



Universität
Basel

Research Project

Life Histories of Theban Tombs

Third-party funded project

Project title Life Histories of Theban Tombs

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Project Website <https://lht.philhist.unibas.ch/>

Project start 01.11.2015

Probable end 31.10.2018

Status Completed

Life Histories of Theban Tombs (LHTT) investigates a cluster of mostly unfinished rock cut tombs and their mutual relations at the hillside of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in Western Thebes and sees it as part of a planned cemetery opened up for a small elite with close links to the reigning king around 1450-1400 BC. Cut into a foothill of the Western mountains, they were considered ideal burial places, and were reused in later periods as shelter for the living. Spatial halls and vast courtyards hewn out of the living rock, walls decorated with depictions and inscriptions, and burial assemblages tugged away in remote, sometimes large substructures, became ideal vehicles of social, religious, and cultural perceptions virulent at the time of their construction, adapted to preferences and choices made by their owners and by those involved in the building process. Equally complex practices were at work generations later, when people appropriated older, often looted tombs to use and modify them according to their own needs and habits. Two further phases of use left a strong imprint on their materiality: their inhabitation by Coptic monks during the late first millennium and their second occupancy by local families during the late second millennium. They settled in the foothills and plains of the Theban necropolis for economic reasons, using the ancient structures as additional living space and as a valuable source for selling and forging antiques to antique traders, collectors and tourists visiting Thebes.

LHTT draws on an integrative archaeological perspective, which combines cultural historical and scientific investigation methods and questions, and aims at retracing the materialized life histories of tombs, i.e. how they interacted with their built and natural environment, with institutions and people from their construction to modern times. The project seeks to re-personalize past human activities such as operations and procedures of tomb building and decoration, funerary practices, inhabitation, looting, etc. LHTT therefore prioritizes research techniques and procedures that give relevance to the detail and variation. The digital collection and processing of data and the development of an open source interactive database system will support this research strategy. Excavations of TT K555, a tomb of the cluster still buried under debris, are archaeologically promising as the debris may have protected deposits and structures from modern disruptions.

Keywords Egypt, Archaeology, Tomb Architecture, Material Studies, Life Histories, Geology, Anthropology, Visual Studies

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Add publication

Published results

4528190, Ziegler, Martin; Colldeweih, Rachael; Wolter, Andrea; Loprieno-Gnirs, Andrea, Rock Mass Quality and Preliminary Analysis of the Stability of Ancient Rock-Cut Theban Tombs at Sheikh 'Abd el-Qurna, Egypt, 1435-9529, Bulletin of Engineering Geology and the Environment, Publication: JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

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