



THUTMOSE II'S TOMB DISCOVERED IN EGYPT

By Doug Petrovich

A joint Egyptian-British archaeological mission between the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the New Kingdom Research Foundation has uncovered the tomb of the Egyptian king Thutmose II, the last missing royal tomb of Dynasty 18. On 18 February 2025, Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced the discovery of his tomb with a press release for the public. The tomb is located in Cemetery C4, within Wadi C and below a Theban mountain, a site that lies approximately 1.5 miles (2.4 km) west of the Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt. The Egyptologists discovered the tomb in a necropolis primarily consisting of the tombs of royal Egyptian women, but once they examined the tomb's burial chamber, they noticed decorations on the walls that actually are indicative of a king.

Considering the vast number of royal Egyptian tombs that have been identified to date, the discovery of a previously unknown royal tomb is an extremely rare occurrence. The last time such a tomb was found is 1922, when the British archaeologist Howard Carter unearthed the tomb of a weak pharaoh from near the end of Dynasty 18 named Tut-ankh-amun,

Left: Location of the tomb of Thutmose II in Cemetery C4, within Wadi C and below a Theban mountain in Upper Egypt. Right: A view of the tomb's entrance from inside. Credit: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

affectionately known as King Tut. Yet the discovery of Thutmose II's tomb in 2022 was made by another British archaeologist, Piers Litherland, an honorary research associate in the Department of Archaeology at Cambridge University, among the western wadis of the Theban necropolis near both the Valley of the Kings and the city of Luxor.



A look inside the burial chamber of Thutmose II's tomb soon after its discovery, with all of the objects in situ (i.e., in their original positions, as first found). Credit: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

In Litherland's words, "Part of the ceiling was still intact: a blue-painted ceiling with yellow stars on it. And blue-painted ceilings with yellow stars are only found in kings' tombs. The emotion of getting into these things is just one of extraordinary bewilderment, because when you come across something you're not expecting to find, it is emotionally extremely turbulent, really. And when I came out, my wife was waiting outside, and the only thing I could do was burst into tears." Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Badie, Head of the Egyptian Antiquities Sector at the Supreme Council of Antiquities and codirector of the mission from the Egyptian side, reported that the tomb was found in a poor state of preservation due to ancient flash flooding that occurred shortly after the king's burial. The raging water inundated the tomb, necessitating careful retrieval and restoration of fallen plaster fragments by modern archaeologists.

The entrance to the tomb and its main corridor were identified first, and subsequent excavation within the royal burial chamber revealed conclusive evidence linking the tomb to Thutmose II. The archaeologists found fragments of alabaster pottery that were inscribed with his name as the "deceased king," along with references to Hatshepsut, his queen and half sister. She went on to be a pharaoh in her own right with the unexpected death of Thutmose II and the elevation of the boy-king, Thutmose III, onto the throne. The excavators also found funerary furniture belonging to Thutmose II—which is a first, as no such items belonging to this king are housed in any museum—along with other artifacts.

The tomb of Thutmose II actually did not contain his body, which currently is encased in glass and on display at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo. The king's mummified body was discovered in 1881 among a cache of royal mummies that were found at Deir el-Bahri, the location of the mortuary temples of Hatshepsut and—next to hers—Mentuhotep II of Dynasty 11. The sarcophagus of Thutmose II never was found, neither previously nor in the king's newly discovered tomb, prompting Litherland to believe that his burial



An inscribed alabaster ring from the tomb of Thutmose II. The highlighted cartouches contain the king's throne name: Aa-kheper-en-Re (The-great-one-is-the-manifestation-of-Re). Credit: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.



A wooden implement from the tomb of Thutmose II. The vertical inscription on the wood, which is read from top to bottom, ascribes praiseworthy qualities to the king, whose throne name is enclosed in a cartouche in the center. The inscription is translated, "The good god, the lord of the two lands, Aa-kheper-en-Re (The-great-one-is-the-manifestation-of-Re), given life, the eternal one." Credit: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.



Amduat fragment from the tomb of Thutmose II. The amduat is the ancient Egyptian concept of the underworld and how its order is maintained, which is summarized in the story of how Re, one of Egypt's solar deities, makes a nightly journey through the underworld, from the time that the sun sets in the west at night until it rises in the east in the morning. Credit: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

goods—and possibly the sarcophagus—were moved to a second, yet-undiscovered tomb. Litherland proposed that a nearby 75-foot mound of rubble might conceal this second tomb, potentially still containing Thutmose II's sarcophagus. Excavations are ongoing as of early 2025, but no confirmed discovery of a second tomb or a sarcophagus has been reported.

Thutmose II's Reign over Egypt during Dynasty 18

Thutmose II (ca. 1516–1504 BC) was the son of Thutmose I by a lesser queen, Mutnofret, and his reign was neither long nor illustrious. One reason for asserting its brevity comes from the writings of Ineni, the official who supervised the construction of some splendid buildings and structures at Karnak—including two obelisks, one of which still stands today—and quarried the tomb of Thutmose I. Ineni's career spanned from the reign of Thutmose I, whose mummy and possessions he kept out of the reach of robbers, to the reign of Hatshepsut. A second reason for asserting a short reign for Thutmose II is that his highest preserved regnal year is Year 9. A third reason for asserting a short reign is his virtual lack of military involvement. His only known military excursion into Asia was a successful punitive expedition into the Negev against the Shasu, his neighbors on the eastern frontier who had attacked the Egyptian lowlands, and the only known campaign into Nubia during his reign was led by some of his officials, probably in Year 4.

Thutmose II never followed up his father's conquests by consolidating the territory that was gained in the Levant, as

Mitanni roamed freely in Syria and Mesopotamia. Mitanni was a Hurrian civilization that was centered in the Khabur triangle and whose empire possessed the remains of Hammurabi's earlier domain. Due to Thutmose II's failure to act, Aleppo became a principality that Mitanni ruled directly, and Niy, through its subservience to Alalakh, was subjugated indirectly under Mitanni's control. Alalakh, ruled by a survivor of the civil war in Aleppo named Idrimi, became a tribute-paying vassal of Mitanni that was allowed to sign independent treaties with cities such as Ugarit and to raid Hittite towns without retribution. This expansion of Mitanni's sphere of influence allowed the northern Levant to be a Mitanni-controlled buffer zone between the Hurrians and the Egyptians, setting

the table for future conflict between the two superpowers when Thutmose III prepared to conquer the Levant.

The Thutmosid succession entered an extraordinary phase after Thutmose II died. His son, Thutmose III (ca. 1504–1450 BC), officially received the throne as a child when his father died, which

probably occurred suddenly and unexpectedly. Since Thutmose III was so young at the time, Hatshepsut (ca. 1504/2–1483 BC), his aunt and stepmother, led the nation on his behalf. Sometime between Year 2 and Year 7 of his rule, she became coregent and served as Egypt's de facto ruler, which continued until she abdicated the throne in Year 22 of both regents. The textual and iconographic information on the monuments of contemporary officials reveals that Hatshepsut gradually transformed herself from queen to king. The evidence indicates that she initially dated her reign from the year of her coronation (1502 BC), but between her second and seventh year in this role, she backdated her reign to coincide with her young coregent's regnal years, a legitimizing action that redefined the counting of her regnal years for the balance of her reign.

Thutmose II's Significance to Biblical History

Moses was born in 1526 BC, which equates to fairly early in Dynasty 18. The dynasty began with the native Egyptian conquest of Lower Egypt by Ahmose I, the last native Egyptian king of Upper Egypt who ruled in Dynasty 17 (ca. 1575–1560 BC) and the first king who ruled in Dynasty 18 (ca. 1560–1550 BC). The dividing line is defined by the final expulsion of the foreign rulers in Lower Egypt known as the Hyksos, and 1560 BC is the year in which he destroyed their citadel at Avaris. The surviving Hyksos escaped to a site in southern Canaan known as Sharuhén. Ahmose I is the king who did not know of Joseph and feared that the Israelites would follow the Hyksos into Canaan with their massive population, take up arms with their former neighbors at Avaris (the Hyksos), and return together to Egypt to defeat the native Egyptians (Ex 1:8–10), who were decimated after their decades-long war with the Hyksos.

Ahmose I began the oppression and enslavement of the Israelites (Ex 1:11), which was continued by his son and heir, Amenhotep I (ca. 1550–1529 BC), as well as Thutmose I (ca. 1529–1516 BC), the middle-aged general whom Amenhotep I personally chose as his heir to the throne. Thutmose I issued the decree for the male Hebrew children to be killed (Ex 1:15–22), and his son came onto the throne as Thutmose II. Actually, there is no biblical passage that refers to Thutmose II, so he evidently performed no actions that Moses deemed worthy of recognition in the book of Exodus. However, much of Moses's early childhood occurred during Thutmose II's reign, and Moses would have been about 22 years old when the king died and turned over the throne to Thutmose III, who later appeared in the Bible as the king who chased Moses out of Egypt for killing an Egyptian (Ex 2:11–15). ❖

