

DESCRIPTION
OF THE
EGYPTIAN TOMB.

Price One Shilling.

DESCRIPTION

25

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XVIII

DESCRIPTION

OF THE

EGYPTIAN TOMB,

DISCOVERED

BY

G. BELZONI.

LONDON :

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1821.

DESCRIPTION

REGISTRATION

DISCOVERED

LONDON:

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JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET

SITUATION AND DISCOVERY

OF

THE TOMB.

THE sepulchre, of which these two chambers form but a small part, is a vast artificial excavation in a rock distant about three miles from the Nile, to the west of the ancient city of Thebes in Egypt. All the various passages and halls of which it consists are covered with similarly painted figures in relief, and the whole length of the tomb equals 309 feet. These two apartments are not contiguous; but they have been selected for exhibition, the one for its great beauty, and the other for the instructive character of its emblematical representations; they will, together, give some idea of the splendour of the whole sepulchre. The figures are casts in plaster of Paris, from wax impressions taken on the spot, and painted with the greatest exactness and fidelity from drawings made at the same time: on the day the tomb was opened, the colours were found as fresh and vivid as they are here represented. In examining, however, this curious monument, its high antiquity ought not for a moment to be lost sight of, as it would scarcely be just or reasonable to compare the paintings, which have decorated its walls for nearly three thousand years, with the finer specimens of modern art. But this is only one of an immense number of excavations to be found in the neighbourhood.

At the foot of the Libyan chain of mountains, is a tract of rocks, called Gournou, lying to the west of Thebes, and extending in length about two miles, which is hollowed out into chambers and galleries where the ancient inhabitants deposited their dead. No mines or catacombs in any part of the world can be compared with these astonishing places, the number and enormous extent of which, attest the vast population of a city, whose antiquity reaches far beyond all historical notice. For though the ruins of Thebes afford the most complete evidence of the genius and amazing resources of the early Egyptians, no record enables us to form the slightest conjecture as to the date of its foundation; since its temples and obelisks had already begun to decay, when Menès, the first king of the country, commenced the building of Memphis. This latter, on the establishment of monarchy, became the capital of Egypt, but of the comparative greatness of the two cities, we may judge by the simple fact that the exact position of Memphis is now a matter of dispute, which the Members of the Institute, who accompanied the French expedition, were unable to determine; while Thebes, though ruined, has resisted, in a wonderful manner, the inroads of time, of ignorance, and barbarity.

Its original inhabitants are supposed to have dwelt in caverns in the rocks; and Osiris, who taught them the use of husbandry, and whom they afterwards worshipped as a god, was imagined to have been the founder of the city. *Carnac*, where now stand the ruins of the oldest and most extensive temple, on the eastern side of the river, was the spot first inhabited, but as the population increased, the western bank was also occupied and covered with houses, palaces, and religious edifices. Though it has been surmised that Homer spoke rather as a poet than as a geographer when he describes it as having a hundred gates; yet Thebes, in its glory, filled the whole valley, resting on each chain of mountains, and the Nile flowed through the centre of a vast and populous city, which is estimated to have been thirty miles in circumference. And if it had greatly declined from its original splendour, long prior to the earliest notice of history, an ancient geographer* still says, that before the invasion of Cambyses, "The sun had never shone on so magnificent a city."

The Persian conqueror, however, hastened its fall; pillaged its temples, and carried away the ornaments of gold, silver, and ivory, with which they were decorated. But even to this day, the remains of this wonderful place are so considerable, that M. Denon asserts, in his *Travels in Egypt*, it took him more than twenty minutes to ride at full gallop round the exterior of the single temple of *Carnac*.

But it is not the object of this short description to dwell on the ruins of Thebes, of which it will be sufficient to mention that the most remarkable are the temples at *Carnac* and at *Luxor*, on the east side of the Nile. On the opposite bank are the temple of *Gournou*, partly buried in the sand, the *Memnonium* where anciently was the colossal statue of *Osymandyas*, and the two sitting gigantic figures, each fifty-two feet high, which remain in their original position. It was from the *Memnonium* that Mr. *Belzoni* brought the colossal bust of the young *Memnon*, as it has been called, now deposited in the *British Museum*.

Such are some of the most striking monuments of the magnificence of the former inhabitants of Thebes; but the present natives of *Gournou*, the most independent of any of the Arabs in Egypt, and greatly superior to them all in cunning and deceit, live in the entrance of the caves, or ancient sepulchres mentioned above. Here, having made some partitions with earthen walls, they form habitations for themselves, as well as for their cows, camels, buffaloes, sheep, goats, and dogs. They cultivate a small tract of land, extending from the rocks to the Nile; but even this is in part neglected, for they prefer to the labours of agriculture, the more profitable but disgusting employment of digging for mummies. Aware of the eagerness with which these articles are purchased by strangers, they make and arrange collections of them, and Mr. *Belzoni* has frequently seen in the dwellings of the Arabs,

* *Diodorus Siculus*.

magazines, as it were, well stocked with mummies, the empty wooden cases in which they had been contained, large pieces of asphaltum, much used and prized by painters, and other objects of antiquity procured from these caverns.

The natives also break up the wooden cases for fuel, with which, together with the bones of mummies, the asphaltum and rags, which embalmed and enveloped them, they heat the ovens in which they bake their bread.

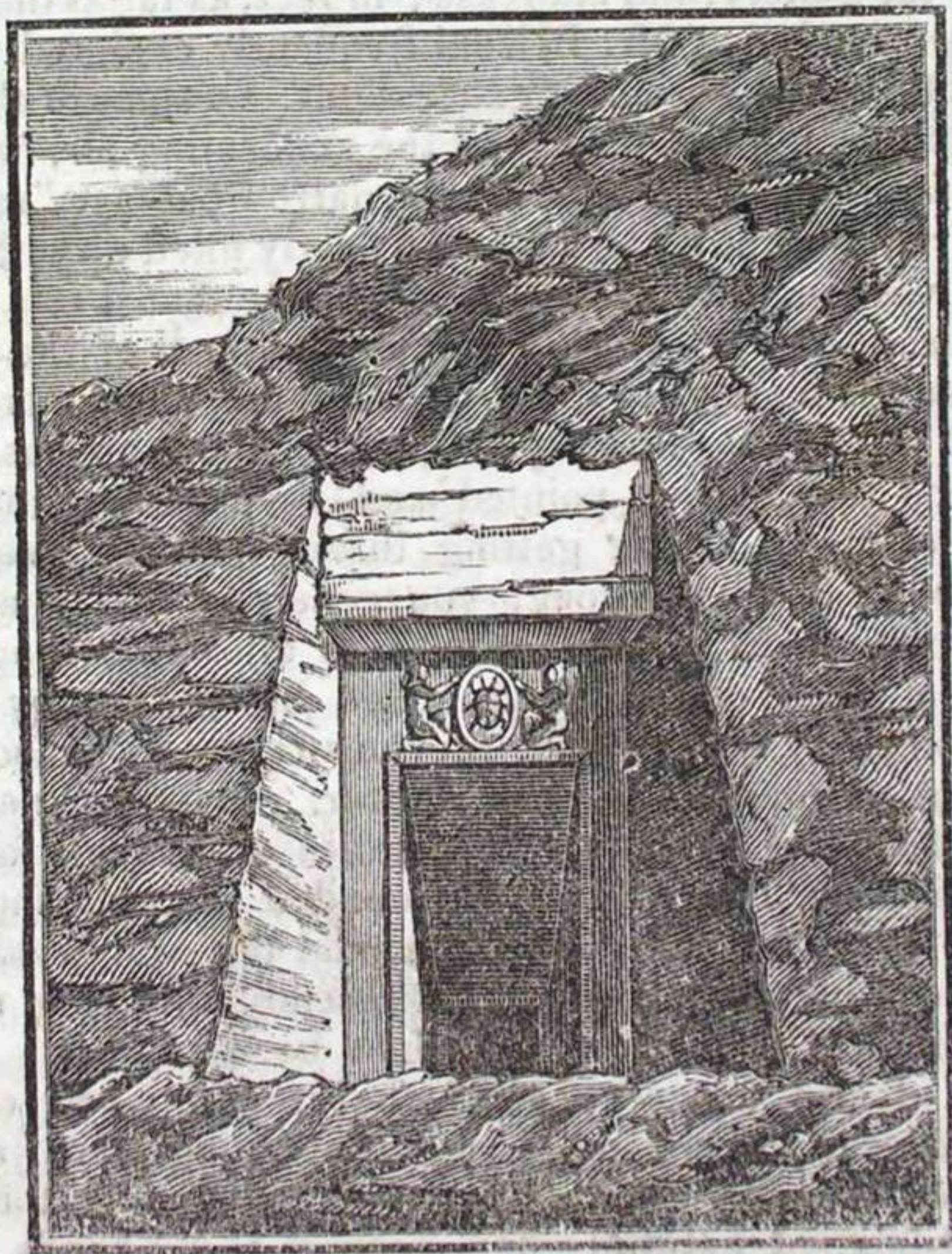
Every part of these rocks is cut out by art, in the form of large and small chambers, each of which has its separate entrance, and notwithstanding they are very close to each other, it is seldom that there is any interior communication between them. Some of them, though now much defaced, shew that they were originally of great magnificence, richly ornamented, and of surprising extent; but, in general, the sepulchres at Gournou are the pits where the Arabs dig for mummies.

It is scarcely possible by description to convey an adequate idea of these subterranean abodes, or of the strange and horrible figures with which they are filled. Most travellers are satisfied with entering the large hall, the gallery, and staircase; in fact, as far as they can conveniently proceed, but Mr. Belzoni frequently explored the inmost recesses of these extraordinary excavations. Of some of these tombs many persons could not withstand the suffocating air, which often occasions fainting. "On entering the narrow passage," says Mr. B., "which is roughly cut in the rock, and nearly filled up with sand and rubbish, a vast quantity of dust rises, so fine that it fills the throat and nostrils, and, together with the strong smell of the mummies, threatens suffocation. In some places there is not more than the vacancy of a foot left, which you must contrive to pass through in a creeping posture, on pointed and keen stones, that cut like fragments of glass. After getting through these passages, some of them 200 or 300 yards long, you generally find a more commodious spot, perhaps high enough to allow a sitting posture. But what a place of rest! surrounded by bodies, by heaps of mummies on every side, which, previous to my being accustomed to the sight, impressed me with horror. The blackness of the walls, the faint light given by the candles or torches for want of air, the different objects that surrounded me, looking at, and seeming to converse with each other, and the Arab guides, naked and covered with dust, themselves resembling living mummies, absolutely formed a scene that cannot be described. In such a situation I found myself several times, and when exhausted, fainting and nearly overcome, I sought a resting-place, and found one, my weight bore on the body of an Egyptian, and it crushed like a band-box. I naturally had recourse to my hands to sustain my weight, but they found no better support: so that I sunk altogether among the broken mummies, with a crash of bones, rags, and wooden cases, which raised such a dust as kept me motionless for a quarter of an hour, waiting till it subsided again.

"Thus I proceeded from one cave to another, all full of mummies,

piled up in various ways, some standing, some lying, and some on their heads. The purpose of my researches was to rob the Egyptians of their *papyri*, of which I found a few hidden in their breasts, under their arms, in the space above the knees, or on the legs, and covered by the numerous folds of cloth, that envelope the mummy."

The above description applies to most of the tombs of Gournou; though, as has been said before, there are some among them of a more splendid construction; but the sepulchres of the kings are in the sacred valley of Beban-el-Malook, which, beginning at Gournou, runs towards the west, and gradually turns due south. Another branch of the same valley runs two miles further to the westward, making five miles from the Nile to its extremity. At the bottom of the narrow valley of Beban-el-Malook, are openings cut in the solid rock; which is a calcareous stone, of an extremely white colour. These entrances are generally surmounted with a bas relief, representing an oval, in which are sculptured, a scarabæus, or beetle, and the figure of a man with the head of a hawk. On each side of this emblem, are two figures in the act of adoration.



Usual Entrance of a Tomb.

In the time of Strabo, 47 such openings are said to have existed; which were considered as so many entrances to the tombs of Egyptian kings. But there must be some mistake in this assertion, for it is not possible that so many could have been formed in this confined

valley: probably some of the sepulchres of the kings were situated at Gournon; at all events, eight entrances only were open, before the discoveries Mr. Belzoni made.

“On the 16th October, 1817,” says the traveller, “I set a number of *Fellahs*, or labouring Arabs, to work, and caused the earth to be opened at the foot of a steep hill, and under the bed of a torrent which, when it rains, pours a great quantity of water over the spot in which they were digging. No one could imagine that the ancient Egyptians would make the entrance into such an immense and superb excavation, just under a torrent of water: but I had strong reasons to suppose, that there was a tomb in that place, from indications I had previously observed in my search of other sepulchres. The Arabs, who were accustomed to dig, were all of opinion, that nothing was to be found there; but I persisted in carrying on the work, and on the evening of the following day, we perceived the part of the rock that had been hewn and cut away. On the 18th, early in the morning, the task was resumed; and about noon the workmen reached the opening, which was 18 feet below the surface of the ground. When there was room enough for me to creep through a passage, that the earth had left under the ceiling of the first corridor, I perceived immediately, by the painting on the roof, and by the hieroglyphics in basso-relievo, that I had at length reached the entrance of a large and magnificent tomb. I hastily passed along this corridor, and came to a staircase 23 feet long; at the foot of which, I entered another gallery, 37 feet 3 inches long, where my progress was suddenly arrested by a large pit, 30 feet deep, and 14 feet by 12 feet 3 inches wide. On the other side, and in front of me, I observed a small aperture, 2 feet wide, and 2 feet 6 inches high; and at the bottom of the pit, a quantity of rubbish. A rope, fastened to a piece of wood that was laid across the passage against the projections which formed a kind of door-way, appeared to have been used formerly for descending into the pit; and from the small aperture on the opposite side, hung another, which reached the bottom, no doubt for the purpose of ascending. The wood, and rope fastened to it, crumbled to dust on being touched. At the bottom of the pit, were several pieces of wood, placed against the side of it, so as to assist the person who was to ascend, by means of the rope, into the aperture. It was not till the following day, that we contrived to make a bridge of two beams, and crossed the pit, when we discovered the little aperture to be an opening forced through a wall, that had entirely closed, what we afterwards found to be the entrance into magnificent halls and corridors beyond. The ancient Egyptians had closely shut it up, plastered the wall over, and painted it like the rest of the sides of the pit; so that but for the aperture, it would have been impossible to suppose that there was any further proceeding. Any one would have concluded, that the tomb ended with the pit. Besides, the pit served the purpose of receiving the rain-water, which might occasionally fall in the mountain, and thus kept out the damp from the

inner part of the tomb. We passed through the small aperture, and then made the full discovery of the whole sepulchre.

“An inspection of the model will exhibit the numerous galleries and halls through which we wandered; and the vivid colours and extraordinary figures, on the walls and ceilings, which every where met our view, will convey an idea of the astonishment we must have felt at every step. In one apartment we found the carcase of a bull embalmed; and also, scattered in various places, wooden figures of mummies, covered with asphaltum, to preserve them. In some of the rooms were lying about, statues of fine earth, baked, coloured blue, and strongly varnished; in another part, were four wooden figures, standing erect, four feet high, with a circular hollow inside, as if intended to contain a roll of papyrus. The sarcophagus of oriental alabaster, was found in the centre of the hall, to which I gave the name of the Saloon, without a cover, which had been removed and broken, and the body that had once occupied this superb coffin, had been carried away. We were not, therefore, the first who had profanely entered this mysterious mansion of the dead; though there is no doubt it had remained undisturbed since the time of the invasion of the Persians*.”

* I can never, however, be persuaded, continues the author, that the invading Persians, strangers as they must have been to the customs of the country, could have succeeded in opening it, unless they had been assisted by the treachery of some native guide, informed, probably by tradition, of the plan of its construction, and of the existence of the corridors and splendid halls beyond its apparent termination. That there was much mystery among the architects of Egypt, and that secrets of this nature were handed down from father to son, and used for the purposes of deception and private emolument, we learn from the following amusing story related by Herodotus:

“Rhampsinitus,” says the historian, “heaped together a far greater quantity of silver than any of the succeeding kings are said to have possessed, and being desirous to secure his treasures, built an apartment of stone, which had one wall on the outside of the palace. This situation the architect made use of to deceive the king, and placed one of the stones in so loose a manner, that a man might easily take it out. Some time after the building was finished, and the king had lodged his riches in the place, the architect, lying upon his death-bed, called his two sons, and acquainted them that he had contrived the king’s treasury in such a manner, that they might always furnish themselves with the means of living plentifully; directing them to the place, and explaining all the particulars they were to observe in taking out and putting in the stone; in a word, he told them, if they would follow his instructions, they might be the treasurers of all the king’s riches. The sons waited not long after the death of their father to put his counsel in execution, and went by night to the palace; where, having found the place, they removed the stone without difficulty, and carried off a great quantity of silver. Rhampsinitus entering one day into the treasury, and seeing his heaps much diminished, fell into a great surprise: in regard he knew not whom to blame, having found all entire, and the apartment, in appearance, well secured. But after the king had two or three times successively visited his treasures, and always found them diminished, he ordered nets to be made, and spread about the vessels that contained his money. The thieves coming as before, one of them entered, and going to a vessel filled with silver, was presently taken in the snare. Finding himself in this extremity, he immediately called his brother, and acquainting him with his misfortune, desired him to come in, and cut off his head, lest the whole intrigue should be discovered, and neither of them escape with life. The brother, comprehending the reason of his

request, did as he desired, and having put the stone in its proper place, returned home with the head. Early in the morning, the king coming to the treasury, was not a little astonished to find the body of the thief taken in the net without a head, and the whole edifice entire, without the least sign of any person going out or coming in. In this perplexity he went away, and commanded the body to be hanged on the wall; appointing a guard, with strict orders, if they should see any one weeping at the spectacle, or pitying the person, to bring him immediately before the king. But no sooner was the body thus exposed, than the mother fell into a great passion, and commanded her surviving son, by any means he could contrive, to take down and bring away the corpse of his brother; threatening, if he refused, to go to the king and let him know that he was the thief who had robbed the treasury."

Herodotus goes on to relate how the brother succeeded, having made the guards drunk, in taking down the body in the dead of the night; and having, in derision, shaved all the guard on the right cheek, he laid the corpse upon one of his asses, and brought it home to his mother, according to her desire. The remainder of the story is still more curious, though perhaps a little improbable.—HERODOTUS. *Euterpe.*

EXPLANATION OF SOME OF THE HIEROGLYPHICS, THE MODEL, &c. &c.

It would have been desirable, that the model of the whole Tomb should have been the first object to present itself to the eye of the spectator; but since the local circumstances are such as to render that arrangement impracticable, it is recommended to begin with the examination of the farthest of the two chambers. This was the room in which Mr. B. found himself, after he had passed through the small aperture in the painted wall, spoken of before; and to this apartment he gave the name of the *Entrance Hall*. Its dimensions are 27 feet, 6 inches, by 25 feet, 10 inches; and the pillars are 4 feet square. Immediately in front of the door, as you enter, is the finest painted group of the whole sepulchre, consisting of four figures, and representing the reception of some distinguished personage, by Osiris, the great divinity of the Egyptians. An explanation of the subject of this group, will serve as a specimen of the manner in which these curious pictures have been interpreted by the eminent scholar to whom he is indebted for the Appendix to the second edition of his Travels:—

Osiris is seated on his throne of state, supported by pillars, or feet; he holds a hook in each hand, and in the left the flail also: King Psammis, with his name on his belt,



is presented to him by the Egyptian Apollo, Arueris, who has the head of a hawk. Behind Osiris, is a female figure, probably the Goddess Buto, with a cage and a bird over her head: according to the Egyptian mythology, she was the nurse of the children of Osiris and Isis. The dress of Osiris is almost entirely white, which, Plutarch says, was the usual colour of his attire, though sometimes it was black.

The whole tablet is surmounted by the winged globe, accompanied by the inscription which is scarcely ever wanting when this tutelary genius is introduced, whose name seems to be indicated by a bent bar, with a hand,



The other characters appear to mean, the *sacred father of the protecting powers, living unalterable, reigning, and ministering.*

But the most remarkable feature of the whole embellishments of the catacomb, consists of a procession of captives; which will be seen on the left, immediately as you enter the chamber on the lower tier, or compartment of the wall:—Before a hawk-headed divinity, are four red men, with white kirtles; then four white men, with thick black beards, and with a simple white fillet round their black hair, wearing striped and fringed kirtles; before these are four negroes, with hair of different colours, wearing large circular ear-rings, having white petticoats, supported by a belt over the shoulder; and next in order, march four white men, with smaller beards and curled whiskers, bearing double spreading plumes in their heads, tattooed, and wearing robes, or mantles, spotted like the skins of wild beasts. Now Mr. B. is disposed to consider the red men as Egyptians, the black-bearded men as Jews, and the tattooed as Persians; and these conjectures seem to accord remarkably well with the history of the times concerned: for Necho, the father of Psammis, *whose tomb this is supposed to be*, is known both from sacred history, and from Herodotus, to have had wars with the Jews, and with the Babylonians; and Herodotus mentions his expedition against the Ethiopians. So that this procession may very naturally be considered as consisting of captives made in his wars.—The passages in scripture, which illustrate this portion of history, will be found in the II. Chronicles, chap. xxxv., ver. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; and chap. xxxvi., ver. 1, 2, 3, 4; and in Jeremiah, chap. xxxvi. See also the 2d Book of Herodotus.—It is impossible to conceive any thing more striking than this agreement of sacred and profane history, with this remarkable representation in the catacomb.

There is ample room for curiosity to indulge itself in conjecture, as to the import of the other pictures which adorn the pillars and the walls of the Entrance Hall.

Hall of Beauties.—Returning into this chamber, where are two statues of granite, with lions' heads, which Mr. B. brought from the temple situated behind the two colossi, in the plains of Gournou; the chief subjects of the representations on its walls will be found to be the reception of Psammis by the principal divinities of the Egyptian mythology: he appears to be generally attended by the hawk-headed deity, Arueris; and, in some places, is presenting offerings to Isis, or other female divinities; and is ultimately received by Osiris, clothed in white.

Passage.—The principal tablets in the passage, are thus explained:—

On the left, No. 1, is Isis, in the form of a cow, adored by groups of figures.

No. 2, King Psammis is represented doing homage to a deity, considered to be a personification of *Stability*; a pair of weeping eyes are inserted between the two lower plates, or bust, and the hands hold the hook and flail. Over the King, the hieroglyphics are interpreted, *King Osiris, Dispenser of comforts to the Countries—Psammis the Powerful.*

Nos. 3 and 4. In these two tablets, the Goddess Buto is exhibited: she holds the King's right hand with her left, and with her right she presents to him a breastplate, which hangs round her neck, and which seems to be the *Alethia*, or Truth of Diodorus.

No. 5. Psammis is represented embracing a singular deity; over the King, is his name, followed by the epithet, *Vulcanian*, or devoted to Phthah.

No. 6. King Psammis, who is the principal figure of the catacomb, is represented sitting on a throne, or chair of state; his belt, or apron, is marked with his name. The vulture soaring over the King seems to represent some tutelary genius; it holds a ring, which, in other cases, serves for the support of plumes, or other honorary trophies. The altar before the figure is loaded with an offering of some substance, cut into slices, and standing in a compact mass.

UP STAIRS.

 THE MODEL.

WITHOUT enumerating the various dimensions of the different Halls and Passages of the Tomb, it will be sufficient to observe that the Model is constructed on a scale of one-sixth of the size of the original Sepulchre.

No. 1. First Corridor.

No. 2. Staircase.

No. 3. Second Corridor.

No. 4. Pit or Well; the position of the ancient ropes which were found, and the bridge of two beams that was constructed, as well as the aperture which was enlarged and forced through the wall, will be observed.

No. 5. The Entrance-hall; this is the farthest chamber represented below of its original dimensions.

No. 6. The Room called the Drawing-room. From this apartment were taken the outlined figures to be seen opposite the cases containing the Egyptian Curiosities. From the Entrance-hall on the left, a large staircase descends into a corridor, and farther on is the other Chamber

No. 7, represented below, called the Hall of Beauties. When standing in the centre of this Chamber, the traveller is surrounded by an assembly of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses.

No. 8. Hall of Pillars.

No. 9. Saloon, in the centre of which is the Sarcophagus of Oriental Alabaster, nine feet five inches long, and three feet seven inches wide; its thickness is only two inches, and it is semi-transparent when a light is placed in the inside. It is minutely sculptured within and without, with several hundred figures, which do not exceed two inches in height, and represent, it may be supposed, the whole of the funeral procession and ceremonies, relating to the deceased, united with several emblems, &c.

The substance of the Sarcophagus, is a stalactitical carbonate of lime, approaching in its nature to arragonite, but of inferior hardness, and slightly differing also in some other of its characters.

It stands over a staircase, which communicates with a subterraneous passage, leading downwards 300 feet in length.

On the right of the Saloon, is a small Chamber

No. 10, roughly cut out of the rock, as if unfinished, and without painting.

On the left of the Saloon is another Chamber

No. 11, with two square Pillars.

On the wall opposite the Model, are placed some casts from different parts of the Tomb.

CASES OF EGYPTIAN CURIOSITIES, &c.

Nos. 1 and 2 contain female ornaments; the mummy of an ape; the toe of a colossal figure, the head and arm of which are coming to England.

No. 3 contains different idols: some made of porcelain, others of a hard calcareous stone; and also fragments of the tomb of Psammis.

No. 4. Various idols of white stone, or of beautiful blue porcelain, from the tomb of Psammis; different fragments of breccia, with hieroglyphics,—found among the ruins of the temple of Berenice, on the Red Sea.

No. 5. Idols of calcareous stone; scarabæi of basalt, and of verde antico; one of a square form, used by the Kings of Egypt, and worn as an ornament on their breasts; some fragments of terra cotta, and lacrymatories.

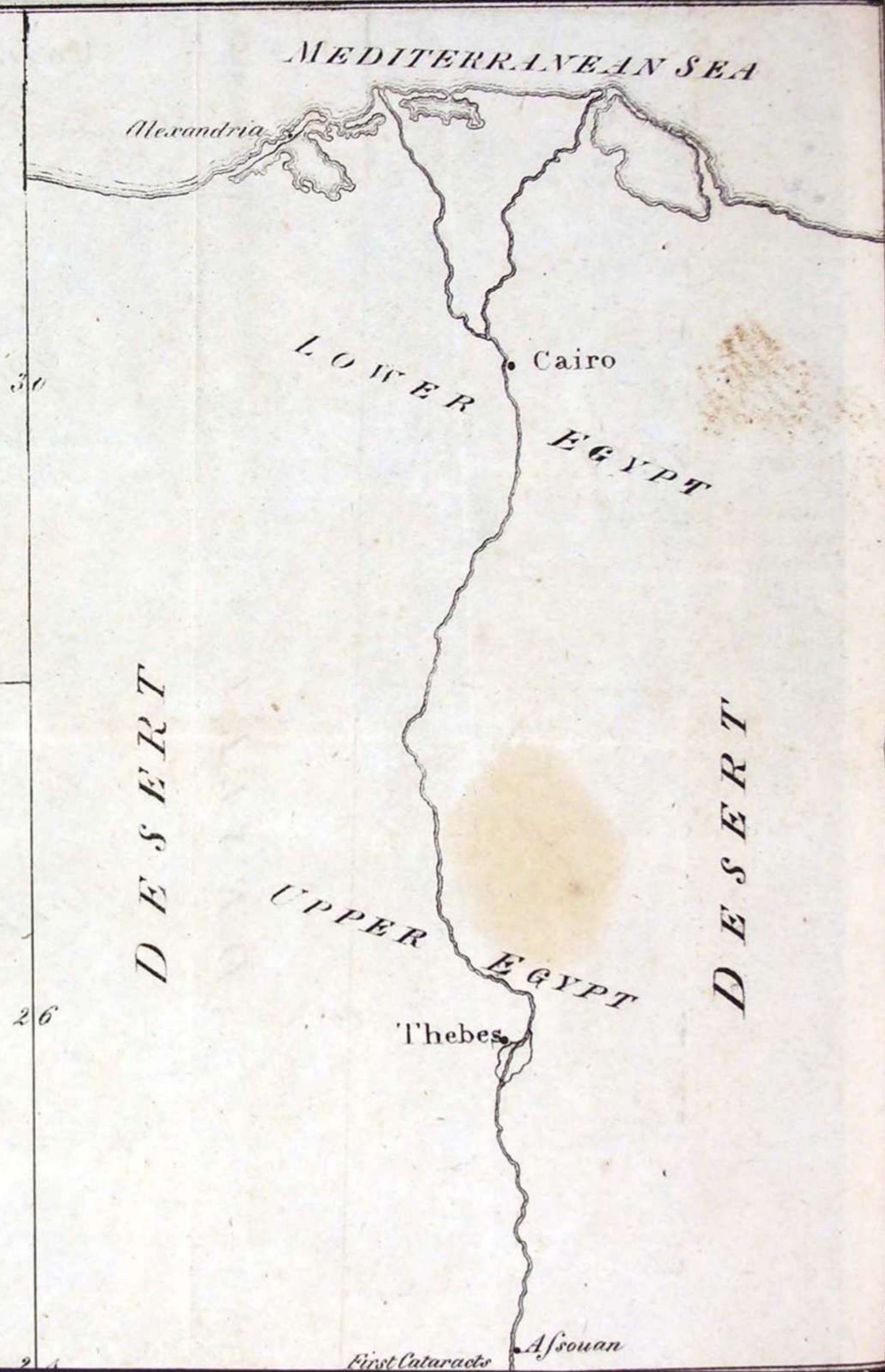
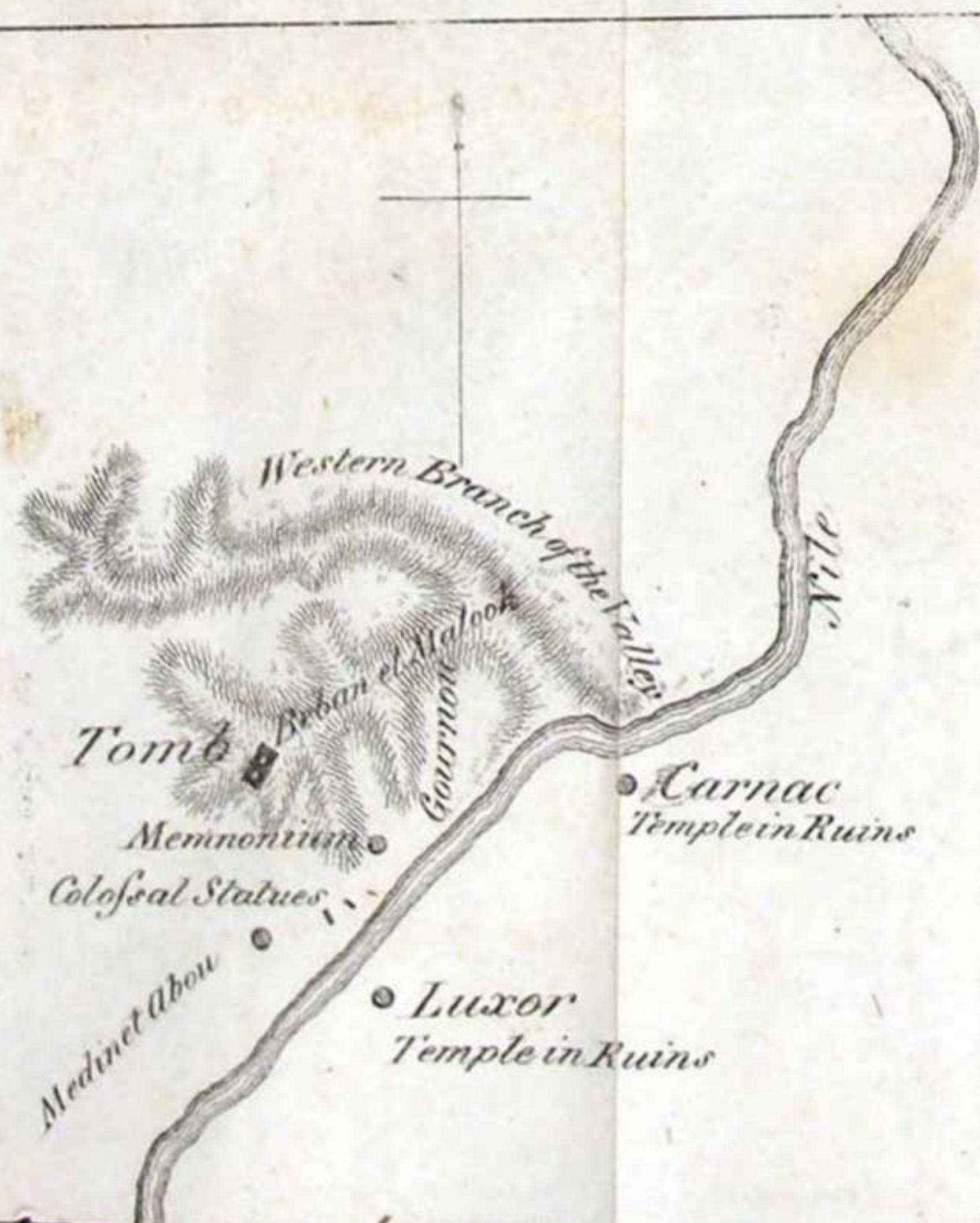
No. 6. Figures of alabaster; plates of the same substance,—supposed to have been used for the religious ceremonies; vases and fragments of alabaster; tomb-stones, from the mummy pits of Gournou.

No. 7. Figures of wood, and of bronze; ancient coins; vases, containing the bowels of mummies.

No. 8. Wooden idols; stone fragments; a most beautiful head of black basalt, from Sais; fragments of a sarcophagus of terra cotta, from the Oasis of Ammon.

No. 9. Wooden boxes, which contained idols.

MAP
 to illustrate the Situation of the
 TOMB,
 discovered by
 G. BELZONI.



No. 10. Ancient shoes; and ropes, made of the leaves of the palm tree; mummies of various animals, quadrupeds, and fish; tresses of hair, in a state of wonderful preservation.

No. 11. A mummy, opened in England a short time ago: it is the most perfect of any of those I unfolded in Egypt, during six years' research; the box in which it was contained, is placed above.

No. 12. The mummy of an Egyptian priest; remarkable for the singular position, and binding of the arms.

No. 13. A manuscript on papyrus, the largest known—it measures 23 feet.

No. 14. A portion of the original tomb of Psammis, which had fallen off from the wall; the colours of the female figure are considerably faded. On a chemical examination of these colours, it appears that the red and yellow are given by oxide of iron; the green and blue, by copper. The colours of the ancient Egyptians seem, therefore, to agree with those employed afterwards by the Romans: for Sir Humphry Davy found, on analyzing the various pigments, contained in vases, discovered in some excavations under the ruins of the palace of Titus, at Rome, that the red colour was sometimes produced by iron ochre, and sometimes by red oxide of lead; and that the blue and green colours were generally given by oxide of copper.

No. 10. A series of experiments on the effects of the loss of the
 palm tree; in which it is shown that the loss of this tree
 is not fatal to the island, as is generally supposed; and that
 the most part of the island is covered with a variety of
 trees, which are not only useful, but also ornamental.

No. 11. A description of the island of St. Vincent, and
 the most part of it, as it is at present; in which it is
 shown that the island is not only fertile, but also
 well watered; and that the soil is of a very good
 nature, and produces a great variety of useful
 and ornamental plants.

No. 12. The manner of an island, and the
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