1.1 Site Definition: Thebes and Modern Luxor

Thebes is one of the largest, richest, and best-known archaeological sites in the world. It lies about 900km (560 miles) south of Cairo on the banks of the River Nile. On the East Bank, beneath the modern city of Luxor (Figure 2), lie the remains of an ancient town that from about 1500 to 1000 BC was one of the most spectacular in Egypt, with a population of perhaps 50,000. Even in the Middle Kingdom, four centuries earlier, Thebes had earned a reputation as one of the ancient world’s greatest cities. Within it, the Egyptians had built the huge temple complexes of Karnak and Luxor. These are two of the largest religious structures ever constructed, and the homes of priesthoods of great wealth and power. On the West Bank lies the Theban Necropolis—covering about 10km²—in which archaeologists have found thousands of tombs, scores of temples, and a multitude of houses, villages, shrines, monasteries, and work stations.
Thebes has been inhabited continuously for the last 250,000 years. The first evidence of the Palaeolithic in Africa was found there. However, the most important period in the history of Thebes was the five-century-long New Kingdom, when what the ancient Egyptians called this “model for every city” achieved unrivalled religious, political, and architectural stature. Every New Kingdom pharaoh—there were 32 of them—and many before and after that date added to the site’s huge architectural inventory. The monuments erected during Dynasties 18, 19, and 20 have ensured that even today, 30 centuries later, it is one of the world’s foremost archaeological sites. Not surprisingly, Thebes was one of the first sites listed by Unesco as a World Heritage Site (in 1979).

The name “Thebes” was given to the town by early Greek travellers. Some historians believe the Greeks misheard the local name for an area around Medinat Habu, “Djeme;” others that it came from “Tapé,” or tp, meaning “head” in ancient Egyptian. In the Bible, Thebes was called “Nô,” from the ancient Egyptian word niw, meaning “city.” The Egyptians also called it waset, the name of the nome (administrative district) in which it lay, or niwt ‘Imn, “city of Amun,” which the Greeks translated literally as “Diospolis,” “city of Zeus,” (the god with whom Greeks equated Amun). The Egyptians had many epithets for Thebes: “City Victorious,” “The Mysterious City,” “City of the Lord of Eternity,” “Mistress of Temples,” “Mistress of Might,” and others. The more recent name for Thebes, “Luxor,” derives from the Arabic al-Uqsur, meaning “the castles,” which in turn may derive from the Latin word “castra,” meaning a military garrison.

Between the river and the desert edge, the floodplain consists of a thick layer of nutrient-rich Nile silt deposited by millennia of annual Nile floods. Today, perennial irrigation waters fields of sugar cane, clover, wheat, and vegetables, and produces two, even three crops annually. Before the completion of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s, which ended the annual Nile flood, the river rose every year in June, and then for the following four months covered the floodplain with 30-50cm of water. The water filled shallow, natural “basins” that were a product of uneven silt deposition across the floodplain. About six such basins lay on the Theban West Bank, each covering several square kilometres. After the floodwaters receded, these now water-saturated basins were planted and their crops harvested in late autumn and winter. In dynastic times, farmers grew wheat, barley, sorghum, pulses, onions, garlic, and melons. These were vegetables of such quantity and quality, grown with such ease, that European visitors constantly
remarked about the wondrous Egyptian soil. Some Greek travellers believed that life generated spontaneously in this rich Nile mud and that simply drinking Nile water would cause a woman to become pregnant. The valley’s fabled richness became for Europeans proof of the special place Egypt occupied in the hearts of the gods. Nowhere but in Egypt were the silts so rich, the crops so ripe, the fields so easily tended. Even today, the Theban area has a great reputation for agricultural excellence, and tourists who come to admire its monuments often leave equally impressed by its landscape. Azure skies, green fields, dark blue river, golden hills, crimson sunsets, and florescent afterglow give Thebes the appearance of an over-imagined painting. Europeans were certain that here was the landscape in which God had created the Garden of Eden.

The close proximity of limestone cliffs and the richness and extent of adjacent agricultural land helped maintain the wealth and prestige of ancient Thebes. But the reasons that it grew from a sleepy Old Kingdom hamlet to a substantial Middle Kingdom town and a formidable New Kingdom city were political and religious. The reunification of Egypt after the defeat of the Herakleopolitans at the end of the First Intermediate Period was largely the work of Theban rulers, and they appointed Theban officials to high government positions, thereby assuming control of the entire country. During the Second Intermediate Period, Theban rulers again achieved prominence; with the expulsion of the Hyksos in the 17th Dynasty, they again governed the Two Lands.

Thebes was inconveniently located too far south to rule a country increasingly tied economically and politically to western Asia. The town of Pi-Ramase was built in the Nile Delta to ease problems of international communications, and it assumed importance as Egypt’s diplomatic and military centre. Memphis, at the apex of the Nile Delta, served as the headquarters of the Egypt’s internal bureaucracy. However, inconvenient location notwithstanding, Thebes prospered and was revered. In part, this was due to the religious, political, and economic power wielded by Amun, the principal god of Thebes. Credited with having freed Egypt from its enemies, making it the wealthiest and most powerful country in the ancient world, establishing Thebes as “the queen of cities,” Amun, joined with the Heliopolitan solar deity as Amun-Ra, became “king of the gods,” the leader of the Egyptian pantheon. The Theban temples of Amun, their huge landholdings, and the large cadres of priests that managed them, ensured that Thebes was Egypt’s pre-eminent religious centre. It remained the perceived capital city of Egypt long after actual bureaucratic authority had moved away. This state of affairs continued into the Late Period. However, as Egypt’s wealth and power declined, so invariably did that of Thebes. There are Late Period, Greek, and Roman references to Thebes, and a large number of Christian monasteries, churches, and hermitages on the West Bank. But from about the 11th Century AD until its “rediscovery” by European travellers in the late 18th Century,
Thebes virtually disappeared from history. With the coming of European visitors, however, Thebes, now Luxor, resumed its place as one of the most famous cities in the world.

1.2 Site Definition: The West Bank

The boundaries of the Theban West Bank have changed significantly during the last century. In common local usage, “The West Bank” has referred to the west bank of the Nile directly across from the city of Luxor, but the term implied no specific boundaries (Figure 4). The term “Theban Necropolis” could also refer to this area, but it was usually limited to the desert lands that extend west from the cultivation into parts of a complex wadi system that contain archaeological remains. Its northern and southern boundaries were not clearly defined.

![Figure 4: Location Map, KV in West Bank](image)

In ancient times, designations of the West Bank were no less vague. The area was called “West of Thebes,” “The Great West,” or “The Beautiful West,” but its boundaries were never mentioned. Today, somewhat more precisely, “The West Bank” is defined administratively as the west bank of the Nile lying within the modern boundaries of Luxor City. The northern boundary lies beyond the modern villages of al-Tarif and the complex called New Thebes. The southern is near Armant. The western is not specified, but extends into the desert beyond any archaeological sites. The eastern boundary is the River Nile.
The area defined as “antiquities land,” that is, land controlled by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, was enlarged in a law passed in 1956. Prior to that date, the Colossi of Memnon lay on a small “island” of government-owned land, surrounded by private fields. In 1956, several hundred square meters of the temple of Amenhetep III held by the private sector were incorporated into antiquities land, creating a single, contiguous archaeological zone that included the principal central core of the temple. (A very substantial part of the temple compound surrounding the central core, however, still lies beneath privately owned sugar cane fields.)

There are still many irregularities in the “antiquities land” boundaries. Some date back to a decision made in 1926, when the Egyptian government issued a decree declaring the West Bank to be a protected area. The 1926 Survey of Egypt graphically showed the area’s eastern boundary on its 1:500 “Theban Necropolis” map sheets. Generally, that line was drawn along the edge of the cultivation, regardless of whether antiquities lay east of it or not. This arbitrary (and, frankly, inexplicable) line resulted in some temples lying partly in the protected antiquities zone, partly in unprotected private lands. The memorial temple of Thutmes III is an example: its First Pylon and courtyard lie beneath private agricultural land outside the antiquities zone; the rest of the temple lies within it.

Thebes was designated a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1979, but none of Unesco’s documents correctly defined its boundaries. They were supposed to have included both the East Bank temples of Karnak and Luxor and the West Bank “necropolis, funerary temples, royal palaces, and a village of craftsmen and artists.” SCA officials have been no more precise about its East Bank borders, but they are more precise about its limits on the West Bank. They argue that the World Heritage Site begins at the Nile, then extends west through agricultural land into the desert beyond the Valley of the Kings. The northern boundary includes the archaeological zone of al-Tarif; the southern, Malkata and Birkat Habu.
For inexplicable reasons, the coordinates given above by the World Heritage Convention for the boundaries of “Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis” do not include some of the pertinent monuments—most notably, Luxor Temple. In the map below (Figure 5), the coordinates have been corrected by the TMP and the entire protected area is shown within the rectangle, the two longitudinal lines representing 32° 35’ E and 32° 40’ E and the two latitudinal lines showing 25° 41’ N and 25° 45’ N. The 2km buffer zone would add another two minutes to each boundary.
For economic reasons, some officials and entrepreneurs have maintained that the eastern boundary of the archaeological zone is not the Nile but the main Cairo-Aswan highway that runs north to south several kilometres west of the river. This definition, they believed, would permit new hotels and cruise ship moorages to be built along the river. The SCA, however, argues that the World Heritage Site does extend to the Nile, and that the area to be protected includes the cultivated floodplain and the Nile riverbank. Justification for this view is that the panoramic view of the West Bank from Luxor is as much a part of the area’s heritage as its individual monuments, and it is clear that Unesco’s intention was to protect that view. Indeed, a law defining the River Nile as the eastern boundary of the site was passed by Egypt’s National Assembly in 1983. It was based upon official amlak (cadastral) surveys of the area. This was reaffirmed in 2005 by the Luxor City Council, when it gave orders to demolish new construction along the banks of the Nile. The reasons cited were that such construction was unsightly, detrimental to the landscape, illegally built on government land, and in violation of antiquities laws.

In 1980, President Sadat decreed the West Bank to be a Cultural Heritage Site, and prohibited any building activity that encroached upon it or altered its character. In 2004, President Mubarak reaffirmed the 1980 decree, and further declared that SCA-owned lands should be surrounded by a 2km-wide “buffer zone” in which only limited building activity would be permitted.

1.3 Site Definition: The Valley of the Kings

The Valley of the Kings (KV) consists of two branches of a huge West Bank wadi, or valley, in the desert west of the temples at Deir al-Bahari, called the East Valley and West Valley (Figures 6 and Figure 7). The former is the better known because of the 60 tombs that have been found there. There are two royal tombs in the West Valley, plus a few small, undecorated tombs of unidentified royal family members. KV is less than a kilometre from the Nile floodplain as the crow flies, but the road leading to it describes a great arc over five kilometres long.

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2 Known today in Arabic as Wadi Bihan el Mouluk (the Valley of the Gates of the Kings) and in antiquity as The Hidden Place or The Great Place
Wadis are small, steeply sided valleys, arroyos, found throughout the limestone hills of Egypt. They were cut into bedrock millions of years ago by heavy rains that fell almost continuously over the North African landscape, eroding bedrock created millions of years earlier when it lay beneath a great sea called Tethys, the precursor of the Mediterranean. Virtually all exposed bedrock in this part of Egypt is limestone, except for small pieces of chert embedded in the limestone strata (making the bedrock look rather like a bowl of cream and raisins). These chert nodules were used from Palaeolithic times through dynastic times as the material of choice for making tools. There is also an underlying strata of montmorillonite, a dangerously unstable stone also called Esna Shale (in Arabic tafla). Esna shale is known in the Valley of the Kings, and can be seen exposed on several KV hillsides and tombs. When this shale is exposed to water or even high humidity, it expands and can exert tremendous pressure on the limestone strata above it. In the process of expansion, it can seriously damage the tombs that are cut there.
For purposes of this masterplan, we consider the term “Valley of the Kings” to include both the East and West Valleys, the entire watershed defined by the hills surrounding them (Figure 8), and the roads and paths that connect them to the Nile Valley.
1.4 Historical Development of KV

1.4.1. Introduction

The Valley of the Kings served as the burial place of Egypt’s pharaohs during the New Kingdom, from 1550 to 1070 BC. The first ruler to be buried here may have been Thutmes I, the third king of the 18th Dynasty; the last was Rameses XI, last ruler of the 20th Dynasty. In the New Kingdom, for the first time, Egyptians located royal tombs away from the memorial temple. They built the temples along the edge of the cultivation, where they could be reached by religious processions that travelled from Karnak Temple by boat along canals cut through the fields. The tomb was dug several kilometres away, in the solid, dry bedrock of the isolated and easily guarded Valley of the Kings, Wadi al-Molouk.

During its five centuries of use, 62 tombs were dug in KV. Each has been assigned a number; the first 22 were numbered by John Gardner Wilkinson in the mid-1800s (Figure 9). Wilkinson’s scheme assigned numbers geographically from the entrance of the Valley southward and from west to east. Since then, tombs have been numbered in order of their discovery, the most recent being KV 62 (King’s Valley tomb 62, the tomb of Tutankhamun, found by Howard Carter in 1922). KV 5, the tomb of the sons of Rameses II, was rediscovered in 1995, but its entrance had been seen by Wilkinson a century and a half earlier, and was given its number then. In addition, there are about two dozen “commencements,” tomb shafts that were begun but almost immediately abandoned for unknown reasons. The non-royal tombs in KV belonged to various officials, royal family members, and priests.

The Valley of the Kings lies about one kilometre (half mile) west of the Nile floodplain at Thebes (modern Luxor). It is a small wadi cut by torrential rains and erosion during several pluvial periods in the Pleistocene into a thick layer of limestone that lies about a discontinuous stratum of Esna shale. The Valley lies about 70m (230 feet) above the level of the River Nile (140m [460 feet] above mean sea level), and the immediately surrounding hills rise an average of 80m (265 feet) above the valley floor. It was probably chosen as the burial-place of royalty because of its geology, its relatively convenient access from the Nile floodplain, and the pyramid-shaped mountain, “the Qurn,”
or “forehead,” rising about 300m (985 feet) above its southern end that perhaps was seen as a symbol of the god Ra.

![Image of Qurn](image)

Figure 10: The Qurn

1.4.2 Tomb Construction

Tombs in the Valley of the Kings were not all cut to a common plan, but changed through time as ancient priests refined their “map” of the journey made by the pharaoh and sun god through the night sky. The plan of the royal tomb reflected this journey, and the changes to plan are therefore theologically significant. Tombs in the 18th Dynasty were relatively small, with steep corridors curving downward and making several right-angle turns before reaching an oval or rectangular burial chamber. Tombs of the 19th Dynasty had steep corridors leading along a single (or a jogged) axis to a large burial chamber and multiple side-rooms. In the 20th Dynasty, tombs were again smaller, nearly level, with wider and higher corridors and much more elaborate versions of various religious texts (Figure 11).
INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE

The walls of KV tombs were decorated in carved and painted raised relief, or painted on a layer of plaster applied to the flat, limestone bedrock. After a tomb chamber had been dug, its walls were smoothed, a thin layer of mud plaster mixed with wheat chaff was applied, and then painted with a white or grey wash. Scenes and hieroglyphic texts were outlined in red ink, and then amended, if necessary, by senior scribes and artisans who used black ink to correct spelling errors or change the proportions of figures. Raised relief was carved, the figures modelled, and paint applied. The artist’s palette consisted of only six colours, each made of natural, usually mineral, ingredients: black (made from soot and charcoal), white (gypsum), red (hematite or ochre), yellow (limonite or yellow ochre), blue (ground faience), and green (rarely used; copper, or a mix of yellow and blue pigments).

The selection of a KV site for a royal tomb was made by the vizier and the country’s principal architects, and later affirmed by pharaoh. Early in the New Kingdom, during the 18th Dynasty, preference was often given to sites at the base of the sheer cliffs that surround KV, ideally below gullies through which, in the rare event of rain, a “waterfall” would pour over the cliff and deposit debris over a tomb’s entrance, burying it ever deeper over the centuries. In the late 18th and 19th Dynasties, the preferred location was in lower-lying talus slopes; in the 20th Dynasty, it was one of the
small spurs of bedrock that extend from the Valley’s sides into the centre of KV. These changes in preferred location may indicate that 18th Dynasty tombs were intended to be completely and permanently sealed after the burial, while 19th and 20th Dynasty tombs were to remain partially accessible so that ceremonies could continue to be performed in them long after the pharaoh had been interred. In this latter case, it is likely that only the burial chamber and its storerooms would have been permanently closed. The orientation of the tomb was apparently the result of geological considerations, not a desire to align the tomb to any particular cardinal direction. Tomb axes run in compass directions from 68° to 357°. In order correctly to place decoration on their walls, artists arbitrarily assumed that a tomb’s principal axis ran from east to west, from the rising to the setting sun, no matter what its actual direction.

By the later New Kingdom, the Valley of the Kings was filled with tombs, and there were fewer and fewer sites available in which more tombs could be cut. This crowding posed problems. It seems unlikely that ancient architects maintained a master plan of the valley showing the location of tombs, because we know of three instances in which quarrymen dug a new tomb that collided with an earlier one. When such collisions occurred, the quarrymen presumably had three choices: immediately change the new tomb’s axis and veer away from the earlier tomb; abandon the new tomb and dig elsewhere; or incorporate part of the earlier tomb into the new.
Once a site had been decided upon, rituals were performed to sanctify it. These included digging small pits, as many as four or five of them, into which were placed miniature construction tools, clay and stone vessels, religious symbols, and foodstuffs. These pits are called foundation deposits and they have been found associated with nine KV tombs, though some scholars believe that all the royal tombs had them.

We know a great deal about how KV tombs were cut and decorated, in part because of thousands of objects and inscriptions found in the village of Deir al-Medina. Deir al-Medina lies about a kilometre (mile) south of KV and during the New Kingdom it served as the home and burial-place of the artisans and artists who carved and decorated KV tombs. The remains of about
70 houses can be seen in the village proper, and during the New Kingdom, about 400 people lived here in small stone dwellings built along a narrow street. Many different specialists lived at Deir al-Medina: quarrymen, plasterers, scribes, sculptors, architects, draftsmen with the skills needed for the preparation of the royal tombs. Their jobs were passed from father to son, and we have records of up to half a dozen generations of a single family employed in KV work. They were paid for their labour in kind: bread, beer, dried fish, onions and other vegetables. Texts found in the village include journals, love letters, business documents, inventories, shopping lists, legal papers—almost every aspect of life is discussed in them—and from them we have learned a great deal about work in the Valley of the Kings.

Quarrymen worked in the tombs in a “left gang” and a “right gang” of up to several dozen men each, each headed by a foreman. These gangs would begin cutting a royal tomb shortly after a new pharaoh ascended the throne and the tomb site has been chosen. They worked with chert tools, one or two men in each gang cutting into the limestone bedrock, others forming basket brigades to carry the debris from the tomb. Their work was lit by oil lamps with linen wicks of carefully measured length; when a wick had burned up—they were designed to burn for four hours—it was time to stop for lunch or to leave for home. Salt was added to the oil to prevent it from smoking. The men worked eight hours a day for eight days, then took a two-day weekend. There were numerous other holidays throughout the year as well, but digging must have been hard and unpleasant work. We know from our own archaeological excavations in KV today that the tombs can be miserably hot, humid, and filled with choking dust. There is an ever-present risk of being cut or bruised by sharp-edged fragments of limestone or of having ceiling blocks weighing several tons collapse on one’s head.

It was difficult to cut tombs with precision, and the ancient supervisors painted control marks on the walls and ceilings of tombs to help quarrymen ensure a straight axis, or make a 90-degree turn, or properly situate a doorway. Surveying tools were simple but effective: carpenters’ squares determined right angles; plumb bobs assured vertical walls; and a length of string measured length. With patience
and care, these elemental tools permitted highly accurate tomb cutting. There is a papyrus in the Egyptian Museum in Turin on which an ancient architect had drawn a plan of KV 2 (Figure 13), the tomb of Rameses IV, and noted the dimensions of its chambers. We can convert the ancient measurements given there into modern metric units—1 cubit = 52.3cm (20 inches) long, 1 palm = 7.47cm (3 inches) or 1/7 cubit, and 1 digit = 1.87cm (0.8 inches) or palm—and compare them with dimensions we can measure today. If we can assume that the plan was drawn before the tomb was cut, not after it—and this cannot be proven—then the quarrymen came within fractions of a centimetre of achieving what the specifications called for.

The limestone bedrock in which KV tombs were cut is a relatively soft stone that can be easily worked. In many parts of the Valley, the stone is structurally sound, fine-grained and strong. However, in other places, it is heavily fissured and cracked, peppered with tennis ball-sized nodules of hard chert (often-called flint) that make quarrying difficult. (The chert nodules, by the way, were an excellent material for the manufacture of stone tools such as hand-axes, chisels and hammerstones—the very tools used by ancient workmen to quarry KV tombs. Many such chert tools have been found in KV.) Where the stone was sound, wall decoration could be cut in raised or sunken relief; where it was poor, decoration was painted on thick layers of plaster applied to the walls to provide a smooth surface.

Tomb preparation was a team effort, rather like an assembly line. While quarrymen roughly cut the tomb, other workmen followed behind, more accurately aligning and smoothing the walls and ceiling with sandstone abrasives and making sure that corners and doorways were squared. Behind them, artisans first applied a thin plaster layer to the walls, painted lines to divide walls into scenes and registers, then drew in red ink outlines of the figures and hieroglyphs to be carved there (Figure 14). Senior artists and scribes used black ink to adjust the proportions of figures or correct spelling errors. Scenes and texts were either carved in raised relief or painted on plaster.

It probably took only a few years to dig and decorate a royal tomb in the Valley of the Kings, even though only 50 or 60 workmen might be involved in the work. When a pharaoh’s tomb was finished, the Deir al-Medina workmen would be free to work on other royal projects, on nobles’ tombs, or on tombs for themselves that were dug adjacent to their village, until the next pharaoh was crowned and his tomb begun.
Royal tombs were sometimes, but by no means always, larger than nobles’ tombs; they varied greatly among themselves in size. As Table 1 shows, there is no correlation between the size of a royal tomb and the regnal length of the pharaoh for whom it was cut. KV 5, tomb of Rameses II’s sons, was the largest, and the KV 5 chambers excavated to date cover over 6000 m³.

<table>
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<th>Tomb Name</th>
<th>Meters³</th>
<th>Regnal Years</th>
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Table 1: KV Tombs by Volume and Regnal Length

1.4.3 Tomb Design

The late American Egyptologist Elizabeth Thomas studied the chambers and corridors of New Kingdom royal tombs and assigned to them letter designations according to the function they were intended to serve (Figure 15). Not all royal tombs have all these chambers, and some have more than one of each. The following indicates these chambers, and notes how some of them changed through time. Where known, the ancient names of each room is indicated, but keep in mind that these names are from Rameside texts and may have been different in earlier periods.
**Chamber A:** The Tomb Entrance, called “Passage of the Way of Shu.” Shu was god of air, and the entrance was fully open to the sky before the reign of Thutmes IV, partly open after.

**Corridor B:** First corridor, called the “Passage of Ra,” referring to the fact that in some tombs, depending on their orientation, descent, and plan, this corridor was the farthest that sunlight could penetrate. The Litany of Ra was often inscribed on its walls.

**Chamber C:** At first, a chamber with a descent, later a stairwell with recesses, then a corridor, “C” (or the niches cut into its walls) was called the “Hall Wherein They Rest.” “They” referred to the statuettes of the thirty-seven gods mentioned in the Solar Litany.

**Corridor D:** A corridor whose ancient name may simply have been “Second Passage,” and/or “Third Passage.”

**Corridor E:** “E” was a deep pit or “well,” called the “Hall of Hindering,” once thought to have been cut to prevent floodwater from entering the tomb, or to thwart tomb-robbers. In 1817, Giovanni Belzoni found the corridor beyond the rear wall of “E” in KV 17, the tomb of Seti I, to be blocked and painted. He also found that ancient thieves had used ropes and boards to climb down into the pit and up the other side. The thieves pierced the blocking, then continued into the tomb. If the wells were intended to be security devices, they regularly failed. Several wells have chambers cut off them, and today, Egyptologists believe that they served primarily as the symbolic burial-place of the god Osiris.

**Chamber F:** This pillared hall is referred to as the “Chariot Hall.” Remains of chariots have been found in the tombs of Thutmes IV and Amenhetep III and in other tombs as well, most notably in KV 62, the tomb of Tutankhamun, and in KV 5. Some Egyptologists have argued that this hall marked the transition between the upper part of the tomb, equated with the “Upper Duat” (a part of the Netherworld), and the lower part, or “Lower Duat.”
**Corridors G, H, I:** The ancient names of these three rooms are not known. Their functions were apparently simple: to offer additional wall surfaces for decoration and texts and perhaps to provide storage space for funerary goods. Originally a stairwell, “H” later became a corridor, then, at least in KV 57, 8, and 11, a chamber. First a room, “I” became a corridor in later tombs. The Turin plan of KV 2 describes it as “The Ramp.”

**Chamber J:** The burial chamber, “J,” was in ancient times called the “Hall in Which One Rests,” or the “House of Gold,” clearly references to the sarcophagus and shrines that were placed in it. Another name was “The Hidden Chamber.” The plan of this chamber changed through time, and could be cartouche-shaped, rectangular, pillared, vaulted, and/or with a sunken central floor level. Four small side-chambers (designated Ja-Jd), two of them intended for storing food and drink, two for statuettes and ritual equipment, were often cut through its walls. Occasionally, as in the tombs of Amenhetep III, Horemhab, and Seti I, there might be more than four side chambers.

**Chamber K:** The “Passage on the Inner Side of the House of Gold,” also called the “Second Passage beyond the House of Gold,” is found in a few tombs. Of unknown designation, it was originally a corridor, later a chamber.

**Chamber L:** This room of unknown purpose was originally a corridor, later a chamber. It is not often found in KV tombs.

1.4.4 Post-Pharaonic Use

When KV was abandoned at the end of the New Kingdom, no further tombs were dug there, but it soon became a popular tourist destination. Greek and Roman traders travelled to Thebes from Alexandria and the Fayum between 332 BC and 300 AD. Graffiti was carved on monuments and hillsides and numerous graffiti has been found on KV tomb walls, and they used the tombs as campsites. The fires they lit and the food they cooked blackened walls and destroyed painted scenes.

The graffiti are not especially profound, but they are useful indicators of the kinds of tourists who visited Thebes two millennia ago. Their visits were motivated by the tales they heard of the wonderful Colossi of Memnon and the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. They would have agreed with Diodorus Siculus (ca. 59 BC) that Thebes, filled with “huge buildings, splendid temples, and other ornaments . . . [was a city] more opulent than the others in Egypt or anywhere else.” And they might have agreed, too, with Diodorus’s disappointment that the opulent remains might originally have been even more so. He wrote that, “while the structures themselves have survived until our era, the silver, gold, and ivory, and a king’s ransom in precious stones, were carried off by the Persians in the time when Cambyses burned the temples of Egypt.” (There is no evidence of this.)
They were followed by early Christians, who used the tombs as hermitages and sometimes defaced the figures of Egyptian gods, or replaced them with figures from Christian iconography. By the 2nd Century AD, Christianity was the predominant religion in Egypt, and between 451 and 1065 AD, when a great famine hit Egypt and decimated its population, many Theban tombs and temples were converted to monasteries or churches, and statues and scenes of pagan gods were defaced. This was the beginning of the desecration of dynastic monuments at Thebes. In 390 AD, Constantine removed two obelisks from Thebes to Alexandria, then to the Circus Maximus in Rome and to Istanbul. These were two of the first shipments abroad of Theban monuments. Many more shipments would follow, although not immediately. For more than a millennium after the Coptic period, Thebes was in a dramatic political and economic depression.

1.4.5 Modern Era

There is virtually no mention of Thebes in any text until the 18th Century, and even knowledge of its precise location was lost. The first modern European to “rediscover” Thebes was the Jesuit priest, Claude Sicard, who came in 1726 and realized that the monuments he gazed upon were those of the fabled ancient city. Earlier travellers to Upper Egypt had mistaken Memphis, Antinopolis, and other sites for Thebes, but failed to recognize the town itself. Once it had been rediscovered, however, it became a major source of antiquities for the European market. The number of European visitors to Thebes in the 18th Century was small; but these travellers published journals and commentaries that contributed to the rise of 19th Century interest in ancient Egypt and to the rapidly increasing popularity of Nile Valley travel. Egyptian art and architecture became popular in Europe and interior decorators and architects clamoured for drawings of ancient monuments. One of the first visitors to sketch what he saw at Thebes was the Danish artist and engineer, Frederik Ludwig Norden (1708-1742). Norden sketched in the Ramesseum and gave the first description of a temple relief.

At nine o’clock, in making a sharp turn round the point of a projecting chain of mountains, we discovered all at once the site of the ancient Thebes in its whole extent; this celebrated city, the size
of which Homer has characterized by the single expression of with a hundred gates,…this illustrious city…the whole army, suddenly and with one accord, stood in amazement at the sight of its scattered ruins, and clapped their hands with delight, as if the end and object of their glorious toils, and the complete conquest of Egypt, were accomplished and secured by taking possession of the splendid [sic] remains of this ancient metropolis.

Denon on first seeing the West Bank, 1803

Another early visitor, Richard Pococke (1704-1765), made the first map of the Valley of the Kings and drew plans of nine tombs. He also sketched plans of the Ramesseum and the Ptolemaic temple at Deir el-Medina. James Bruce (1730-1794), who discovered the tomb of Rameses III in the Valley of the Kings (KV), later called “Bruce’s Tomb,” also accurately described how the relief decoration in the temple of Medinat Habu had been carved.

The most important early attempt to record Theban monuments was prompted by Napoleon’s desire to learn more about the country that he sought to conquer. His army was in Egypt in 1799-1801, accompanied by over 130 scholars from all fields of science and the arts. They had instructions to record everything from modern costume to natural history to ancient monuments. The results of their surveys, published as the Description de l’Égypte, appeared between 1809 and 1828. Two of the 19 folio volumes of plates were devoted to the antiquities of Thebes and gave Europeans their first (mostly) accurate description of its monuments. Two members of this scholarly brigade, Prosper Jollois and Edouard de Villiers, prepared a remarkably accurate map of KV, with plans of several KV tombs and many other Theban monuments.
The Description and other 19th Century works on Egypt whetted Europe’s appetite for things Egyptian and encouraged large numbers of explorers, adventurers, merchants, and scholars to visit Thebes, both to study the monuments and to carry them home. So, too, did such popular books as Amelia Edwards’s (1831-1892) A Thousand Miles Up the Nile, and paintings of the Theban landscape (both real and imagined) (Figure 18) by such artists as Alma Tadema (1836-1912), David Wilkie (1785-1841), Edward Lear (1812-1888), John Frederick Lewis (1805-1876), and especially David Roberts (1796-1864).

One of the most successful early travellers was Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1859) who had come to Egypt to sell a water-lifting device to the government. He failed at this, but quickly found employment carting antiquities from Theban sites to Europe. A map drawn by Belzoni exists as one of the earliest attempts to record the tombs in KV (Figure 19). His most famous discovery was the tomb of Seti I (KV 17), which is often referred to as “Belzoni’s tomb.”
Belzoni describes searching for private tombs and antiquities at al-Qurna: “Surrounded by bodies, by heaps of mummies in all directions . . . the blackness of the wall, the faint light given by the candles or torches for want of air, the different objects that surround me, seeming to converse with each other, and the Arabs with the candles or torches in their hands, naked and covered with dust, themselves living mummies, absolutely formed a scene that cannot be described.”

John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875), who worked at Thebes in 1824 and 1827-28, copied scenes and inscriptions in the private tombs that eventually led to his hugely successful study of life in ancient Egypt, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, a masterful ethnography of dynastic times. Wilkinson also surveyed the known tombs in the Valley of the Kings, assigning numbers to the 20 tombs then visible and establishing the numbering system still used today.

After Egyptian hieroglyphs were deciphered in 1822, the demand for accurate copies of Egyptian texts grew rapidly. Jean François Champollion (1790-1832), who was responsible for the decipherment, recorded texts and scenes at Thebes, and was the first to recognize that royal tomb inscriptions were religious texts, not autobiographical ones. Niccolo Francesco Ippolito Baldessare Rosellini (1800-1843) worked with Champollion and published 400 folio plates of Egyptian texts and scenes. Together with the *Description*, they were Egyptologists’ principal reference works for many decades, and still remain valuable sources. Champollion’s interest in Thebes was not entirely benign, however. He also worked to cut pieces of wall decoration from the tomb of Seti I and have them installed in the Louvre.

In reply to a complaint from Joseph Bonomi, Champollion wrote: “…one day you will have the pleasure of seeing some of the beautiful bas-reliefs of the tomb of Osirei [Seti I] in the French Museum. That will be the only way of saving them from imminent destruction and in carrying out this project I shall be acting as a real lover of antiquity, since I shall be taking them away only to preserve and not to sell.”

The greatest of the 19th Century epigraphic expeditions was that of Carl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884), which resulted in the *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Aethiopien* (1859), 894 folio plates of Egyptian texts, reliefs, architectural drawings, panoramas, and maps, including two volumes on the monuments of Thebes. It is the largest Egyptological work ever published, and today, as Egyptian monuments deteriorate, it is an increasingly valuable record of ancient sites. Other epigraphers and artists who worked in Thebes include Edouard Henri Naville (1844-1926) who published four tombs
Photography was used at Thebes by Maxime du Camp (1822-1894), Francis Frith (1822-1898), and other early photographers, but they did not try to produce systematic records of the monuments. Perhaps the first to do that was Felix Guilmant, who made a complete photographic record of the tomb of Rameses IX. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s photographer, Harry Burton (1879-1940), was responsible for several major photographic surveys at Thebes, including complete coverage of the excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun and its objects.

From the 19th Century onward, Egyptian antiquities were much sought after by European collectors and museums. Many tales have been told about gun battles fought between rival expeditions and violent diplomatic rows over objects. But by the early 20th Century, this Wild West Bank image had ended, and the number of objects stolen or sold dramatically declined. It did not cease altogether, however: theft and vandalism still occur at Thebes in spite of the best efforts of authorities to prevent it. The passing of strict antiquities laws in Egypt has helped, as has the listing of Thebes in 1979 as a Unesco World Heritage Site, and Unesco declarations controlling international trade in antiquities. However, as long as there are customers, there will be people willing to supply the market.

Archaeological work in Thebes has varied greatly in methodology over the last 150 years, moving from highly destructive, slipshod ransacking of tombs and temples, to the meticulous analysis of even microscopic remains. Unfortunately, until recently, the former approach was by far the more common.

Excavations funded by the American businessman Theodore Davis (1837-1915) in the Valley of the Kings included work by Howard Carter, Edward Ayrton, and Arthur Weigall. Carter later cleared the tomb of Tutankhamun (discovered in 1922, worked on until 1932), an enormous undertaking that still is not fully published. Arguably, seven excavations have become the best-known of the many conducted at Thebes and have thrust Thebes into international headlines that helped shape people’s image of what ancient Thebes was like. They are: the discovery of the tomb of Seti I by Giovanni Belzoni (1817); the discovery of caches of royal mummies in 1881 (in Deir al-Bahari tomb 320) and 1898 (in the tomb of Amenhetep II); the discovery of the tomb of Nefertari by Ernesto Schiaparelli in 1903; James Quibbell’s discovery of the tomb of Yuya and Thuya, the parents of Queen Tiy, in the Valley of the Kings in 1905; the 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun by Howard Carter; and the 1995 discovery by the Theban Mapping Project of KV 5, a tomb of sons of Rameses II. Interest in the valley grew after the 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, but...
concern for the protection of KV tombs came about only in the 1990s. It has resulted in the careful excavation of KV 5, KV 10, KV 14, and KV 16, and in conservation studies of KV 17.

1.4.6 A Move toward Conservation

One of the first visitors to express concern for the preservation of Theban monuments was Richard Pococke. He lamented that, “They are every day destroying these fine morsels of Egyptian Antiquity, and I saw some of the pillars being hewn into millstones.” Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) decried the all-too-common tourist who came to Thebes “with a pot of tar in one hand and a brush in the other, leaving on all the temples the indelible and truly disgraceful record of his passage.” And he begged his colleagues to “preserve Egypt’s monuments with care. 500 years hence Egypt should still be able to show to the scholars who shall visit her the same monuments that we are now describing.” Mariette’s plea was largely ignored, however, and, if anything, the destruction of the monuments became even more common in the later 19th Century.

Some notable examples however should be pointed out. We have records of flood prevention work in KV in the vicinity of KV 17 (Seti I) by J.G. Wilkinson, Robert Hay, and James Burton when they cleared debris from earlier excavations by Belzoni. However, it would take to the end of the 19th Century before the advent of modern scientific archaeology arrived with the work of William Matthew Flinders Petrie. He is often referred to as the father of Egyptology for his achievements in the field.

> “The science of observation, of registration, of recording, was yet unthought-of; nothing had a meaning unless it were an inscription or a sculpture. A year’s work in Egypt made me feel it was a house on fire, so rapid was the destruction going on.”
> W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1931

The complete mapping, recording, and surveying of the Valley would not be completed until the end of the 20th Century. This work is summarized in Chapter 5.