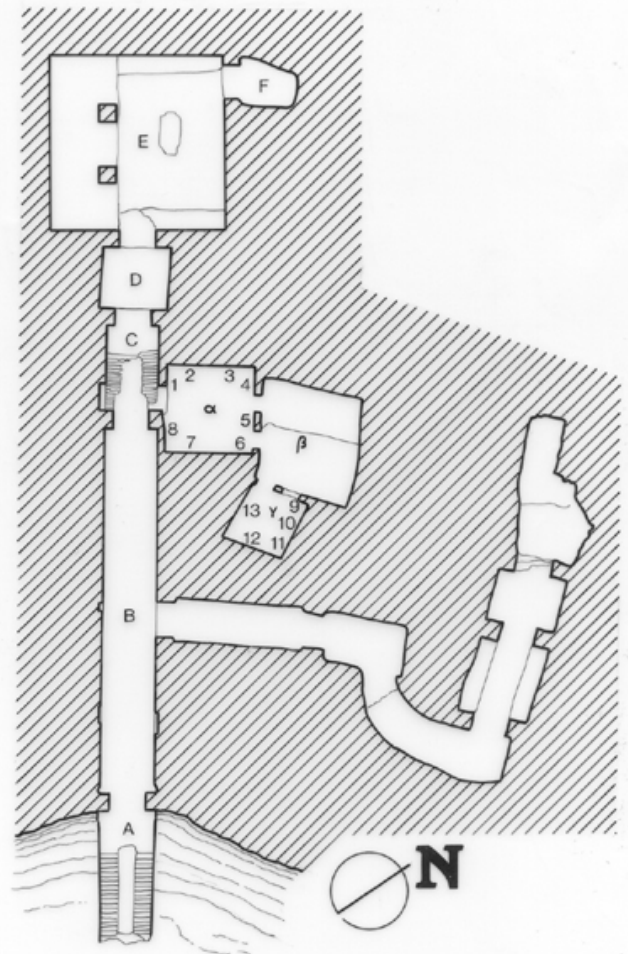


THE ROYAL TOMB

The Royal Tomb lies in a narrow side valley leading off from the Royal Wadi at a distance of 6 kms. (nearly 4 miles) from its mouth, which is itself about 5 kms. (3 miles) from el-Till village. It was intended for Akhenaten, princess Meketaten, and probably for Queen Tiy also, and (in an unfinished annexe) an additional person (Nefertiti?). Its basic design and proportions are similar to those of the royal tombs in the Valley of Kings at Thebes, except that since it was intended for several persons, there are additional burial chambers. The rock is of poor quality, so that much of the decoration was wholly or partly cut in a thin layer of gypsum plaster spread on the walls. Much of this has been destroyed. Most of the surviving decoration is in the chambers for princess Meketaten. Despite this, the impressive dimensions and dramatic atmosphere of the tomb make it well worth a visit. The entrance to the tomb is covered by a modern construction intended to prevent the tomb from being flooded by the occasional heavy rains that send water sweeping down the wadi.

The tomb is entered from the valley floor by a steep flight of steps with smooth central ramp (A). A long sloping corridor (B) leads down from the doorway to a second flight of steps (C). Below this lies a shaft 3.5 metres (11 feet, 6 inches) deep (D). Meagre traces of decoration survive on the walls above the shaft: the side walls showed the King and Queen making offerings to the Aten; the end walls depicted one or more of the princesses. Beyond the shaft is the King's burial chamber (E), with raised platform on the left, and the remains of two square pillars. Note also the rectangular plinth in the middle of the floor where his sarcophagus once stood. Of the decoration little now survives, apart from fragile patches of plaster at ceiling level, with titles of the Aten, Akhenaten and Nefer-titi, but earlier there were scenes of women mourners from a depiction of the King's funeral.

If we now retrace our steps, a doorway on the left, just beyond the top of the lower staircase (C) leads to the tomb of Princess Meketaten, the second of Akhenaten's daughters. It consists of three chambers, the first and third with decorated walls.



CHAMBER ALPHA. Following the scenes in a clockwise direction: (1): remains of seven registers of representatives of foreign peoples raising their arms in adoration of the Aten. (2)–(3): King, Queen and princesses worship the Aten in a temple as the sun sets in the west, with courtiers below. (4): nine registers of soldiers and chariots. Note that in some cases the heads of the horses are in frontal view, rare in Egyptian art. (5): originally seven registers of soldiers, some of them foreign, raising their hands in adoration of the Aten, depicted on the adjacent wall. (6)–(7): King, Queen and princesses worship the Aten in a temple as the sun rises over the eastern horizon. Attendants and chariots await outside. Birds and animals rejoice in the sun's rays at the left end, beyond the temple. (8): two registers originally showed King and Queen mourning a dead princess lying on a bier (bottom left). No name occurs here for the princess, but it is normally assumed to be Princess Meketaten, in view of the similarity with a scene in the inner chamber where she is named. King and Queen weep over the corpse, with distraught attendants behind. An infant lies in the arms of a nurse, presumably the princess's baby. This and the similar scene in the inner chamber convey a depth of personal emotion unique in Egyptian art.

The CENTRAL CHAMBER BETA, on two levels, is undecorated.

CHAMBER GAMMA. Following the scenes in a clockwise direction: (9): remains of pictures of funerary furniture beside the doorway. (10)–(11): a second scene of mourning a dead princess on a bier. Mourners, including two princesses (?), lament beside the bier. Funerary offerings are shown. Note again the child in the arms of an attendant. (14)–(15): Princess Meketaten stands on a pedestal beneath a canopy decorated with leaves. King and Queen and princesses, attendants and courtiers stand in front. The design of the canopy relates it to childbirth, suggesting that Meketaten may have died whilst giving birth to the child shown held in the nurse's arms in the previous scene.

Returning to the main corridor (B): half-way along it a second doorway opens into a long string of corridors and chambers, all unfinished and undecorated. In size and design they resemble another royal tomb, and it has been suggested that it was intended for Nefertiti, though obviously never used.

The Royal Tomb was discovered in the 1880s by local people. It had been plundered and damaged in ancient times, and since discovery has been damaged further. Many objects from the tomb are in museums. The most important are: fragments from two granite sarcophagi and their lids belonging to Akhenaten and to Meketaten, the former restored (Cairo Museum); fragments from an alabaster Canopic chest for Akhenaten, also restored (Cairo Museum); over two hundred *shabti*-figures of Akhenaten. From this material we can be reasonably sure that Akhenaten was buried in the tomb (following his death in his 17th year of reign). The tomb was later so thoroughly desecrated that the fate of the King's body is not known. Early reports of the finding of human remains in the tomb are now impossible to verify.

On the south side of the main Royal Wadi are further large unfinished tombs. By their size and location they seem also intended for members of the Royal Family. One, in the Royal Wadi itself, has a steep entrance staircase similar to that for the Royal Tomb, leading also to a corridor of impressive dimensions which does not, however, lead very far. In a side wadi a little to the east are two more unfinished and undecorated tombs, one consisting of a long straight corridor passing down through four doorways.