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TRANSFERRING TUTANKHAMUN'S INNERMOST SHRINE: PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract:

A team of conservators that have years of experience in the routine treatment techniques, such as removing previous treatments, treating flaking gilding layers and consolidating deteriorating layers was given the task to transfer the four shrines of Tutankhamun from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo at Tahrir square to the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza. The treatment of the innermost shrine was time-consuming and difficult. From the very early stages of the project, when the idea was first introduced, followed by the removal of the showcase to start the detailed examination and documentation, there were endless challenges. Consolidation and conservation may have been less challenging, except for the detached parts of the ceiling inside the shrine, which had to be re-adhered to minimize the risk of their falling down with the slightest movement. Yet the biggest challenge was dismantling the shrine professionally, safely, and efficiently inside one of the busiest spots in the museum, directly in front of the entrance of the hall in which the mask of Tut-ankhamun was exhibited. The diaries of Howard Carter and Alfred Lucas, were of great importance during the whole process. Although the conditions and events are not the same, yet the challenges they faced while dismantling the shrine inside the burial chamber are compared here with the challenges the team encountered almost 100 years later. Hence in this article, which could be considered more of a report, the challenges and technical problems are documented as a guideline for archeologists and conservators, who need to handle large wooden moveable structures that had been previously transferred and restored in the past.

1. Introduction

The official removing of the blocking of the entrance to the burial chamber of the tomb of king Tutankhamun (KV 62) on the 17th of February 1923 revealed a side wall of a gilded shrine, that turned out to be the outermost of four wooden gilded shrines nesting inside of each other, filling up nearly the complete space in the burial chamber. The innermost of the shrines enclosed the quartzite sarcophagus of the king [1]. After their reassembly and exhibition at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (EMC) the four gilded shrines became one of many centers of attraction for visitors. The innermost shrine, on which this article will focus on, takes the form of the barrel-vaulted *pr-nu*, generally interpreted as the shape of the prehistoric *palace of the north* of Lower Egypt. Piankoff published the shrine together with the three other surrounding gilded shrines [2]. Hieroglyphic texts and bas relief depictions decorate all outer and inner surfaces of the shrine. The barrel-vaulted roof has two vertical boards at the two ends decorated with a winged solar disk. From the top the vaulted part is divided by stripes with hieroglyphic texts into ten partitions starting with two mirroring protective *wedjat*-eyes each on a shrine followed by kneeling mirroring figures on the sign for gold *nbw*, representing Isis and Nephthys then mirroring images of the Anubis jackal recumbent on

a shrine followed by Neith and Selkis again as mirroring kneeling women on *nbw*-signs and finally the vulture goddess Nekhbet and the goddess Wadjet with the head of a cobra and the body of a vulture spreadding their wings to include the *šn*-sign of infinity. Chapter 17 of the book of the Dead [3] is inscribed on the interior walls of the shrine. The texts start on the back wall, continue on the right wall and end on the left wall. This chapter is one of the longest in the book of the dead and presents a monologue of the sun god Re, the creator-god, describing his first appearance coming out of the primeval ocean, the god Nun. On the ceiling, the inner side of the vaulted roof, the sky goddess Nut is shown flanked by two depictions of Horus with the body of a human and the head of a falcon spreading their protective wings over the quartzite sarcophagus of Tutankhamun located right below. Each of the gods is standing on a *nbw*-sign. On the left side panel of the exterior Thoth is depicted twice assuring that Re lives and that the turtle is dead. The gods Imesty, Anubis, Duamutef and Geb proclaim that the king is saved from evil and that he can pass into the Netherworld. Thoth appears again on both sides of the right-side panel of the shrine announcing the unification of the king with Re and that the solar barge moved passing the dangerous Apopis. The gods Hapy, Anubis, Kebehsenuef and Horus state that they protect the body of the dead Tutankhamun, that his head remains fastened to his body and that his heart has been placed in its place again, so that he may take part in the ceremonies of Sokar the god of the Memphite necropolis [2]. The dead king referred to again as Osiris after the Amarna interlude [4] is surrounded within the innermost coffin by religious texts and all forms of protection provided by the protective gods to ensure the safety of his body to achieve his unification with Re and accordingly his eternal resurrection. After the discovery of the tomb, all the artifacts found in the tomb were documented, treated and transferred to the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir. However, when the idea of building the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) was introduced back at the very beginning of the 21st millennium, there was a lot of debate on the location of the museum, the design of the museum and the objects that would be exhibited in the new museum [5]. Ever so many museum scenarios were discussed, but at the end it was settled that the collection of Tutankhamun would be moved from the Egyptian museum in Tahrir (EMC) to the new museum to become the star-collection of the GEM. Since that decision was taken endless discussions and debates were held on how the collection would be safely transferred. There was a major concern of how to safeguard all the treasures during transfer, yet he main challenge was the transfer of the four shrines, that had been exhibited in gallery 7 in the upper floor of the EMC. Almost 100 years ago the Egyptian Museum at Ismailia Square (the old name of Tahrir square), was fairly new and no one would have imagined that the whole collection would be moved out of the museum again. Therefore, it had been decided to allocate the complete collection of Tutankhamun in the upper floor of the museum [6]. After the final decision of moving the shrines was taken studies and projects were conducted on the shrines' transfer. To our knowledge there was a project on the innermost shrine in 2014, and a preliminary report on the condition of the shrine was presented to the ministry. However, this report was not publicized. Another study on the outermost shrine, also not published, was conducted by a group of conservators from ICOM-CIPEG, the ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and Cairo University staff in 2016. In 2017 several meetings were organized to start work on moving all four shrines and the pall frame. At first plans were set and designed to assess the condition of the shrines and conduct an experimental study on how to dismantle and move the innermost shrine within six months. After all, according to the notes by Lucas back in the late 1920's it did not seem to be an extremely difficult task to dismantle that shrine. It is worthy to note that the "2016" plans were very optimistic, because it took a team of over 30 professionals from the EMC, GEM and Cairo University (CU) to work on the project for ensuring that the shrine was safely transferred to the GEM in 2021. The team was divided into three groups, tab. (1):

1) Management and Supervision were responsible for ensuring the availability of materials, coordination between different members of the team, issuing security clearance for team members working after formal opening hours at the museum. In addition to writing detailed condition and progress reports.

2) Analysis and documentation team were responsible for documenting the shrine and conducting non-destructive analysis methods.

3) Conservation team was responsible for cleaning, consolidation, facing of the gilded layers and securing detached layers.

Table (1) the project team

Authority	Management and Supervision	Analysis and Documentation	Conservation
GEM	Dr. T. Tawfik	I. Abd El Fatah	Dr. N. Badr
	Dr O. Abu El Kheir	I. Shaheen	El M. El Said
	Dr H. Kamal	A. Abd Raboh	S. Mahmoud
	Dr E. Zidan	A. Adel	A. Tarek
	Dr. O. Ebeid	A. Hakim	H. Bayoumi
		H. Mostafa	F. Magdy
		M. Mostafa	M. Mohamed
		S. El Hendawy	M. Ragab
EMC	M. Othman	E. Mertah	Sh. Kobeisy
			S. El Touny
			E. Mertah
			R. Mahmoud
			H. Aly
			M. Ibrahim
			A. Abd El Azziz
CU	Dr N. El Hadidi		
	Dr. M. Rifai		

During the months in which the fourth innermost shrine of Tutankhamen underwent treatment and pre-

paration for its next move, the conservation team and curators faced many challenges. Carrying the disassembled parts of the shrine safely into the tomb millennia ago and then heaving them out more than a century ago with minimal loss must have been an immensely difficult task. Dismantling the four shrines in the small burial chamber of Tutankhamun was certainly problematic due to the limited space in which workers had to maneuver the heavy wooden ceilings and panels to transport them out of the tomb. This study aims to report and discuss the difficulties and challenges encountered during the process of preparing for the safe transfer of the fourth innermost shrine to its new location at the GEM.

2. Description of the Innermost Shrine

The overall mean measurements of the innermost shrine, which was not a true rectangle, are 2.93 m by 1.62 m at the base and 1.90 m high. It was constructed out of five large sections that entered the burial chamber separately, figs. (1 & 2) [1].

Figure (1) ceiling and cornice of the innermost shrine made in one piece, as discovered in the tomb after dismantling the three shrines (*Reproduced with permission of the Griffith Institute, Oxford Univ*.).

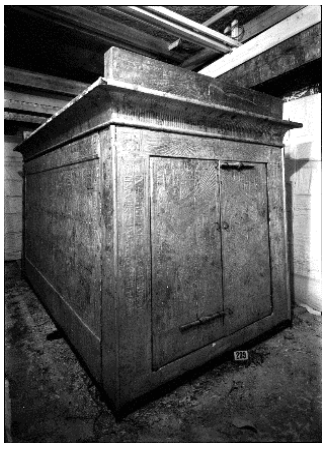

Figure (2) the innermost shrine inside the burial chamber after dismantling the three shrines. (*Reproduced with permission of the Griffith Institute, Oxford Univ*.).

The sections were marked by the ancient Egyptian craftsmen with hieroglyphic signs painted on the gilding in black to indicate how they fitted together and to show their intended orientation [7]. Possibly for practical maneuvering reasons the doors of the shrines were placed facing the east side towards the entrance of the so-called treasury room instead of facing towards the west as suggested by the black hieroglyphic marks. It did not fit tightly around the cornice of the quartzite sarcophagus at the west side or as mentioned in the notes by Carter "….*the shrine slightly too small which necessitated the ancients to cut away from the top edges of the inner surface about a centimeter and a half. This apparently owing to the shrine or sarcophagus not being a line rectangular*." This resulted in the numerous splinters that were found on the floor, because the workmen had to cut away the inner surface of the frieze, fig. (3). To further overcome the error, they also left the joints between the framework of the sides and ends of the shrine slightly open leaving gaps between the ceiling and the east and west sides of the shrine [8].

Figure (3) the inner frieze that was removed, showing part of a wooden tongue that joined the sides with the ceiling. Photo by authors

2.1. *Dismantling the innermost shrine by Carter*

Howard Carter found himself confronted with the difficult task of dismantling the four shrines and carefully removing their fragile parts out of the burial chamber for treatment, consolidation and stabilization, before starting its long journey on the Nile to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (EMC). Scaffolding and hoisting tackle had to be introduced in the very narrow burial chamber around the outermost shrine leaving only very limited space for Carter and his colleagues to work on dismantling the shrines and maneuvering their parts out of the tomb. Nevertheless, this huge operation was completed in only eighty-four days. The wood planking of the shrines had survived well, considering the over three thousand three hundred years since their production, but had shrunk because of the very dry environment. As a result of the wood shrinking the gold-work upon gesso had in many places become detached and in Carter's words "when touched, tended to crush and

fall away" [9]. Similar intact artifacts had not been found prior to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and with limited materials and equipment it was not possible to completely comprehend how the parts of the shrines had been joined together inside the burial chamber. Slightly forcing open the cracks bet-ween the sections of the outermost shrine Carter disc-overed that they were held together by means of wooden tongues. To separate the sections, he used a fine saw to cut these tongues, that had been inserted by the ancient carpenter into the thickness of the wooden panels, cornice pieces and ceiling sections. To Carter's surprise in the next shrines bronze tongues inscribed with the names of Tutankhamun were found [9]. Finally, after dismantling and clearing the parts of three shrines the innermost shrine was reached. Contrary to the ceilings of the previous shrines, which were produced in several sections joining together, the ceiling and cornice of the innermost shrine was made in one piece. It was thus a very heavy and large object, that took several days to be lifted and gradually turned in order to be evacuated from the burial chamber. Carter wrote about this complicated maneuver: "It was one of our most difficult problems". He considered taking apart the sides, ends and doors a much easier undertaking although he had mentioned earlier in his diaries, speaking about the shrines in general, that the sections weighed from a quarter to three-quarters of a ton [9].

2.2. *Dismantling the shrine at the Egyptian Museum (EMC)*

After taking the final decision to transfer the shrine, the conservation team had to carefully examine each part of its five sections prior to its dismantlement, professionally pack and safely transport the sections to the GEM. A detailed diagnosis of the condition of the shrine confirmed that it suffered from deterioration aspects that can be summarized in the following points: dust accumulation on the exterior shrine surface above the golden layers, a thick layer of dirt on the upper part of the shrine ceiling, several vertical and horizontal cracks in all sides and ceiling of the shrine, weakness, flaking, separation in some layers of gilding and the preparation layer, and the emergence and agglomeration of wax used in the previous conservation. In the following points the challenges in every stage are briefly documented.

2.2.1. Dismantling the showcase

The first pictures of the shrines at the EMC clearly show that they had been exhibited without a showcase, fig. (4). However, at some later stage metal-frame showcases were built around each shrine. The space between the sides of the innermost shrine and the glass panels were less than half a meter in three of the four sides, just enough for one person to move around for the periodic maintenance and monitoring, which were conducted regularly over the years.

Figure (4) the shrine at the Egyptian museum without a showcase, but with interior lights. Reproduced with permission of the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

To dismantle the showcases and set up an *in-situ* work area right in front of the entrance of the room exhibiting the king's golden mask, scaffoldings were erected all around the showcase. Then the shrine was covered with a thick layer of foam padding to minimize the risk of any parts such as nails, metal extensions or glass from scratching the exterior surface of the shrine during the dismantling of the showcase. Some of the 4mm thick glass panels, that had been glued and sealed with silicone rubber to the metal frame to prevent dust from seeping into the showcase, were fragile and could easily break during handling. It was decided to carefully remove the north, south and west side glass panels, followed by the eight upper panels, and last but not least the west side containing the showcase door, fig. (5-a & b). After completing this stage, the metal skeleton of the showcase was carefully moved away from the shrine and dismantled. Temporary barrier sheets were pulled all around the scaffolding, to prevent curious museum visitors from constantly asking questions or taking a peek.

Figure (5) **a.** & **b.** dismantling the showcase

2.2.2. Documentation, investigation and analysis

After "freeing" the shrine from its showcase high resolution digital photography was used for documentation. Lighting conditions were problematic; because the museum depended mainly on natural daylight from the skylights, supported by a few very weak spotlights. The large number of visitors of the Tutankhamun galleries, fig. (6-a), the narrow spaces around the shrine, the scaffolding that had to be removed prior photography, the poor lighting conditions and the glitter of gold made it challenging to obtain good quality images, prolonging the documentation process, fig. (6-b & c). The interior of the shrine was documented using both visible and UV light to record the agglomeration of molten paraffin wax that had been used inside the tomb by Lucas. RTI images of some chosen parts and laser scanning were conducted to study the uneven surfaces in detail. X-ray radiography, which was conducted to understand the joinery system applied by the ancient carpenter, was extremely difficult on hot days, and the investigation could not be conducted in an environment with temperatures higher than 27ºC, because of the working conditions of the portable equipment. Therefore, the temperature and relative humidity were measured daily for several months, until the temperature inside the museum fell below 27 ºC during the cooler months of the year, fig. (6-d). Furthermore, due to safety measures the procedure of x-raying the shrine had to be performed either before or after the formal visiting hours. With such a small window of two hours per day (from 7 to 9 am in the morning, or from 5 to 7 pm in the evening) to set up the equipment and take the images any conservation procedures related to dismantling the shrine had to be postponed. However, it was worth the wait, and all the results obtained from the aforementioned examinations were of major importance for setting the treatment plan, dismantling the shrine, and packing the parts for transportation. These results are beyond the scope of this article, nevertheless they are discussed in in two other articles by other members of the team whose names are listed in tab. (1).

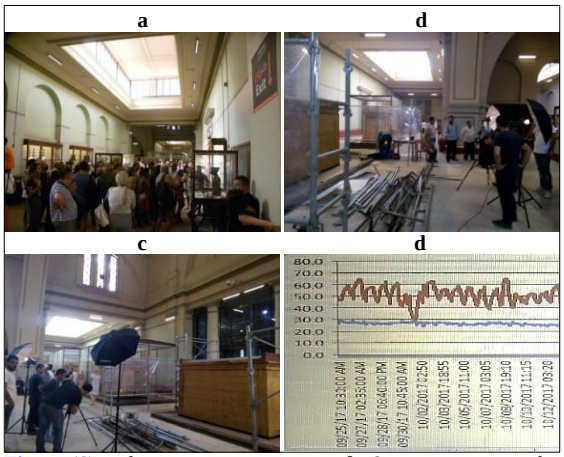

Figure (6) **a.** the crowds at the museum, **b.** & **c.** documentation by high resolution digital photography with visible light, **d.** monitoring the environmental conditions at the museum.

2.2.3. Working conditions at the EMC

The original design of the EMC depended on natural ventilation and lighting from windows and skylights. However, there are many reasons for the failure of this natural ventilation system such as blocking corridors with large objects and showcases, direct sun light through windows and skylights, and short ventilation cycles. This may lead to unstable environmental conditions and insufficient natural ventilation cycles, trapped air pollutants inside museum galleries and rooms. Furthermore, large numbers of museum visitors on a daily basis and open windows significantly increase relative humidity. The clear glass in the skylight above the shrine allowed more natural light to enter the galleries, increasing temperatures in the galleries and inside showcases. With the absence of ideal ventilation and environmental variations, it was difficult to work efficiently inside the shrine, especially during the hot summer months. To make matters worse the worldwide Covid 19 epidemic lockdown postponed work from mid-March 2020 till the summer months of 2020, and when the team gradually returned to the museum some of the members fell ill. As a result, the work was relatively slow till the end of Dec. 2020.

3. Organizing Work

After thoroughly studying the working conditions at the EMC, assessing the condition of the shrine, forming the conservation team and dividing the work between members of the team to maintain an organized flow of work, conservators worked in systematic order according to the numbering in the *AutoCad* drawing, fig. (7). Not more than two conservators would work on the gilded surface of each side and ceiling of the shrine exterior and only two conservators at a time could work on the exterior surface of the shrine.

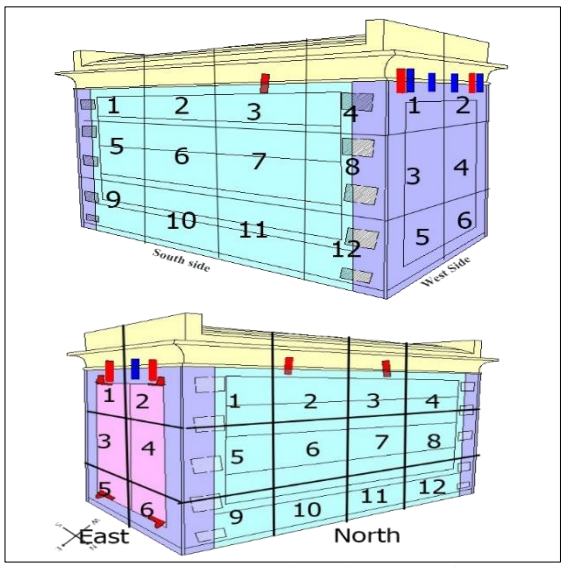

Figure (7) *AutoCad* drawing of the four sides of the shrine; numbers explain the work order.

3.1. *Treating the detached gilding layer*

The shrine suffered from many deterioration aspects in the gilding layer such as: cracking, detachment, fragility and weakness, flaking, weak plaster layers, modern wax layers covering parts of the gilding, and complete separation of previously restored gilded gesso, especially in the interior ceiling, figs. (8-a: c). Work started by cleaning the gilding layer, figs. (8-d: f), which was followed by the careful and slow treatment of the brittle layers. Separated parts of the gesso layer were re-adhered to the wooden substrate by injecting either Paraloid B 72, Paraloid B 82, Klucel G, or a mixture of 3% Paraloid B82 dissolved in acetone and 1% Klucel G dissolved in ethyl alcohol. In some cases, it was necessary to apply a facing layer of Japanese tissue paper and Klucel G on top of the gilding layer before either restoring it back to its original position or softening it. The injection process was repeated several days later after carefully applying one or two facing layers on the original gilded surface for protection, fig. (8-g).

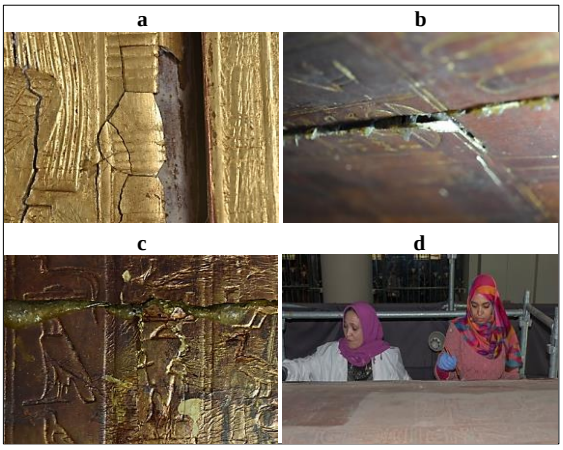

Figure (8) **a.** missing parts of the gilding layer in the east side due to the friction of opening and closing the doors, **b.** separating and flaking layers of the ceiling, **c.** paraffin wax layer agglomeration in the cracks, **d.** & **e.** cleaning the ceiling and sides of the shrine, **f.** facing the interior ceiling.

3.2. *Removal of paraffin wax layers covered the shrine (previous treatment material)*

After the discovery of the tomb in 1922, several conservation treatments had been applied for secure handling of the objects during their transportation on most of the collection. Alfred Lucas had used large amounts of molten paraffin wax as a consolidation material for all fragile and brittle objects. As a preliminary procedure prior to transfer the shrine from the EMC to the GEM, the wax layer, which had over the years started to "bulge out" of the cracks attra-cting dust and aerosols, was carefully removed by mechanical cleaning using scalpels.

3.3. *Facing the gilding layer*

After removing the excess wax from the interior panels, the shrine was completely covered with sheets of 9 g Japanese tissue paper and 3% Klucel G, however the exterior remained without facing until one month before the dismantling date, which was postponed to 2021. After treatment and stabilization of the gilding layers, the scaffolding was removed and a temporary showcase was used to safeguard the shrine during its last months of exhibition at the EMC, fig. (9).

Figure (9) Temporary showcase.

4. Results

For the transportation to the GEM there were several propositions made for transferring the shrine, and during the 1st Int. Tutankhamun GEM Conf., which was held in May 2015 in a presentation prepared by

a Japanese-Egyptian team entitled "Transferring means of collection care into Grand Egyptian Museum - the new house of Tutankhamun collection" the possible routes for transferring objects from the upper floor to the lower floor at the EMC were discussed. The team looked at the dimensions of the museum's staircases, galleries and elevator, which could be used during the transfer of the complete collection of the young king. The Japan Int. Cooperation Agency (JICA) suggested transporting the dismantled parts of the shrine transferring them by the EMC stairs. An Egyptian committee for the transportation of the shrines of Tutankhamun was formed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in 2017, headed by Tarek S. Tawfik at that time Director General of the GEM. After thorough investigation using modern technology, and stabilizing the condition of the shrine, the committee suggested carefully dismantling it again into its five main parts, packing each part separately and transporting it similarly to the method used in the tomb. Once it arrived at the GEM, it was to be immediately reassembled in its new showcase. A risk assessment was conducted and the transport and maneuvering plan of the packed five parts both in the EMC and the GEM was carefully designed, fig. (10). The professional scientific work to prepare the innermost shrine for transportation paved the way for the successful dismantling, packing and transportation of the remaining three gilded shrines to the GEM.

Figure (10) maneuver plans at the GEM in 2017.

5. Discussion

The idea of transferring Tutankhamun's treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo to another building was discussed in depth in 1975 and 1976, and an almost complete vision was developed for a new museum to be built at Giza, which was supposed to house the objects of the young king. However, it was postponed until recent years, when the building of the GEM was completed [10]. When the final decision was taken, the small belongings of the young king were carefully moved to the GEM. Gradually the dimensions of the moveable objects grew, such as the beds and chariots, but conservators were still capable of moving them, without disassembly. Moving the shrines was the big challenge. The limited space in the entrance of the tomb had initially forced the ancient carpenter to design the innermost shrine in five separate parts: four sides and a ceiling, while the ceilings of the three larger shrines were composed of two to three parts. This old and clever construction idea was the reason for the successful transportation of these large and heavy objects into the tomb centuries ago. For their dismantlement the same procedure was reversed back in the 1920's. The sides and ceilings were separately packed in wooden boxes for their transfer from the Valley of the Kings to the Nile banks of Luxor where they were loaded on boats travelling northwards to Cairo. After their arrival at the EMC, they were carried upstairs for their display in the corridors of the upper floor, where they remained for decades. To overcome all the aforementioned challenges while preparing the shrine for its transfer to the GEM, it was necessary to do thorough research and investigation into the methods of dismantling and transporting the shrines at the time of discovery in the 1920s, and benefitting from the knowledge they gathered about the joinery techniques of the shrines and the challenges that occurred during their transportation out of the burial chamber. The previous experience meticulously documented in the diaries of Alfred Lucas were discussed and taken into serious consideration while planning "with new ideas and modern equipment" the move of the shrines from the EMC to the GEM, starting with the innermost shrine on the contrary to the protocol applied in the tomb, when the outermost shrine had to be moved out of the tomb first after sawing off its ceiling. However, when Carter and Lucas were able to comprehend the joinery system in the shrines, the three remaining shrines were easily dismantled without destructively sawing off further joints.

6. Conclusion

All authors of this article and the two other articles in this volume were part of the team involved in the study, documentation, stabilization, and preliminary conservation of the innermost shrine. They did everything possible using all available modern examination and analysis technology according to international guidelines and standards to allow for a safe transport of the shrine to its new magnificent place of display, the GEM. The in-situ treatment and conservation of the shrine in the EMC was a delicate and challenging task from the very beginning while dismantling the showcase. For suggesting and implementing a successful conservation plan thorough intensive investigation and documentation was an initial procedure. The treatment of the deterioration aspects, especially the detachment of the gilding layer as well as the separated fragile gesso layer were very challenging due to limited working space and being constantly surrounded by curious museum visitors. After approximately 4 and a half years of preparation, study, endless discussions and conservation work, the shrine was carefully dismantled into five pieces, professionally packed and on the 13 of March 2021 it was transported from the EMC to the GEM. The parts reached the GEM safely and the shrine was shortly after reassembled in its new specially tailored showcase awaiting the grand opening of Tutankhamen's new galleries.

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