

The Michael Cohen Gallery

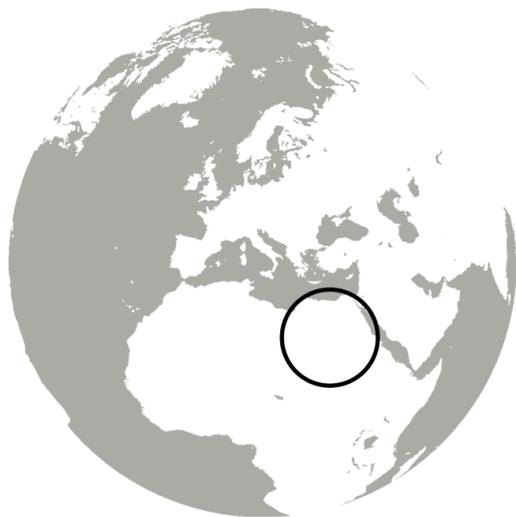
# The tomb-chapel of Nebamun

Ancient Egyptian life and death

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## The tomb-chapel of Nebamun

### Ancient Egyptian life and death

Nebamun was a rich accountant in the Temple of Amun at Thebes (modern Karnak) in about 1350 BC. The chapel in his tomb was decorated with extraordinarily beautiful paintings showing how the wealthy wanted their lives to be seen for eternity. But not everyone was so lucky in life or death.

The tomb-chapel paintings show an idealised vision of life. Other objects in this gallery hint at the actual experience of living in Egypt for both rich and poor.

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#### IMAGE CAPTION

A wall-painting of Nebamun hunting in the marshes

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#### OBJECT CAPTION

This inscribed granite stela comes from the tomb-chapel of twin brothers, Hor and Suty. They were important officials, the chief architects in the Temple of Amun where Nebamun worked, and they probably knew him. Their door-shaped stela is decorated with prayers and hymns to the Sun-god who ruled over life and rebirth.

EA 826

# Surveying the fields for Nebamun

## CASE 1

Nebamun was the accountant in charge of grain at the great Temple of Amun at Thebes (modern Karnak). This scene from his tomb-chapel shows officials inspecting fields. A farmer checks the boundary marker of the field. Nearby, two chariots for the party of officials wait under the shade of a sycamore-fig tree.

Other smaller fragments from this wall are now in the Egyptian Museum, Berlin, and show the grain being harvested and processed.

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

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This fragment on loan from Berlin shows men in a field catching quails in a net. We think that Nebamun's tomb-chapel was in an area called Dra Abu el-Naga because this fragment was found there in 1890.

BERLIN ÄM 18540

'The Chief of the Measurers of the Granary' (mostly lost) holds a rope decorated with the head of Amun's sacred ram for measuring the god's fields. After Nebamun died, the head was hacked out, but later, perhaps in Tutankhamun's reign, someone clumsily restored it with mud-plaster and redrew it.

The old farmer is shown balding, badly shaven, poorly dressed, and with a protruding navel. He is taking an oath saying, 'As the Great God who is in the sky endures, the boundary-stone is exact!'

EA 37982

# Nebamun viewing his geese and cattle

CASE 2A–2B

These paintings are parts of a wall showing Nebamun inspecting geese and cattle.

He watches as farmers bring the animals to him; his scribes (secretaries) record the number of animals for him. Hieroglyphs describe the scene and the farmers' conversation, talking and squabbling among themselves as they queue up.

Nebamun is depicted as a man of wealth and authority, supervising large numbers of servants and animals. Everything is designed to show Nebamun's prestige; he is shown at a larger scale than other people and is posed formally. Even his skin is painted differently.

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

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This scribe holds a palette (pen-box) under his arm and presents a roll of papyrus to Nebamun. He is well dressed and has small rolls of fat on his stomach, indicating his superior position in life. Beside him are chests for his records and a bag containing his writing equipment.

Farmers bow down and make gestures of respect towards Nebamun. The man behind them holds a stick and tells them: 'Sit down and don't speak!' The farmers' geese are painted as a huge and lively gaggle, some pecking the ground and some flapping their wings.

The alternating colours and patterns of cattle create a superb sense of animal movement. The artists have omitted some of the cattle's legs to preserve the clarity of the design. The herdsman is telling the farmer in front of him in the queue:

'Come on! Get away! Don't speak in the presence of the praised one! He detests people talking . . . Pass on in quiet and in order . . . He knows all affairs, does the scribe and counter of grain of [Amun], Neb[amun]'.

The name of the god Amun has been hacked out in this caption, even where it appears in Nebamun's name. Shortly after Nebamun was buried, King Akhenaten (1352–1336 BC) had the name of Amun erased from monuments as part of his religious reforms.

## A feast for Nebamun

CASE 2C

An entire wall of the tomb-chapel showed a feast in honour of Nebamun. Naked serving-girls and servants wait on his friends and relatives. Married guests sit in pairs on fine chairs, while the young women turn and talk to each other. This erotic scene of relaxation and wealth is something for Nebamun to enjoy for all eternity. The richly dressed guests are entertained by dancers and musicians, who sit on the ground playing and clapping. The words of their song in honour of Nebamun are written above them:

*The earth-god has caused  
his beauty to grow in every body . . .  
the channels are filled with water anew,  
and the land is flooded with love of him.*

IMAGE CAPTIONS

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All the guests wear elaborate linen clothes. The artists have painted the cloth as if it were transparent, to show that it is very fine. These elegant sensual dresses fall in loose folds around the guests' bodies.

The young men sit on rows of stools, beside a group of young women who sit on chairs with cushions. Men and women's skins are painted in different colours: the men are tanned and the women are paler. In one place the artists altered the drawing of these wooden stools and corrected their first sketch with white paint.

Some of the musicians look out of the paintings, showing their faces full-on. This is very unusual in Egyptian art, and gives a sense of liveliness to these lower-class women, who are less formally drawn than the wealthy guests. The young dancers are fluidly drawn and are naked apart from their jewellery.

A rack of large wine jars is decorated with grapes, vines and garlands of flowers. Many of the guests also wear garlands and smell lotus flowers.

EA 37984, EA 37981, EA 37986

# Visiting the tomb-chapel

CASE 2D

Tomb-chapels were meeting places between the worlds of the living and the dead. People visited this tomb-chapel to commemorate Nebamun.

In the innermost room there would have been a statue of Nebamun and his wife. Family members would come on festival days to say prayers and offer food, wine, water and flowers to this statue. Passers-by could also visit the tomb-chapel to say prayers for Nebamun and look at the paintings. Graffiti left by admiring visitors show that tomb-chapels sometimes remained open for many generations.

## OBJECT CAPTIONS

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1. Painted limestone statue of an unnamed man and his wife from a tomb-chapel at Thebes. EA 2301
2. Pottery amphora for wine. A note on the amphora records the vintage. From el-Amarna. EA 58457
3. Bread, bouquet of flowers wrapped in papyrus, pottery dish of figs, basket of figs and dates and dom-palm fruit.  
EA 5341 (from Thebes); EA 5368; EA 5395–6;  
EA 17106; EA 35941 (from Thebes);  
EA 40942 (from Deir el-Bahri);  
EA 45292 (from Asyut)

# Offerings for Nebamun

CASE 2E

This was the most important scene in the tomb-chapel. It is painted in a formal style with a white rather than cream background to make it stand out. It shows a huge pile of lavish food before the dead Nebamun and his wife (now lost), with wine and ornate perfume jars. Their son Netjermes (now lost) offers them a tall bouquet of papyrus and flowers, symbolic of the annual festival of the god Amun, when relatives came to visit the dead. Hieroglyphic captions contain funerary prayers and a list of offerings.

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

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The food offerings include sycamore-figs, grapes, differently shaped loaves of bread, and also a roast duck and joints of meat, which only the wealthy could afford.

Large jars of wine are garlanded with grapes and vines. In many places the green and blue has been lost, since these colours were applied as roughly ground pigments which have fallen away.

Traces of red grid-lines are visible in places under the background colour. These lines helped the artists to lay out the figures, but they used them only in this scene because it was the largest and most formal in the tomb-chapel.

EA 37985

# Offering bringers

CASE 2E

A procession of simply dressed servants brings offerings: sheaves of grain and desert animals to be food for Nebamun. These include a young gazelle and two desert hares. The border at the bottom shows that this was the lowest scene on this wall.

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## IMAGE CAPTIONS

One servant holds two desert hares by their ears. The animals have wonderfully textured fur and long whiskers. The superb draughtsmanship and composition make this standard scene very fresh and lively.

The artists have even varied the servants' simple clothes: the folds of each kilt are different. With one of these kilts, the artist changed his mind and painted a different set of folds over his first version, which is visible through the white paint.

This man carries a small Dorcas gazelle. It is still alive and he holds it tightly to stop it struggling free.

EA 37980

# Nebamun hunting in the marshes

CASE 2F

Nebamun is in a small boat, hunting birds with his wife Hatshepsut and their young daughter in the marshes of the Nile. Scenes of leisure had already been traditional parts of tomb-chapel decoration for centuries and they showed the tomb-owner 'enjoying himself and seeing beauty' in the afterlife, as the hieroglyphic caption here says.

Fertile marshes were a place of rebirth and eroticism, making this more than a simple image of recreation. The huge striding figure of Nebamun dominates, forever happy and forever young, surrounded by the rich and fertile life of the marsh. Hunting not only supplied food but represented Nebamun's triumph over the forces of chaos.

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

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This spear is all that remains of another half of the scene, which showed Nebamun spearing fish. This half of the wall is lost, apart from two old photographs of small fragments of Nebamun and his young son (shown on the reconstruction drawing). The painters have captured the scaly and shiny quality of the fish.

The artists have filled every space with lively details. The marsh is full of lotus flowers and Plain Tiger butterflies. They are freely and delicately painted, suggesting the pattern and texture of their wings.

A tawny cat catches birds among the papyrus stems. Cats were family pets, but he is shown here because a cat could also represent the Sun-god hunting the enemies of light and order. His unusual gilded eye hints at the religious meanings of this scene.

EA 37977

# Nebamun's garden of the west

CASE 2G

Nebamun's garden in the afterlife is like the earthly gardens of the wealthy in ancient Egypt. The pool is full of birds and fish, and surrounded by borders of flowers and rows of trees. The fruit trees include sycamore-figs, date-palms and dom-palms – the dates are shown with different degrees of ripeness.

On the right of the painting, the goddess Nut leans out of a tree and offers sycamore-figs to Nebamun (now lost). On the left of the pool a sycamore-fig tree speaks and greets Nebamun as the owner of the garden, her words are recorded in the hieroglyphs.

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## IMAGE CAPTIONS

The goddess in the tree offers sycamore-figs and jars of wine or beer. The artists accidentally painted her skin red at first but then repainted it yellow, the correct colour for a goddess' skin.

The pool is shown from above, with three rows of trees arranged around its edges. The waves of the pool were painted with a darker blue pigment; much of this has been lost, like the green on the trees and bushes.

EA 37983

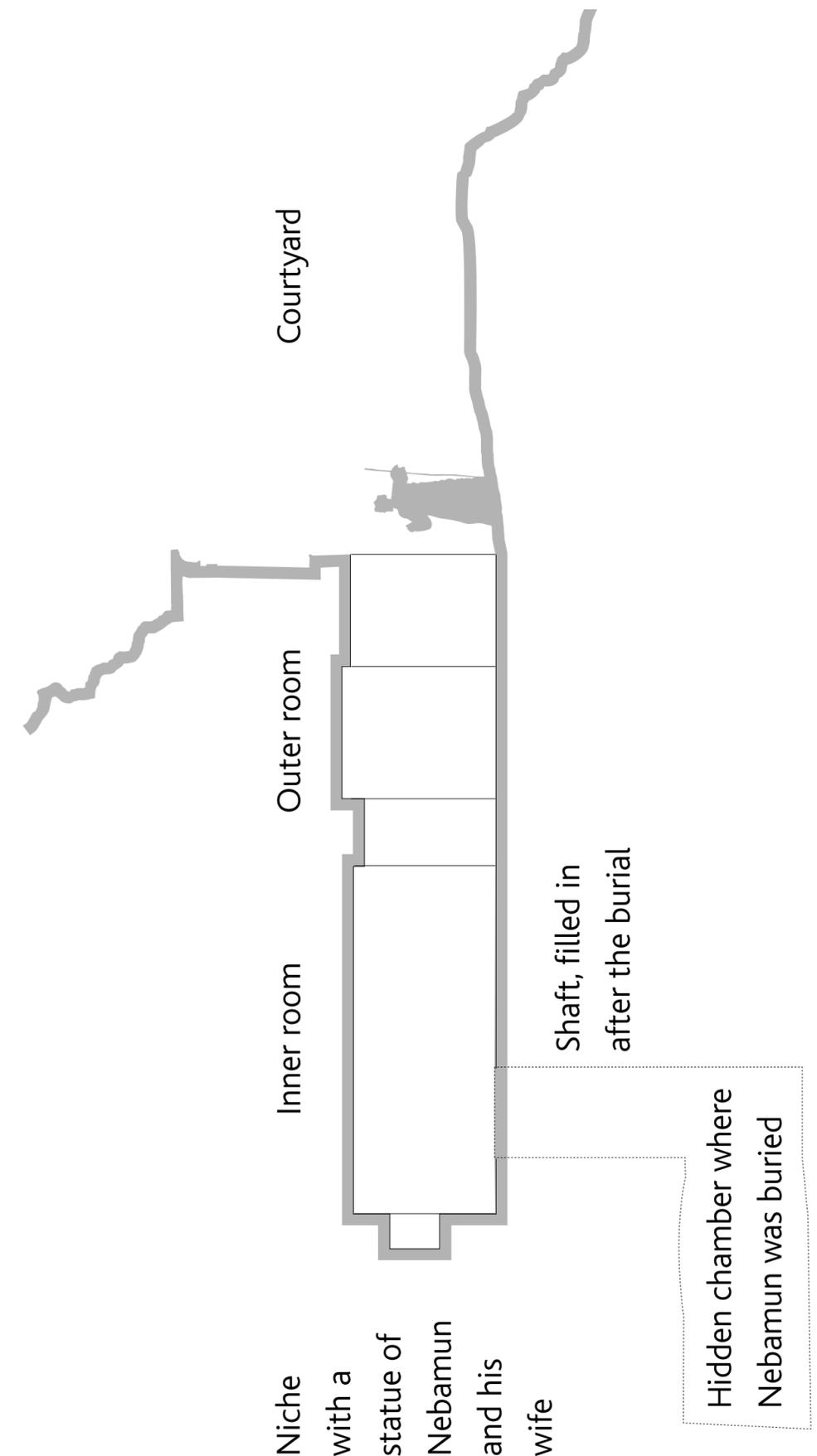
## The paintings and the tomb-chapel

Nebamun's tomb-chapel was cut into the desert hills opposite the city of Thebes (modern Luxor and Karnak). The tomb-chapel was discovered in 1820 by Giovanni d'Athanasia, working for the British consul, Henry Salt. D'Athanasia removed eleven fragments from the wonderfully painted walls and sent them to the British Museum. The fragments are very fragile; they were extensively conserved during 2001–2007 but need to be displayed at an angle to preserve them. Although d'Athanasia did not record the tomb-chapel's exact location, it was probably in an area now known as Dra Abu el-Naga.

### IMAGE CAPTION

The hillside at Dra Abu el-Naga, riddled with the doorways of ruined tomb-chapels cut into the rock. In the nineteenth century a village was built over parts of the cemetery.

Photograph: Copyright 'Proyecto Djehuty', Spanish Mission at Dra Abu el-Naga, 2005



# Building the tomb-chapel

## CASE 3

A team of workmen cut the tomb out of the rock. As the limestone of the hills was flaky, they added a thick layer of mud plaster to the ceilings and walls to provide a smooth surface for the artists.

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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1. Cast of the back of one of the paintings showing the rough surface of the rock under the mud plaster.
2. Wooden smoother for plaster.  
From Thebes. EA 5986
3. Bronze chisels, one with an original wooden handle. From Thebes. EA 6045; EA 15740

*continues—*

The artists first sketched out the figures in red, and in some scenes they used grids and lines to help them lay the figures out. Sometimes the sketches can still be seen, showing how the artists changed their minds.

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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4. Paint brushes made of palm fibre, stained with ancient paint and bitumen.  
EA 5555 (from Thebes); EA 36889;  
EA 36892–3; EA 41186 (from Deir el-Bahri)
5. Painter's palette, inscribed with the names of two royal scribes Amenhotep and Minnakht. There is still ancient paint in the pigment wells. EA 36825

The painters used various minerals, white huntite for highlights and creamy calcium for the background. Red and yellow were made from ochres; black from carbon. The greens and blues came from a manufactured glassy substance (Egyptian frit).

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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6. Ancient samples of red ochre, Egyptian blue and green frit with samples of ochre from modern Luxor. EA 5563; EA 5568–9; EA 18337

The tomb-chapel was painted by a team of artists. We do not know their names, but records of the artists for the royal tombs survive at their village nearby, at Deir el-Medina. One flake of limestone lists all the villagers who had missed work during 1250 BC, such as Pennub who was off one day because 'his mother was sick'. Artists also used such flakes for sketching.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

7. List of workmen absent in 1250 BC.  
From Deir el-Medina. EA 5634
8. Artist's sketch of a duck. EA 56706

Outside the tomb-chapel a courtyard was cut into the hillside. The walls of the chapel facade were decorated with rows of pottery cones stamped with the names and titles of the owner.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

9. Pottery cones from Thebes belonging to Netjermes (perhaps Nebamun's son) and another man named Nebamun.  
EA 62734; EA 62871

## The lost tomb-chapel of Nebamun

Nebamun was buried in the cemetery of Thebes, in the desert hills on the west bank of the Nile. His tomb was within sight of the Temple of Amun where he had worked, 4 kilometres away on the east bank. The cemetery was close to the desert valley where the kings of Egypt were buried.

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IMAGE CAPTIONS

The area of ancient Thebes (modern Karnak and Luxor). This map marks modern settlements only.

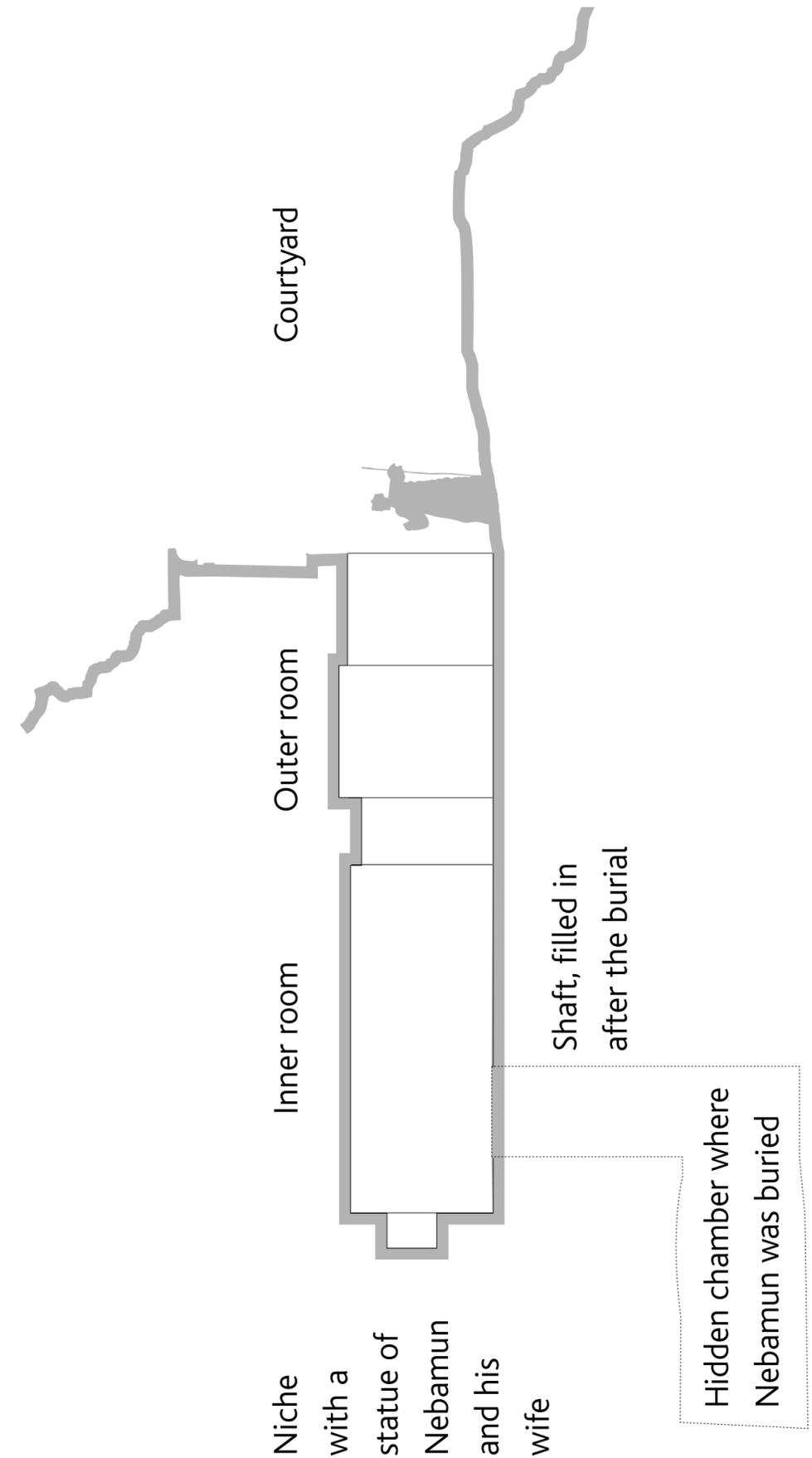
Nebamun's tomb-chapel was in the area now known as Dra Abu el-Naga, although we do not know exactly where. Many tombs were cut into the hillside here. Most are now ruined but the doors of many are still visible. In the nineteenth century a village was built over parts of the cemetery.

Photograph: Copyright 'Proyecto Djehuty', Spanish Mission at Dra Abu el-Naga, 2005

CAPTION

Like most tomb-chapels, Nebamun's probably had two rooms, with the walls and ceilings covered with paintings. The animation shows the surviving paintings as we think they would have appeared on the walls. From other tomb-chapels we can reconstruct some parts of the decoration, but we will probably never know for certain exactly how Nebamun's tomb-chapel looked.

An interactive version is available at [www.britishmuseum.org/nebamun](http://www.britishmuseum.org/nebamun)



## Living in Ancient Egypt (1)

*Follow your heart while you're alive!  
Put perfume on your head,  
Clothe yourself with fine linen . . .  
Make holiday and don't tire of it!*

*Harpist's Song, about 1400 BC*

Archaeology reveals the reality of ancient Egyptian life, often in contrast to the idealised vision presented by elite monuments such as Nebamun's tomb-chapel. The objects displayed here are contemporary with Nebamun and many are like those in his paintings. The wealth of the small elite came from their official positions managing the country and, as in many cultures, we know very little about the lives of the rest of society.

## Lives of the wealthy

Almost all our evidence comes from a small wealthy group made up of government officials, priests and military officers. As in most societies, rank and status were displayed through beautification, distinctive clothing and the use of luxury products. Many of the objects in this gallery survived only because they were buried in the tombs of their wealthy owners. They provide a glimpse of these people's lavish lifestyle during an era of Egyptian empire around 1350 BC.

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### IMAGE CAPTION

Looking down from the desert hills where the wealthy were buried, across the fields that Nebamun would once have supervised, towards the modern town of Luxor.

Photograph: Red-Head

# Leisure

## CASE 4

Only the wealthy had much time for leisure, which became a sign of their status. At feasts, the wealthy were often entertained by flute and lute-players, dancers and singers. The words of their songs survive in tomb-chapel paintings like Nebamun's, but the music was not written down.

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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1. Wooden flutes. From Dahshur. EA 6385–7  
Wooden flute. EA 6388
2. Arched wooden harp. From Thebes. EA 6382

Few people could read or write. For officials, writing was a means of power, but written poems also provided the wealthy with entertainment. By Nebamun's time some poems were already 500 years old and were learnt and read as classics. These included *The Teaching of the Vizier Ptahhotep*, which was written around 1950 BC.

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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3. Part of a papyrus roll with a copy of *The Teaching of the Vizier Ptahhotep*, from a private library at Thebes.  
The poem begins:

*Do not be proud because you are wise,  
but consult with the ignorant as with the wise!  
The limits of art are unattainable;  
no artist is fully equipped with his mastery.  
Fine speech is more precious than malachite,  
but can be found with maid-servants at the millstones.*

EA 10509.1

4. Ivory scribal palette (pen-box) with two reed pens. Jottings and ink stains are still visible on it. From Thebes. EA 5524

People played several different games. Children's toys also survive, though these objects may have had other uses or religious meanings. The most popular board game for adults was senet. Finely inlaid ivory boards for this game were sometimes buried with their wealthy owners.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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5. Wooden toy lion, with moving jaw, rock crystal eyes and bronze teeth. From Thebes.  
EA 15671
6. Clay and wood toy mouse with moving mouth and tail. EA 65512
7. Ivory senet board with a drawer for storing the gaming pieces. Glazed gaming pieces.  
EA 21603; EA 35921–3; EA 55212; EA 6411;  
EA 66669
8. A knuckle-bone and throw sticks, used as dice. EA 20935; EA 21605 (from Thebes);  
EA 26686

## Fashion

CASE 4

Different styles of clothing were worn by different levels of society. Finely pleated white linen garments were fashionable in Nebamun's time, as can be seen in the paintings.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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9. Ivory and wood handle from a ceremonial fan, carved with the face of Hathor, the goddess of music and love. From Thebes (the ostrich feathers are modern).  
EA 20767
10. Sandals woven from palm leaf. EA 4464
11. Collar. From el-Amarna. EA 59334

*continues—*

Men and women wore elaborate collars and necklaces. They were often decorated with floral motifs and protective symbols, made from brightly coloured glazed materials, semi-precious stones or even gold and silver. Jewellery could be a sign of office, such as rings with the wearer's name and titles, or a sign of royal favour.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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12. Gold ring with the name of Thutmose III.  
From Memphis. EA 71492
13. Signet ring depicting a child-king. EA 32723
14. Chalcedony and cornelian rings from Gurob.  
EA 68914–16
15. Necklaces and collars.  
EA 3084 (from Thebes); EA 3359;  
EA 65557  
EA 65617 (from the Valley of the Kings);
16. Earrings with flower motif. EA 54317–18  
Gold earrings. EA 14350–51
17. Gold bracelets. EA 66840–41
18. Gold collar. From Memphis. EA 3074

## Beauty

CASE 4

The wealthy wanted to look young and beautiful, just as they were shown in their tomb-chapels. Both men and women wore make-up, and the wealthy had access to perfumed oils, often imported from abroad.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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19. Bronze mirror with its handle in the form of a young naked woman holding a duck. EA 38332
20. Bronze razor with wooden handle.  
From Thebes. EA 5593

*continues—*

Floral designs and erotic scenes of the marshes often decorated make-up equipment and containers. These luxurious status symbols were often shaped as delicate animals and young women. The imagery evoked beauty and also regeneration and rebirth.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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21. Ivory cosmetic box in the shape of a duck carrying her ducklings. EA 5946
22. Wooden cosmetic box in the shape of a plucked duck. EA 5949
23. Ointment-spoon with a handle showing the protective god Bes in a papyrus marsh. From Thebes. EA 5954
24. Ointment-spoon with a handle showing a naked girl in a papyrus marsh. EA 38188
25. Ointment-spoon in the form of a bouquet of lotus-flowers, with inlaid ivory buds. From Memphis. EA 5965

Containers for eye-paint (kohl) and cosmetic oils were often lavishly designed using expensive materials such as glass or semi-precious stones.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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26. Ceramic vase in the shape of a woman playing a lute. From Thebes. EA 5114
27. Wooden cosmetic box held by a figure of a young Nubian maidservant. EA 32767
28. Calcite kohl-pot. EA 29336
29. Glass kohl-pot, decorated with gold. EA 24391
30. Glass cosmetic bottle in the shape of a fish, found buried under the floor of a house at el-Amarna with other glass vessels like those shown here. EA 36344 (from Thebes); EA 4741-3 (from Memphis); EA 55193 (from el-Amarna)
31. Glass kohl-container in the form of a papyrus-stem, with applicator. EA 2589

# The wealthy home

## CASE 5

The large villas of the wealthy elite had gardens, pools, outbuildings, granaries, workshops and areas for livestock, unlike the crowded quarters for poor townspeople.

Examples of villas have been excavated at sites such as the royal city of el-Amarna.

### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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1. Limestone model of a townhouse. EA 2462

Below: A model of the city of el-Amarna, showing wealthy villas surrounded by smaller houses.

Photograph: B.J. Kemp/Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt

Sun-dried mudbrick was the main material for building houses, but these rarely survive. The walls were often whitewashed, and were sometimes painted with colourful decoration inside. Small open windows, high up, would let light and air into the rooms but keep out the heat.

2. Part of a painted limestone window-grille, from a wealthy house at el-Amarna.

EA 63517

3. Painted plaster from the wall of a wealthy house at el-Amarna, showing ducks and flowers. EA 58846

4. Glazed tiles decorated with marsh plants and birds. From the suburbs of el-Amarna.

EA 21654–5; EA 21665–6; EA 21673–4;

EA 24328; EA 26724; EA 49076–8; EA 55183;

EA 58479–80; EA 58484; EA 55185;

EA 55600; EA 59290; EA 59295–6; EA 69683

## Furniture

### CASE 5

Houses had distinct areas for men and women and seasonal rooms. Bedrooms were often small rooms in the most private area at the back of the house. Even wealthy homes would have had few pieces of furniture, but their chairs, stools and boxes were made from expensive woods, often lavishly decorated and inlaid with coloured ivory and other precious materials.

#### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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5. Chairs and stools, from wealthy tombs at Thebes.  
EA 2476–7; EA 2480
6. Wooden boxes. Used to store linen, cosmetics and other personal belongings, from wealthy tombs at Thebes.  
EA 5897; EA 5907; EA 24708

## Gods in the home

### CASE 5

Household rituals were important: wealthy houses often had a small shrine to a god or ancestor. A household god like the fierce little Bes was particularly important at times of danger, such as during sleep or childbirth. Images of gods would protect the family, such as the 'clay cobras' which one magical text says should be 'placed in each corner of every room in which there is a man or woman'.

#### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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7. Headrest. People slept on their sides, resting their necks on wood or stone headrests, sometimes protected by images of the god Bes.  
EA 18156 (from Akhmim); EA 65266 (from Thebes)
8. Glazed cosmetic container with wooden applicator held by the god Bes. EA 65242
9. Small clay figurines of gods and divine animals for personal protection.  
EA 55594 (from el-Amarna); EA 61671; EA 61915 (from Abydos)

## Tableware

### CASE 5

Pottery vessels were used by all levels of society. Small cups and plates were used during meals, large casseroles for cooking, and storage jars for keeping and transporting water, oil and wine. While beer and bread formed the staple diet of most people, the rich could feast on meat, poultry and wine. Finely shaped vessels, sometimes painted or polished, expressed the wealth and prestige of the elite.

#### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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10. Wine and oil jars. These were kept upright on stands or by partly burying them in the mud floors of houses.  
EA 4861; EA 50747; EA 51097;  
EA 57419 (from el-Amarna)
11. Lead drinking-straw found buried beneath a house at el-Amarna. It was hidden there with a hoard of fine glass vessels, including a fish-shaped bottle.  
EA 55148–9
12. Drinking cups and bowls. Some were made from lavish substances such as calcite or a brightly glazed material, and were decorated with floral designs and marsh scenes.  
EA 4555; EA 4801; EA 30449; EA 32626

## Living in Ancient Egypt (2)

*I will tell you about the fisherman:  
his job is the worst for wearing him down!  
He has to work in the river,  
consorting with crocodiles . . .*

*The Teaching of Khety, about 1900 BC*

Archaeology reveals the reality of ancient Egyptian life, often in contrast to the idealised vision presented by elite monuments such as Nebamun's tomb-chapel. The objects displayed here are contemporary with Nebamun and many are like those in his paintings. The wealth of the small elite came from their official positions managing the country and, as in many cultures, we know very little about the lives of the rest of society.

## Lives of the workers

Most people were farmers who worked the land and were sometimes employed on state construction projects. They were not wealthy enough to be buried in decorated tombs. They were illiterate, and so their names and experiences are almost entirely lost, as in many societies. The study of human remains in poor cemeteries is often the only way of learning about the short lives of most ancient Egyptians.

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### IMAGE CAPTION

Fertile land flooded by the river Nile, where the farmers worked and where wealthy men such as Nebamun enjoyed themselves.

Photograph: Red-Head

## Living conditions

### CASE 6

We have very limited evidence, but it seems that at least some of the lower levels of society held similar religious and political beliefs to the elite. They even played the same games, though with much less luxurious materials.

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### OBJECT CAPTIONS

1. Wooden headrest, used as a pillow.  
From Deshasheh. EA 29565
2. Gaming-board scratched on a block of stone.  
The gaming pieces are made out of shaped fragments of broken pots. From Giza.  
EA 14315
3. Pair of child's sandals made from woven cord.  
From Giza. EA 4418–19

*continues—*

Most people lived in villages along the river or in the fertile river delta. Because their houses were made of mudbrick, wood and reeds they are rarely preserved. Where poor people's houses survive in towns, these reveal a huge difference between the resources of the majority and the elite. The drab colour and simple materials of their objects contrast with the stylish personal goods of the elite who governed them.

4. Pottery model of a simple dwelling with a courtyard full of food. About 1850 BC.  
EA 32610
5. Pottery vessels and a mould for making bread made from poor quality clay, unpolished and undecorated.  
EA 43223–4 (from Deir el-Bahri); EA 49313 (from Umm el-Qa'ab); EA 58630 (from el-Amarna); EA 63718 (from Matmar); EA 65731 (bread mould from Buhen)

## Work and survival

### CASE 6

The river Nile was central to life, its annual flood made the land fertile. For the wealthy, fishing was a leisure activity, but for the poor it was a means of survival. Fish provided a major source of protein for most Egyptians.

#### OBJECT CAPTIONS

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6. Bronze fish-hooks and harpoon-heads.  
EA 36792; EA 37885; EA 41194 (from Deir el-Bahri); EA 67441
7. Pottery dish of dried fish with strips of cloth.  
From Thebes. EA 36191
8. Fishing net. From Thebes. EA 36886

Many Egyptians spent their lives working in the fields. Few farmers owned land, but cultivated it for landlords or state institutions in return for a share of the crops. The staple diet was bread and beer made from emmer wheat. Meat and wine were rarely available to the masses.

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OBJECT CAPTIONS

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9. Wooden hoes, used for breaking up the earth before planting.  
EA 5408 and 41677 (from Deir el-Bahri)
10. Flints. Stone tools such as these were used for everything from household tasks to butchery. From el-Amarna.  
EA 55156; EA 67632-6; EA 67638
11. Grinding stone and hammer.  
EA 35701 (from Wadi Maghara); EA 35705 (from Philae)
12. Iron sickle with wooden handle. EA 5412
13. Wooden fan, for winnowing grain.  
From Thebes. EA 18206
14. Hank of flax. Flax was grown to produce linen for clothing. EA 36177
15. Knotted rope of halfa-grass. From Deir el-Bahri. EA 43222
16. Sieve made from palm-leaf. From el-Amarna.  
EA 55130

Do not remove from gallery



# Large print guide



The tomb-chapel of Nebamun  
Ancient Egyptian life and death

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ROOM 61

Do not remove from gallery



# Braille & tactile



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ROOM 61