As one of the last authors reviewed by W.J. Murnane who kindly sent me his final comments a few days before his death, I am delighted to present this tribute to his memory, a roving walk in the company of one of his favorite pharaohs, under a deep blue starry sky.1

Among the finds from KV 55 recently exhibited in Munich and then returned to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo there was an inlay fragment of the ‘sky’-sign, slightly convex, in deep blue glass, adorned with yellow stars (Fig. 1).2

This object was previously published by Reeves, and I have commented on its possible original location in tomb KV 55.3 The possibilities are:

A) the coffin,
B) an unknown or destroyed object from KV 55,
C) the canopic jars.

The coffin may be ruled out. Only one ‘sky’-sign was inserted at the end of the inscription and the inlay is still visible. It is made of deep blue glass without stars.4 Another possibility may have been the top of the same column where such a sign might be expected, but there is no room for it now and the fact that the starry fragment is slightly curved strongly suggests that it was not placed there. Moreover, it would have been surprising to find two identically-shaped inlays with such different details.

Option B: An unknown or destroyed object, is hardly plausible despite the fact that some inlays recovered from the tomb apparently belonged to items other than those already known. Since, as the authors of the catalog suggest, the deep blue signs formerly in Munich were part of the nomen Amenhotep,5 I believe the fragment of the hieroglyph6 comes from the end of the right horizontal inscription on the outside under part of the coffin (inscription ‘C’). There, in the lacuna, was perhaps the formula to which the hieroglyph probably once belonged.7 The symmetrical formula gives however “Son of Re, living by Maat, lord of the crowns.”8 In the same way, the fragment of a clypeus from a ‘scarab’-sign is from part of a royal praenomen, despite the fact that its scale is slightly larger than expected for the known inscriptions from the coffin.9 However, all of these inlays and fragmentary inlays are easy to insert in the already known inscriptions from KV 55, opposite the starry ‘sky’-sign. This means that option C: the canopic jars must be considered seriously.

The problem, however, is that on each jar, in the location where this inlay should have been, there is a fragment of calcite that fills the channel of the right end part of the ‘sky’-sign. As Krauss

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1 I wish to express my thanks to Amanda Dunsmore for her precious advice and improvements to the translation.
4 Munich 2001, front cover.
5 Munich 2001, p. 75, Kat. 63. The possibility that the nomen of Akhenaten was written Amenhotep in the emended part of the coffin is not to be completely discounted if this last change occurred during Tutankhamen’s reign. However, the inlaid signs newly executed in the altered parts of the coffin present a wide range of materials and colors, opposite the signs belonging to the nomen Amenhotep apparently only worked in a deep blue, glazed material.
7 D’Akhenaton à Toutânkhamon, pl. XXXII, b, missing in δ. In the restored underside of the coffin, fragments of gold foils suggest the title “lord of the crowns” at the end of the formula, just before the cartouche, cf. Munich 2001, p. 104, Abb. 59.
8 Ibid., pl. XXXII, a.
9 Ibid., pl. XXX (g). Another possibility is that it belonged to a ‘heart-scarab’ composed of various elements.
has convincingly demonstrated, this fragment of calcite comprises part of a more ancient ‘sky’-hieroglyph. There is no evidence that the original ‘sky’-sign was inlaid, yet the channel looks too deeply cut for a hieroglyph to have been simply engraved. If this was the case, it would have been easier to sand back completely the inscription of Kiya, including the ‘sky’-sign, rather than replace it with a sliver of calcite. If it had been filled in such a way, it was probably because the original sign was also inlaid. If one compares the dimensions of the items, the results are as follows:

starry fragment: 11
Length: 5.55 cm,
Width: 1.1 cm (0.68 cm for the ‘sky’ without the ‘corner’),
Thickness: 0.25 cm

calcite fragment: 12
Length: 3.6 cm (but, Martin adds: “The channel was not continued for the entire length of the ‘heaven’ sign, but only for a distance of approximately 5.4 cm from its right end.” 13),
Width: 0.6 cm

The difference between the dimensions are at odds if one supposes that the space for the calcite inlay was the original location of the fragment. Nevertheless, it seems that all the calcite inlays vary in width from one jar to another and moreover, it seems that the plaster join is also of some thickness. If one allows a thickness of 0.04 cm for this join on both the upper and the lower sides, then the channel is about 0.68 cm high which may fit with the starry inlay. As for the length, it is noteworthy that the channel in which the calcite fragment was originally laid was about 5.4 cm, hence not so far from the 5.55 cm of the starry fragment. The remaining calcite inlays have apparently all been broken a few centimeters along the left side, probably when the colored inlays on the left were removed, leaving the channel empty there.

If we accept the possibility that the starry inlay comes from one of these jars, a scenario then arises: the removal of the right side of the ‘sky’-sign and its replacement with a calcite inlay, contemporaneous with the erasure of the titles and name of Kiya underneath, was carried out in the tomb and one fragment of the original inlay was ‘left’ in the tomb by the workers. Such a scenario seems hardly possible. Tomb KV 55 was not the best place for such work, even if hastily done. Moreover, logically speaking, the other changes to the funerary equipment of Kiya must also have been undertaken in KV 55. It is hard to imagine the insertion of a new uraeus on the jar stoppers and coffin, the cutting of a new false beard, new scepters, new inlays (items not immediately available in the Valley of the Kings) and the new engraving on gold foil inside the coffin, in such an inappropriate place. All these factors suggest that the changes to the canopic jars and coffin of Kiya, in order to adapt them for a king, were done in a workshop and not in the tomb.

We must then consider another scenario. The starting point is the shape of the right end of the starry fragment. Here, the ‘corner’ of the ‘sky’-sign is visible. If the ‘sky’-sign had only been cut out and replaced with a calcite inlay, this essential part of the hieroglyph would have been missing over the remaining inscription. It would have been necessary to add this ‘corner’ with another material (paint for example). It is then very possible that the workers preferred to re-insert this part of the hieroglyph with its starry decoration and to cut another fragment corresponding in length, in the middle part of the ‘sky’-sign rather than to bungle the work. The care they took in filling the empty space at the right end of the sign with a fragment of calcite, instead of simply filling it with some plaster, indicates that their intention was to perform a high quality change and not simply the erasure of Kiya’s hieroglyphs. Making a new ‘sky’-sign with parts of the former one, i.e., its ‘corner’ elements, was presumably the obvious solution.

In this case, the presence of the starry inlay fragment among the items from KV 55 can only be explained by considering that the defacement of the remaining inscription (i.e., that which involved Akhenaten’s and the Aten’s names) and the sanding back of the ‘sky’-sign above it took place in KV 55. This possibility has, however, been challenged by Dodson, following a suggestion of Eaton-Krauss: “This erasure is normally linked with the removal of cartouches from the coffin.

11 Munich 2001, p. 78.
13 Ibid., p. 113. In fact, the channel had been cut all along its length, but was later sanded back, except for 5.4 cm on the right end.