

VALLEY OF THE KINGS

EPIGRAPHICAL SURVEY IN THE TOMB OF RAMESSES VI (KV 9)

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In 1996 and 1998-2000, by permission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt, the present writer, during three brief visits to the Valley of the Kings, carried out a survey of Greek graffiti in this tomb as an introduction to a more detailed study.¹⁾

¹⁾ I am grateful to the Supreme Council of Antiquities for permission to carry out the preliminary work described above and I highly appreciate the cooperation of the Egyptian Antiquities Authorities in Upper Egypt and Qurna.

Tomb no. 9 in the Theban Valley of the Kings, close to the last resting place of Tutankhamun, is the tomb of Ramesses VI. A corridor about 100 m long and 4 m high descends into the limestone rock (*Fig. 1*). In the middle of the corridor length there is a hypostyle hall with pillars, and at the end, a vast burial chamber with fragments of a stone sarcophagus, which had once contained the pharaoh's mummy.

Ramesses VI, who was pharaoh from 1143 to 1136 BC, was one of the sons of Ramesses III, a ruler of the Twentieth Dynasty whose reign came at a time of Egypt's declining greatness. Yet his tomb is rightly believed to be one of the most splendid of the Ramesside royal tombs.

The walls of the tomb are covered with extremely interesting and well preserved paintings of religious and eschatological content.

Greek graffiti left by people visiting the tomb in Ptolemaic times appear on these works of Egyptian art. The graffiti were left not only by tourists, but also by some official visitors. Some of the royal tombs were still open at the time. The Greeks called them *syringes*. They were seen with pious admiration, in the faint light of oil lamps or torches (*Fig. 2*).

Admiration over the tomb (considered as the "tomb of Memnon") was expressed in the inscriptions left on the walls. These were written mainly in Greek, occasionally in Latin. The graffiti were written in black ink or red paint, or else scratched upon the magnificent original decoration of the tomb. Although such practice seems unacceptable today, the ancient visitors deemed it important to commemorate their passage and to express their admiration for the

tomb (The words "I admired" are among the most frequent in the graffiti). Some ancient tourists actually took care not to write directly upon the ancient wall paintings and searched for a free space next to the Pharaonic painted decoration.

The authors of these inscriptions – as always in such cases – wished to commemorate their own names in the famous places. They often put their occupation or position held next to their names. These authors were often persons of standing, civilians and military men, scholars and philosophers, people coming from afar, from mainland Greece and Asia Minor, and residents of towns in Upper Egypt. Officials of the Roman administration in Egypt also left their names on the walls of the tomb, occasionally with a philosophical sentence. One of these visitors did not even make the effort to write the text himself. A personal secretary presumably wrote down "his words", while the dignitary added only the following in Greek: "I admired".

The texts were written in prose as a rule, but in some cases they were written in verse. Some persons only left their "signature", others left longer inscriptions and sentences. A date was given only in a few cases.

The publication of these Greek texts by J. Baillet²⁾ is still very useful, but a second survey of this material, including some improved readings and new interpretations is necessary. The comparative material is bigger now and it is possible to attempt a more extensive prosopographical study.

Chronological questions are of particular importance. It seems that most visits to this particular *syrinx* took place in the period from the 2nd to the 4th century AD.

²⁾ J. Baillet, *Inscriptions grecques et latines des tombeaux des Rois ou syringes à Thebes* (Cairo 1926).



*Fig. 1. Interior of the tomb of Ramesses VI
(Photo © A. Łukaszewicz)*

Also the personal names mentioned in the graffiti are of considerable interest. As stated above, some important members of the elite of Graeco-Roman Egypt had visited the tomb, but there were also visitors from outside Egypt, attracted by the renown of the place.

An early example (1st century AD) is the graffito no. 1720 concerning Antonia Agrippina. From later times we have various officials, both civilian (e.g. Claudius Bassus alias Himerius, the *katholikos* of Egypt, no. 1247, cf. also no. 1249; or 1282, where a *comes* of Thebaid left his signature in commemoration of his visit) and military (e.g. Tiberius, a *princeps*, no. 1294).

Some of these texts show more profound religious inspiration. Many of them explicitly mention the name of Memnon with whom the owner of the tomb, Ramesses VI, was erroneously identified by the Greeks.³⁾ The graffiti are found in various parts of the tomb. Their respective location may shed additional light on the visiting conditions at the time.

Issues of palaeography require special attention. Only a limited number of texts could be studied in three working periods not exceeding a few days each. The work will be continued in the coming years. The prospective publication will concentrate on problems of prosopography and chronology.

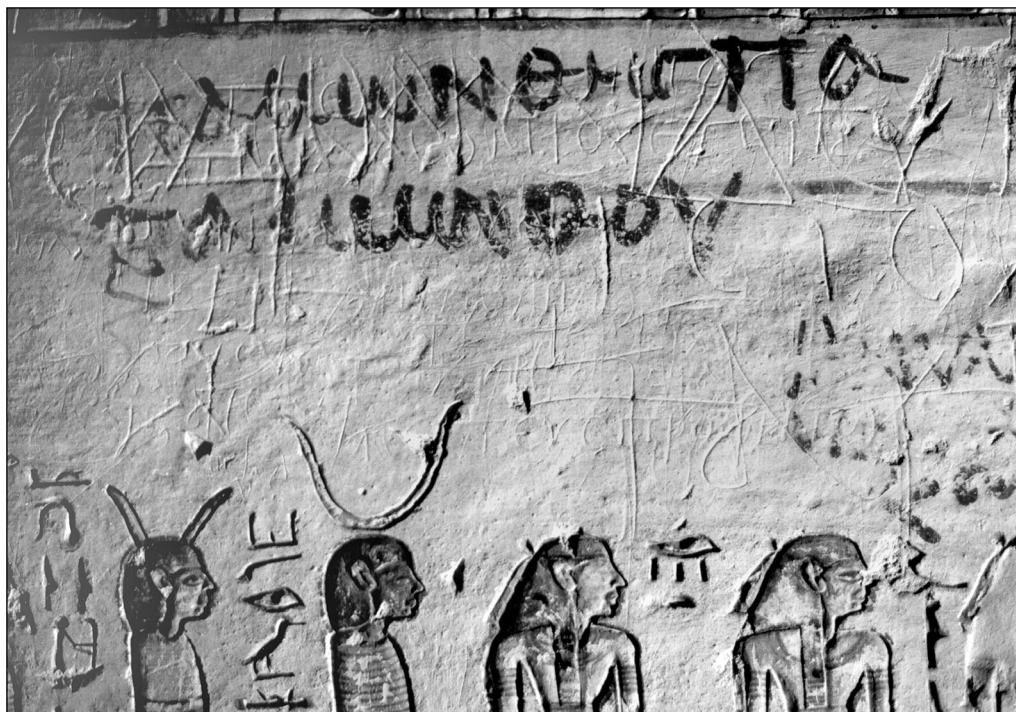


Fig. 2. Graffito of Pamonthes, son of Pamonthes
(Photo © A. Łukaszewicz)

³⁾ Cf. A. Łukaszewicz, *Aegyptiaca quaestiones tres* (Warsaw 1995).