

Deir el-Medina Studies

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Edited by Jaana Toivari-Viitala
Turo Vartiainen
Saara Uvanto



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A Selection of Wall Fragments from Deir el-Medina's Tombs in Cairo Museum

Gema Menéndez

Research Fellow. Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)

In June 2009, on the occasion of the conference *Deir el-Medina Studies* in Helsinki, I had the opportunity to present the project *Popular religion in written Deir el-Medina's sources. Study of the stelae and other inscribed objects from Deir el-Medina at the Egyptian Museum of Cairo*, which we had carried out since 2001 in the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid. The aim of the project is to catalogue and publish some of the Deir el-Medina inscriptions kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The project is financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, and is directed by Dr. José M. Galán (CSIC) in collaboration with the late Aadel Mahmoud, the then-curator of the Egyptian Museum, who was responsible for the New Kingdom Section and also very much interested in the community of workmen at Deir el-Medina (Mahmoud 1999, 2011). The volume will be published to honour the memory of Aadel Mahmoud.

The corpus comprises sixty-seven pieces, including stelae, offering tables, libation basins, architectural pieces (lintels, jambs, fragments of wall), etc. The ensemble makes up an important documentary corpus for the study of the inhabitants of the community, their expressions of personal piety and funerary beliefs. A preliminary report has already been published in the *Bulletin of the Egyptian Museum* in 2009, which includes a complete list of the objects that comprise the catalogue (Menéndez 2009, 30–34). The present article aims to introduce the catalogue, the history of the collection, and a small selection of the wall fragments that form part of the catalogue. All of the wall fragments belong to workmen's tombs, and they have remained in the shadow of stelae and other inscribed objects of the personal piety. They are lost fragments of tombs, some of which are not preserved today, and thus deserve our attention.

Catalogue

The catalogue is currently in its final stage and is planned to be published in 2014. We have excluded the ancestor's stelae published by Demarée (*ibid.*

1983), the offering tables already in the *Catalogue Général*, such as CGC 23075 y CGC 23076 (Kamal 1906, 63–64, pl. XVI), statues, ancestors' busts and the objects registered by Baraize and Bruyère, which are currently missing and of which graphic documents could not be obtained, such as JE 43693 (Baraize 1914, 42) and JE 43589 (Baraize 1914, 40).

The catalogue includes new colour photographs that show details that were not appreciated in previous publications, such as the polychromy, artist's corrections, the presence of holes in some stelae in order to attach small wooden doors as in a "reliquary", the remains of mud on the back revealing that they were originally set in a wall, etc. Complementing the photographs, epigraphic drawings will accompany the file for each object, with the corresponding hieroglyphic transcription, translation and comments. Information regarding the find spot and the archaeological context has been included. Bruyère's notebooks, kept in the archive of the IFAO, have been consulted to contrast and complement his *Rapport*, and they provided most of the information.

The importance of the catalogue is based on two key points. First, the majority of the objects have not received adequate epigraphic attention, either because of the circumstances related to the first publication or because they have not been regarded as bearing relevant textual information. Second, many of the objects are nowadays difficult to access and study, and thus collecting the material in a modern publication will facilitate the work of future specialists. The project intends to contribute to the study of Deir el-Medina by presenting a volume that provides valuable information on neglected objects that are relevant to the study of the gang.

History of the collection

In 1858, the Department of Antiquities started the archaeological works at Deir el-Medina under the direction of Auguste Mariette. Until then, the discoveries made in the area had been the result of sporadic visits and poorly controlled European commissioners in search of antiques with which to trade. The findings resulting from Mariette excavations were kept in the Boulaq Museum and in a magazine located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah. There is no documentation or record of the objects that were part of the Boulaq collection, or of the magazines in the West Bank in Luxor, but we do know that the latter were subsequently transferred to Cairo Museum in 1882 (Černý 1927, 195, n. 1; Maunier 1892, 215–216).

Mariette's successor in office was Gaston Maspero, who in 1909 commissioned the French architect and archaeologist Émile Baraize to reconstruct

Table I								
JE	TR	SR	Object	Dim. (cm)	Date	Provenance	Remarks	Bruyère's doc.
21064	4.25.3.2	4/14065	Wall	48.8 x 40.8 x 9	R. II	TT 10 (?)	Boulaq N° 162	pv 2004 06653
40367	---	4/13506	Jambs	163 x 22.5 (right) 160 x 21.5 (left)	R. II	TT 356 (?)	---	---
41469	---	3/10353	Wall (?)	18.5 x 26.3 x 6	19 th D.	Private tomb (?)	---	pv 2004 06651; nb 2004 1941
43591	---	4/13547	Wall	58 x 75 x 5	R. II	Private tomb	Baraize 1912	---
43679	---	3/10058	Wall (?)	12.3 x 26.5 x 8.4	20 th D.	Private tomb (?)	Baraize 1912	---
54888	---	7/20532	Wall	48 x 63	R. II	TT 290	Bruyère 1922- 1923	Pv 2004 06317
54890	---	---	Wall	37 x 51.5	R. II	TT 326	Bruyère 1923	MS 2004 0144, 10b, 11b; pv 2004 06317
64811	---	7/21463	Wall	33.5 x 21.5 x 10	R. II	TT 290	Bruyère 1922- 1923	---

the Ptolemaic temple of Deir el-Medina, as well as the surrounding wall and the gateway of the enclosure (Baraize 1914). While clearing the inner area to recover the blocks of the temple and stabilize the ground, Baraize found over a hundred objects mainly belonging to the chapels located to the west of the temple (Bruyère 1952, II, 3–13). The pieces that were found in good condition and that seemed to be of interest were moved to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo in 1912, and were assigned the numbers between 43564 and 43694 in the *Journal d'entrée*. The remaining objects were hidden in three small *cachettes* inside the enclosure. One *cachette* was located in the southeastern corner, and it included many limestone fragments discovered in the southern side of the *temenos*. The other two were in the northeastern corner, and contained the findings from the northern area of the enclosure and from the temple and monastery (Bruyère 1948, I, 39; 1952, II, 14–15).

A short time later, in 1914, the IFAO focused its attention on Deir el-Medina and applied for the concession of the site. A few years later, in 1922, Bernard Bruyère took up the excavations in the village becoming the “father” of the archaeology of Deir el-Medina. He began by showing some interest on Baraize’s work, as he published the photographs of the stelae Baraize had handed over to the museum. He also published transcriptions of the texts and comments, mainly of a religious nature (Bruyère 1925b, 76–96). The IFAO’s excavation continued until 1952 and added twenty-nine

Fig. 1: List of wall’s fragments from private tombs.

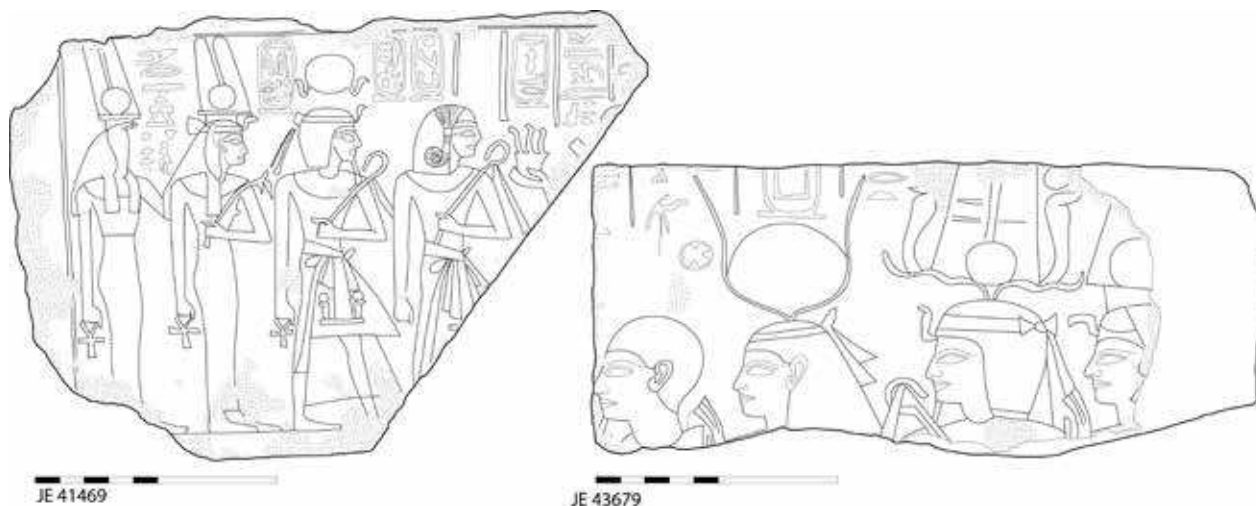


Fig. 2: Possible wall's fragments JE 41469 and JE 43679.

objects with an inscription to the Cairo collection, registered as the *part-age* between Cairo Museum, Louvre Museum and the IFAO. In addition to the findings of the IFAO in Deir el-Medina, another small group of objects come from the excavation carried out in Valley of the Kings by Loret in 1898–1899 (e.g. Kuentz 1929, 113–116, pl. I), and by Davis and Ayrton in 1905–1906 (e.g. Keller 1995, 142, 148).

In the catalogue, there is a small group of objects of unknown provenance that, through internal evidence, have been identified as belonging to Deir el-Medina's workmen (Menéndez 2009, table 1).

A selection of wall fragments from Deir el-Medina's tombs

Among the objects of the catalogue there is a small group of relief fragments that seem to be part of the wall decoration of private tombs in the western cemetery rather than votive stelae. The identification of these as fragments of mural decoration is based mainly on the fragment's shape, the iconography depicted in the piece, the inscription, or the register of the find spot documented and published by Bruyère (Fig. 1).

It is well known that the tomb decoration at Deir el-Medina varied according to the place where the tomb was located and the quality of the stone. In some cases, the innermost chapel of the tomb or the part located outside the rock was built of mud bricks and then decorated with limestone

slabs attached to the walls, a practice reminiscent of the use of *talatats* during the Amarna period. This system, based on decorative slabs, had a very limited life, prompting the fall of the slabs, their deterioration and their consequent finding out of context. The slabs are mainly characterized by their rectangular shape, perfectly cut, with a thickness between 5–10 cm, and having the back side chiselled to be inserted or attached to the wall.

Among the pieces of doubtful origin and with the characteristics mentioned above are the fragments JE 41469 and JE 43679 (Fig. 2). The first one was purchased in Luxor by the antiquarian Mohammed Mohasseb and moved to Cairo Museum in 1908 (Legrain 1908, 57–59). The latter was found by Baraize in 1912 inside the Ptolemaic enclosure (Bruyère 1952, II, 10, 12, fig. 82). Both pieces have a very distinctive theme, the representation of royal ancestors and deities in the same scene, common in Deir el-Medina's tombs, such as TT 2, TT 4 or TT 10 (PM I:1, 7 (10) I, 12 (8), 21 (6) I). Furthermore, the rectangular cut reminds of slabs used for the decoration of walls. Combining all this evidence allows us to suggest that they are fragments of wall decoration. However, it is not possible to specify the tomb of origin or the owner's name.

In the case of JE 21064 fragment (Fig. 3), the Museum's *Journal d'entrée* includes a note pointing to the tomb of Penbuy and Kasa (TT 10) as its probable place of origin. The tomb is located high up the hill at the north-western corner of the cemetery. The inner walls of the tomb were plastered and painted. Thus, it is likely that the slab came from the outer part of the monument, much of which was already destroyed before Bruyère's excavations. However, a few limestone relief fragments were found down the funerary shaft (Bruyère 1925, 62–63, figs. 6–7). The carefully cut edge of the quadrangular slab makes it clear that it is not a broken fragment, but an independently carved block that was attached to the wall. Bruyère mentions that the tomb had been discovered by Leconte Dunoy in 1917 (Bruyère 1925, 61). However, the piece was already in the Boulaq Museum in 1871, when Lieblein included a reference to it in his *Dictionnaire de noms* (Lieblein 1871, 323, no. 993), and later Maspero in 1880 (176 [XXXI, no. 6], 186 [LXIV]). It could have been found by Mariette in 1862, when the Department of Antiquities was working in Deir el-Medina (Maunier 1890, 215–216), or bought around that time in the antiquities market.

The better known fragment is JE 43591 (Fig. 4), a rectangular slab that is more likely part of a tomb wall rather than a stela. The scene is divided in two registers, showing two moments of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley.



Fig. 3: Wall's fragments with the representation of Penbuy and the scribe Ramose (JE 21064).

Fig. 4: Slab showing the Beautiful Feast of the Valley. Probably from the tomb of Ameneminet (JE 43591)

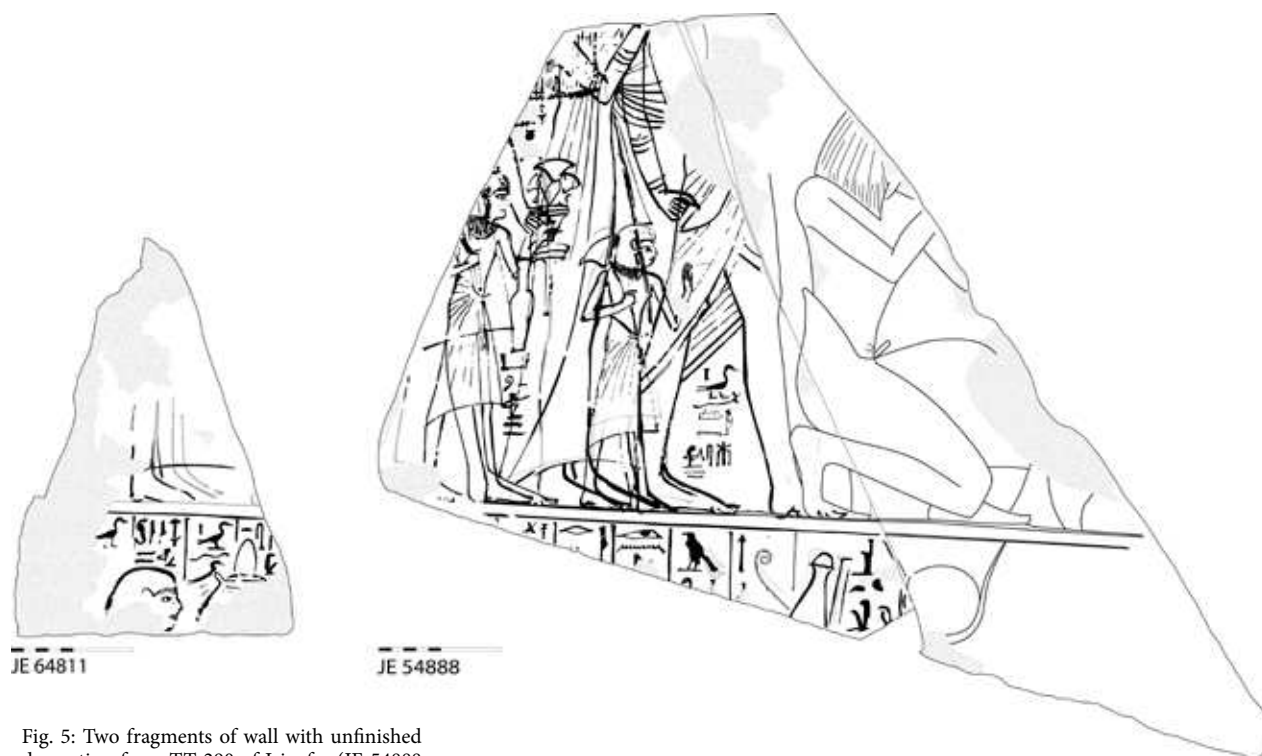
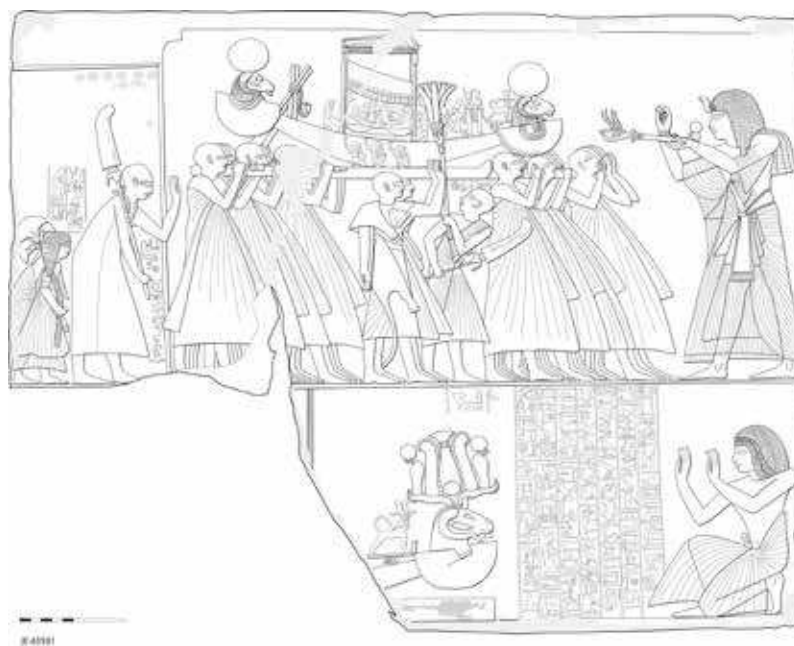


Fig. 5: Two fragments of wall with unfinished decoration from TT 290 of Irinefer (JE 54888 and JE 64811)

The representation of the scribe Amenemipet, the vizier Paser and the king date the stela before the year 5 of the reign of Ramses II, since Amenemipet is not attested after this year, as he was replaced by Ramose as scribe of the gang (Davies 1999, 76–78). The servant in the Place of Truth, Ameneminet, seems to be the main character of the relief and, therefore, the owner of the tomb. Although Baraize found the fragment inside the Ptolemaic enclosure in 1912, Bruyère points out that it comes from a tomb (Bruyère 1952, II, 7) which could have been located inside the enclosure and destroyed before the construction of the temple, and it is so indicated in the museum's *Journal d'entrée*, and repeated by Foucart and Kitchen (Foucart 1921–1922, 165, fig. 6; KRITA I, 296–297). The tomb, however, has never been identified.

Bruyère provided information about the find spot of the fragments JE 54888 and JE 64811 (Fig. 5). The former consists of two pieces of limestone glued together, and shows an unfinished wall decoration. The right side has been carved, while the left side still remains with the preliminary lines in black and red. The latter is also a limestone fragment and preserves the preliminary design. Both pieces come from the same tomb and, most likely, from the same wall. According to the data of the discovery, both fragments come from the tomb of Irinefer (TT 290) found in 1922 (Bruyère and Kuentz 1926, 93, pl. XVII; Bruyère 1924, 25, fig. 1). It seems that the chapel was prepared to be decorated with slabs of relief. During the excavation process several pieces of this type were found, including a piece that fits with JE 54888. This fragment has not been identified in Cairo Museum, and we ignore its whereabouts and its register number (Bruyère and Kuentz 1926, 93, fig. 1). Due to the size of the figures and their orientation it is assumed that they could come from the south wall of the chapel.

Among the Cairo collection, there are several fragments that seem to belong to the decoration of workmen's tombs. These are objects that are part of the artistic memory of the village, different from the concepts of personal piety attested in stelae.

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