

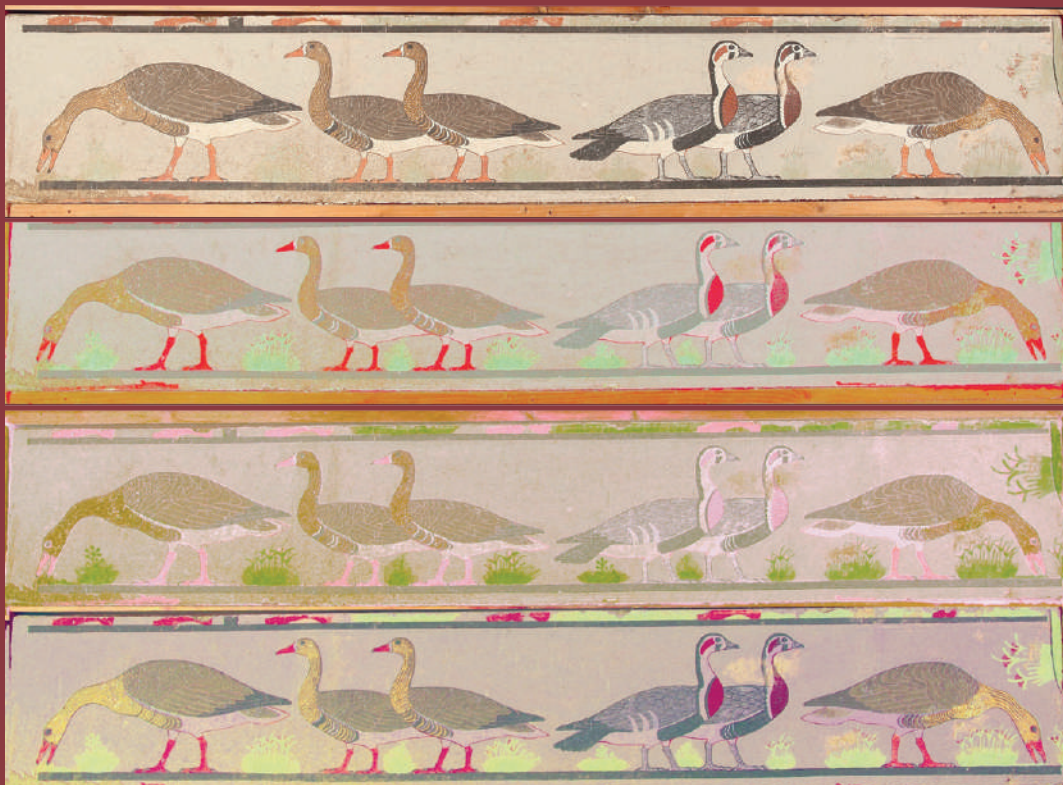
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II



INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE
MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ANTIQUITIES

IX

RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS

Evidences of Modern Magical Practices in the Tomb AT-28 in Assasif-Luxor

An Anthropological Approach

THE ARTICLE presents evidence of magical practices at the tomb of Vizier Amenhotep Huy AT-28 in Assasif-Luxor excavated by the Instituto de Estudios del Antiguo Egipto (fig. 1) from an anthropological approach. The objective is to observe the transformation or permanence of magical practices linked to archaeological objects as indicators of heterogeneous cultural facts and traditions in relation to current behaviors in Luxor.¹

This article offers the analysis of a manuscript spell dated 1139, the year of the hijrah, or 1783 in the Gregorian calendar, which was found in the 2017 excavation season, along with ethnographic information and documentary sources on magical practices in the area. The integration of these objects with local villagers reflects the relationship of Luxor families with the tomb of Vizier Amenhotep Huy and their worldview associated with looting in the Theban necropolis.

1. RESEARCH CONTEXT

At the end of the eighteenth century, Egypt was under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid I and his vizier Halid Hamid Pasha; likewise, there was an increase of European's interest in antiquities with the arrival of Napoléon Bonaparte.² Arab, Bedouin and Berber communities occupied Luxor at that time. Within these settlements, al-Qurna was built by the al-Hurabat tribe, who had inhabited the necropolis since the thirteenth century AD.³ Al-Hurabat with al-Hassassna, Atiyat, Gabhat and Batlain tribes integrated the archaeological objects into their homes while those were also involved in foreign excavations, sale of antiquities, visitor guides, etc. Soon, formal accusations of looting tombs and destruction of archaeological sites arose, among which the case of Abd al-Rasul family stood out.⁴

* Instituto de Estudios del Antiguo Egipto.

1. EKMAN, CHACÓN 2006; TULLY, HANNA 2013.

2. CHOUËIRI 2005; WINTER 2003.

3. VAN DER SPEK 2011, p. 62.

4. TULLY, HANNA 2013, p. 366.

2. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Guiselle Negreiros dos Santos (2016) conducted a study of medieval Arab magical practices on looting manuals such as the manuscripts MS 2764, 2765 and the Quran for the protection of treasure hunters. Both sources mention *djinns*, *shayatin*, *efrits* and other entities as part of a hierarchical structure dominated by Solomon, as well as the use of *suras* for protection against these entities.⁵

Although the Islamic religion prohibited touching mummies and these manuals warn clearly about it, Luxor inhabitants took the mummified bodies and offerings out of their sarcophagi. They even mutilated and burned the bodies to prevent revenge from the tombs' owners.

These looting manuals include the location, description of the tombs' content, and the methods used for robbing. Some sections of the manuals, along with Classical Arabic, mix texts that include magic words, incantations or spells to protect against curses when tombs and their contents are violated. G. Negreiros (2016) shows some of these elements on the manuscript MS 2764:

He will mix and make a mass, leave it in the shadow, while you speak: I swear to you in God great and powerful, creator of help to those who want to reach the eyes, and he knows the looks that no one overcomes, he sitting on the throne, in the water, in the wind, in the name of God-is-great-above-all. Very high you let out of that place as you enter, carrying what you need. And there is no power greater than yours for everything and whatever you bless.⁶

Along with enchantments, stone amulets, pieces of wood, animal teeth and Bakhur incense were used: "(...) At dawn on Sunday, light up and pass incense looking east, you will find a long way (...)." ⁷ These rituals were performed in specific orientations, days and schedules. They include mentions of Allah, proving how magic and religion are interconnected: "Take what you can carry and it does not come near the king. Look, I'm giving him some advice. Spend incense dancing and praying: servants and people of good prayer [sic] help us to God all powerful."⁸

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Artifacts related to looting activities at the Vizier's tomb are: boxes of cigarettes, tarboosh hats, nineteenth-century water bottles, a manuscript spell dated 1783 along with two *ushebtis*, a 1908 British newspaper and a letter dated to the early twentieth century. In one of the niches, a document was found where a thief demands the sending of 100 piasters to buy a house, and a piece of paper in Arabic with a formula for performing an exorcism.⁹

Therefore, this article focuses on the cryptographic translation of the manuscript found along with two *ushebtis*: one of clay and one of faience tied by their feet with a cotton string. Interpretation was

5. THORNDIKE 1923.

6. NEGREIROS DOS SANTOS 2016, pp. 64–77.

7. NEGREIROS DOS SANTOS 2016, p. 80.

8. NEGREIROS DOS SANTOS 2016, p. 80.

9. MARTIN, BEDMAN 2017.

not easy, as these cryptographic magic symbols have no translation. Those are called *logaui djinni*—language of geniuses—within the tradition of Arab magic and are known as the language of angels and demons in the Solomon’s magical tradition.

Parts of the text are in classical Arabic. Letters are often omitted or mixed, making it difficult to interpret, thus a word can have thousands of meanings. It should be read from right to left. Some words were written backwards and others in geometric shapes, such as pyramids surrounded by symbols. Likewise, the manuscript was written in several ways as the paper was doubled and therefore the faces are numbered in the direction of writing and the way the sheet was folded (fig. 2).

4. DOCUMENT TRANSCRIPT

1) Cryptographic symbols of opening the spell

Water

I know you AL SHANT (*conjure the subject by his name followed by symbols of King Solomon's domain*)

In the company of Nour Shakdi, Jaw, al Salyb (*the one of the cross*), Awad

Allageri, Jhone (*names of the squad of looters*)

Under harmony and wealth

All protected by Tashma Qarakyaka (*angelic or teacher's name*)

Year 1197

2) AL SHANT (conjure 3 times the name of the entity in the form of a pyramid)

AL SHANT

AL SHANT'

Wazer Muslim (*sheikh*) full moon/royal honey (*offerings*)

Cryptographic symbol series

3) NORTH (*illegible words*)

Scans under the name (cryptography) of the theft

(symbol)

Almaren (*symbol*)

SECRET

FIRE

(cryptograms)

OOI

LAAL (*symbol*)

33

4) Merciful God (*Koran's opening formula*)

Waal wasahakiry (*illegible*)

On Doomsday

We have and will have the greatest (god)

By the and with the (“walaho or falaho” formulates the invocation of the supreme power)

For never ever

I speak to you SHANT (*genius*) by the grace of God (*fragment broken*)

(Two columns of cryptographic symbols)

With the (walaho) (divine power)

Talking about this issue is not easy for people, because it involves two forbidden practices in Islam, one illegal: the theft of graves, and another immoral: sorcery, because treasure hunters are also spirit-hunters. Some ethnographic cases below:

Case 1: Abdul Hakim narrates that while he was preparing his land for agriculture near Medinet Habu, he found a gold statuette and glimpsed a glare coming from the soil as indicating that there were more treasures. As he dug, the brightness went deeper without him being able to reach it. Then, he decided to call a sheikh who told him that the treasure-protecting genius played with him so as to protect the relic. They proceeded to negotiate with the genius, who handed them another valuable statue but which cost Abdul to be assaulted by the tomb spirit who claimed the virginity of one of his daughters.

Case 2: Another informant—undisclosed name —says that he owes his fortune to a deal made with the djinns of the tombs, but has had a hard time because he has not been able to return to the mosques or fast in Ramadaan: if he did so, he would lose everything and remain in misery.

Case 3: A sheikh dedicated to the opening of tombs revealed his method: you have to reach midnight without a moon; the full moon powers the spirits so you should never go on this phase of the moon. It is necessary to have four elements: land of a sacred site, blessed water of the *zam zam* well, fire of a bonfire and air with incense brought from Mecca. The opening of the tomb begins by reciting special parts of the Quran for the spirits and then proceeds with drawing up the contract. This document is the most important part of the whole rite, as it ensures the peaceful cooperation of the underworld and its subjugation.

To make the contract, both parties must be identified by name; the name of the genius, spirit or demon with which it will be agreed and the names of the humans involved in the looting. All this is surrounded by sigils, symbols of power, protection and cryptography of the jins language that only powerful sorcerers know. The contract must benefit both parties: men will obtain wealth and other things that are stipulated in writing in the contract and, in turn, spirits will demand something that matches their hierarchy.

Finally, an offering must be made.

Powerful geniuses bestow great treasures and can sexually request women from the looters or they can ask for one of the looters' souls, which means not being able to do their religious practices again. Other lower-power geniuses can be traded with simple offerings such as royal honey, statues that are a material abode for them, and freedom from their duties for eternity in the custody of the tomb for which they were condemned by other wizards. In some cases, mighty wizards decide to threaten and dominate weak spirits, not only to be given treasures, but also to force them to be under their service for future tasks, such as breaking marriages, curing or generating diseases, among others.

This analysis gives comprehensive account of fieldwork, medieval documentation and ethnography, so as to contrast them in the points of change or continuity, allowing us to see cultural syncretism.¹² Thus, the magical practices in ancient, medieval, and modern Egypt are compared below:

Martín Valentín (2002) offers archaeological evidence on the magical practices of ancient Egypt, demonstrating how the knowledge and use of the name of any entity gave power over them. The magical action is effective if following some rules: priests had to have adequate knowledge and be in ritual purity, they had to be dressed with white linen clothing, they had to have performed ablutions and cleansed their bodies in the sacred lake. The instruments used had to be cleaned and purified; the formulas had to be written in myrrh ink on a new papyrus. The place where the ritual was to take place, the time, the astronomical conditions, had to be calculated in detail. They used resources such as fire, the human voice or instruments such as sistrum, and incense to create a conducive environment to the manifestation of the gods, and to make evil beings flee. The use of talismans was crucial. Talismans were chosen according to their protective function (i.e., the eye of Horus *udjat*); empowering talismans (i.e., *djed* pillar); talismans of divinities, for offerings (the *udjehu* offering table) and substitution bodies (*ushebtis*).¹³

Similarities are observed in medieval Arab magical practices and in Pharaonic magic in the manner, concepts and objects used. An example of this is the use of offerings, amulets or ritual performed by specialists (magicians/priests), who possessed the knowledge to link the material and spiritual, guaranteeing the success of the looting.

Medieval texts and ethnographic evidence describe the figure of the sheikh as a guide, healer, exorcist or magician who has the knowledge to trap djinns and perform tasks ranging from breaking or binding marriages, causing or curing diseases and possessions or, as in this case in Luxor, enchanting the tomb guardians to take objects. For this, talismans with divine names and verses from the Quran were made.¹⁴ The letters of these names had numerical equivalences and astral correspondences. Through the writing of names, design of symbols (for example, six-pointed stars of the Solomonic tradition) or magic figures (magic squares of *wafq* or *gadwal*) in talismans, their recitation in oral spells (*azima*) or the use of amulets such as frog parts, vulture feathers or raven eyes, damage was inflicted or demons were countered. During the ritual, objects and spells were accompanied by incense as a traditional Islamic practice to ward off evil.

At the base of the magical practices in Pharaonic and Islamic Egypt, we also find similarities, since there are just a few changes as language, the names of the gods, spirits or demons, the sacred elements used by the magician, etc. Examples that illustrate these changes in the manners and permanence in the structure are: the use of *ushebti* statuettes in ancient times and their reuse in modernity; the magic formulas in which Osiris, Anubis and the gods of the underworld were conjured through hieroglyph language in ancient times, while the *shanti* and other geniuses of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition are currently invoked in the Arabic language; the use of

12. GONZÁLEZ 2008; REDFIELD, LINTON, HERSKOVITIS 1936.

13. MARTÍN VALENTÍN 2002, pp. 45–101.

14. FRANCIS 2011; ROZA 2014.

words that demonstrate the importance of knowing and invoking names to appease the deceased owner of the tomb and seek cooperation, protection and guidance from the underworld. These activities are proofs of the continuity and syncretism in the magical-religious practices and are testimonies that this place still has echoes of the pious and magical space it was in the time of the pharaohs, from the reuse of the Vizier's chapel as a site of elaboration of mummies, their looting in the fifth century, to the presence of hermit monks in the seventeenth century.

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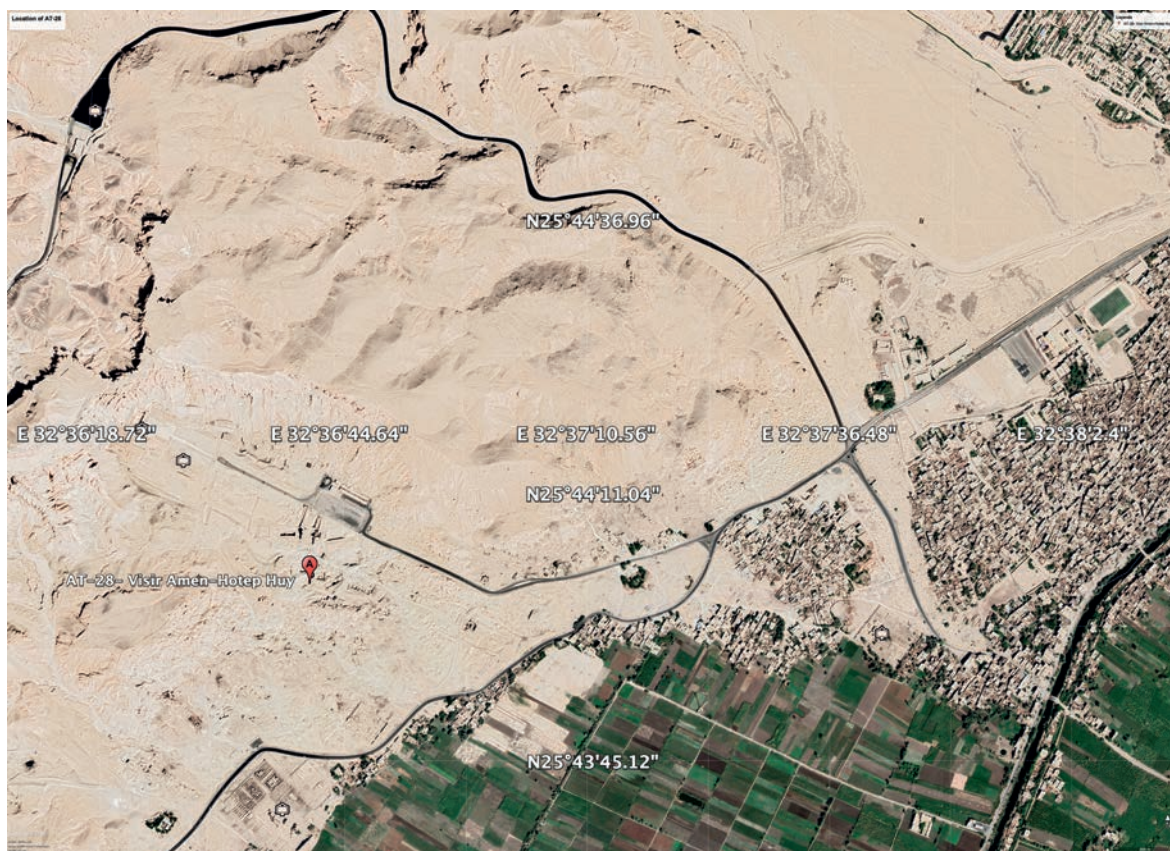
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Fig. 1. Location of AT-28.

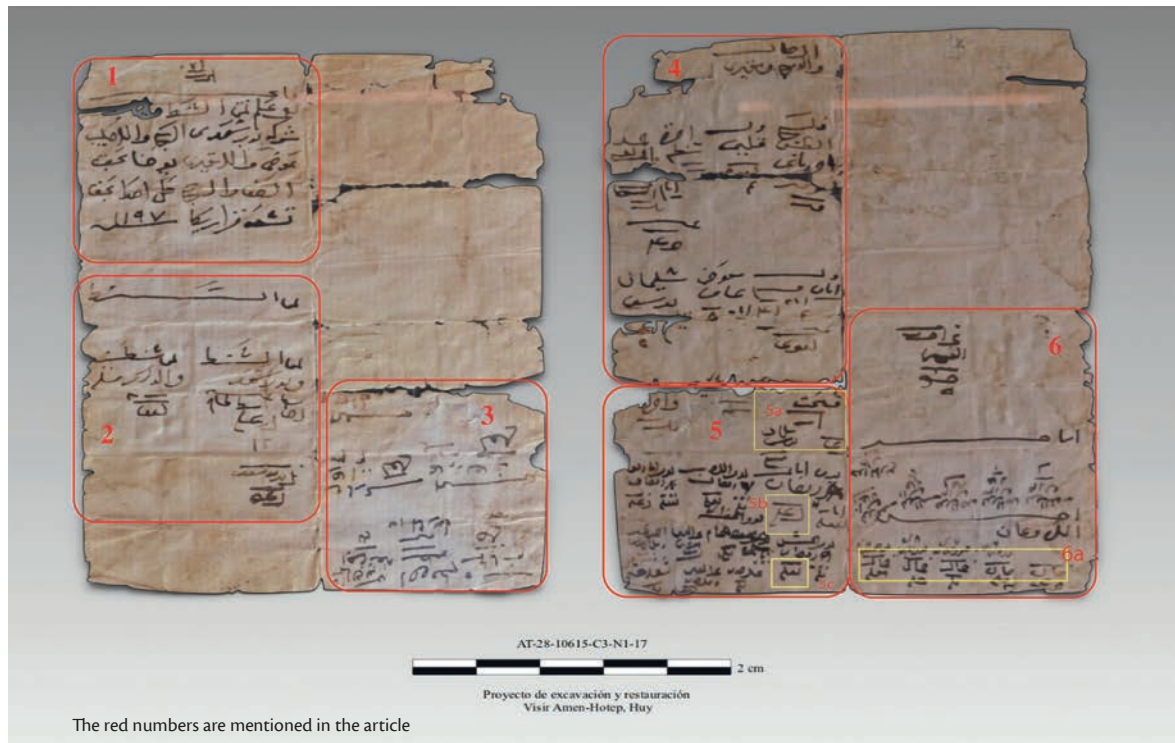


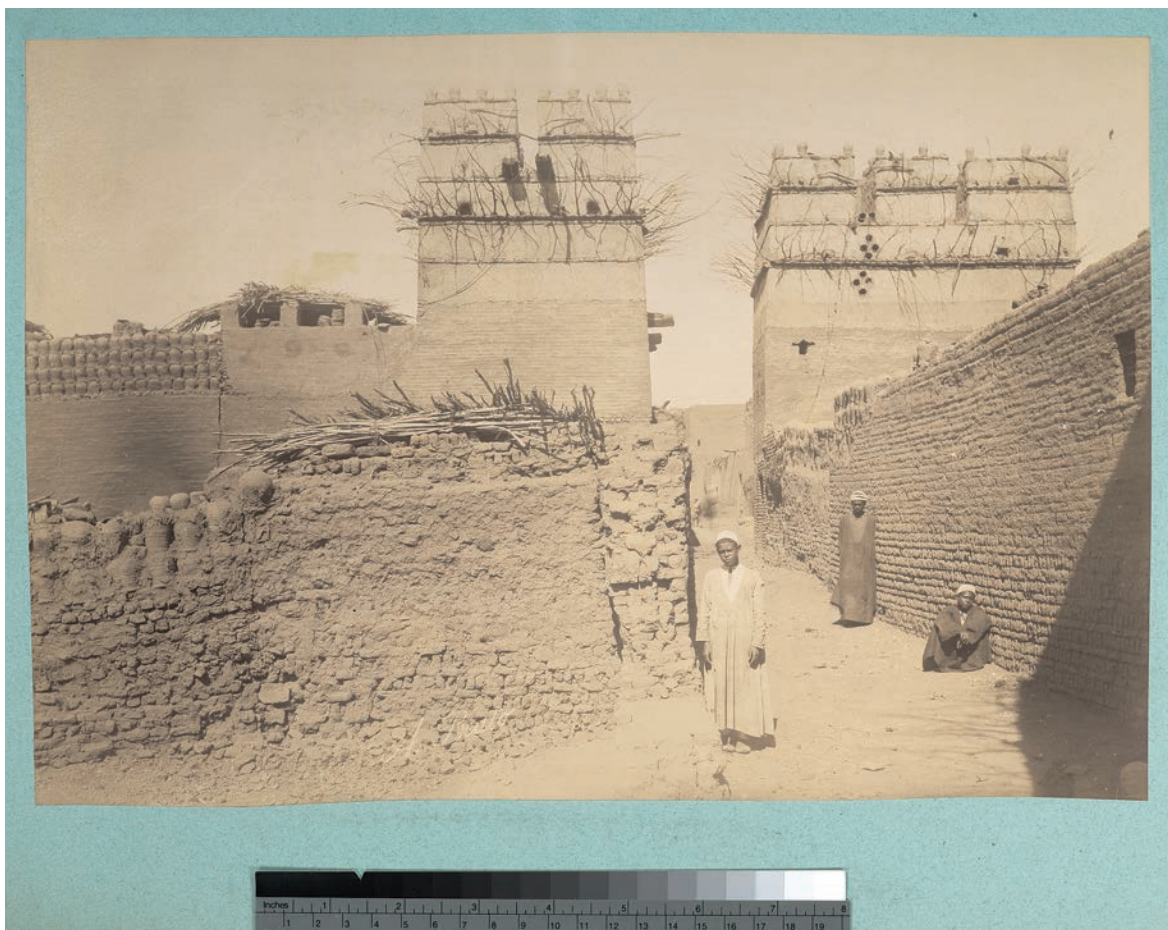
Fig. 2a. Spell manuscript found at AT 28.



Fig. 2b. Zakariyā Ibn-Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, *Kitāb 'Agā'ib al-maḥlūqāt wa-ḡarā'ib al-mauḡūdāt*, Wāsiṭ 1280 – Bayerische Staats Bibliothek [BSB Cod arab. 464].



Fig. 3. Ushebtis found at At-28 evoking Harut and Marut's story.



a



b

Fig. 4. a. "Luxor vue de..." (1860–1869);
b. Sheikh Arab (1860–1929). The Miriam and
Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and
Photographs