

Four Surveyors of the Gods: In the XVIII Dynasty of Egypt – New Kingdom c. 1400 B.C.

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SUMMARY

I have often heard it said, and even seen it written, that no one actually knows who the surveyors of ancient Egypt were !

This could not be more distant from the facts ! In reality, even though the harpedonaptae (“rope stretchers”) who were the surveyor’s assistants were not individually known, the master surveyors were not only well known but each even had his own tomb adorned with wall paintings and hieroglyphics of a biographical nature attesting to their achievements and status during their lives in the service of the King.

Ironically, the four well testified Royal Surveyors, or Scribes of the Fields, as they were officially titled, are all from the Eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom (around 1400 B.C.). This is the period of the ancient culture most renowned for producing such notable characters as the Thutmoses (four main ones), Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamun, Hatshepsut, and Horemheb, the great general.

It is not surprising that to this very active, and somewhat turbulent era, we can attribute the four Royal Scribe Surveyors, Amenhotep-si-se, Djoserkareseneb, Khaemhat and Menna, through whose funerary monumentation we can take a colourful and exciting trip back nearly 3500 years to experience Royal surveying – Egyptian style !

In the following paper you will meet these four surveyors, see and hear about their lives and families from their biographical tomb paintings and inscriptions, as well as finding out some more information regarding the most colourful and legendary times in which they lived, where they were interred and under whose Pharaohnic rule they worked and were buried.