

Session 8

Agatha Christie narrating ancient Egyptian sources: Hekanakhte and “Death comes as the end”

HPHI7008 Fact or Fiction

Dr Katharina Zinn

Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology and
Heritage





15/09/2010
special Google-
Doodle for the
120th birthday





Agatha Christie and Egypt

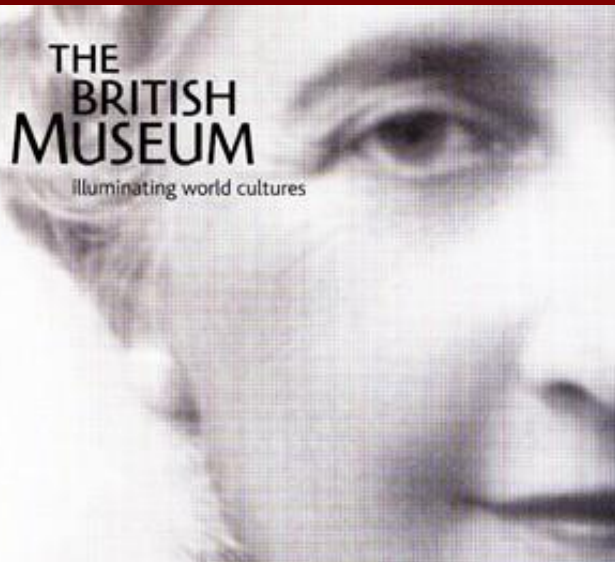
- *There are very wonderful things to be seen in Egypt, are there not?*
--Agatha Christie, *Death on the Nile*, (1937)
- first visited Egypt at age of 20
- went again in 1931 and 33, after married to archaeologist Max Mallowan Max's influence: growing interest in archaeology, became interested in ancient Egyptian civilisation



Dame Agatha Christie and Sir Max Mallowan



Agatha Christie with Max Mallowan
c.1931 celebrating their marriage
aboard a Nile steamer in Egypt.



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BRITISH
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illuminating world cultures

Mystery in Mesopotamia

Closed 24–26 December, 1 January

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THE NEW YORK TIMES

Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie
und
der Orient

**Kriminalistik
und
Archäologie**

Charlotte Trümpler

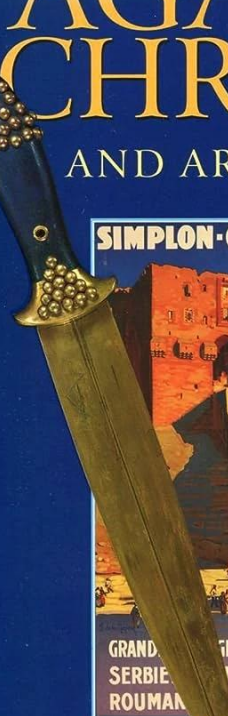
SCHERZ

Charlotte Trümpler

SCHERZ

AGATHA CHRISTIE

AND ARCHAEOLOGY



SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS



GRANDE BRETAGNE . FRANCE . SUISSE . ITALIE
SERBIE . SLOVÉNIE . SLOVÉNIE . BULGARIE
ROUMANIE . GRÈCE . TURQUIE . SYRIE

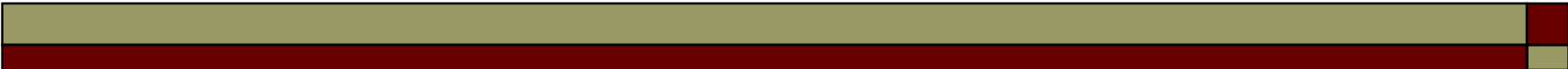
ALEP

Edited by Charlotte Trümpler

SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS

GRAND PAYS . FRANCE . SUISSE . ITALIE
SERBIE . SLOVÉNIE . BULGARIE
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Exhibitions

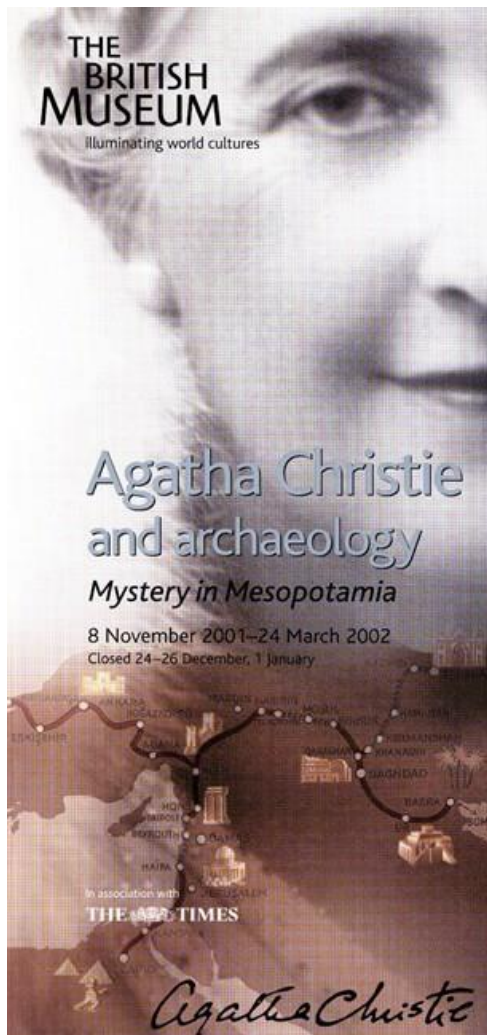
- ❑ https://agathachristie.fandom.com/wiki/Agatha_Christie_and_Archaeology:_Mystery_in_Mesopotamia
- ❑ <https://archive.archaeology.org/0203/reviews/christie.html>

"Agatha Christie und der Orient — Kriminalistik und Archäologie"

(Agatha Christie and the Orient — Criminology and Archaeology)

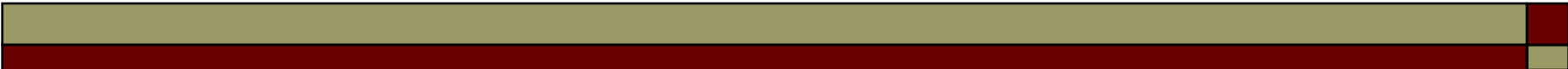
- ❑ Ruhrland Museum, Essen (19 Oct 1999 - 5 Mar 2000)
- ❑ Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna (13 Apr 2000 - 17 Sep 2000)
- ❑ Antikenmuseum, Basel (29 Oct 2000 - 1 Apr 2001)
- ❑ Vorderasiatisches Museum Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz (15 May 2001 - 30 Sep 2001)
- ❑ British Museum, London (8 Nov 2001 - 24 Mar 2002) – Agatha Christie and Archaeology
- ❑ Copenhagen

BM Publicity Text



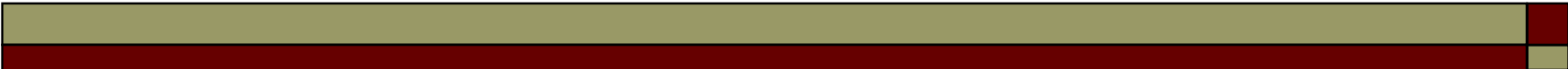
Agatha Christie originally became interested in archaeology on a visit to the site of Ur (in modern Iraq) in 1928. It was at Ur that she met her future husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan, and became involved in excavation of the sites in Iraq and Syria that were to make his name.

Agatha was greatly devoted to her husband and his career, accompanying him on digs and fulfilling the role of junior assistant: cleaning and repairing objects, matching pottery fragments and cataloguing finds. She became very best-known was much respected by Max's colleagues for her painstaking and skilled work. She also found time to write, and some of her best-known books are based on her life in the Middle East: *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*, *Appointment with Death*, and most particularly, *Murder in Mesopotamia*. This tour looks at some of the objects from each of the sites that Agatha worked on, and some of the photographs that she made there, a unique record that captures the mood of the digs.



Agatha Christie and Egypt

- She came to know a number of Egyptologists and found inspiration for her books in the history of Egypt. Egypt before the Second World War was one of the smart places to spend the winter. Cairo had its own social season and throughout the winter months, cruise ships sailed up and down the Nile from Aswan to Cairo and back, mooring at temples along the way. Visitors spent at least a week at Luxor from where they could spend days exploring the Valley of the Kings.



Agatha Christie and Egypt

- The tomb of Tutankhamun had been discovered in November 1922 but even ten years later, work to remove the thousands of wonderful objects was still going on. It was supervised by the man responsible for the discovery, Howard Carter.

Stories from Egypt

- *In the course of an excavation, when something comes up out of the ground, everything is cleared away very carefully all around it... That is what I have been seeking to do-- clear away the extraneous matter so that we can see the truth-- the naked shining truth.*
--Agatha Christie, *Death on the Nile*
- Egypt (and a cruise ship) first used in short story published 1920s with Egypt merely as convenient background
- 1934 short story (!) *Death on the Nile*: setting more authentic (author had seen temples she described) – 1937 novel
- *Death Comes as the End* (helped by Stephen Glanville)
- Play *Akhnaton* (written in 1937, published 1973, never performed) → advised by friend and Egyptologist I. E. S. Edwards

Agatha Christie and archaeology, Egypt, Near East

□ Novels:

- Murder in Mesopotamia [1936]
- Death on the Nile [1937]
- Appointment with Death [1938]
- Death Comes as the End [1945] - Set in Thebes in 2000BC, only novel not set in contemporary society
- Come, Tell Me How You Live [1946] - archaeological reminiscences
- They Came to Baghdad [1951] – espionage thriller
- An Autobiography [1977]

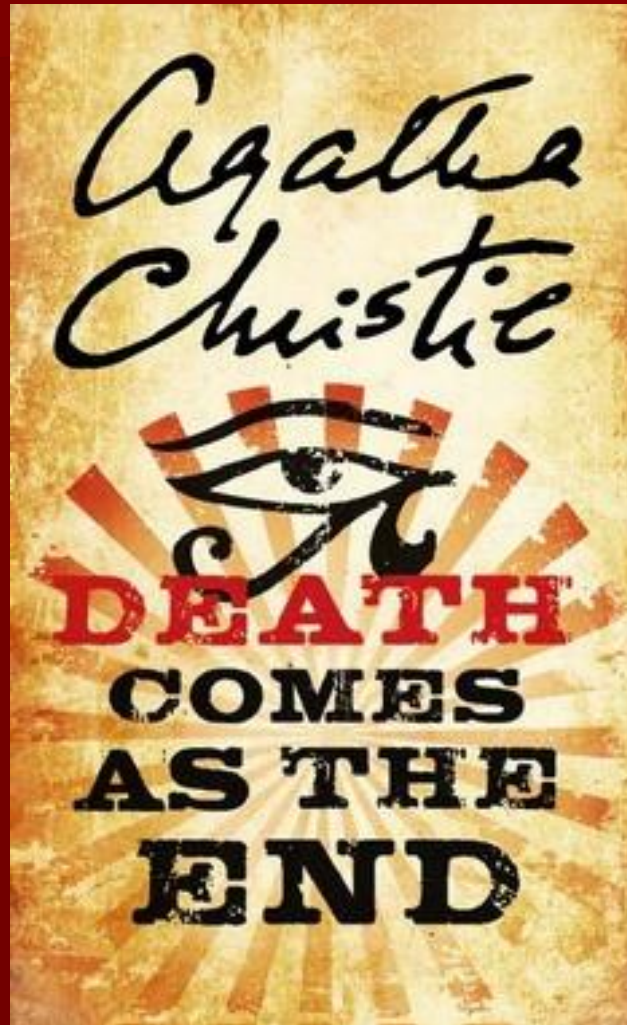
□ Play:

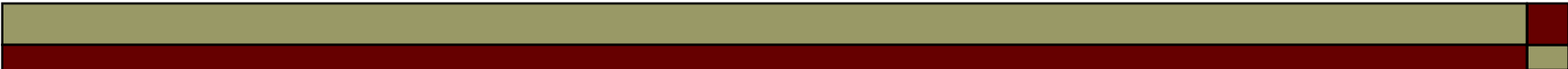
- Akhnaton (written 1937, performed 1973)

□ Short Stories:

- The adventure of the Egyptian Tomb
- The Sittaford Mystery

Agatha Christie and Archaeology





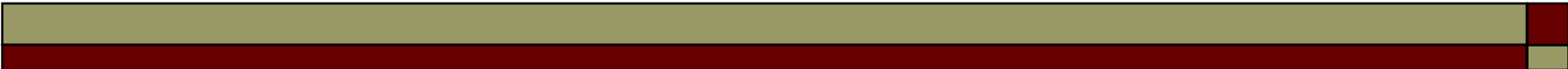
Death comes as the end

- ❑ It is 2000 BC in Egypt and Imhotep the Ka-Priest brings home his beautiful young concubine Nofret. But not all the members of his family welcome her. When she is found dead Imhotep's daughter, Renisenb, suspects it might not have been an accident. The death unleashes the greed and hate that have been building up within the family and the horrific events that follow tear it apart.

Stephen Glanville and Death comes as the End

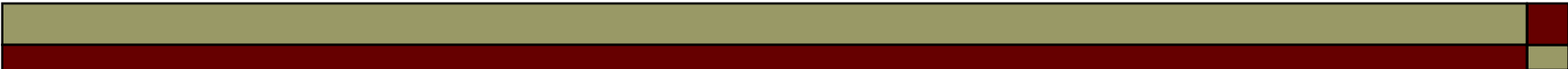


- This is Christie's only book with a historical setting.
- The idea of setting a murder mystery novel in Egypt was suggested to her by Stephen Glanville a noted Egyptologist and close personal friend and colleague of Christie's husband Max Mallowan.



Review by Mathew Prichard

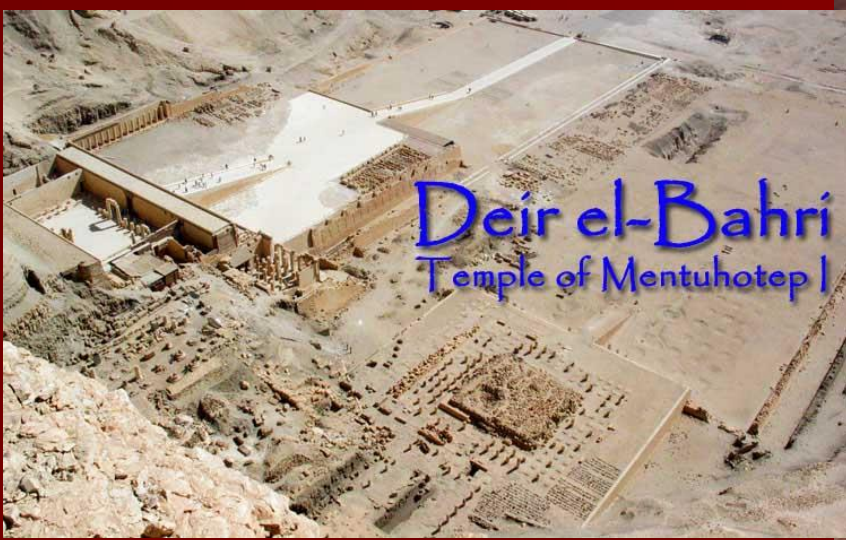
- Undoubtedly the tour de force of Nima's oriental writings was *Death Comes as the End* (written in 1943 as I was born!) This is a story set in ancient Egypt with ancient Egyptian characters and is a dark, brooding tale with a family that falls into disarray when Imhotep, a wealthy widowed priest and farmer from ancient Thebes, imports a new and thoroughly evil concubine called Nofret. The book is full of violent murder, cunning poisoning and intrigue. It is impeccably researched, with the help of an old friend of Max's called Stephen Glanville, and is particularly clever because although there is quite enough authenticity to transport the reader convincingly back to ancient Thebes, the intrigue and plotting would certainly not be out of place in the twentieth century. Without Hercule Poirot, or Miss Marple, this book has never been famous, nor the fastest seller, but I think it is one of Nima's finest achievements.

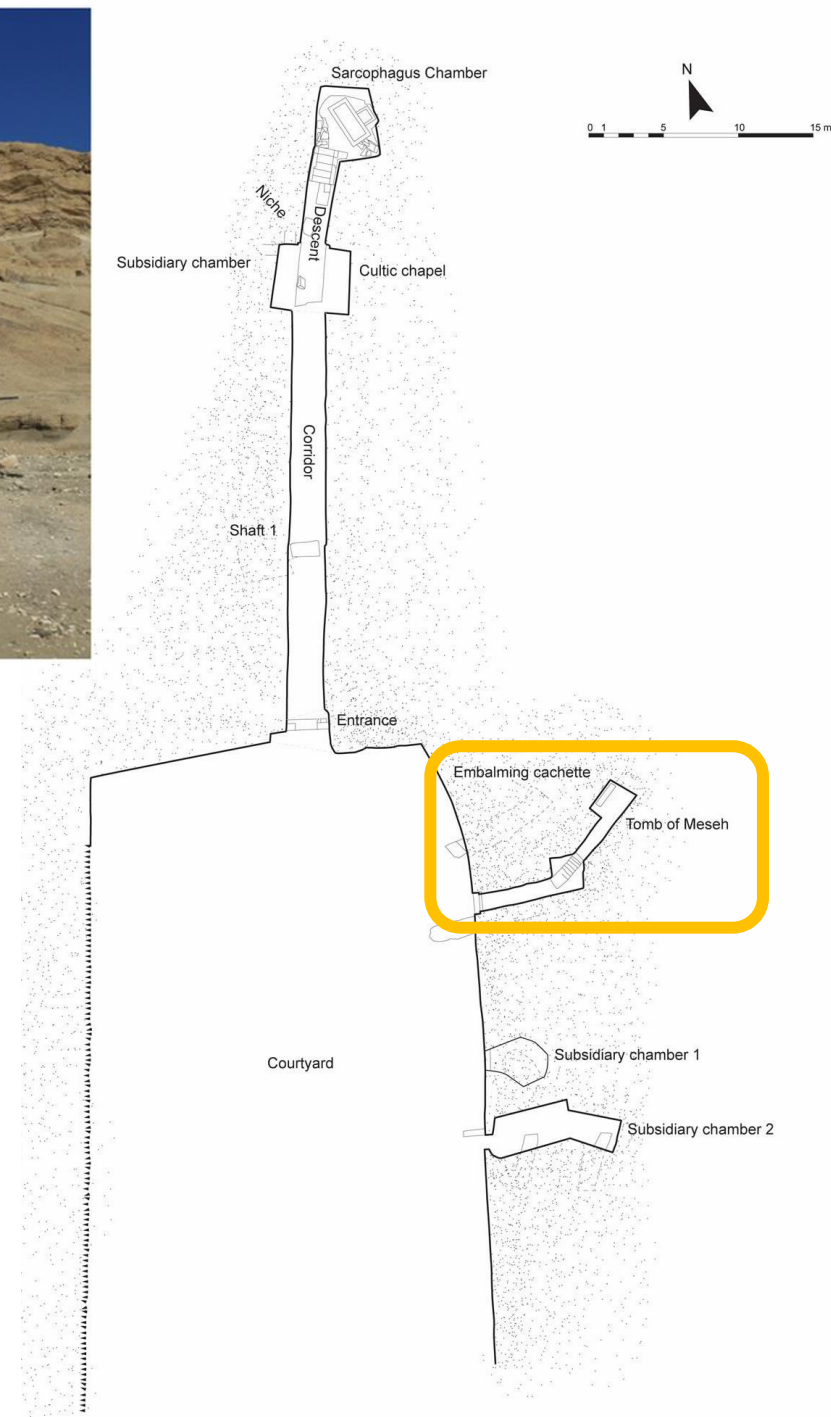
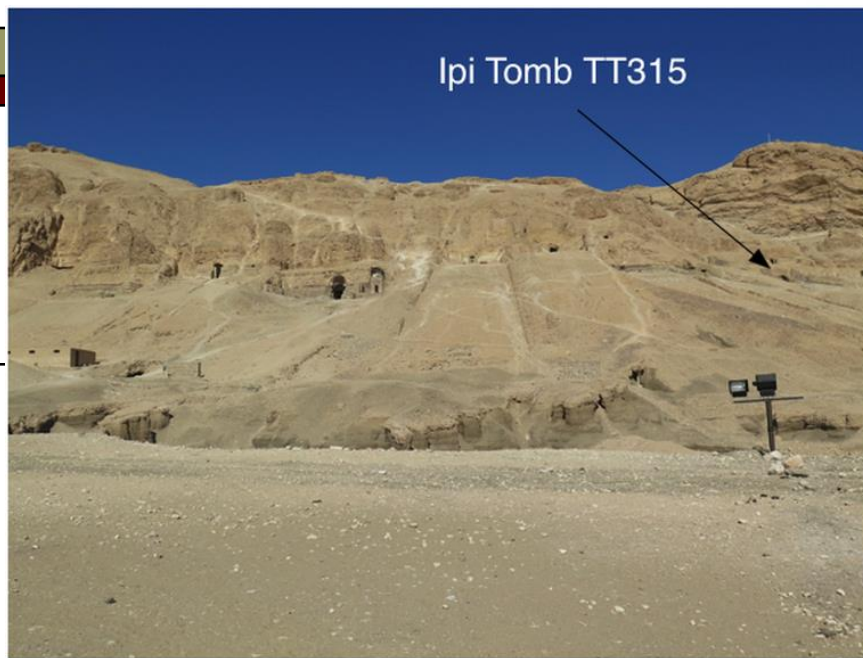
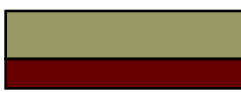


Death Comes as the End [1945]

- Set in Thebes in 2000BC (11. dynasty 2081-1938BC), this is Christie's only novel that isn't set in contemporary society. Her interest in the historical period was a result of husband Max Mallowan's archaeological work, but it was the notable Egyptologist Stephen Glanville who challenged her to write a book set in this time.







- Egypt, Upper Egypt, Thebes – central sector of the cliffs at Deir el-Bahari, Tomb complex of Ipy (TT 315, MMA 516), subsidiary tomb of Meseh (MMA 516B), MMA excavations, 1921–22
- subsidiary tomb for a relative or dependant on Ipy, discovered a set of papyri written by Theban land-owner Heqanakhte to his family



Find story locations

Detective -- all detectives --

Story Death Comes as th

View locations

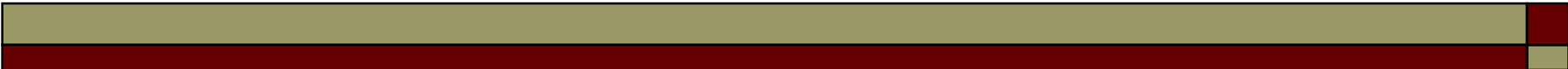
Locations

Results for **Death Comes as the End**.

- The Nile, Egypt
- Heracleopolis
- Memphis
- Thebes
- Syria
- Byblos, Lebanon
- Elephantine



Share this map: <http://agathachristie.com/map/story-locations/death-c>

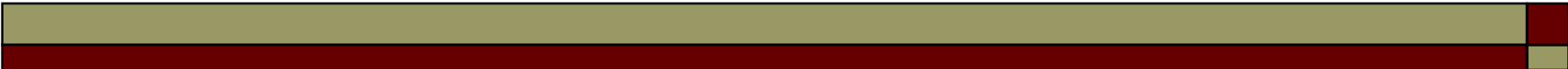


Death Comes as the End [1945]

- ❑ Set in Thebes in 2000BC (11. dynasty 2081-1938BC), this is Christie's only novel that isn't set in contemporary society. Her interest in the historical period was a result of husband Max Mallowan's archaeological work, but it was the notable Egyptologist Stephen Glanville who challenged her to write a book set in this time.
- ❑ Filled with hostilities, grievances and family drama, Christie readers will be familiar with the set-up of this mystery, even if the context is different. Imhotep, the father, has returned home with his concubine, Nofret, who will face an uphill battle to win over his children, Yahmose, Sobek, Ipi and Renisenb.
- ❑ When Imhotep is called away, his sons and their wives sense an opportunity to challenge Nofret, but it backfires and they face being disowned by the patriarch... And then the first murder is committed.

Characters in "Death Comes as the End"

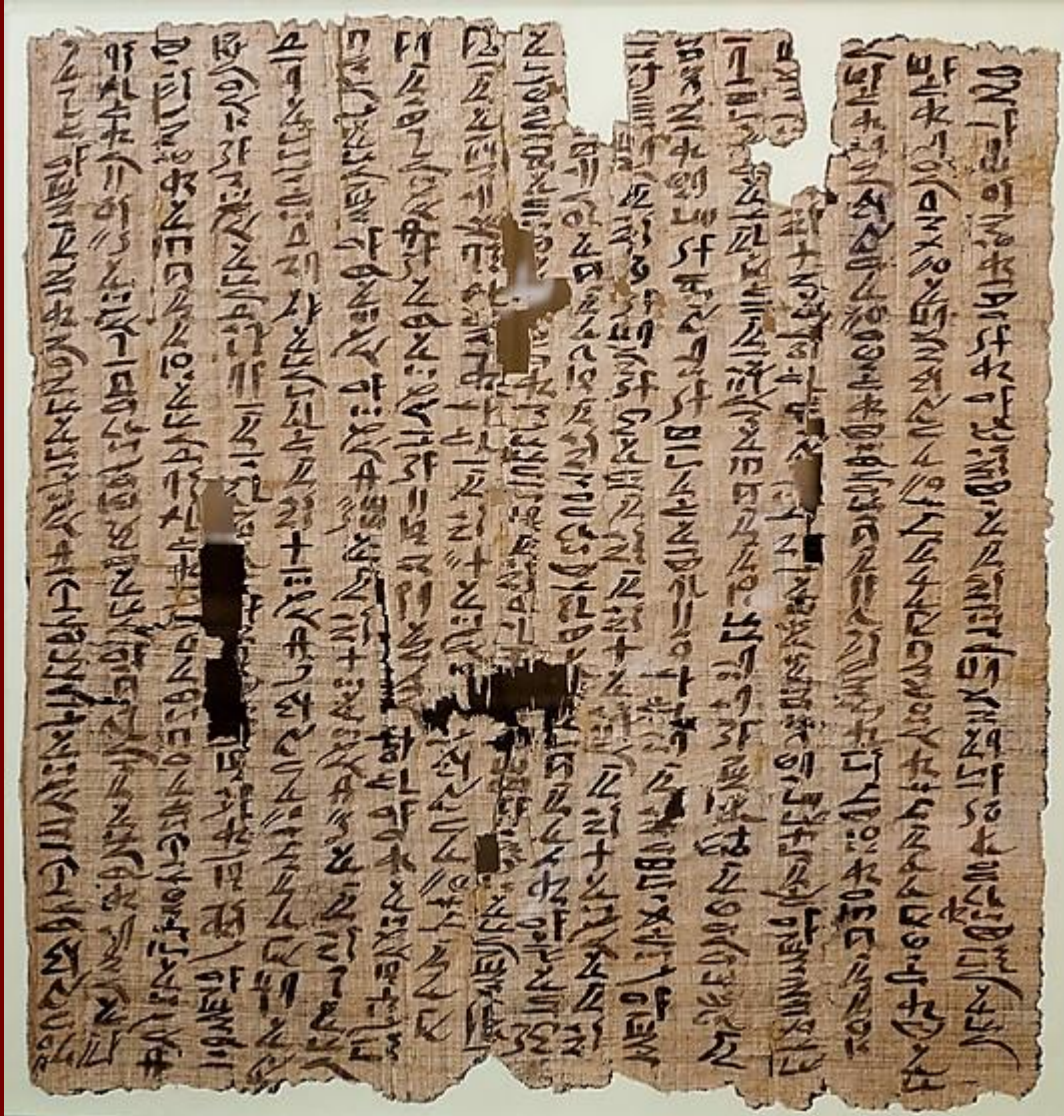
- ❑ Imhotep, a Mortuary Priest
- ❑ Nofret, Imhotep's concubine from the North
- ❑ Esa, Imhotep's mother
- ❑ Yahmose, Imhotep's eldest son
- ❑ Satipy, Yahmose's wife
- ❑ Ipy, Imhotep's youngest son
- ❑ Renisenb, Imhotep's daughter
- ❑ Sobek, Imhotep's second son
- ❑ Kait, Sobek's wife
- ❑ Henet, a female retainer
- ❑ Hori, the family's scribe
- ❑ Kameni, a scribe from the North
- ❑ Teti, Renisenb's daughter
- ❑ Khay, Renisenb's late husband



Death comes as the end

- ❑ written from the perspective of Renisenb (young widow reacquainting with her family – usual procedure in AE)
- ❑ her father (Imhotep) brings Nofret into their lives, who disrupts and antagonises Imhotep's sons (Yahmose, Sobek and Ipy), as well as their wives
- ❑ Imhotep is called away, Nofret presses Kamenit and Henet into service
- ❑ Satipy and Kait attempt to bully Nofret with tricks, plan backfires: Nofret appeals to Imhotep → he threatens to throw all his sons and their families out of the household on his return

The original sources:



Heqanakht Letter I

Middle Kingdom (dyn.
12, Senwosret I)

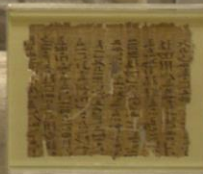
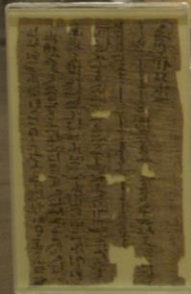
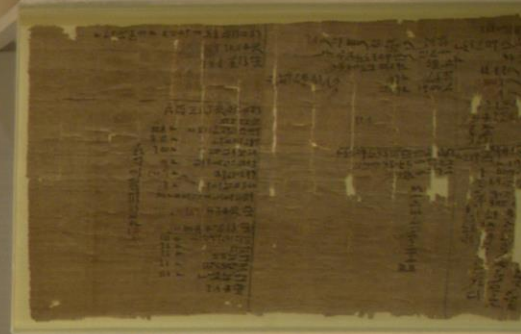
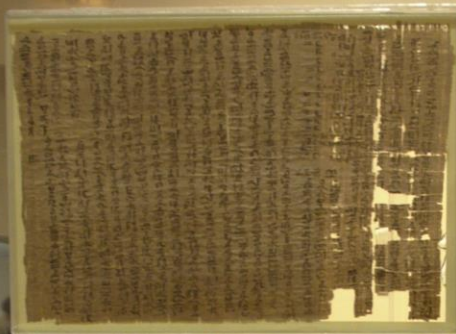
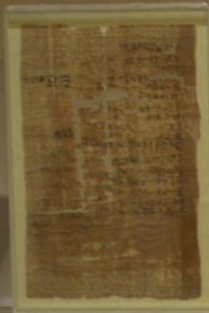
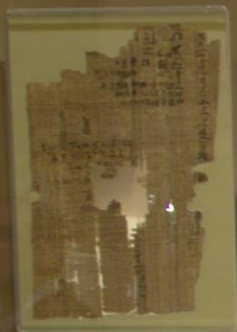
Thebes, Deir el-Bahri,
Tomb complex of Ipy
(TT 315, MMA 516),
Tomb of Meseh (MMA
516B)

Papyrus (h. 28.4 cm, w.
27.1 cm) , ink

Rogers Fund and Edward
S. Harkness Gift, 1922

Accession Number:
22.3.516

EXIT



The Heqanakhte Paper

- Heqanakht = native of Thebes during the early twelfth dynasty
- "ka-servant" of a high official he was responsible for the high official's statue cult and the administration of the land and income that had been endowed to maintain this cult
- letters and accounts written by Heqanakht and one or more scribes on sheets of papyrus discovered by Herbert E. Winlock in MMA excavation season of 1921-1922 in the tomb of Meseh (owned a side passage and crypt in the tomb complex of the vizier Ibi) → rock cut tombs overlooking the temples at Deir el-Bahri
- documents were still folded, tied and sealed, = unique insights into the domestic and financial affairs of an average middle class family

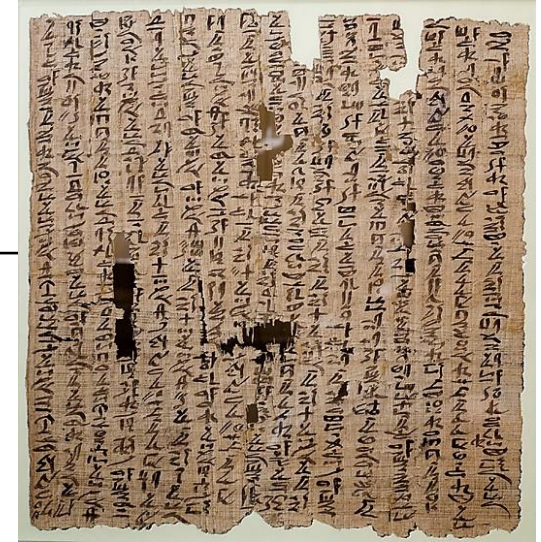
Sealing, from letter 22.3.518
from Heqanakht to Rahotep
(MMA 25.3.269)



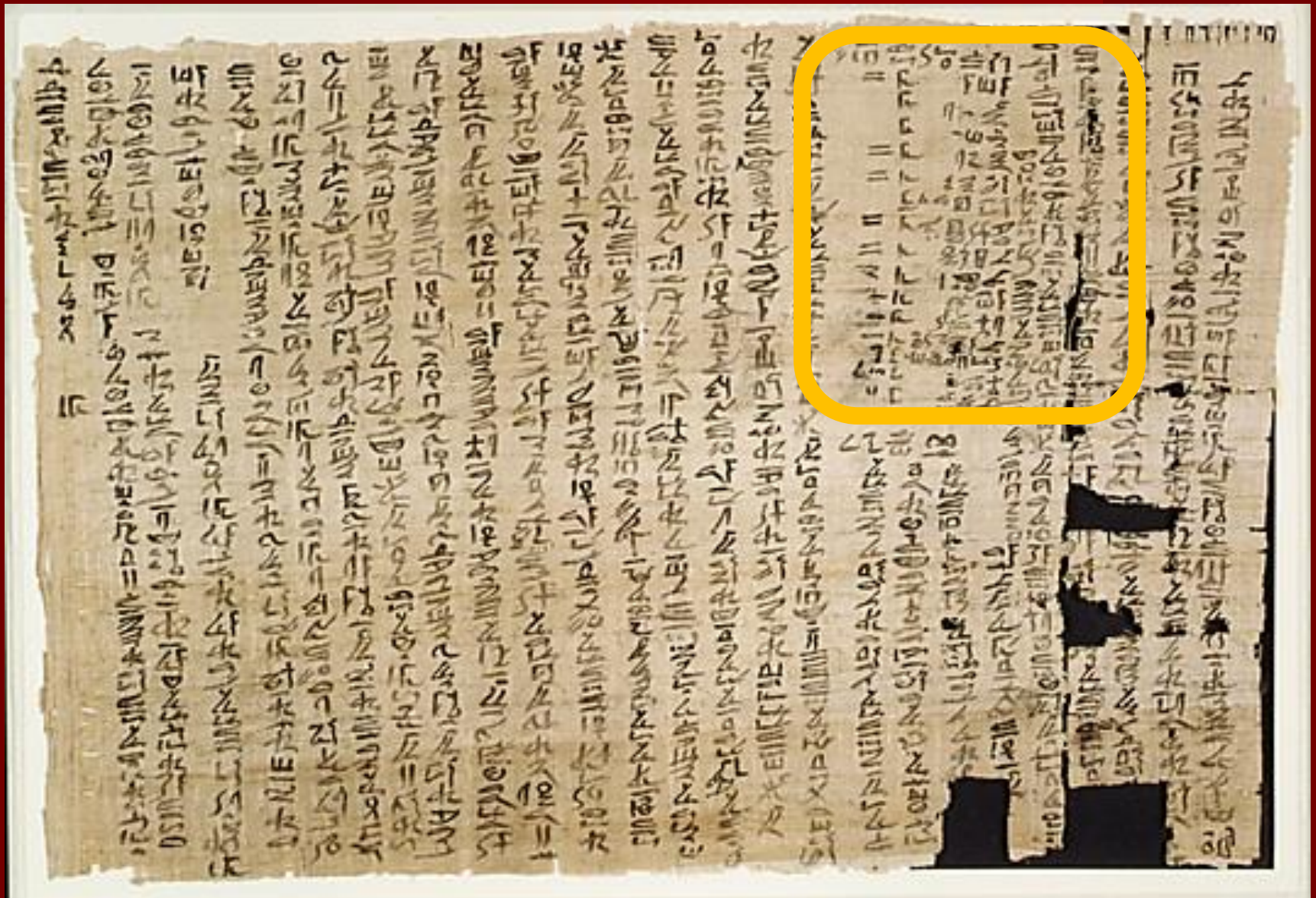
written by Heqanakht to the Overseer of the Delta
Herunefer, single sheet with no joins, written in red
and black ink; discovered unopened, tied with string
and sealed with a lump of mud

Heqanakhte 1

- front side (recto) of letter I
- written, probably by Heqanakht himself
- columns from right to left
- pristine sheet of papyrus in hieratic script with black ink
- addressed to Heqanakht's family, specifically to a man called Merisu, who was a kind of steward responsible for the functioning of the household and its production
- Heqanakht gives instructions to send two individuals (Nakht, possibly Merisu's deputy, and Sinebniut, a subordinate) to rent land in a place named Perhaa, comments on the rental fee of land previously leased, directions about the rations to be provided for the man Nakht on his mission to Perhaa



Heqanakhte II



The original sources:

- Read the Heqanakhte Papers

<http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/heqanakht.htm>

- **Second Letter**

- *A son speaks to his mother, (namely) the ka-servant Heqanakht to his mother Ipi (jpj) and to Hetepet (Htp.t):*

How is your wellbeing through the favour of Monthu, Lord of Thebes (wAs.t)? And how is your whole household, how is your wellbeing?

Do not worry about me! Behold, I am healthy and alive. Behold, you are like one who can eat his fill, when he was (already so) hungry that he had sunken eyes. Behold, the whole of Egypt has died (and) you did not hunger.

The original sources:

- *Record of the household's incomes:*
 - Ipi (jpi) and her servant woman 8 (heqat)*
 - Hetepet (Htp.t) and her servant woman 8 (heqat)*
 - Heti's (Ht) son Nakht (nxt) together with his dependants 8 (heqat)*
 - Merisu (mr.sw) and his dependants 8 (heqat)*
 - Sahathor (zA-Hwt-Hr) 8 (heqat)*
 - Sanebnut (ZA-nb-n'.t) 7 (heqat)*
 - Anpu (jnp) 4 (heqat)*
 - Snefru (snfr.w) 4 (heqat)*
 - Sa-inut (zA-jnw.t) 4 (heqat)*
 - Mai-sa-hetepet (may-zA-Htp.t) 5 (heqat)*
 - Nofret (nfr.t) 3½ (heqat)*
 - Satwerut (zA.t-wr.wt) (?) 2 (heqat)*
 - Total 79½ (heqat)*

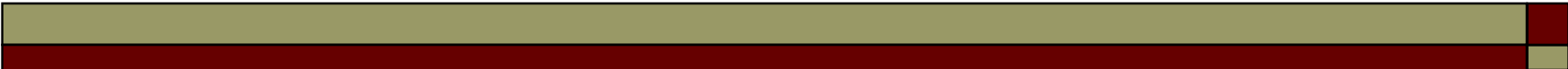


Inspirations – material culture as the data behind the fiction

- ❑ Glanville also assisted Christie with details of daily household life in Egypt 4000 years ago. In addition he made forceful suggestions to Christie to change the ending of the book. This she did but regretted the fact afterwards, feeling that her (unpublished) ending was better.
- ❑ The novel is based on some real letters from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom period from a man called Heqanakhte to his family, complaining about their behaviour and treatment of his concubine.
- ❑ Christie uses a theme for her chapter titles, as she did for many of her novels, in this case the Egyptian agricultural calendar.

Hekanakhte Papers

- Now, what do you mean by having Sihathor [the second son, who acted as a go-between] coming to me with old, dried-out, northern barley from Memphis, instead of giving me ten sacks of good, new barley? Fine - You're happy, eating good new barley while I'm going without. Isn't that so? Your ship has come in for you, when in fact you do nothing but evil .If you had sent me the old barley simply to keep the new barley intact, what could I have said, [except] "Well done !"? But since you won't assign me a single bushel from the new barley, I won't assign one to you - for the rest of eternity.



Hekanakhte Papers

- Bear this in mind: being half alive is better than being plain dead. Listen, you say hunger only about [real] hunger. Look, they are beginning to eat people here. Listen, there is nobody to whom your sorts of rations are given anywhere. So make the most of it until I return. Look, I am going to spend the rest of the summer here.
- Now if Sneferu really does want to be in charge of those bulls, you must put him in charge of them. He did not want to be with you cultivating, walking up and down, nor did he want to come here with me. Whatever he wants, let him enjoy what he wants. Anyone who rejects these rations, woman or man, should come here to me and live as I live. But there is nobody who has come here to me.

Hekanakhte Papers

- Now, be sure to have the maid Senen thrown out of my house - take great care of this - the very day Sihathor returns to you [with this message]. Listen, if she spends one more day in my house ... But it is you who let her do evil to my new wife. Look, why must I scold you? What can she do against you, all five children? Also greet my mother Ipi a thousand times, a million times, and Hotepet and all the household. Now, what about this evil treatment of my new wife? You are taking a liberty. Are you set up alongside me as a judge? You shall stop - that would be the best thing.

Hekanakhte Papers

- Now, you are to send Iutenheb [the new wife] to me. I swear by this man - I mean Ipi [the deified tomb-owner whose ka-servant Heqanakhte was] - anyone who commits an abuse against my new wife, he is against me and I am against him. Look, she is my bride, and how a new wife should be treated is well known. Listen, as for anyone who acts for her as I have acted - would any of you be patient while his wife is being denounced to him? Shall I be patient? Is there any way I can be at the same table with you people? Will you not respect her?

Further source: Teaching of Ptahhotep (Pap Prisse)



21 (Papyrus Prisse column 9, lines 7-13)

*If you wish friendship to last
within a house you may enter,
as master, as brother, or as
friend,
anywhere you may enter,
resist approaching the wife.
It is not good for the place where
it is done,
It is not clever to open it up,
A thousand men are tied against
what is good for them;
a little moment is like a dream,
but death is reached by knowing
it.*

Inhabitants of Kurna originally found the papyrus inside the rishi coffin of pharaoh Sekhemre-Wepmaat Intef of the 17th Dynasty, whose tomb was probably located in Dra' Abu el-Naga' near Thebes.

Further source: Teaching of Ptahhotep (Pap Prisse)

□ Death comes as the End, pg. 24 (ch.2)

Esa paused and said slowly:

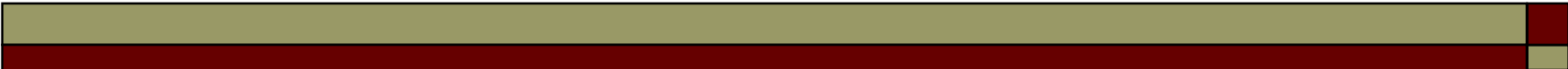
“Nofret is beautiful. But remember this: Men are made fools by the gleaming limbs of women, and lo, in a minute they are become discolored carnelians...”

Her voice deepened as she quoted:

“A trifle, a little, the likeness of a dream, and death comes as the end.”

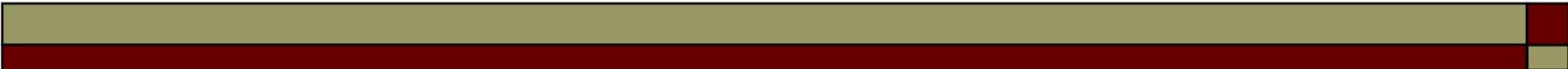
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Death comes as the end

- ❑ Suddenly everyone has a motive to kill her and when she is found dead at the foot of a cliff, an accident seems unlikely.



Detailed checked objects

- Wooden toy cat/lion of Teti, Renisenebs daughter

BM EA 15761

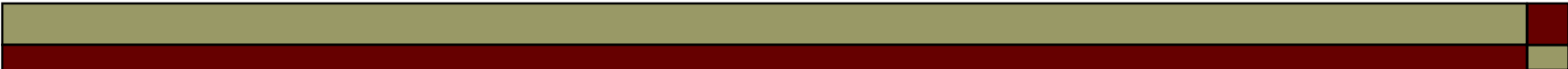


**Wooden toy
cat**

From Thebes,
Egypt

New Kingdom
(1550-1070
BC)

Moving jaws
and bronze
teeth



Detailed checked objects

- ❑ Wooden toy cat/lion of Teti, Renisenebs daughter
- ❑ Tripartite necklace of Nofret: jewelry, found in tomb of Sithathor, Lahun, MK



Detailed checked objects

- ❑ Wooden toy cat/lion of Teti, Renisenebs daughter
- ❑ Tripartite necklace of Nofret: jewelry, found in tomb of Sithathor, Lahun, MK
- ❑ Letters to the Dead (Christie inspired by one bowl, now in Berlin + Leiden Pap. J 371)

UCL 16244



(1) A sister speaks to her brother. The sole friend Nefersefkhi. (2) A great cry of grief! To whom is a cry of grief useful? You are given it for the crimes committed against my daughter evilly, evilly, (3) though I have done nothing against him, nor have I consumed his property. He has not given anything to my daughter. Voice offerings are made (4) to the spirit in return for watching over the earthly survivor. Make you your reckoning (5) with who(ever) is doing what is painful to me, because my voice is true against any dead man or any dead woman (6) who is doing these things against my daughter.

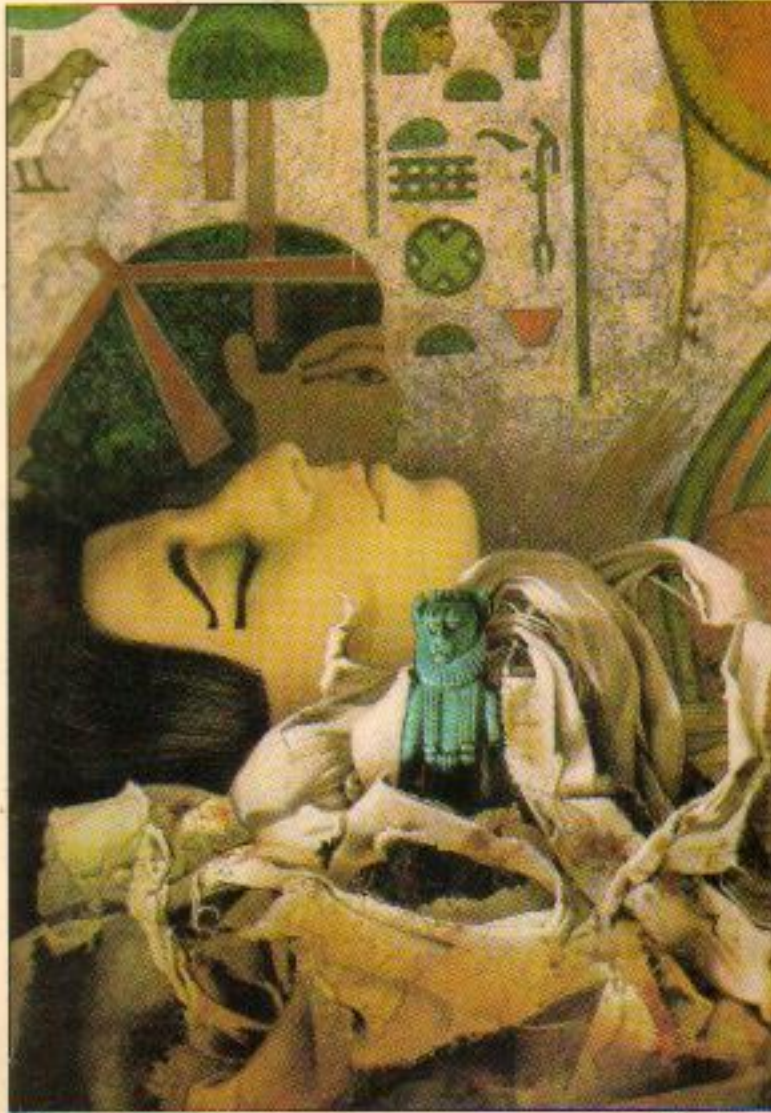
Pap. Leiden J371: To the wise spirit of Onkhari

- *What offence have I committed against thee that I must come to this the evil condition which I am in? What offence have I committed against thee that thou must help against me? For, since I became a husband to thee, until to-day, what I have done to thee that I kept secret? What am I to do, when I shall have to give my evidence [as to] what I have done to thee, when I shall stand with [thee] before [the judge,] in words of my mouth [directed] to the cycle of the gods of Ament, and thou shalt be judged through this writing — viz., [through] the words of my complaint against what thou hast done, what wilt thou do?*



Agatha Christie

Death Comes as the End



Cover art by Tom
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