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# Experiencing Inscriptions in Space: Extended Inscriptions of the Early New Kingdom (Qenamun – Useramun – Rekhmire)

**Abstract:** Some major tombs of the early New Kingdom in the Theban necropolis of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna display massive inscriptions. These inscriptions appear to have been set deliberately against a continuous reading. In their vertical and horizontal extensions, they exceed bodily frames and what sight can embrace. They are integrated into broader text-image compositions that extend dynamically over the surface of an entire wall. Their formats can be seen as pointing to the royal sphere or illustrious predecessors, and as massive blocks of text materialising speech and agency emanating from the main figure on the wall (the king, the vizier's father or the vizier). In some cases, opposite walls resonate with one another through extensive parallelism. The inscriptions deploy their effects and significations through their material presence in space and their overwhelming impact on the visitor's senses rather than discursively. Beholders move in an enveloping space, brought about by the pictorial and textual decoration of the walls. Standing in front of a massive textual inscription, they are fascinated by and drawn into the shimmering chromatic surface of a wall of writing.

## 1 Introduction

The site of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna is located on the west bank of ancient Waset (Arabic: Luxor; Greek: Thebes), the place of origin and first capital of the kings of the time. During the early New Kingdom (c. 1550–1350 BCE), the site developed as the place of burial and display of some of the highest officials of the time. The tombs cluster next to each other in artificial terraces on the slope of the hill, inserting themselves between earlier tombs dating to the Middle Kingdom (c. 2000–1800 BCE) and partially reusing these, with particular intensity during the reigns of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (c. 1475–1400

BCE).<sup>1</sup> Their architectural layout and decoration (images and inscriptions combined) attest to a spirit of competitive emulation among the tomb owners, a small circle of people who, one generation after the other, knew each other personally. In doing so, they also celebrate the identity and privileged status of an exclusive group.<sup>2</sup>

Some of these tombs include inscriptions that extend over considerable surfaces on the walls. The texts are complex in their verbal composition and rhetoric, yet nearly impossible to read continuously on the walls on which they are displayed. While the texts could, hypothetically, have been performed orally on occasions, their display in inscriptional form must have corresponded to intentions other than verbal communication. This article asks what these intentions could have been and how the inscriptions as material objects in space could have been engaged with in ancient times.

Three tombs in particular present such massive textual inscriptions: those of the vizier Useramun (T(heban) T(omb) 131; reigns of Hatshepsut – early Thutmosis III); his nephew and successor in office, Rekhmire (TT 100; Thutmosis III – early Amenhotep II); and, in a third generation, the ‘chief steward in Perunefer’, Qenamun (TT 93; later Amenhotep II). For expository reasons, I begin with the last, Qenamun, then move back to Useramun and conclude with Rekhmire. In all cases, the discussion proceeds from a necessarily etic analytic description of features deemed relevant. Based on this, I then attempt an imagined reconstruction of possible ancient experiences associated with the inscriptions. Before doing so, some background information and notes on descriptive conventions are in order.

Studies by Dimitri Laboury have made abundantly clear that ancient Egyptian artists could express their own style and individuality and sign their work either directly or through a portrait in *assistenza*.<sup>3</sup> These more distinguished artists were socially recognised and could achieve and display considerable status.<sup>4</sup> The decoration programme of the tombs of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, including their inscriptions, were designed by master painters.<sup>5</sup> In addition to knowing the iconographic repertoires, these artists had considerable hiero-

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1 Overview: Kampp 1996, map III. Reproduced here as Fig. 1 with the location of the tombs discussed in this article highlighted. For the historical development of the necropolis with a focus notably on these same tombs, see Shirley 2010, 98–107, with fig. 5 on p. 100.

2 For the notion of ‘competitive emulation’ in relation to the decoration programme in the central necropolises of the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–2150 BCE), see van Walsem 2012–2013.

3 Laboury 2013.

4 Laboury 2016; Laboury 2022, 40–42, with extensive references.

5 Detailed case study: Laboury 2015; see also Laboury 2020, 95; Laboury 2022, 52, 64.

glyphic expertise.<sup>6</sup> They were assisted in the realisation of the tomb by subalterns with only limited hieroglyphic expertise.<sup>7</sup> The inscriptions consist of coloured and internally detailed, painterly hieroglyphs. They are adjacent to scenes to which they relate, and laid out in columns, i.e. vertically, similar to the figures in the scenes. As these and other aspects discussed below make clear, the inscriptions were, thus, conceived to be seen in a direct, intrinsic relation to the scenes. Some if not all of these master painters were able to adapt the layout of scenes and inscriptions on the spot. This is made clear by the comparison between *Vorlagenostraka* (ostraca on which drafts of texts and/or scenes were inscribed) and the final realisation of inscriptions or scenes on a wall;<sup>8</sup> discrepancies between the sketch on the wall and the final realisation when both are observable;<sup>9</sup> and idiosyncratic, virtuosic elaborations of individual focal signs in an inscription.<sup>10</sup> In the following, I use ‘designer’ to refer to the master painter responsible for conceiving and implementing the decoration and inscriptional programme of the tomb; this should not be taken to exclude the possibility that, in some cases, more than one person was involved at this level. It is also understood that both the tomb owner and the master painter(s) were probably involved in making decisions relative to the conception of the monument.

The tombs consist of an open courtyard, a funerary chapel dug into the hill and burial spaces below ground where the body rested. The funerary chapels were open to visitors. The decorative programmes and their often ostentatious nature make clear that these were spaces for affirming the social identity of the tomb owner and, by extension, of his kin. In addition to the tomb owner’s family, visitors would have included, at a minimum, other members of his social group (some themselves with tombs nearby) and their respective dependents, as well as the artists involved in making these tombs and looking for models in other tombs.<sup>11</sup> Reasons for visiting the tombs included the performance of the

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<sup>6</sup> Laboury 2022, 39–49; see also Laboury 2016, 379–381; for an earlier master-sculptor proudly referencing his hieroglyphic expertise and, more broadly his being party of restricted knowledge, Stauder 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Laboury 2022, 52–61.

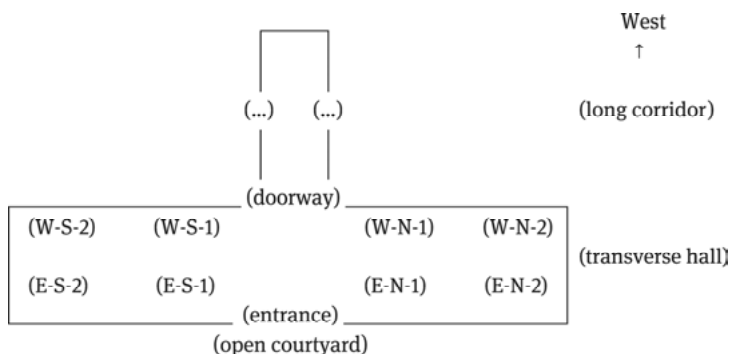
<sup>8</sup> Laboury 2022, 43–47 (general discussion of the phenomenon, including a reference to an important, soon to be published *Vorlagenotakon* found in the forecourt of Amenemope, TT 29); Tallet 2005 and Tallet 2010 (tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100); Lüscher 2013 (tomb of Menkhepereseneb-Nakhtmin, TT 79).

<sup>9</sup> Laboury 2020, 93–94.

<sup>10</sup> Laboury 2022, 47–49.

<sup>11</sup> Several visitors to early New Kingdom tombs of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna are even known by name through the graffiti they left behind; see Den Doncker 2019b, 73–88.

funerary cult, collective occasions of celebration and interest in the tombs themselves. These reasons varied with time: during construction and decoration, in the decades following the tomb owner's death as the funerary cult was still alive, and later still, in some tombs that were deemed remarkable for their contents, for the historical memory of the tomb owner or for some other reason.<sup>12</sup> Traces of ancient engagements with the tombs and their decoration can be seen in the location and contents of the graffiti left by ancient visitors on the walls, for instance, in association with a particular figure.<sup>13</sup> Another aspect of the reception of the tombs is seen in how certain elements were taken over from one tomb to the next.<sup>14</sup> How various types of visitors might have moved within the funerary chapels is not documented. Any reconstructions in this regard made below should, therefore, be considered schematic and imagined.



The entrance of the tomb was ideally aligned to the east, where the sun rises. The funerary chapels present a characteristic plan in an 'inverted T' with a transverse hall and a long corridor (see the diagram above and Fig. 1). The transverse hall was the primary space for a public display of the tomb owner's social identity. The long corridor led deeper into the mountain and the west, the realm of the dead, to an offering place, marked by images of the tomb owner with his wife and an offering table; contrasting with that of the transverse hall, the long corridor was typically decorated with scenes with a funerary tenor.

In the following, I am concerned only with the funerary chapels and often use 'tomb' as a shorthand for the funerary chapel. I use ideal co-ordinates – co-

<sup>12</sup> On these aspects as well, see Den Doncker 2019b, with further references.

<sup>13</sup> Such graffiti are found in various places throughout Egypt. Focusing on Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, see the detailed study by Den Doncker 2019b, 110–206.

<sup>14</sup> Den Doncker 2019b, 207–290; for the case of the early Thutmoside viziers, specifically 252–279.

ordinates corresponding to the ideal orientation of a tomb as just described – even if, according to the local topography and space available, the actual orientation of a tomb deviates from these more or less pronouncedly. The inscriptions discussed below are located on the two long walls of the transverse hall: the one in front of the visitor entering the tomb (the west wall) and the opposite wall, behind the visitor entering the tomb (the east wall). The west wall is divided into two sides by the doorway opening to the long corridor: for the visitor standing in front of that doorway, a right-hand (or northern) side, henceforth ‘W(est)-N(orth)’; and a left-hand (or southern) side, henceforth ‘W-S’. The opposite (east or back) wall is similarly divided into a northern side (E-N) and a southern one (E-S) by the entrance to the tomb. I generally use ‘wall’ in the following for one of these materially continuous surfaces of decoration and inscription (thus: W-N, W-S, E-N or E-S). Each ‘wall’ defined in this way in the tombs discussed below is generally divided into two subparts: one closer to the doorway or entrance, the other farther apart. These are referred to by the sigla W-N-1 and W-N-2, respectively; and similarly for the other walls.

## 2 Qenamun’s Appointment inscription

In Qenamun’s monumental tomb at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna (TT 93) a long text tells how the king, Amenhotep II, appointed Qenamun to ‘chief steward in Perunefer’ (Figs 1–3).<sup>15</sup> While the title itself is not otherwise attested, the place, Perunefer, was a major harbour in the early New Kingdom, associated with either Tell el-Dab’a or Memphis.<sup>16</sup> Qenamun, who was also an overseer of the cattle of Amun and held important military responsibilities,<sup>17</sup> was part of a small group of men who owed their rise to the highest positions, at least in part, to a personal proximity to the king, Amenhotep II.<sup>18</sup> In Qenamun’s case, his own mother, Amenemipet, was a wet-nurse to the future king, Amenhotep II.

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<sup>15</sup> Translation and study: Stauder forthcoming. Original publication: Davies 1930, pl. 8; text also in Urk. IV 1385–1390.14, collated with copies by Kurt Sethe.

<sup>16</sup> For the former proposal, e.g. Bietak 2017; for the latter, Pasquali 2007, 77–78, n. 37; Förstner-Müller 2014.

<sup>17</sup> For the latter, see Gnirs 2013b, 699–700, 710–711; Shirley 2013, 588–589. For lists of Qenamun’s titles and epithets, see Davies 1930, 10–16.

<sup>18</sup> Late in his reign, the preceding king, Thutmose III, appears to have surrounded the future Amenhotep II with a group of trusted tutors and nurses whose relatives would become some of Amenhotep II’s highest officials, replacing, perhaps gradually, a previous generation of offi-

## 2.1 A royal type of text in a non-royal context – a local emulation

A little less than half of the textual substance of the inscription is preserved, however, a lot can still be said about it.<sup>19</sup> Qenamun's Appointment inscription is set as a throne session of the king with his officials, specifically an 'appearance' (*ḥ't*) of the king.<sup>20</sup> It belongs to a genre, the so-called *Königsnovelle*, that centres around a performative pronouncement of the king: the king speaks in a ceremonial courtly context, with or without the group of court officials intervening, and his words are followed by their immediate effect.<sup>21</sup> Qenamun's Appointment inscription is a particularly developed type of *Königsnovelle*, with the king speaking first to express his intent to appoint a chief steward in Perunefer (cols 2–11); the courtiers eulogizing the king's effectiveness in decision-making and speech (cols 11–16); the king speaking a second time to appoint, then instruct, Qenamun (cols 17–27); the courtiers again eulogizing the king's speech and decision (cols 27–31); and a final narrative describing Qenamun's installation and effective action as chief steward in Perunefer (cols 31–36).

The inscription, in the celebratory space of a non-royal tomb or stela, of shorter or longer stretches of the king's very words is documented in various instances in the Old, Middle and New Kingdom.<sup>22</sup> It represents a remarkable distinction for the official in and of itself, marking his extraordinary proximity to the king. Inscribing a *Königsnovelle* – a quintessentially royal genre – in a non-royal space goes one step further. Only two other instances are known, both from Sheikh Abd el-Qurna and dating to the preceding reign of Thutmosis III: firstly, the Appointment inscription of vizier Useramun (discussed below); then, the

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cials stemming notably from the extended Ineni-Aametju family (on which see the second and third part of this article). See Shirley 2005, 265–282; Shirley 2013, 586–589; Laboury 2007, all with references to previous discussions.

<sup>19</sup> The following is a condensed form of what is developed more in depth in Stauder forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> '[His] Person's [appearance] on the thron[e] on the electrum dais (...)' (col. 1, [*ḥ't*] *ḥm*[=f] *ḥr st-wr*[t] *ḥr tntyt n d'm* (...)). The restoration of *ḥ't*, based on parallels and the size of the lacuna, is secure.

<sup>21</sup> For this definition of the *Königsnovelle* (the label is an inherited misnomer), see Stauder 2021, with references to other definitions revolving more broadly around notions of royal action. Under the definition above, the *Königsnovelle* can be viewed as a 'genre' (with this term understood as referring to more or less stabilized textual formats that, through cultural convention, contribute to inform the production and interpretation of texts). Under the broader definitions that are common in Egyptology, the *Königsnovelle* is less a genre but simply a general type of text in which the king acts in specific, typically episodic contexts.

<sup>22</sup> Stauder-Porchet 2020a, 78–86; Stauder-Porchet 2020b, 218–219; Stauder-Porchet 2021a; Stauder-Porchet 2021b.

Byblos journey inscription of the treasurer Senneferi.<sup>23</sup> Qenamun's and Senneferi's tombs are located only a few dozen metres away from Useramun's (see Fig. 1). Upon current evidence, the practice of inscribing a *Königsnovelle* in a non-royal space, thus, appears highly confined in time and space.



**Fig. 1:** Map of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, after Kampp 1996, map III, with the main tombs discussed in this article highlighted: Useramun (TT 131), in red; Rekhmire (TT 100), in yellow; Qenamun (TT 93), in blue. The tomb of Senneferi (TT 99) is highlighted in green. The map demonstrates the spatial proximity of the three only known instances of *Königsnovellen* in non-royal contexts (Useramun, Senneferi, Qenamun). The tombs in the cluster around Qenamun's (Amenemope, TT 29; Mery, TT 95; Sennefer, TT 96) are marked by thinner black ovals.

Useramun's inscription, a full *Königsnovelle*, probably served as an inspiration for Senneferi's inscription, which consists of a unique combination of features of the *Königsnovelle* with features of the event autobiography. It certainly did for

<sup>23</sup> For the latter, see Strudwick 2016, 98–102, pl. 25–29, colour pl. 15A–16A; Urk. IV 532.12–536.4. Discussion: Eichler 1998; Stauder forthcoming, the final section (sub 'User's inspiration').

Qenamun's inscription. Similar to Useramun's, Qenamun's inscription is a full *Königsnovelle* set as a throne session; centres around the appointment of the official; and consists of two speeches by the king and two by the courtiers, set in a narrative frame and followed by a final narrative section.<sup>24</sup> The designer of Qenamun's Appointment inscription was looking at Useramun's Appointment inscription also at the level of layout: similar to Useramun's inscription, Qenamun's is associated with a pictorial scene featuring officials, among which the appointee, standing in front of the king seated in a kiosk; both inscriptions, moreover, consist of precisely thirty-six columns, both shorter ones and longer ones extending over the full height of the wall.<sup>25</sup>

Through his Appointment inscription, Qenamun, thus, gestures toward Useramun, remembered as the most powerful figure of two generations before. Ancient visitors familiar with Useramun's extraordinary monument located just a few dozen metres away would no doubt have noticed this gesture on Qenamun's part.

## 2.2 Inscriptional layout

Even with less than half of the inscription surviving, this appears to be carefully laid out on the wall (Fig. 2). The inscription was associated with a now largely destroyed audience scene in which the king in a kiosk sits in front of standing officials, among which, no doubt, Qenamun himself. The Appointment inscrip-

<sup>24</sup> In the case of Useramun's inscription, the courtiers speak first; in Qenamun's inscription, the king speaks first, conforming better with expectations of decorum. It has been suggested that the reverse order in Useramun's inscription could reflect a historical situation in which a royal council or 'diwan' of highest officials around the king could then have played a major role in decision-making (Dziobek 1998, 145–147; Gnirs 2013a, 167–168). Things would have changed by Qenamun's time.

<sup>25</sup> On yet another level, Qenamun's Appointment inscription includes a direct quotation from another text inscribed in Useramun's tomb, the Royal Instruction to the Vizier (also found in the tomb of Useramun's successor in office, Rekhmire): Qenamun, 22–24, *mk* [... ca. 6 quadrats (23) ... ca. 17 quadrats *mk dhr*] *pw mi wdd pw* *mk* [...] ca. 2 quadrats (24) ... ] 'See, [...] See, it belongs to [bitterness], it is a thing like gall. S[ee(?), ...]'; Royal Instruction to the Vizier, Useramun, 2–3 / Rekhmire, 2–3, *mk smn pw n t3 r-dr=f mk ir t3ti mk nn bnr is pw* *mk dhr pw mi wdd* *mk b3 pw mdri nbw n pr n nb=f* 'See, it is the mainstay of the entire land. See, as for the (office of the) vizier, see it is not a sweet thing, see, it belongs to bitterness like gall. See, it is metal that walls off the gold for the house of its lord' (the term 'quadrats' refers to the square or rectangular groups into which hieroglyphic signs are usually arranged. Here, they indicate the extension of the lacuna).



tion runs in thirteen shorter columns inscribed above these standing officials, then in twenty-three more columns extending over the full height of the wall. The inscription, thereby, appears to be tightly associated with the scene.

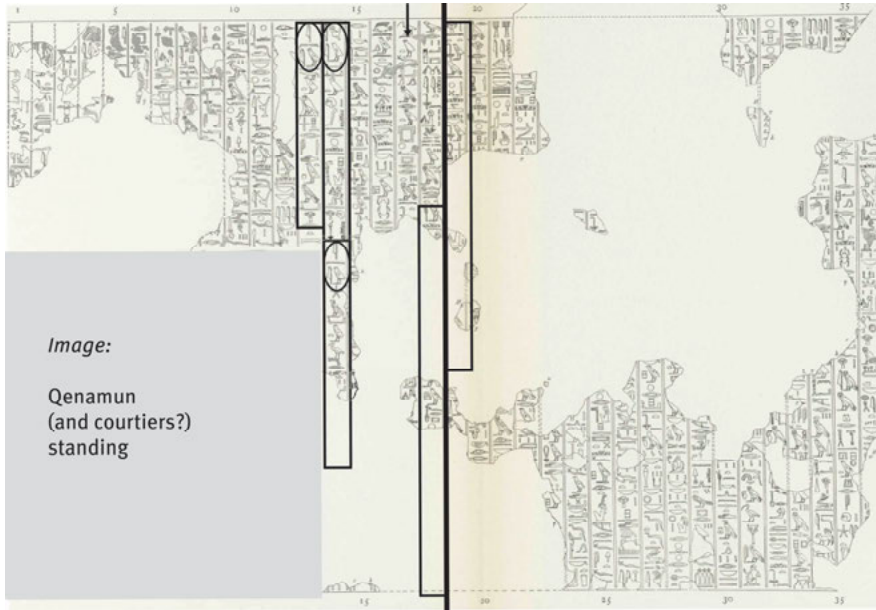


Fig. 2: Qenamun's Appointment inscription (after Davies 1930, pl. 8).

Similar to other inscriptions, the continuous text is laid out in such a way that several textual segments begin at the top of columns.<sup>26</sup> An example is between the two pairs of speeches, the sentence telling of the discovery of the perfect fit for the job, Qenamun (Fig. 2, marked by the arrow): <sup>(17)</sup>*gm.n.tw=f hr 'k m rwt hft prrt m r3 n nsw (...)* 'He (= Qenamun) was found entering through the doorway in accordance with what came forth from the king's mouth: (...)'. In their preceding speech, the courtiers eulogize the king's wisdom in decision-making with a

<sup>26</sup> For the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–2150 BCE), see Stauder-Porchet 2021c, with many examples. In the First Intermediate period and Middle Kingdom (c. 2150–1700 BCE), for example, the inscriptions of Hetepi of el-Kab (Stauder 2023a), Hor (Wadi el-Hudi 143; Galán 1994, 66), Khusebek (Manchester 3306; Baines 1987, 54), or Harwerre (IS 90; Stauder 2023b). For a series of other remarkable features of layout in a continuous text, see Nesimontu's stela (Louvre C1; Obsomer 1993).

triple rhetorical question, a literary trope:<sup>27</sup> <sup>(13)</sup>*in-ıw sšm.tw hr imı pt r skdwt m hrt*  
<sup>(14a)</sup>*in-ıw dd.tw tp-rd n rı n pth špss hr-ıb hmwt* <sup>(14b)</sup>*in-ıw sb3.tw dhwtı r mdwt ...*  
<sup>(13)</sup>Is Horus who is in the sky guided for the navigation in the above? <sup>(14a)</sup>Is an instruction of knowledge given to Ptah, the eminent one who presides over the crafts? <sup>(14b)</sup>Is Thoth taught to speak? (...). The first question is fitted precisely to column 13, the last of the shorter columns above the image of the officials standing (Fig. 2, with each question boxed; *in-ıw* marking yes/no questions in an oval). The second question occupies the same vertical extension in the upper part of column 13, the first with full height. The third question, in the lower part of column 14, then borders the pictorial scene vertically. Overall, the three rhetorical questions are set on the boundary between image and inscription in a way that is too precise to be unintentional. Similar effects of layout are found in Useramun's Appointment inscription (see Section 3.1).

As noted, the text is a *Königsnovelle*. Its most central element is the king's performative words appointing Qenamun at the beginning of his second speech: *wđ.n=i [d.tw kn-ımn m imı-r3 pr] m prw-nfr* [...<sup>ca. 9 quadrats</sup>] <sup>(19)</sup>*hr-ntt sw m nhb* 'I have decreed [that Qenamun be placed as steward] in Perunefer (...) <sup>(19)</sup>because he is in accordance with the stipulation.' The king's performative act of appointment is also the central element in the surface of the inscription: it is inscribed in the lower part of column 18 and the upper part of column 19,<sup>28</sup> thus, wrapped precisely around a virtual central axis of the thirty-six-column long inscription (see Fig. 2). Given the shorter extension of the initial columns 1 to 13, this is not the exact middle point of the text as a composition of words, but the centre of the inscription as such. Other highly elaborate Egyptian inscriptions are similarly centred on their middle columns and, at times, wrapped around a virtual central axis.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This literary trope is found in Middle Egyptian literary texts of various periods (Eloquent Peasant B1 179–181; Teaching of Amenemhat 9a–d; Teaching of a Man to his Son 3.1–3; Lamentations of Ipuwer 5.8). The same pattern is also found in an earlier Thutmoseid *Königsnovelle*, Ahmose's stela for Tetisheri 6–7 (Urk. IV 27.10–12) *sh3.tw nn hr sy-ışst sđd.tw mdt tn hr ihı pty spr r h3ty=k* 'For which-what<sup>sic</sup> do you evoke this? Why is this matter being related? What has reached your heart?' (Stauder 2021, 114–117, specifically 116), with *sy-ışst*, literally 'which-what<sup>sic</sup>', itself a Sinuheism (Stauder 2013, 260–264).

<sup>28</sup> Notice, incidentally, how the causal clause *hr-ntt sw ...* is fitted to the top of column 19.

<sup>29</sup> Examples have been noted for the late Old Kingdom, Werre (Stauder-Porchet 2021b), Weni (study in preparation by this author), and Neferkare's letter to Harkhuf (Stauder-Porchet 2020b, 206–208). In the New Kingdom, the Kurkur stela (c. 1325 BCE; Darnell and Haddad 2003) has a thirteen-column-long inscription; *pr-ı3*, 'Pharaoh', occurs only once, right on top of the central column 7.

One wonders to what degree the elements of layout just described would have been perceptible to ancient visitors. As they imply a relation between spatial layout and the words of the inscription, only the more limited group of visitors that were literate in hieroglyphs would have been concerned. Among these, ancient beholders might have had ways of engaging with inscriptions differently from ours. Perhaps, standing in front of an inscription, they would, at some point, have moved to its centre (here, cols 18–19)? Perhaps, they would have directed their eye to the interface between image and text (here, cols 13–14)? While such questions are ultimately unanswerable, the fact that such features of layout are found recurrently in elaborate inscriptions of various periods at least speaks to the idea that ancient designers deemed these important in making an inscription such as Qenamun's the sophisticated bidimensional object it is.

## 2.3 The inscription in its contexts

Qenamun's tomb (TT 93)<sup>30</sup> is part of a cluster of tombs belonging to the highest officials of the reign of Amenhotep II.<sup>31</sup> The time saw the construction of a series of increasingly monumental tombs, next to one another and gradually moving up the slope (Fig. 1, the tombs marked by the thinner black ovals): those of the vizier Amenemope (TT 29) and of the mayor of Thebes Sennefer (TT 96) earlier in the reign of Amenhotep II; those of the High Priest of Amun Mery (TT 95) and of Qenamun later in the reign of the same king. Qenamun's tomb is the most recent one in this restricted group, and the one located highest on the slope. It is also the most monumental, combining and amplifying features of the architecture of the tombs of both Sennefer and Mery, which themselves had already been amplifications of such features in earlier tombs nearby.<sup>32</sup> The interior of the tomb, moreover, had one of the finest decoration programmes of the time with a series of iconographic and technical innovations.<sup>33</sup>

On the west wall of the transverse hall, two images of the king seated in a kiosk flank the doorway to the corridor leading into the mountain. Such focal images of the king,<sup>34</sup> on which light falls through the entrance, attract the visi-

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<sup>30</sup> Davies 1930.

<sup>31</sup> Bavay 2010, 40; Gnirs 2018, 101, fig. 1 and 109–111.

<sup>32</sup> Detailed analysis by Bavay 2010, 38–43.

<sup>33</sup> On these, see Den Doncker 2019a, 180 and n. 34–36, with further references.

<sup>34</sup> Also known as '*Blickpunktbilder*' or '*images de mire*'; see, further, Hartwig 2004, 55–73, 129–130, n. 66. More generally on representations of the king in tombs of the eighteenth dynasty, see Radwan 1969.

tors' attention and direct them further to the associated compositions. On the left-hand (southern) side of the west wall (W-S), the seated king presides over the ceremonial presentation of the New Year's gifts brought to him under Qenamun's supervision. On the right-hand (northern) side (W-N), the king presides over the audience scene with which the Appointment inscription is associated (W-N-1). Further to the right (W-N-2), a scene with three standing female musicians is identified by its textual caption as an occasion of Merriment in Perunefer. The musicians are oriented towards a canopy under which two officials, Qenamun and Pehsukher, stand in front of the king-to-be, Amenhotep – still a child but already wearing the full royal regalia. The king-to-be sits on the lap of his nurse, Amenemipet, Qenamun's own mother (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3:** Qenamun, the right-hand (northern) side of the west wall (W-N) (after Davies 1930, pl. 8–9).

The right side of the west wall (W-N), thus, falls into two roughly equal halves (W-N-1; W-N-2), also marked visually by the orientation of the seated and standing figures in each. Simultaneously, the wall W-N forms a unity both visually and semantically. It is bracketed symmetrically by the two images of the king in full regalia: seated in the kiosque next to the doorway; and seated on his wet nurse's lap in the canopy at Perunefer at the other end. Officials are seen standing, among them Qenamun, in front of both images of the king and king-to-be. Associated with the royal audience on the left, the Appointment inscription is an instance of a royal 'appearance' (*ḥ't*; see Section 2.1); in the scene associated with the canopy on the right, the caption above the lute player, a song addressed to the king-to-be, celebrates the occasion as a 'king's appearance' (*ḥ't*-

*nsw*).<sup>35</sup> In the Appointment inscription, Qenamun is appointed to ‘chief steward in Perunefer’ by the reigning king, who twice references times past when he was only a ‘king-to-be’ (*inpw*, cols 8 and 19); the scene associated with the canopy is a scene of Merriment in Perunefer, presided over by the king-to-be.

The right side of the west wall (W-N), thus, expresses the dual source of Qenamun’s exalted position: the king’s appointment and his mother’s proximity to the king-to-be. While most of the overall composition consists of pictorial scenes including their captions, the Appointment inscription is a massive textual inscription, making the king’s words ever-present in Qenamun’s space of self-celebration.

## 2.4 Possible ancient experiences

Given the analytic description above, possible modes of ancient engagements with Qenamun’s Appointment inscription can be imagined. Visitors walking up the slope to Qenamun’s tomb would have passed through a dense landscape of relatively recent monumental tombs, some of which they might have known or entered on their way. The dominant location of Qenamun’s tomb and a sense of its increased overall monumentality would have primed any experience. Entering the transverse hall, the visitor would have immediately been drawn to the focal images of the seated king flanking the doorway on either side on the west wall. While light fell on these and their golden background through the entrance, the rest of the transverse hall was comparatively darker, with the ten massive pillars further reducing light. A light shaft was cut on either side of the façade just below the ceiling,<sup>36</sup> and visitors could have carried torches with them, adding a mobile source of flickering light. An innovative feature of the tomb is a protective, scented resin-made varnish covering the images and inscriptions,<sup>37</sup> probably enhancing the visual impact of the chromatic surface of the walls.

Given the conditions of lighting, the sheer extension of the walls and the ten pillars constraining movement, visitors would have been left with a sense that there was always more than the limited parts of the scenes and inscriptions that were fully visible to them at any one time in any one position. Moving along

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<sup>35</sup> Davies 1930, pl. 9, the second column counting from the left (= Urk. IV 1396.10), *nfr-w[y] hr=k m h’t-nsw htp.ti hr st-wrt{t}* ‘Ho[w] beautiful is your face in the king’s appearance when you rest on the throne!’.

<sup>36</sup> Kampp 1996, 355, fig. 230.

<sup>37</sup> Den Doncker 2019a, 181.

the wall from the right focal image of the king, they would have spotted the officials, one of them Qenamun and, associated with these, a textual inscription of monumental proportions; then, further to the right, a scene of merriment culminating in an image of the king-to-be seated on his wet nurse's lap in a canopy. Some earlier visitors would have known that the nurse was none other than Qenamun's own mother; all would have noted the symmetry between the two images of the king on the wall: a message regarding the sources of Qenamun's exalted position was, thus, conveyed visually. More fundamentally perhaps, moving through the monumental, colourfully decorated and unevenly lit space of the pillared transverse hall must have been an overwhelming experience: Qenamun's exalted position was, in this way, conveyed directly to the senses.<sup>38</sup>



**Fig. 4:** Qenamun, Appointment inscription, with the beginning of the scene of Merriment in Perunefer to the right. Note that the colours have not been restored (photograph Dimitri Laboury © Université de Liège).

<sup>38</sup> In studying the façades of funerary chapels in the Old Kingdom central necropolises, Bette 2021 very similarly addresses monumentality for its sensorial impact on a visitor.

Reading the Appointment inscription continuously would have been nearly impossible given the vertical extension of the columns, the presence of a pillar impeding movement backwards and the lighting conditions. A visitor literate in hieroglyphs could have spotted individual words or phrases. Longer segments, such as sentences, extend over a large part of a column or, worse, from the bottom of one column to the top of the next: the beholder is forced to move up and down on the unevenly lit wall and would easily lose track when moving from the bottom of one column to the top of the next. A text in columns is easily scanned when the columns are short, such as on a sheet of papyrus; when projected over the height of a wall that exceeds the frame of a human body and with limited space to walk back, columns of text are set against reading.

Visitors would have engaged with the inscription in fundamentally visual ways. They could have been struck by the format itself: the association of the inscription with a royal audience scene, its format largely in full-height columns, and the sheer horizontal and vertical extension of the inscription over the wall, making this a giant block of text. Similar formats are found in the nearby tombs of the viziers of the two preceding generations, Useramun and Rekhmire, and not elsewhere. Visitors who knew these two tombs would have seen Qenamun placing himself, through his inscription, in direct continuity to those viziers. Going further, they could then have sensed an intent on Qenamun's part to even surpass these earlier inscriptions in monumentality, just like the architecture of his tomb surpassed those of his predecessors.<sup>39</sup>

Independently of such indexical significant relations with other inscriptions, Qenamun's Appointment inscription would have been seen as a massive block of text in and of itself. The inscription, which extends vertically and horizontally beyond the visitor's bodily frame, is felt for its material presence in space. The sheer quantity of text inscribed vastly exceeds what is usually inscribed in any non-royal contexts: something extraordinary to an ancient visitor. The eye, moreover, is attracted by the individual, internally detailed and coloured signs and the overall bidimensional, shimmering surface of the inscription: on both levels, fascinated with the visual appearance of the inscrip-

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<sup>39</sup> While Useramun's Appointment inscription develops over thirty-six columns, similar to Qenamun's, only five of these extend over the full height of the wall, against twenty-three full-height columns in Qenamun's inscription. The Royal Instruction to the Vizier extends over twenty-four columns in Rekhmire's tomb, twenty-one of which are in full height (the same text has a similar extension in Useramun's tomb, where only fragments survive). The Session of the Vizier extends over thirty-six full-height columns in Rekhmire's tomb, but is associated with a seated figure of the vizier, not of the king, and accordingly located away from the focal image of the king; see Section 3.3.

tion. The inscription is intended to overwhelm the senses and invites the visitor to become immersed in it.

### 3 The Vizierial Cycle in Useramun's tomb

As just noted, Qenamun's Appointment inscription, through its format, gestures to the inscriptions in the tombs of the viziers of the two preceding generations, Useramun (TT 131) and Rekhmire (TT 100). The vizier's office, which had been discontinued during the Theban seventeenth dynasty,<sup>40</sup> was reintroduced in the early eighteenth dynasty probably during the reign of Thutmose I.<sup>41</sup> In this historical context, a powerful Theban family was able to retain the office over three generations until the very early reign of Amenhotep II with the viziers Aametju, his son Useramun and the nephew of the latter, Rekhmire.<sup>42</sup> The major part of Useramun's funerary chapel (TT 131)<sup>43</sup> was devoted to the self-celebration of the vizier, including his father, and, in direct relation to this, to the ideological presentation of the newly reintroduced office of the vizier. No less than four major textual compositions, listed below, are inscribed in the space of the transverse hall of TT 131, forming what can be termed a 'Vizierial Cycle'. The Appointment inscription is well preserved, if not entirely; Aametju's Teaching is severely damaged. The Royal Instruction to the Vizier and the Session of the Vizier are largely destroyed in Useramun's tomb, but recur in the tomb of Useramun's successor, Rekhmire, where they are almost entirely preserved. All four inscriptions are tightly associated with pictorial scenes to which they appear to be an expansion. The first three consist mainly of direct speech:

- Useramun's Appointment<sup>44</sup> — associated with an audience scene of the king seated in the kiosk with officials standing in front of him. The text tells of the need to find a successor ('a staff of old age') to the ageing vizier Aamet-

<sup>40</sup> Shirley 2013, 555–556.

<sup>41</sup> A first clearly attested vizier is Imhotep, under Thutmose I. Aametju seems to have been Imhotep's (direct?) successor under the same reign (Shirley 2010, 83; Shirley 2013, 550).

<sup>42</sup> Shirley 2010, 83–98, figs 2–4.

<sup>43</sup> On the two separated 'tombs' of Useramun, TT 131, the funerary chapel dedicated to public display, and, higher up on the hill, TT 61, the underground structure inscribed with funerary compositions, see Dziobek 1994.

<sup>44</sup> Scene and text: Dziobek 1994, 73–75, pl. 17a, 19, 42–43, 72, 81; for the text specifically, Dziobek 1998, 3–21, pl. 1; Urk. IV 1380.9–1383.20; study: Helck 1955. The shorter Ramesside text on P. Turin 1878 vo, also dealing with Useramun's appointment and attesting to the historical memory of the vizier well after the early New Kingdom, is entirely distinct (Frère 2019).



ju, and the king's appointment of Aametju's son, Useramun, to this office. The textual composition is a developed *Königsnovelle*, marked by the characteristic incipit *ḥpr swt ḥmst nsw* (...) 'Occurrence, then, of a throne session of the king (...)'.<sup>45</sup>

- Aametju's Teaching to his son Useramun<sup>46</sup> — associated with an image of the seated vizier Aametju and Useramun standing in front of him. The textual composition is framed as a 'Teaching' (*sb3yt*) in the Middle Egyptian literary tradition, an instruction spoken by a father (Aametju) to his son (Useramun).
- The Royal Instruction to the Vizier<sup>47</sup> — associated with an audience scene with the king seated in a kiosk and the newly appointed vizier, Useramun, standing in front of him. The king addresses the vizier in a text beginning with *tp-rd rḏy m ḥr n t3tī* (...) 'Principles laid upon the vizier (...) ' (the text is commonly known under the modern label 'Installation of the vizier').
- The Session of the Vizier<sup>48</sup> — associated with an audience scene of the vizier seated in his office in the presence of his standing subordinates. While the three other texts are dominated visually by the figures of the seated king (Appointment, Instruction) or of Useramun's father (Aametju's Teaching), the Session of the Vizier is entirely centred on the vizier himself and does not include any direct speech. Instead, the vizier's function is profiled in the third person. The incipit *tp-rd n ḥmst n imī-r3 nīwt t3tī* (...) *m ḥ3 n t3tī* (...) 'Principles for the sessions of the mayor and vizier (...) in the vizier's office (...) ' (the text is commonly known under the modern label 'Duties of the vizier').

### 3.1 Image–text relations: Useramun's Appointment inscription

As just noted, all four textual inscriptions are explicitly associated with pictorial scenes through their incipits. In addition, Useramun's Appointment inscription presents further elements of layout associating the inscription to the scene

<sup>45</sup> Stauder 2021, 102–104, 125–130.

<sup>46</sup> Scene and text: Dziobek 1994, 75–76, pl. 18–19, 72, 82; text specifically: Dziobek 1998, 23–54, pl. 2. For a translation of this highly fragmentary text and a commentary, see Vernus 2010, 59–62, 70–73.

<sup>47</sup> Scene and text: Dziobek 1994, 77–78, pl. 17b–c, 74, 84; text specifically, see Dziobek 1998, 55–66, pl. 3b; study: Faulkner 1955.

<sup>48</sup> Dziobek 1994, 78–85, pl. 75, 85–86; synoptic text including the better-preserved versions in later tombs, see Davies 1943, pl. 119–122; study: van den Boorn 1988.

(Fig. 5). In the courtiers' second speech, the father-son succession of the viziers is justified rhetorically, notably through a homology with the father-son succession of the kings (and, beyond, with Horus succeeding to Osiris in the mythical sphere): column 24, 'His father was (...) at the time of your father Aakheperkare (= Thutmose I) (...)'.<sup>49</sup> The succession is also argued for in general, metaphorical terms: column 28, 'It is the son who makes protection around his father; it is the flesh that makes carpentry for the bone (...)'.<sup>50</sup> The placement of both segments of speech are remarkable (see Fig. 5):

- After the shorter columns 1–23, above the audience scene, the passage quoted first is in the lower part of the first full-height column 24. It, thus, borders the audience scene to the left, being inscribed just next to the figure of the last official in that scene, precisely the vizier to be appointed, Useramun (Fig. 6d).
- Before the shorter columns 29–36, which occupy only the lower part of the wall, the second quoted passage is fitted precisely to the top of column 28. It, thus, borders the image of the temple of Amun, to the right, the target of a procession of the newly appointed vizier along with high officials.

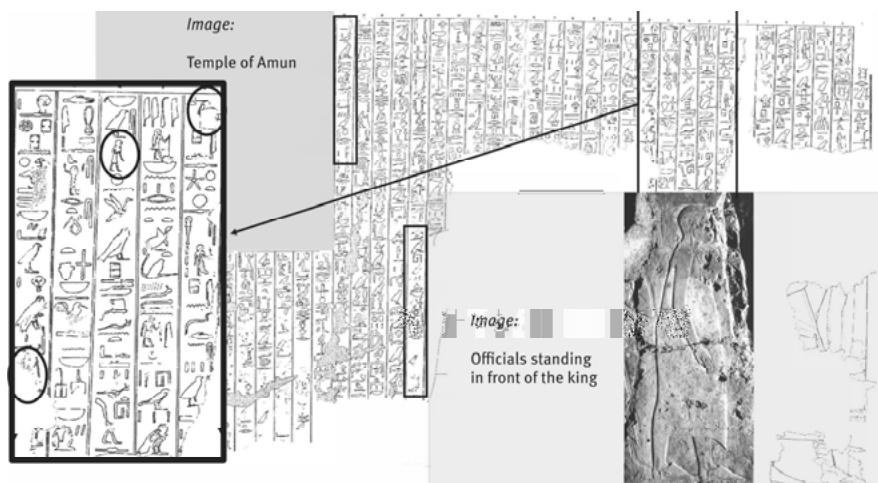



Fig. 5: Useramun's Appointment inscription (after Dziobek 1994, pl. 81 and pl. 43).

<sup>49</sup> In Egyptian: *wn it=f m h3w it=k '3-hpr-k3-r'* (...). For the mythical precedent: col. 23, *htp=k iw't st ist it=k pw hms.n=k hr nst=f* 'You (= Thutmose III) occupy the inheritance of Isis's son (= Horus); your father is he on whose throne you have sat down'.

<sup>50</sup> In Egyptian: *in s3 mkk h3 it=f in h'w whr n ks* (...).

Among the shorter columns above the audience scene (1–23), columns 8–12 describe the grounds for finding a successor to the ageing vizier Aametju in imaged terms: ‘Old age (*ỉꜣwt*) counts its hour (...) A little stoop (*ksw*) has alighted on his back (= Aametju’s) (...) It is beneficial <for> your Dual Land that the attention be directed to a staff of old age (*mdw ỉꜣwt*)’. The last expression, *mdw ỉꜣwt*, is an overt allusion to the Teaching of Ptahhotep, the culturally most central expression of didactic poetry, dating to half a millennium earlier in the early Middle Kingdom (c. 2000–1900 BCE). Through the allusion, the succession of the viziers is inserted into an order sanctioned by tradition and the principle of the Maat.<sup>51</sup> Going further, *ỉꜣwt* ‘old age’ plays with *ỉꜣwt* ‘office, function’, in reference to the very object of the inscription, an appointment to office. The two occurrences of *ỉꜣwt* ‘old age’ are at the beginning of column 8 and the end of column 12, marking a spot of text that sits precisely above the figure of the ageing vizier (Fig. 5). The word *ksw* ‘stoop’ is in the centre of that spot of text (col. 10; see also Fig. 6b). The two instances of *ỉꜣwt* have the semantic classifier or determinative . *Ksw* has a similar classifier/determinative, without the staff of authority. All three echo the stoop of Aametju in the scene just underneath (Fig. 5 and 6h).

The designer would have been helped in fitting salient verbal contents to specific places in relation to the associated pictorial scene by the modularity of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. Signs consist of phonograms (representing sound only), logograms (representing a word or a root, hence, sound and meaning simultaneously), and semantic classifiers or determinatives (representing [a class of] meaning only). This allows for most words both considerable compressions and expansions in spellings relative to the more common spellings.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the textual genre of the *Königsnovelle* is highly flexible; sections can be expanded or contracted, added or suppressed. Given such general possibilities, Useramun’s Appointment inscription must have been composed with a view to its layout on the wall. In part, at least, this probably implies adjustments that would have been carried out directly on the spot, physically next to the inscription.

<sup>51</sup> Blumenthal 1987; Shirley 2005, 64–69.

<sup>52</sup> An example is Sarenput I’s autobiographical text, inscribed in two versions in his tomb at Qubbet el-Hawa (c. 1950 BCE), one around the doorway on the façade, another on a wall inside the funerary chapel. Both versions are fitted to the particular spaces of their inscriptions, resulting in a number of variant spellings (Favry 2003).



**Figs 6a–h:** Useramun's Appointment: impressions of a once magnificent inscription (courtesy Julianna Paksi, Université de Liège): (a) beginning of the inscription (cols 1–2), touching the royal kiosk on the right; (b) col. 10, *ksw* 'stoop'; (c) cols 22–26; (d) col. 24, lower part, with Useramun's back; (e) col. 27, upper part, *mdw i3wt* 'staff of old age'; (f) cols 15–17, top; (g) col. 15, close-up; (h) the standing Aametju.

One is also led to ask is to what extent such subtle text-image arrangements could have been perceived by ancient visitors. The standing figures of the officials in the scene (Figs 5, 6d, 6h) would have been key for early visitors, the primary audience of the decorative programme of the funerary chapel. These would have formed a small group of people, some direct participants in or witnesses to the no doubt highly public event of Useramun's Appointment; others, having been told about it or party to similar occasions. The figures of the standing officials have roughly human size, making these easy targets of identification: visitors could have projected themselves into the scene to various degrees. Having noticed the stooped back of the ageing vizier, a visitor could then have looked up to the columns of text and spotted some of the hieroglyphic signs with a similar stoop. A visitor literate in hieroglyphs could have been enticed further to read the part of the inscription above the figure of Aametju, almost as

if this were, within the continuous text, a caption to that figure. Such a literate visitor could have been pleased with the various verbal and graphic plays on the terms *ỉ3wt* ‘old age’ and ‘office’, and the associated Ptahhotepian background. Rather than reading the inscription as a continuous text (an unlikely eventuality as already noted in the case of Qenamun’s Appointment inscription), a literate visitor could, thus, have engaged with specific spots in the inscription, attention being directed to those by the image of the ageing vizier beneath.

### 3.2 The inscriptions in space I: The right-hand side (northern half) of the transverse hall

A visitor entering the transverse hall of Useramun’s tomb (Fig. 8) would have been drawn to the focal image of the king in the kiosk on the wall facing them (the west wall) to the right of the doorway (W-N-1). The audience scene and the associated Royal Instruction to the Vizier extend to the right over the full height of the wall. The columns of text are inscribed in retrograde writing (Fig. 7). This requires a brief note of explanation.

Animate signs face the beginning of the text in regular hieroglyphic writing (animate signs, thus, face right in a text that reads from right to left). More to the point, they face the reader, as if entering into a conversation with him.<sup>53</sup> This relation is reversed in retrograde writing: animate signs show their back to the reader rather than facing him. Retrograde writing is found mostly in texts written in columns. It is not uncommon in ritual and funerary texts inscribed in linear hieroglyphs (hieroglyphs that are simplified in form but without the distinct abbreviations and ligatures of hieratic), in some cases, at least, pointing to temple manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> Retrograde writing is otherwise motivated by an association with pictorial scenes, often with a kinetic dimension.<sup>55</sup> Signs, for instance, in netherworld books inscribed in royal tombs of the New Kingdom can be oriented like the figures in the sun bark, while the text itself unfolds in the direction in which the sun bark progresses;

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<sup>53</sup> This is a general feature of hieroglyphic writing, both in ancient Egypt and in the Maya world, see Houston and Stauder 2020, 22–23.

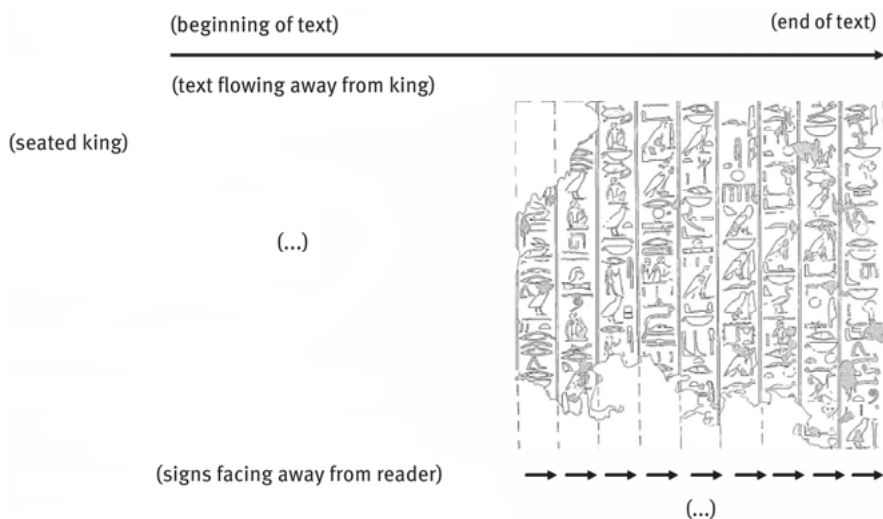
<sup>54</sup> Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Retrograde writing, for instance, on some copies of a text known as the ‘King as Sun-priest’, thus, ‘allows important sections of the text, especially the names of king and god, to be positioned next to the relevant images’ (Simpson 2016, 337).

the signs, thereby, show their backs to where the text begins.<sup>56</sup> The autobiography of Ahmes son of Abana (Elkab 5), a text inscribed in the same decades as Useramun, contains signs which are oriented to the right similar to the standing figure of Ahmes, while the text begins next to the figure of Ahmes. Through the retrograde writing, the text is seen as emanating from Ahmes' figure speaking the text.<sup>57</sup>

A very similar situation is seen in the Royal Instruction to the Vizier in Useramun's tomb. The signs are oriented in the same way as the king seated in the kiosk, facing right. Through its retrograde arrangement, the textual inscription is seen as a materialisation of the king's speech, as if emanating from the king in the kiosk.

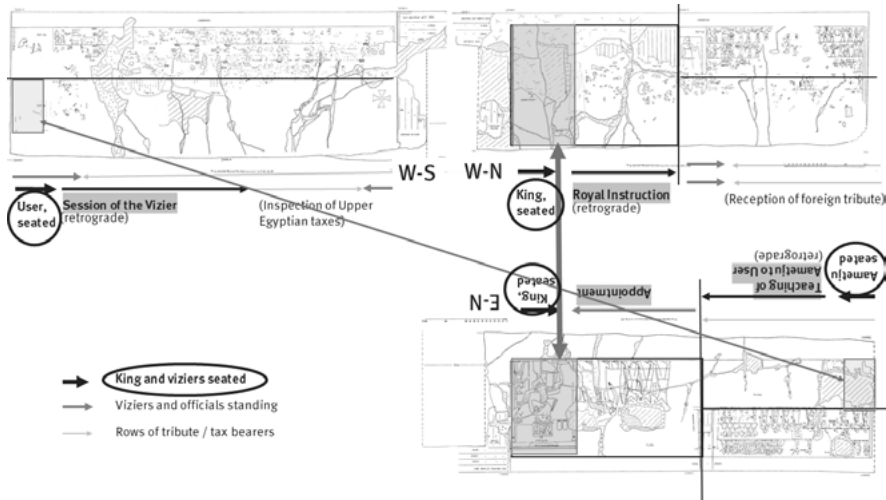
Turning to the opposite wall, the one to the visitor's back when entering (the east wall), stands another image of the king in the kiosk (E-N-1). An audience scene and the Appointment inscription, also over the full height of the wall, are associated with this secondary focal image. The writing is not retrograde here, nor could it be: the king speaks, but so do the courtiers addressing him; the inscription, moreover, is set in a narrative frame.



**Fig. 7:** Retrograde writing: Useramun, Royal Instruction to the Vizier, a larger preserved section in the upper part of columns 13–21 (after Dziobek 1998, pl. 3b).

<sup>56</sup> See further, Mauric-Barberio 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Simpson 2016, 344–345.



**Fig. 8:** The transverse hall of Useramun's lower tomb, TT 131 (after Dziobek 1994, pl. 72 + 74 + 75).

Moving further to the right along those two walls, a visitor would have seen further scenes with captions or extended inscriptions. On the rear wall (E-N-2), the newly appointed vizier is seen being instructed by his father, Aametju, on the lower register (E-N-2-low); the Teaching is inscribed in retrograde writing as if emanating from Aametju. On the upper register, the newly appointed vizier is seen leading a procession to the temple of Amun (E-N-2-high). On the opposite wall (W-N-2), the standing vizier is seen twice, in two similar registers, presiding over three rows of tribute bearers in each register (W-N-2-high and W-N-2-low).

Each wall is integrated visually into a whole. On the east wall, the image of the temple of Amun occupies a central position, binding together the three parts: the Appointment scene (E-N-1), the instruction by the old vizier (E-N-2-low) and the procession of the new vizier to the temple of Amun (E-N-2-high). On the west wall, the tribute bearers all move to the left, facing the two standing figures of the vizier (W-N-2 high and low); these are oriented to the right, in the same way as the seated figure of the king and the Instruction text emanating from it (W-N-1). The vizier, in receiving the tributes, is, thus, seen discharging the office he has been royally instructed into in the text. Facing one another, the two walls are symmetrical in their arrangement:

- A secondary focal image of the king (E-N-1, on the rear wall, flanking the entrance that leads into the tomb) faces the primary focal image of the king (W-N-1, on the front wall, flanking the doorway that leads further into the mountain).

- Both are associated with an image-text composition that extends over the full height of the wall (W-N-1, E-N-1).
- The other half of each wall is divided into two superposed registers (W-N-2-high and low; similarly, E-N-2-high and low).

This overall parallelism between the two walls turns the northern half of the transverse hall into a space that envelops the visitor.

### 3.3 The inscriptions in space II: The transverse hall as a whole

The transverse hall of Useramun's tomb displays one further image-text composition that has something to do directly with the function of the vizier: a scene of the vizier seated in his office before his subordinates, associated with the text 'Principles for the Session of the Vizier', is on the left (southern) side of the west wall (W-S-2-low). The image-text composition is associated with a scene in which taxes from Upper Egypt are brought to the vizier for inspection (W-S-1-low; W-S-high over the whole length). The text of the Session of the Vizier itself is inscribed in retrograde writing: although not spoken by the vizier, it is presented visually as emanating from him, as if a materialisation of his agency.

On one level, there is a symmetry with the right (northern) side of the west wall (W-N): a seated figure (the king in W-N, the vizier in W-S) is associated with a textual inscription in retrograde writing flowing toward a series of tribute or tax bearers. But this symmetry is also broken on two levels. Unlike the seated king and the associated Royal Instruction to the Vizier, the seated vizier and the associated Session of the Vizier occupy only the lower half of the wall. Rather than next to the doorway, similar to the focal image of the king, the seated vizier and the associated inscription are placed at the very end of the wall, at the position farthest away from the doorway. While the Royal Instruction to the Vizier is associated with the primary focal image in the transverse hall, the Session of the Vizier is relegated to a relatively more discrete position.

The vizier stands before a seated figure of authority in the Instruction, the Appointment and the Teaching: the vizier's king, the king again, and the vizier's father, respectively. The vizier is seated, himself heading the scene, only in the Session of the Vizier. This is compensated by spatial separation: the Session is placed on a wall (W-S) on which there is no figure of the king and outside the royal northern space (W-N + E+N) described above. The Session is, in fact, placed at the greatest distance possible from any figure of the king, on the outermost position of that wall (W-S-2-low).



A four-part hierarchy is, thus, expressed through placement and size: Instruction > Appointment > (Father's) Teaching > Session:

- The royal scenes and associated inscriptions (the Instruction and the Appointment) are associated with the primary and secondary focal images, flanking the doorway to the corridor and the entrance, respectively, and occupy the full height of the wall.
- The non-royal scenes and associated inscriptions (the Teaching and the Session) are relegated to the corners of the wall, in the lower halves – with an internal difference: the Teaching is on a royal wall, the Session on a wall with no king.
- While the royal scenes face one another along the main axis of the tomb, the non-royal scenes are diagonally opposed across the transverse hall.

Visitors moving through the transverse hall would have experienced these hierarchies immediately in space, without the analytic mediation above. They would have been struck by the presence of many figures of authority and the remarkable fact that the vizier is visually profiled as one among these, if at the relatively lowest ranking. They would have been struck further by the number of textual inscriptions associated with each of these figures of authority and the sheer amount of continuous text inscribed in the transverse hall. On these combined accounts, the textual inscriptions would have had a strong impact – independently of any attempt at reading their verbal contents.

### 3.4 Royal inscriptional formats

In addition to their sheer extension and presence in space, the inscriptions present distinctive formats:

- They are associated with audience scenes showing a seated king with officials standing in front of him (Instruction; Appointment) or, in a derived form, with scenes headed by a seated vizier, father or son (Teaching; Session).
- The columns of the textual inscriptions can extend over the full height of the wall (Instruction; Appointment, in part).
- The inscription can be in retrograde writing, as if emanating from the seated figure, materialising his speech and/or agency (Instruction; Teaching; Session).

These combined features are not found elsewhere in non-royal inscriptions of the time. The one that comes closest is perhaps Ahmes son of Abana's autobiog-

raphy, mentioned above. The text is inscribed in retrograde writing, in forty columns over the full height of the wall, and extending horizontally over forty such columns. However, it is not associated with a throne session, and no figure of the king is seen; and it is not a *Königsnovelle*, nor are there any elements of royal speech.<sup>58</sup>

The combined features listed above are found, on the other hand, in Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Deir el-Bahari, located just a few hundred metres to the north of Useramun's tomb. A series of image-text compositions are inscribed on the middle portico of this temple: the Queen's Divine Birth, the Queen's Youth, the Queen's Proclamation and the Punt Expedition. These form a royal cycle, similar to the way in which the image-text compositions in Useramun form a vizierial cycle. The inscription of year 9 in the southern section of the middle portico shows an audience of the queen seated in front of her standing officials.<sup>59</sup> The queen's speech is inscribed in retrograde writing in columns extending over the whole height of the scene. The crowning inscription in the northern section of the same portico is another throne session in which the queen's father, the King Thutmosis I, speaks to present his daughter, the future queen, to the officials.<sup>60</sup> The textual inscription unfolds in full-height columns, in retrograde writing, as if emanating from the king.

The two spatially separate parts of Useramun's funerary complex present a series of royally inspired features. The funerary chapel at the foot of the hill of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna (TT 131) has a buttressed façade crowned by a pyramid, while the tomb proper, higher up on the hill (TT 61), has restricted, royal funerary compositions inscribed in the burial chamber.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the separation into two parts could itself be seen as emulating the royal model of a separation between the funerary temple and the tomb. The Royal Instruction to the Vizier inside the funerary chapel (TT 131) consists entirely of royal speech addressed to the vizier. The genre of the Appointment inscription

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<sup>58</sup> The inscription was made by Pahery, Ahmes's grandson, who could have been close or even party to the inner circle of Hatshepsut considering that his father, also named Pahery, was the preceptor of Wadjmes, a son of Thutmosis I (I thank Dimitri Laboury for discussion on this point.) The inscription, furthermore, includes *hr*-marked forms and constructions used narratively, which are a token of the somewhat artificial language cultivated in royal inscriptions of the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III, and in other high-flown compositions of the time such as the vizier Rekhmire's autobiography (Vernus 1990, 62, n. 9 and 64, n. 28; Stauder 2013, 239–240).

<sup>59</sup> Naville 1898, pl. 85–86.

<sup>60</sup> Naville 1898, pl. 60–63a.

<sup>61</sup> Dziobek 1998, 150 and 152–155, respectively.

itself is royally inspired: at the time of its composition, this is the first and only instance of a *Königsnovelle* focused on a non-royal participant and inscribed in a non-royal space.



**Fig. 9:** A royal format: left, Hatshepsut's year nine inscription (after Naville 1898, pl. 85–86); right, the Royal Instruction to the Vizier, here in the better-preserved tomb of Rekmire (after Davies 1943, pl. 13–15).

The king's presence is, thus, seen in the transverse hall of Useramun's funerary chapel on at least four levels simultaneously:

- through the primary and secondary focal images;
- through the inscription of royal speech, materialised by retrograde writing (the Instruction);
- through the inscription of a *Königsnovelle* (the Appointment), a quintessentially royal genre;
- and through inscriptional formats (the Instruction and the Appointment), pointing to the royal funerary temple at Deir el-Bahari.

Visitors entering Useramun's funerary chapel would already have noticed royal features on the outside. They would then, in the transverse hall, have been struck by the sheer quantity of inscribed text, by the material presence of the inscriptions and further by their format, different from those in other non-royal tombs. Some early visitors from the inner circle, such as Useramun himself, would have been familiar with the inscriptions at Deir el-Bahari, others not; the royal format of the inscriptions would have been clear to all. The textual inscriptions on the accounts discussed above are, thus, themselves images of the king's presence in the tomb, for all to be seen and felt.

## 4 Rekhmire: A further monumentalizing of the textual inscriptions

Rekhmire had two vizierial compositions inscribed in his tomb (TT 100), located just a few dozen metres to the south of his uncle Useramun's:<sup>62</sup> the Royal Instruction to the Vizier<sup>63</sup> and the Session of the Vizier.<sup>64</sup> The Session of the Vizier is found again in the nearby tomb of Amenemope (TT 29), Rekhmire's successor and one of the 'new men' of the reign of Amenhotep II. The tomb is unfinished, so that it remains open whether the Royal Instruction to the Vizier was intended to be inscribed there as well or not.<sup>65</sup> The Royal Instruction to the Vizier is found one more time in the tomb of Amenemope's successor Hepu (TT 66; reign of Thutmose IV),<sup>66</sup> while the Session of the Vizier recurs roughly a century later in the tomb of Paser (TT 106; reign of Ramses II) as part of an inscriptional programme that more generally demonstrates an antiquarian interest by the tomb owner.<sup>67</sup> Rekhmire places himself in the continuity of his uncle, Useramun, by inscribing these two compositions; similarly, later viziers would place themselves in this illustrious lineage. The Appointment inscription and Aametju's Teaching are not taken over as both reflect the specific nature and context of the father-son succession: Aametju-Useramun.

The transmission does not concern the texts in isolation, but the integrated image-text compositions over the space of a wall; thus, from Useramun to Rekhmire:<sup>68</sup>

- Useramun, W-N → Rekhmire, W-S: the king in the kiosk with the Royal Instruction to the Vizier with the associated scene of the vizier receiving foreign tribute on behalf of the king;

<sup>62</sup> Primary publication of the tomb and its inscriptions, see Davies 1943.

<sup>63</sup> Scene and text: Davies 1943, 15–17, pl. 13–16. Synoptic text (Useramun, Rekhmire, Hepu) by Davies 1943, pl. 116–118; also Urk. IV 1085–1093 (Rekhmire, with Useramun and Hepu presented as variants). Study: Faulkner 1955.

<sup>64</sup> Scene and text: Davies 1943, 30–36, pl. 24–28. Synoptic text (Useramun, Rekhmire, Amenemope) by Davies 1943, pl. 119–122. Study: van den Boorn 1988.

<sup>65</sup> The publication of the tomb and its inscriptions is in preparation by the Mission Archéologique de la Nécropole Thébaine (Université de Liège and Université libre de Bruxelles) under the direction of Laurent Bavay (archaeology) and Dimitri Laboury (decoration programme). For the time being, see the synoptic text in Davies 1943, pl. 119–122.

<sup>66</sup> See the synoptic text in Davies 1943, pl. 116–118.

<sup>67</sup> Dimitri Laboury (personal communication).

<sup>68</sup> Den Doncker 2017, 349–351; Den Doncker 2019b, 261–266.

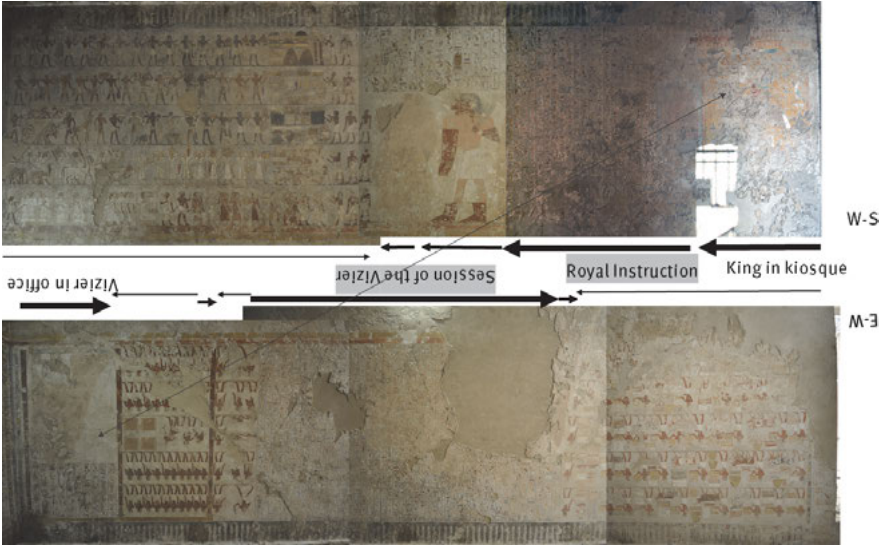
- and Useramun, W-S → Rekhmire, E-S: the vizier in his office with the Session of the Vizier with the associated scene of the inspection of Upper Egyptian taxes.

The placement of the scenes is shifted from one wall to the next by a principle of minimal dissimilation. The Royal Instruction to the Vizier, being associated with a focal image of the king in the kiosk, is moved from the right to the left of the doorway on the west wall (W-N → W-S). The Session of the Vizier is accordingly moved to the opposite east wall (W-S → E-S); the figure of the seated vizier remains at the end of the wall, away from the passage.

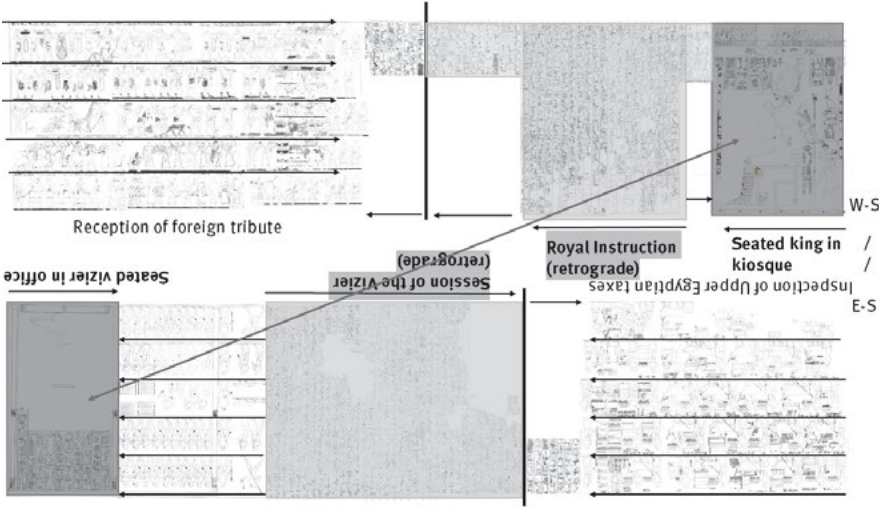
#### **4.1 Extending all vizierial compositions over the full height of the wall**

One major innovation in Rekhmire's transverse hall relative to Useramun's is that the vizierial image-text compositions are all extended over the full height of the wall in a single register (Figs 9–10). The standing figure of the vizier in the Reception of Foreign Tribute now occupies the whole space below the extended textual caption, contrasting with Useramun's realisation with two superposed, smaller standing figures of the vizier. Even more spectacularly, the seated vizier in his office and the associated inscription of the Session of the Vizier now occupy the whole height of the wall, against Useramun's realisation in the lower half of the wall.

The designer of Rekhmire's tomb pushed the visual integration of the walls even further than in Useramun's tomb by a series of changes. After the text of the Royal Instruction to the Vizier, he added figures of officials, including the vizier, moving out of the audience (W-S-1, left end). These seem to move to a second figure of the same vizier, the one that presides over the Reception of the Foreign Tribute (W-S-2, right end). The dynamic directionalities, already strong in Useramun's realisation, are, thus, pushed even further: flanking the doorway, the king is oriented to the left; so is the flow of his speech in retrograde writing (the Royal Instruction to the Vizier); so are the figures exiting the audience, to the left of the text, as if they were, quite literally, exiting the massive surface of text in front of him (the Instruction); and so is the second standing figure of the vizier, to which all tributes move in the opposite direction.



**Fig. 10:** Rekhmire, the left-hand (southern) part of the transverse hall (photograph Dimitri Laboury © Université de Liège).



**Fig. 11:** Rekhmire, the left-hand (southern) part of the transverse hall (after Davies 1943, pl. 13–32).

Five rows of bearers of produce from Upper Egypt are shown on the opposite wall (E-S) (against two times three rows in Useramun, where the equivalent part of the wall W-S was split over two registers), while five rows of subordinates stand before the seated vizier. The rows of marching produce bearers and standing subordinates, all converging towards the seated vizier, are, thus, aligned horizontally, on either side of, and, therefore, as if traversing, the full-height block of textual inscription of the Session of the Vizier. This massive surface of textual inscription, in retrograde writing, is oriented in the opposite direction, similar to the dominant figure of the vizier from which it is seen to emanate. Linguistically, the text consists mainly of focusing constructions expressing that the vizier is the source who sends out people and information or the goal to which these are sent back ('It is he who (...)'; 'It is to him that (...)'). This dynamic centrality of the figure of the vizier, reflected visually by the two opposite directionalities that integrate the whole wall, would have been immediately understood by any visitor, even without reading any part of the textual inscription.

## 4.2 A vizierial space in the southern half of the transverse hall

The southern part of the transverse hall forms a dynamic space defined by extensive parallelism between the two walls, W-S, E-S. Concentrating on the main elements only:

- W-S shows the seated king in the kiosk and, emanating from him, the inscription of the Royal Instruction to the Vizier in retrograde writing; then five rows of bearers of foreign tribute marching in the opposite direction.
- E-S shows the seated vizier in his office and, emanating from him, the inscription of Session of the Vizier in retrograde writing; then five rows of bearers of Upper Egyptian taxes marching in the opposite direction.

This parallelism between the wall dominated by the king (W-S) and that dominated by the vizier (E-S) creates a space in which the visitor is made to experience how the vizier's agency stands in prolongation to that of the king. The northern space (to the right when entering the tomb) in Useramun's transverse hall consisted of two walls both dominated by the king (W-N, with the Instruction; E-N, with the Appointment). The southern space, to the left, when entering Rekhmire's tomb, shows even more extensive parallelism, here, between the king and the vizier himself. The rules of decorum are teased to the maximum, yet preserved by the spatial separation: while the king is a focal image flanking the doorway, the seated vizier is placed on the other end of his wall, at a maximal distance from the king, and not as a secondary focal image (see Fig. 11).

The vizierial programme in Rekhmire's tomb demonstrates a deliberate intent at increasing monumentality relative to Useramun's tomb.<sup>69</sup> This is not due to the increased size of the transverse hall – which has roughly the same ground plan in both tombs – but the combined effect of a series of changes in Rekhmire's tomb, discussed above: the full height of all scenes and textual inscriptions on both walls; the even stronger directionalities extending over the entirety of both walls; and the higher parallelism between the walls.

## 5 Conclusion

The very long texts inscribed in the tombs of Useramun, Rekhmire and Qenamun are rhetorically complex configurations of words, deeply embedded in the written and literary culture of their time. As such, they are legitimate and fascinating objects of philological study. But this is not how the inscriptions on the walls of the funerary chapels were primarily meant to be engaged with in ancient times, notwithstanding the possibility that the texts could have been performed verbally on occasions.

The walls on which the extended texts are inscribed are thoroughly integrated, notably through directionalities spanning across the scenes and textual inscriptions, with the often retrograde orientation of writing playing a major role. Symmetries between opposite walls bring about a sense of an enveloping space. The dynamic integration on the walls and the parallelism between these in Rekhmire's tomb are enhanced further relative to Useramun's model, bringing about an even greater sense of monumentality, without the space being any larger.

The inscriptions were intended to be seen to point to other inscriptions through their format: the royal texts in Useramun's tomb (the Royal Instruction to the Vizier and the Appointment) to inscriptions in Queen Hatshepsut's funerary temple nearby; the texts in Rekhmire and Qenamun's tombs to Useramun as a model to be emulated. The sheer quantity of inscribed text – higher than in any other comparable context of the time – would itself have made no small impression on any visitor, and, thus, been a central part

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<sup>69</sup> A similar intent is seen in the same tomb in the long corridor, with its ascending ceiling. In relation to Rekhmire surpassing his predecessor Useramun, Alexis Den Doncker speaks of a 'grandeur mannerism' (Den Doncker 2017, 346–349; Den Doncker 2019b, 261–266).



of the message. The inscriptions, often inscribed in retrograde writing, would have been seen as giant surfaces of words emanating from the dominant figure (the king or the vizier) – as materialisations of their speech and/or agency. The royal presence could no doubt be strongly felt in the inscribed spaces.

The inscribed columns of text, in many cases extending over the full height of the wall, exceed the bodily frame of the visitor both vertically and horizontally. The beholder, moreover, is fascinated by the individual, colourful and internally detailed signs (Fig. 12) and drawn into the shimmering tapestry of the overall, bidimensional surfaces of the inscriptions (Fig. 13) – on both accounts, attracted away from the signs as mere surrogates for linguistic meaning. More than through a discursive verbal argument, the inscriptions in the broader decorated spaces speak to the senses, providing an overwhelming expression of the high officials' exalted position. Monumentality, here, is not just a matter of size but an embodied, immersive experience.



**Fig. 12:** The Session of the Vizier, close up (photograph Dimitri Laboury © Université de Liège).



**Fig. 13:** The Session of the Vizier (photograph Dimitri Laboury © Université de Liège).

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