudinal hall (most represented scenes inside the longitudinal hall are related to funeral rites), but the functions of the Osiris temple are related to these funeral rites. The left side, where this image is depicted, represents the netherworld, so the artist may have represented the temple scene here for that reason. However, the other scene found in TT 134 represented the temple upon the east walls of the transverse hall, on the right side. The difference could be correlated with the fact that TT 147 was from the 18th Dynasty, while TT 134 is from the 19th dynasty. The proportion of the funerary scenes increased in 19th dynasty becoming located in more than specific parts of the tomb, as was previously the case. Thus, it is logical to find the Osiris temple depicted in the transverse hall in TT 134 and in the longitudinal hall in TT 147 (Fig. 4.3).

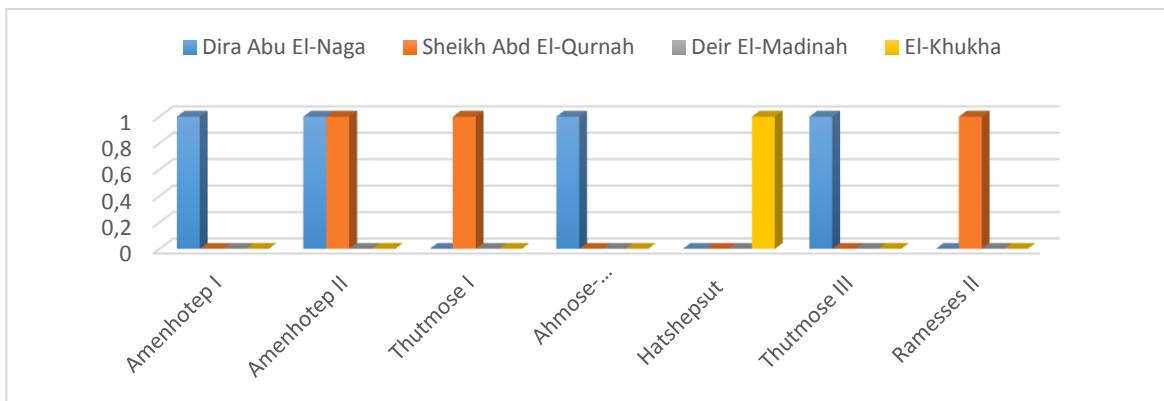


Fig. 4.3. Distribution of the scenes with mortuary temples, organized by site.

Mortuary temples are mostly represented in tombs that overlook the actual locations of these temples. The Ramesseum temple is represented in TT 138 at Sheikh Adel-Qurnah overlooks the Ramesseum temple and Thutmose III's mortuary temple; a scene with the chapel to the goddess Hathor in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple in TT 49 is located in the El-Khokha region, which overlooks the causeway and the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut; Thutmose I's mortuary temple is represented in TT 51, which is situated in Qurnat Murrai', which overlooks the ruined site of Thutmose I's mortuary temple; and representations of Amenhotep I, Ahmose-Nefertari, and Thutmose II are given upon the walls of the tombs in the Dira Abu El-Naga necropolis, which overlooks these three temples. This indicates that the tomb owner or the artist took Theban topography into account when developing the tomb. The mortuary temple of Amenhotep III is represented twice in our set: in Dira Abu El-Naga (TT 334) and in Sheikh Abd El-Qurnah (TT 90), which could be explained by the fact that Qurnat Murrai'; which overlooks the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III, was overcrowded. Dira Abu El-Naga was a holy burial ground, as it is opposite the Karnak complex. High-ranking officials of the King Amenhotep III choose the region of Sheikh Abdel-Qurnah to erect their wide engraved tombs due to its high-quality stones.

Tomb Owners' Titles in Respect to Temple Representations

The authors examined all of the tombs with either religious or mortuary temple representations and found that most owners of these tombs had titles related to the temples represented in their tombs. The existence of these temple scenes can be traced to the titles of the tomb owner and form a kind of autobiography of the deceased. The term *Blickpunktsbild* (focal point representation) has been adopted by scholars to refer to ways in which noteworthy facts about the deceased's life, social environment, the role in which he or she wished to be remembered, and the means hoped for in self-sustenance in the hereafter.²⁰ Therefore, the walls of the tomb played an important role for the self-presentation and preservation of the deceased. The temple scenes we discuss here are *Blickpunktsbild* in this understanding.

Few tomb owner's titles are unrelated to the temples depicted. These could be related to another temple with a relationship to the represented temple (e.g., ceremonies that related to two temples together). For example, there are two representation of TT 31, where the owner, Khonso, has the title of the first priest of Thutmose III, which related to the first scene, a representation of Thutmose III's mortuary temple. The other scene shows Monthu temple, located in Armant, and the tomb owner has the title high priest of Monthu, lord of Djorty (i.e., El-Tud), which relates him to the temple of Monthu in El-Tud, not in Armant. However, there is a known ceremony in which the god Monthu visited all four of his cult temples in Thebes, where the region between these temples was known as the Theban Palladium. This region was under the protection of Monthu. Therefore, the represented scene here is an episode of god Monthu's visits (the Monthu Feast) to his temples in Thebes. It probably represents the visit of the god from his temple at El-Tod to his temple at Armant.

²⁰ Hartwig, *Tomb painting and identity in ancient Thebes*, 51.

Results

1. Most of the owners of these tombs have titles that relate them to the represented temples in their tombs. Therefore, the reason for the existence of the temple scenes in these tombs are the titles of the tomb owner, a kind of autobiography of the deceased.
2. Tombs with temple scenes, whether for the mortuary or the religious temples, are located in a region of the Theban necropolis that overlooks or is opposite to the actual location of the temple. Therefore, the authors suggest that the owners of tombs chose the site of their tombs based on their relationship to the depicted temples to be close to them (in the case of a mortuary temple) or opposite to them (in the case of a religious temple) to obtain the benefits of the rituals that were performed in these temples and its causeways during festivals and daily services.
3. Most scenes in mortuary temples are represented upon the west walls of the left side of the transverse hall. The majority of the religious temples are represented upon the east walls of transverse hall's right side, which may indicate that the artist took into account the actual location of the mortuary temples (on the west bank of the Nile) and the walls (west walls) where he represented the mortuary temple. It may also indicate an intention to imitate Theban topography. This hypothesis can be confirmed by the existence of the majority of the mortuary and religious temples' representations across the left side and right side of the transverse hall, respectively.

Conclusion

The scenes of temples scenes within Theban necropolis tombs are very interesting. This paper investigated whether the artists represented temple scenes in private Theban tombs by considering their actual locations. Furthermore, the relationships between owners' title(s) and the represented temples' scenes are established as well. The authors take into account all of the available temple scenes (33 scenes in 23 tomb), classifying the different iconographies these temples, comparing the location of the scenes of the temples (both mortuary and religious) to their actual locations; investigating the tomb owners' titles to study their relation to the temples represented. Following these methods, a main finding is that the artists represented the both mortuary and religious temples inside Theban tombs with reference to the physical locations of the temples.

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