

CHAPTER 2

REPORT ON THE 1986 EXCAVATIONS  
FRAGMENTS OF A PAINTED ROYAL FIGURE WITH ARTIST'S GRID  
FROM WEST STREET 2/3

by

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(with additional comments by Elizabeth Shannon)

**Part 1. Description and technical discussion by Fran Weatherhead**

Four fragments of painted wall plaster were excavated from the roofing rubble in the Front Room of house West Street 2/3. They had probably derived from the west wall of this room, or else from the other side of the wall, the east wall of the middle room. Very little of the original design remains, but two pieces show that a figure of a royal personage was involved (fragments 1 and 2), and it is reasonable to assume that the other two came from close by (cf. Figure 2.1). Originally the figure, if it had been standing, could have been about 68.4 cms. high, an estimate based on a possible canon of proportion. The design itself is unusual in that it is a painted sketch, finely executed over a grid, yet with no painted background or infill of colour. From the following technical analysis certain conclusions can be made which throw some light on the nature, if not the purpose, of the sketch. This analysis has been based solely on visual inspection made in the field. Beginning as it were from the inside and moving to the exterior we will note in turn the composition of the bricks, the plaster rendering, and the painted surface and grid.

The wall plaster had been applied to sun-dried marl bricks of the usual type found at the Workmen's Village. The shapes of the brick fragments and positions of breaks show that all of the original bricks had been laid as stretchers. The brick sections adhering to wall plaster fragments 1 and 2 physically join together, thus joining up two areas of design, the front and back of the head. Only 24.5 cms. remain of the original length of the brick, the left outer edge being intact, and the right-hand edge broken.

Of fragment 3 two sides of the corner of the brick remain. Its widest dimension from an intact edge to a broken edge is 11.5 cms. This is too wide for the shortest face of the brick,<sup>1</sup> so while the design gives us no clues as to its alignment, it is evident that the brick and therefore the design must lie horizontally, as is shown in Figure 2.1, or, equally possible, turned through 180 degrees.

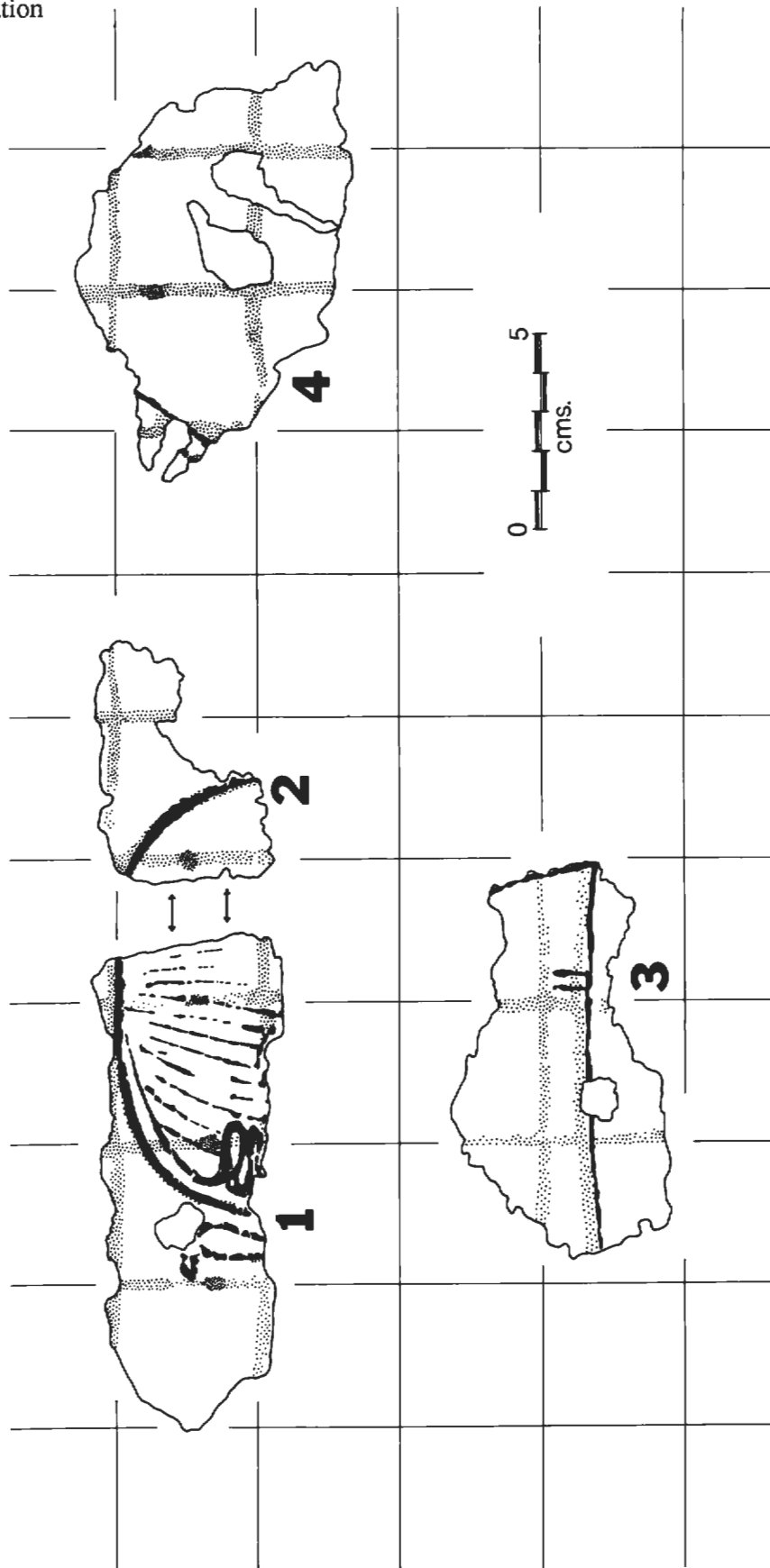
The relation of fragment 3 to fragments 1/2 is problematic. It is difficult to see how it could come from part of the figure or its clothing if one is to account for the two white strokes adjoining the longest white line. However, it is to be noted that the longest line, which is slightly curved, was important enough as part of a main outline to have an underdrawing in red.

On fragment 4 the edges of the brick are broken or abraded and only 24 cms. remain of the original length and 8.5 cms. of the original height. Again on fragment 4 the design tells us little, but the shape of the brick indicates that the longest face lay horizontally. Examination of the grid does enable us, furthermore, to suggest a position for this brick in relation to fragments 1/2 (see below).

A smooth flat painting surface had been obtained by applying two layers of plaster carefully levelled off at each layer. Some of this rendering has been lost on each of the brick fragments, and the bare deteriorated surface of the brick now surrounds the surviving plaster. The vertical faces of fragments 1, 2 and 3 are completely flat, while an unevenness of at most 1 or 2 mm. occurring in a horizontal direction on fragments 1, 3 and 4 would no doubt have appeared minimal on the original complete wall surface. Indeed, it is not surprising that such attention had gone into the preparation of the plaster ground, as this was to receive a carefully proportioned

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<sup>1</sup> The bricks which form the walls of West Street 2/3 had average dimensions of 33 cms. (length) x 10 cms. (height) x 16.5 cms. (breadth)



F.J.W. '86

Figure 2.1. Four fragments of wall plaster from West Street 2/3 (original by A. Boyce and Fran Weatherhead). The distances between fragments 1/2 and 3 and 4 are unknown.



Figure 2.3. Fragment no. 4.

and finely executed drawing.

The fact that the mud plaster had not received a final coat of gypsum plaster is unusual in the history of Egyptian wall painting, although this has primarily concerned itself with wall painting outside the domestic context. Amarna is already a well-known exception to the practice, for in both the Main City and in the Workmen's Village itself painting was done directly on mud



Figure 2.4. Fragments 1, 2 and 3 showing the relationship between painted surfaces and the shapes of the brick fragments.

plaster.<sup>2</sup>

The first plaster layer was 3-4 mms. thick and appears to consist of the same marl clay as the bricks, both having the same pinkish tinge. It is presumed that the clay had been quarried at the site.<sup>3</sup> Fine sand had been added to the clay as a filler to prevent shrinking and cracking, an unusual ingredient since the filler in most Egyptian wall plaster is organic.<sup>4</sup> The top layer is 0.5-0.75 mm. thick, and had been applied so thinly in places that the underlying plaster shows through. In these areas the top layer had inadvertently been skimmed off by the plasterer in his efforts to obtain a level surface. Paintwork continued nevertheless over these parts. The top layer which is light greyish-brown consists of mud plaster, but this time instead of sand finely divided chaff acted as filler. Pulverised dried-out donkey dung may have provided the chaff.<sup>5</sup> The chaff particles, about 2 mm. long, are visible on the surface and their alignment, which is predominantly horizontal, shows the direction of the last sweep of the plasterer's trowel. Impressions show where the chaff had been abraded away, or more likely, blown away shortly after drying. It is to be noted that the plaster rendering bearing the drawing contrasts markedly with the crude mud plaster found e.g. round the base of a mortar in the north-west corner of the Front Room (Figure 1.7), and which is believed to have continued around the base of the walls. This comprised only one layer; it also had more varied thickness and contained coarser organic material.

A curious feature of fragments 1, 3 and 4 is the six small conical depressions on the surface, 2-2.5 mm. deep. The hole in number 3 is fairly round; the holes in the other fragments more irregular. This suggests deliberate pecking with a pointed instrument, a practice well-known on

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *COA* I: 6, 9, 15, 39, 48, 56, 59, 80, 85, 93, 100, 107, 108, 112, 118, Plates IX, XV, XXXVI-XXXIX; *COA* II: 5, 7, 9, 22-25, 28-30, 33, 34, 37-42, 44-46, 49, 64, 74, 76, Plates LV, LVI; *COA* III: 40-44, 53, 56, 87, 88, 40, Figs. 6.8-11, Plate XLVI; Frankfort, ed. 1929; Davies 1921: 1-7; Newton 1924: 289-298; Frankfort 1927: 218, Plate LIV; Frankfort 1929; Pendlebury 1931: 233-243; Petrie 1894: Chapter 2, Plates I-V; Kemp 1979b; *AR* II: Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kemp 1984-85: 93.

<sup>4</sup> Lucas and Harris 1962: 76.

<sup>5</sup> Comparison by the author with modern donkey dung from the site.

Roman wall plaster to prepare the surface for another plaster layer, and usually a new painting.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps in corroboration of our suggestion, it appears as if an instrument caught the surface in a dragging movement an instant after making one of the depressions on Fragment 4. But since there is no trace of another layer on top of any of our fragments, presumably the new rendering was never applied. We have been unable to find in the published literature comments on the presence of these marks on Egyptian wall plaster, so that we are unable to compare our specimens with others. Changes in décor may usually be taken to indicate either a change in function of a room, or the occupation by new owners with new tastes, or simply the replacement of a design grown worn and shabby,<sup>7</sup> but as no new scheme was undertaken and the old one left mutilated, this implies that the room ceased to be used, possibly coinciding with the final abandonment of the site. These events are, of course, highly speculative, and with so few depressions on the bricks it is really impossible to say whether they are part of a regular dispersal of peck-marks on the original wall or simply the result of accidental abrasion. Pecking, this time over a wider area, is also evident next door on the unpainted south wall surface of wall [1781] in Area viii of the West Street 2 annexe, beside the patch of rough stone paving (Figure 1.3, unit [2750]), but here again it remains inconclusive.

The presence of the grid indicates that the artist had used it as a device to draw up the figure according to currently accepted ideas of human proportion. In Egyptian art the unit of the grid had been derived from the proportions of a stylised human figure,<sup>8</sup> and the number of grid-squares varied over time. In the Amarna period it has been proposed that 20 squares from the hair line on the forehead to the soles of the feet were the norm for a full-length figure,<sup>9</sup> but as the forehead on our figure shows no sign of distortion characteristic of the Amarna style we can tentatively assume that 18 squares for a standing figure or 14 squares for a seated figure adopted at other times in the Eighteenth Dynasty, and seen under paintings in the Theban necropolis, were used here. (However, with so little evidence before us it would be wise not to rule out completely the possibility of a 20-square grid). The head is clearly that of a royal figure, and the re-establishment of the traditional style in its depiction would be consistent with changes in art-style following the reign of Akhenaten.<sup>10</sup>

The little that remains of the head shows the expected layout: a grid line coincides with the base of the wig at the front,<sup>11</sup> and a vertical line bisects the head at about the centre. The missing base of the rearing cobra would have fallen a short distance below the hairline horizontal, thus contrasting (obvious stylistic differences apart) with the only known gridded head of Akhenaten, on a stele found in the Amarna Royal Tomb, where cobra base and horizontal coincide.<sup>12</sup> It is to be noted, however, that the design in general of the top of the head has features in common with the head of Tutankhamun on such depictions as the south wall of his tomb when viewed with a hypothetical 18-square grid.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Weatherhead (in press).

<sup>7</sup> Traces of coloured wall plaster were found amongst other houses in the Village which had been whitewashed and replastered time after time with plain mud plaster. Cf. COA I: 59.

<sup>8</sup> Discussion has ranged over the possibility of a metrological origin of the system of proportion since the end of the last century. See Lepsius 1884: 99. The argument has more recently been taken further by Iversen, claiming that Egyptian artists established a canon of proportions by using the standardisation of the natural human body already incorporated in the cubit measure, constituting in itself an elementary system of proportion, see Iversen 1975: 20ff. These claims have been contested by Robins 1982, 1983b and 1984b.

<sup>9</sup> Robins 1983. The hypothesis is based on analysis of the grids appearing in scenes with standing figures of Akhenaten from the tomb of Ay and the Royal Tomb at Amarna.

<sup>10</sup> However, G. Robins, noting that features of the Amarna style existed for some time after Akhenaten's reign, has pointed out that these occur in the construction of the figures on the north wall of Tutankhamun's tomb, although it is not clear whether the drawings were done using a 20-square grid or simply done freehand. See Robins 1986: 51, Figure 45; Robins 1985: 27-30. Dr. Robins, in a personal communication, has also pointed out that because our figure had become more traditional in the shape of the head, this does not necessarily mean a change back to the traditional grid system; not enough detailed information has yet been obtained concerning the return to traditional art styles.

<sup>11</sup> Robins has pointed out that the artists did not always slavishly draw outlines guided by the grid, the hairline being a case in point, cf. Robins 1985: 51-53.

<sup>12</sup> Robins 1983: Figure 2.

<sup>13</sup> Robins 1984: Figure 1.

The average width of the squares is 3.6 cms., so by calculation one would expect a standing figure to have reached a height of about 64.8 cms., using the traditional 18-square grid, plus another square for the top of the forehead,<sup>14</sup> that is, about 68.4 cms. If the figure had been seated then 14 squares of the traditional grid for a seated figure would give a height of 54 cms.

The grid may have been prepared using a measuring device based on the Small Cubit of about 45 cms. length,<sup>15</sup> the oldest linear measurement used by craftsmen to as late as the Twenty-sixth Dynasty.<sup>16</sup> Two subdivisions of the Small Cubit, namely digits, measure about 3.7 cms. The close correspondence with our grid spacing should not be discounted as coincidence; the convenience of using a rod with regular divisions marked on it is obvious. In fact our grid-squares vary from 3.45 to 3.9 cms. in width,<sup>17</sup> variations which can reasonably be accounted for by carelessness in laying out the lines between marked points of the grid. One can imagine the draftsman assessing the desired size of his composition on the wall, noting that 1/18 of the size of the figure approximated to two digits, then measuring out the grid with the help of a cubit rule. This finding contrasts with Mackay's investigation of thirty-eight grid sizes in thirty-six Theban tombs where no standardised unit was noted. Mackay concluded that the grid squares varied in size according to the size of the drawing required, which itself depended largely on the size of the wall surface to be painted.<sup>18</sup>

The grid from the Workmen's Village could, in addition, have been employed as a draftsman's aid in the scaling up of a preliminary drawing, now lost or perished.<sup>19</sup> It is thought that some ostraca and papyri scored with grid lines contained drawings to be transferred to larger enterprises.<sup>20</sup> The idea that the sketch itself was a preliminary drawing for some other enterprise, for instance a tomb relief, can be ruled out as it is obviously non-portable. This may be compared with the small gridded stele of Akhenaten and Nefertiti found in the Royal Tomb where, if it is to be discounted as an item of funerary equipment, an artist's model is a possibility.<sup>21</sup>

The grid on our fragments presents no distinct paint layer. A dilute solution of pigment -<sup>22</sup> iron oxide or red ochre - both of which were easily available in Egypt, had been applied with only a

<sup>14</sup> Although many depictions, especially in the New Kingdom, show one square's depth (hypothetical and extant) from the hairline to the top of the head as ours does, others, occurring more in the Middle Kingdom, fall short of this to about two-thirds or three-quarters of a square. Thus generally it is not convenient to count up the squares making up a figure starting from the top of the head. Furthermore, the Egyptians themselves appear to have adopted the hairline as a starting point since this option would allow for the portrayal of figures with head-dresses where the top of the head would not be visible.

<sup>15</sup> This generally accepted figure, and that of the Royal Cubit, as about 52.5 cms., was originally induced by Lepsius, and later found to accord with the average length of 6 cubits from Tutankhamun's tomb, and those in the Museum of Turin.

<sup>16</sup> The larger Royal Cubit, 52.5 cms. long was in use since the Third or Fourth Dynasty. Although it had the same subdivisions as the Small Cubit it was less likely to have been used since it was reserved for ritual occasions and the construction of official buildings. Cf. Iversen 1975: 16.

<sup>17</sup> Where possible readings were taken between the two sides of each square, care being taken to select the centre of each red line. In all, six vertical readings were taken, and nine horizontal.

<sup>18</sup> Mackay 1917: 76.

<sup>19</sup> Baud has argued (1935: 49) that a distinction could be made between grids used to draw up human figures based on a canon of proportion, and others where the grid was merely a draftsman's aid employed to transfer a drawing from one surface to another. However, this position is untenable for important scenes involving human beings because grids always divide up figures at the same significant parts of the body, which they would not do if occasionally intended as mechanical aids to facilitate reproduction. It is to be noted that on the ostrakon showing Senenmut (see below for reference) the outline is painted over the grid. Clearly proportion was paramount, for if it was not and the grid intended only for transfer then the grid would have been painted on top. An example of a grid used solely for copying is the one over an ibex in the Tomb of Kenamun at Thebes (Wilkinson and Hall 1983: Plate 23).

<sup>20</sup> A good example of this is the tomb portrait of Senenmut showing grid lines at Deir el-Bahari, which may have been drawn up using a gridded preparatory drawing similar to the ostrakon containing his portrait. Cf. Peck 1978: Plates 2, 3, IV.

<sup>21</sup> Cairo temp. no. 10/11/26/4. Martin 1974: 91-93, Plate 54. However, it is again to be noted that the grid served proportion first since it occurs under the carving.

<sup>22</sup> Fragments of what is presumed to be red pigment have been found during the recent excavations at the Workmen's Village, but no analysis of these has yet been done. One large lump weighing about 27 g. was actually found in the rubble in the northern half of the Front Room in West Street 2/3 (unit [2128]) very close to the painted bricks.

small amount of binding medium, judging by the almost transparent appearance. Some of the lines are hard-edged suggesting, probably correctly, that a brush had been used. Red blobs on fragments 1 and 2 line up along a straight line. Two blobs occur also on fragment 4, and by laying a ruler across all three fragments and following the slight angle a tentative position for fragment 4 - 13-16 cms. from fragment 2 - may reasonably be found, which also accommodates the original lengths of the bricks underneath. Of course the evidence is too meagre to be conclusive, and we cannot be certain that the angled line-up of the blobs on the fragments is not fortuitous.

The blobs of red paint may be accounted for by the marking out of points at regular (measured?)<sup>23</sup> intervals across the wall at the top and bottom of the composition (and perhaps in the middle, too, if the straight edge was not going to be large enough) before joining these up vertically with a brush using a straight-edge.<sup>24</sup> The fact that these marking-points appear on three of our fragments implies that the fragments probably came from the edge of the design, or that only the figure was gridded if it was part of a larger composition.

A common method in Egyptian wall painting for producing straight lines for grids and guide-lines was to use a paint-dipped string stretched tightly across the wall surface and to snap this smartly against the wall.<sup>25</sup> String which had been stained red was found as part of a bundle of artists' equipment in the tomb of Menthuherkhepshef at Thebes (Davies 1913: 5, Plate XVII). The blobs, if this method had been adopted, would then have to be accounted for by a frayed area of string which would produce a spread of paint at the same level along the wall as the string was moved across at prescribed intervals. However, there are two reasons for resisting this theory. Firstly, it has been noted that the laying out of grids with string was avoided where important figures were to be constructed as this was probably reckoned to be too rough-and-ready a method, often producing distorted squares.<sup>26</sup> The other is that the string would reproduce in paint on the wall the twists of the twine<sup>27</sup> and small spatters of paint from the impact, neither of which is present on our own example.

Red underpainting by brush was also used as guide-lines for the main outline. These occur on the top of the head on fragments 1 and 2, and under the main white lines on the other two fragments.

The question arises why the grid was not painted over with a background colour, as was the usual practice in Egyptian art. However, in the Workmen's Village we already have sketches in white directly on mud plaster with no infill of colour, which were found *in situ*. These are the Bes figures from Main Street 3, the procession of women from Long Wall Street 10, and the lower border of an unrecognisable main design from Long Wall Street 11.<sup>28</sup> Rough sketches in black on whitewashed walls were also noted, for instance in Long Wall Street 7.<sup>29</sup> It therefore appears that monochrome sketches were not unusual in the Workmen's Village. Four were described by Peet and Woolley, and they imply that there had been others. Their numbers, together with the fact that they occurred in **different** houses, suggests that they should not be regarded as a series of unfinished works, but instead as the remains of a simplified style of room decoration. When seen in this light there is no reason to suspect our drawing to differ.

Thus precedents would seem to indicate that our drawing is not an unfinished work. Indeed it would not be reasonable to outline a figure twice before filling in with colour when the second outline was no "improvement" on the first.<sup>30</sup> Moreover the fact that the fine strands of the hair

<sup>23</sup> Exact distances between the centres of the blobs are hard to measure, but we can be reasonably confident in the regular 3.65 cms. interval which occurs in the four readings taken, making a good case for use of a cubit rod.

<sup>24</sup> A row of similar dots can clearly be seen at the edge of Senenmut's portrait, Peck and Ross 1978: Plate IV.

<sup>25</sup> Mackay 1917: 74.

<sup>26</sup> Mackay 1917: 75.

<sup>27</sup> The twists of the twine are clearly reproduced on grids occurring in the tomb of Nakht at Thebes. Cf. Mora, Mora and Philippot 1984: Plates 36, 37.

<sup>28</sup> COA I: 75, 84, 85, Plate XVIII; Kemp 1979b. No red underpainting was mentioned in the original report. Red is only noted as a possible colour for traces of three bands at the bottom of the Bes drawing (Kemp 1979b: 47).

<sup>29</sup> COA I: 59, 83.

<sup>30</sup> Preliminary and secondary sketches occur, of course, one on the other in many unfinished tombs and on papyri, but these are often considerably offset, as if the work of apprentices had been improved upon by a master.

had been put in adds weight to our argument; such details would not have been added if they were to be covered up later. It appears that the artist made a concession to the importance of the subject by laying out a grid first, but in no other way changed a particular method of working known at the time. Thus the ground colour had not first been put in, and there had been no overpainting later.

The white paint on our fragments forms a distinct paint layer, especially on the main outlines. The white design had clearly been applied over the grid. The strands of hair and the rearing part of the cobra are painted rather thinner, perhaps with a narrow reed brush similar to those used by scribes. The white is either gypsum or chalk, both commonly used in Egyptian painting. A medium such as gum or gelatinous size is commonly believed to bind the pigment.

The coils of the cobra had been deftly painted by swivelling a flat-headed brush to produce fine lines changing to thicker ones. This had been achieved in one movement, denser deposits of paint being left as the brush pressed slightly harder in the corners of the coil. The same bundle of artist's equipment mentioned earlier<sup>31</sup> contains the type of brush which could have been used, strips of wood or palm-rib with teased-out ends.

Peet and Woolley suggest that both black and white types of monochrome sketch which occurred in the houses appeared in a later period of occupancy at the Workmen's Village, superseding earlier polychrome schemes.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the situation might be rather more complex. The *in situ* monochrome sketches, occurring as they do in the Front Rooms of houses, may have a contextual significance as least as important as the suggested chronological one (see below). While Peet and Woolley note that plain plaster covered earlier polychrome plaster they do not provide similar information for the would-be later monochrome sketches. (There could, of course, have been a time lapse between plastering and painting, impossible to detect but which would give a later date). The exception is their note that the sketch in Long Wall Street 11 overlaid earlier painted decoration (COA I: 85). We can add another from our close inspection of an early expedition photograph of the Bes figures from Main Street 5, which appears fully as Plate VIII in Kemp 19b79. Here plain white painted plaster lies underneath. On the other hand, and in contradiction to Peet and Woolley's hypothesis, we note the scene of processing women, shown in Plate VII of the same article, which clearly does not cover an earlier plaster (although Peet and Woolley observe this, too, they do not question their original supposition (COA I: 84). A reasonable assumption would therefore be that this sketch, at least, could have been painted soon after the house, Long Wall Street 10, was built.

It is to be noted, too, that the rooms which received the full colour treatment were primarily the Middle Rooms; coloured decoration survived at the bases of walls, hardly recognisable owing to the overlaying of later coats of whitewash and plaster.<sup>33</sup> There is also evidence that upper rooms were sometimes painted.<sup>34</sup> It is possible that these rooms had more elaborate decoration because they were more important than those which had the simpler plain or monochrome plaster, thus the difference could be contextual. The repeated replastering which occurred in the Middle Rooms may in fact indicate frequent use of these rooms, a feature which would not be surprising if they had been used as living-rooms, often smoky from the charcoal hearths that regularly occupied a central place in the floor.

Returning to our fragments, we can be reasonably confident that our drawing was executed on the first rendering applied to the wall. There is no evidence on our admittedly few specimens of plaster that an earlier layer had existed which had been removed. As it is unlikely that the bricks would have been left unplastered for any length of time, it follows that our plaster had been applied at the building stage of the house. We can assume too that the drawing was done at an early stage for it appears that a particular area of wall was reserved for it which was specially plastered for the purpose (as noted previously, the plaster ground is markedly different from that represented close by).

<sup>31</sup> Davies 1913: 5, Plate XVII.

<sup>32</sup> COA I: 59. The reason Peet and Woolley give is that pigments seemed to have run out. But as they also suggest that the chapels were built, and presumably decorated, over a long period (ibid.: 98) this implies that pigment was, indeed, always available. For coloured chapel plaster see COA I: 94, 107, Plate XXXVI; AR II: Chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> COA I: 59.

<sup>34</sup> COA I: 56, 80-1, Plate IX.2; AR III:25.



The subject matter of our fragments would thus have important implications for dating the house. As noted above, this appears to be post-Amarna in style and possibly denotes Tutankhamun. Peet and Woolley (*ibid.*: 53) have already suggested that West Street was a later addition to the Village, something confirmed by the excavations of this season (see Chapter 1 of this report). The studies of the ring bezels by Shaw (*AR I*: Chapter 9) and Shannon (*AR IV*: Chapter 12) reveal that whilst the history of the Village in all likelihood began in the reign of Akhenaten and continued past the accession of Smenkhkara, it had flourished predominantly in the time of Tutankhamun. A late date for our fragments would therefore fit in with these hypotheses. Furthermore, the subject matter of two of the plastered walls excavated in the easterly two-thirds of the Village contrasts with that on our fragments and would thus add weight to the idea that this part of the Village was occupied a few years earlier than West Street. On one, the style of the processing women on the original rendering of Long Wall Street 10 shows some features characteristic of the Amarna style. On the other, the remains of a polychrome design, recorded by Peet and Woolley in the Upper Room of Main Street 10, a human figure was involved in what they interpreted as probably a scene of Aten worship (*ibid.*: 60).

Returning to the question of context we have noted that all four monochrome sketches which were found *in situ* came from the Front Rooms of houses. Although ours could have come from the Front Room, too, the function of this room is not quite the same as in the other houses. The Front Rooms excavated by Peet and Woolley frequently contained evidence for the grinding and pounding of cereal grains and for weaving, both of them activities carried out primarily by women (The Appendix to Chapter 3 of this volume discusses the general layout and uses of rooms in the Village). But in West Street 2/3 these activities had been housed separately in the annexe on the south, except for the mortar in the north-west corner of the Front Room. Even this, however, may not have been the principal mortar for cereals since, as noted in the house description above, a limestone mortar came from the fill of the annexe and had probably stood originally not far from the quern emplacement. If the subject matter of the Bes figures and processing women is a reinforcement of the "female" nature of the rooms in which they occur (cf. Kemp 1979b: 51-53), our drawing, which in complete contrast shows part of an altogether grander theme - a royal scene - may point to an essentially masculine association for the Front Room. The hypothesis is advanced elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 1) that West Street 2/3 belonged to accommodation occupied by a police unit, and was an equivalent on a reduced scale to East Street 1.

In conclusion we can say that the examination of the four fragments of wall plaster found in West Street 2/3 has yielded a surprising amount of information about the techniques of manufacture and drawing methods. This in turn, taken with the implications of the art-style and information gained from comparison with other wall plaster from the Village, has reinforced the idea of a late date for West Street and suggests a mainly contextual significance for the linear art-style rather than a chronological one.

## **Part 2. Subject matter and identity of royal figure by Elizabeth Shannon**

The design on fragment 1 is readily identifiable as the crown of a head wearing a striated wig with uraeus on the brow. The "Nubian" wig so often seen in the art of Amarna has such striations at its top. In carved representations, the short layered curls that make up the lower part of the wig form a few rows over the forehead. This is not apparent on the brick fragment no. 1, where this area is occupied only by the coils of the uraeus. Approximately half a grid square behind the coils is a diagonally curved line which may be a stray mark, but is well placed to be part of the top row of curls. The striations seem broken at this point, supporting the latter interpretation.

### **Subject matter**

West Street 2/3, though not equal to the "Foreman's House" of East Street 1, is somewhat larger than ordinary houses in the Village. Though the bricks were found amidst the rubble on the floor of the wide shallow Front Room of the house, they could have fallen from the dividing wall

between this room and the Middle Room, and could have formed part of the wall surface of the latter rather than of the former. Admittedly a royal figure seems unusual subject matter for a private house, but one possible parallel comes from the Main City, in the niches sometimes found in the loggia and/or central room (corresponding to the Front and Middle Rooms of the Workmen's Village houses). These niches were painted with a short hymn to the Aten, and in at least the house of the vizier Nakht (K50.1) and in M50.16 apparently contained the painted figure of the king adoring cartouches of the Aten (COA I: 42-3). Though floral designs, Bes figures and musicians are better known from the Village, Peet and Woolley did report in one house a possible closer parallel, a "polychrome design with a human figure, probably a scene of Aten worship" (ibid., 60). Owing to the fragmentary condition of the present pieces, it is impossible to say whether the royal figure is worshipping at all, much less what deity might be involved. No Aten rays appear, but it cannot be absolutely ruled out that they may have been beyond the surviving portions.

### The identity of the royal person

**The drawing.** Very little remains from which to draw conclusions about who the drawing represented. However, the shapes of the heads of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun in the Nubian wig do differ. Depictions of Akhenaten in this wig are comparatively rare, and except for the archaic wig on some of his *shawabti*-figures, he does not wear other striated wigs. Two examples in the Nubian wig occur in the Amarna tombs, one in the reward scene from the east wall of the tomb of the High Priest Meryra (RT I: Plate XXX), and the other from the east side of the entrance of the tomb of Panehsy, where the wig is topped by the *atef* crown (RT II: Plate VIII). Both examples are too badly damaged to show where the wig ends and the brow begins, but both give the impression of a shallower, less domed forehead than in the West Street drawing. The line made by the slope of the forehead is more oblique than convex (Figure 2.5 right).

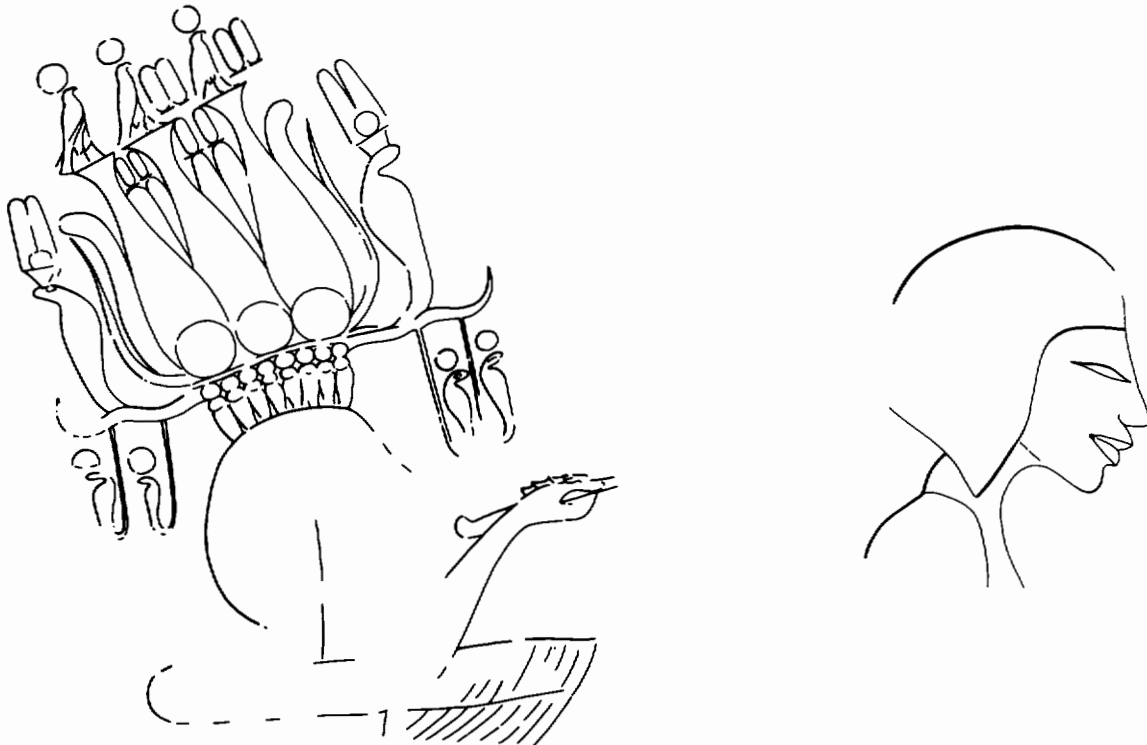


Figure 2.5. Left: profile of Akhenaten wearing the *atef* crown above the Nubian wig (tomb of Panehsy, after RT II: Plate VIII). Right: Akhenaten wearing the Nubian wig (after Aldred 1973: no. 38).

On the east wall of the tomb of Pentu is another representation in what might be the Nubian wig

(RT IV: Plate VIII). Here the lines are very uncertain, but again the forehead seems less domed than in the present example. Other representations of Akhenaten in the Nubian wig<sup>35</sup> occur among the trial pieces excavated at the Central Palace (COA III: Plates LXV.8 [cf. Figure 2.5 left] and 9; LXVII.12; LXX1.1 [no. 350], 4), and two practice pieces of uncertain provenance but reputedly from el-Amarna in the Brussels Museum, nos. 3051 and 3052 (Aldred 1973: nos. 9, 10). None of these is inscribed with a royal name, and none has royal insignia, except for the disproportionately small and faintly scratched uraeus on Brussels 3051 noted by Aldred and barely discernible in the photograph published by him. The others have been traditionally supposed to be Akhenaten on grounds of portraiture. These pieces are the work of artists of varying degrees of skill, and some are perhaps questionable as to identity. Taken together, they do however show a shallowly curved forehead. In half of the cases the back of the wig angles outwards as if to indicate a long head like that of the princesses, rather than continuing straight downwards as with the West Street 2/3 drawing, if the representation is correct.

Representations of Tutankhamun in the same wig include (but are not limited to) the lid of the carved and painted ivory chest from his tomb (Figure 2.6 left), some of the scenes on the small gilded shrine, Tutankhamun as lion slayer on the ceremonial shield, as archer on the gold-covered fan (Figure 2.6 right), bow case and buckle from his tomb. Only on the shrine does he have a shallower forehead reminiscent of Akhenaten's. Usually it is a high, pronounced dome like that of the West Street 2/3 design.



Figure 2.6. Left: Tutankhamun in Nubian wig, as depicted on the ivory chest from his tomb. Right: Tutankhamun in Nubian wig, as depicted on the gold-covered fan from his tomb.

No representations of Smenkhkara in the Nubian wig are known.

As for Amarna queens, Nefertiti's head in this wig is usually less domed like that of Akhenaten (cf. Aldred 1973: nos. 18, 23, 24, 48, etc.), and Ankhnesenamun in this or similar wigs usually also shows a shallower forehead than her husband.

**Indications from the grid.** One feature of the relationship of the drawing to the grid is immediately apparent: the crown of the head runs exactly along one of the horizontal grid lines. The nose of the uraeus also exactly meets a vertical line. The figure seems to fit the grid as does the major figure in a composition. That the grids used by Egyptian artists were not only devices for the copying of small designs on to larger areas, but were in fact also instrumental in drafting figures according to an established canon has been amply demonstrated (Mackay 1917; Iversen 1975; Robins 1983: 68, and 1986). In traditional Egyptian art the major figure in a scene was usually constructed so as to stand 18 squares tall from the hair (brow) line to the base line, with

<sup>35</sup> Discounting *shawabti*-figures 196 and 216 (Martin 1974: Plates 42, 45), since being rendered in the round they are difficult to compare with more-or-less two dimensional representations.

certain key points hitting certain other grid lines. During the Amarna era (including Tutankhamun's reign, cf. Robins 1984) different rules prevail, yet a canon is followed, and in every case where grid traces remain and both king and queen are shown, the traces fit the king (major figure). The queen is slightly smaller, and usually does not fit the surviving or reconstructed grid. Therefore, it seems that the figure from West Street 2/3 is the major figure, not a queen accompanying a king. In view of the extreme scarcity of cartouche bezels from the Village with queens' names (Shaw 1983; this volume, Chapter 12), a queen alone (as the major figure) seems unlikely.

That the Amarna canon, and therefore the Amarna system for gridding, differs from the traditional has long been recognised (Iversen 1975: 58, note 1), yet agreement as to its rules has yet to be reached. Robins (1983; 1986: 45-6, 50-1) proposes a grid 20 squares high from base line to hair line. She divides the height of the major figure by 20 and finds that though the same key points do not hit the same grid lines as in the traditional canon, certain points do seem to correspond to certain lines in a consistent manner. Gilderdale, on the other hand, suggests a more variable gridding system (1984; 1985), based on his idea that in the more extreme "early" Amarna style the height from base line to the join of the neck and jaw is always 18 squares. He then adds the squares necessary to complete the head. This method is unusual in that it gives no hair line. The largest obstacle to resolving the question is that no reliable example of an Amarna grid has been discovered. The well-known slab from the Royal Tomb is gridded so irregularly as to admit of more than one interpretation, while the grid noted by Robins in the tomb of Ay (1983: 67-8) is incomplete, and concerns figures with their heads missing. For the record, it should be noted that the tomb of Parennefer also contains traces of a gridded figure of Akhenaten, though here both ink drawing and grid are so faint that their traces are only visible in a few places.<sup>36</sup> From the viewpoint of understanding the Amarna canon, it is unfortunate that the West Street 2/3 drawing includes none of the facial profile, which might have settled several questions.

Since the face has not survived on this most recent grid from Amarna, the question of the hair line remains particularly puzzling. The lower horizontal grid line in the present piece appears to fall near that point, yet the actual end of the bands does not survive, so the present drawing cannot be said definitely to have a grid line approximately at that point. Yet one observation regarding hair lines in general might be made. In Gilderdale's system there is no such grid line, and the hair line of the major figure falls at varying points between lines 19 and 20 (Gilderdale 1984: Figures 2-7). To the draftsman who used them, grids were a practical tool. Ink drawings from Amarna show that draftsmen then, as now, tended to begin a figure with the head, and to begin the facial profile at the brow (hair line point). In Amarna drawings, a break or overlap in the ink line can often be seen at this point (the tomb of Mahu contains many inked figures showing this feature, a few of which are in the photograph published by Davies (*RT* IV: Plate XLII). Trial sketches furnish further examples (Aldred 1973: no. 59; Pendlebury 1951: Plates LXXIV.3; LXXVIII.8). It is logical that a canonically accurate figure would be drawn beginning at a specified line rather than at some undetermined point between lines.

All such questions aside, the predictable fit of surviving points of the West Street 2/3 head and uraeus within the grid provides one more indication that grids were used at Amarna to construct figures that were more stylised than naturalistic. This should be remembered whenever portrayals of Akhenaten are used as a basis for theories about his actual appearance.

### Summary

Despite the closest of examinations the purpose and identity of the royal figure from the wall of West Street 2/3 must remain uncertain. For the subject matter there may be parallels at Amarna, one of them in the Workmen's Village. As to the identity, on grounds of fit within the grid and scarcity of inscriptional references from the Village to queens, a king seems most likely. The high, domed shape of the forehead and perhaps also the back of the wig give the impression

<sup>36</sup> This is the uncarved drawing of Akhenaten seated wearing the *atef* crown and served by Parennefer, on the back wall of the tomb (*RT* VI: Plate VI). Grid traces appear in the area of the king's upper chest, and (horizontal only) at the top of the Aten's rays. Additional guidelines occur along the cornice and row of uraei (again, only horizontal, and here marking off the architectural features rather than corresponding to a regular grid).

that the king was Tutankhamun rather than Akhenaten.

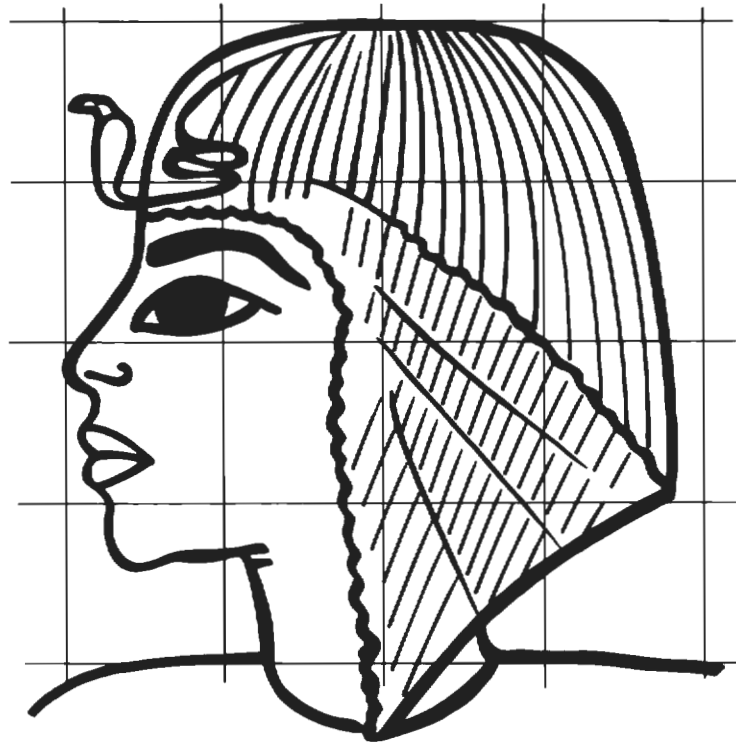


Figure 2.7. Reconstruction as head of Tutankhamun based on proportions from Robins (1984: Fig. 2), as in the tomb of Tutankhamun.