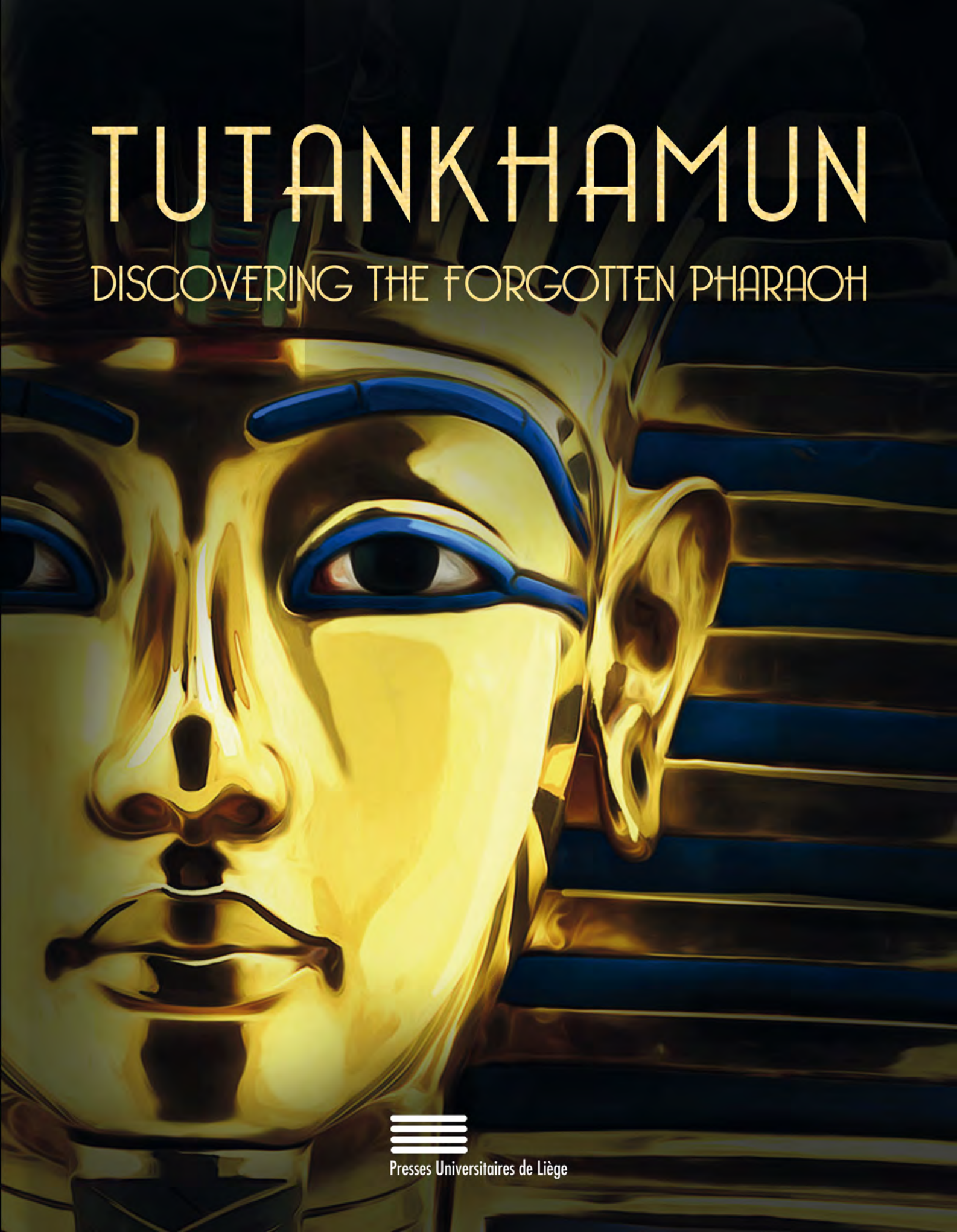


# TUTANKHAMUN

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH



Presses Universitaires de Liège

Collection *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 12

**TUTANKHAMUN**  
**DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH**

Catalogue edited by

**Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY**

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Jean-Lou Stefan

The anonymous private collectors who entrusted us with their pieces.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Agostinho da Cunha, untimely seized by the Abductor, as ancient Egyptians called it.

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# The Carter Adventure

Dimitri LABOURY

# The Discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb

“A story that opens like Aladdin’s cave, and ends like a Greek myth of Nemesis (the goddess personifying divine vengeance) cannot fail to captivate the imagination of all.”

Lady Burghclere, Introduction to the book by H. CARTER and A.C. MACE, *The tomb of Tut.ankh.amen* (1923)

On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding act of Egyptology — when Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphic writing system of pharaonic Egypt in 1822 — the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun by Howard Carter and his patron Lord Carnarvon in November 1922 single-handedly encapsulated the fantasies that the general public harbors for Egyptian archaeology:

the unearthing from the dark corners of history a young king with a dramatic fate, a figure almost completely unknown at the time; the uncovering of a fabulous treasure beyond people’s wildest dreams; and finally, a series of deaths that seemed at the time (according to those inclined to think so) to be linked to the tomb and a curse of the pharaohs. But if this discovery, perhaps the most emblematic in the history of archaeology, has all the trappings of a novel, even a fairytale, it is worth considering that it was not due only to luck (even if it is sometimes still needed in archaeology). On the contrary, it was the result of dogged determination on the part of Howard Carter based on the analysis of various clues that many had ignored, combined with his remarkable knowledge of the Valley of the Kings and the unwavering support of Lord Carnarvon.

Naysayers often criticized the fact that Howard Carter had not studied archaeology or even attended a public school, something he himself complained about. Born on May 9, 1874, he was the last of the eleven children of Martha Joyce Sands (ca. 1837–1920) and Samuel John Carter (1835–1892), a renowned artist and animal painter who acquired a certain renown (working for the *Illustrated London News*, among others) and from whom he inherited his talent, like many of his brothers. At the age of fifteen, he had to give up his interest in ornithology



Fig. 1: Carter and Callender opening the successive doors of the funerary chapels of Tutankhamun. Private collection, UK.

and entomology in order to devote himself to drawing and painting, which were considered more profitable. It was with one of his father's regular clients, William Amhurst Tyssen-Amherst (1835–1909), a great collector of Egyptian antiquities, that he had his first encounter with the culture of the pharaohs. The Amherst collection, one of the most important in the United Kingdom at the time, included a famous papyrus that chronicles the trial of tomb robbers in the Valley of the Kings at the end of the New Kingdom [see S. Polis's essay on the fragment of this papyrus preserved in Brussels]. Without realizing it, Howard Carter had already confronted his fate. Touched by the young Carter's fascination with these objects from a distant past and a faraway country, Lady Amherst decided to recommend the budding painter to the Egypt Exploration Fund to which she contributed, and so the future discoverer of Tutankhamun's tomb made his first trip to Egypt as an illustrator, then only seventeen years old, in the company of the young Egyptologist Percy Edward Newberry (1868–1949),

only six years his senior, who would become one of his most faithful friends. At the end of the same year, during the winter of 1891–2, he assisted the austere but no less fascinating William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942) — considered the founder of Egyptian archaeology and the inventor of modern archaeology — on his archaeological exploration of the site of Amarna. The young draughtsman was introduced to archaeology on the very spot where Tutankhamun probably lived and where he spent his early years, in the new royal residence of his father, Akhenaten, the “heretic pharaoh” (as some liked to call him at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). In addition to the attention to detail that the practice of drawing had cultivated in him, there is no doubt that he inherited from Petrie his precision and his interest in finding the slightest clue to piece together the story: a kind of “Sherlock Holmes” of archaeology, as Howard Carter would later describe him. The experience was therefore most profitable, even though, at the beginning of the season, Petrie had written in one of his many letters to his mother

Fig. 2: Howard Carter (1892–1893).

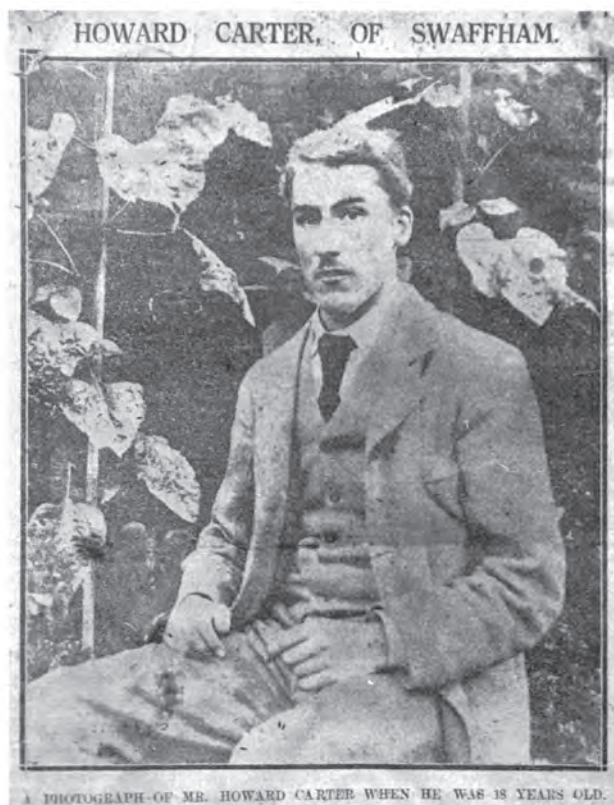


Fig. 3: Sir W.M.F. Petrie (1886).





that “Mr. Carter is a good-natured lad, whose interest is entirely in painting and natural history,” concluding, “It is of no use to me to work him up as an excavator.”

The Egypt Exploration Fund, however, decided to temporarily stop its very expensive excavations, so the apprentice archaeologist continued to work for this institution as a draughtsman from 1893 to 1899 on the site of Deir el-Bahari in the foothills of the rock formation that houses the Valley of the Kings. With the appointment of French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846–1916) as head of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, Carter was offered the prestigious position of Chief Inspector of Antiquities of Upper Egypt, which he took up on January 1, 1900. Those were happy years, during which time he made many remarkable discoveries, supervised various archaeological missions and began fruitful excavations in the Valley of the Kings thanks to the financial support of the American former lawyer and businessman Theodore M. Davis (1838–1915), who purchased the site concession in 1902. After eleven years in the Theban region, he was promoted at the end of 1904 to the Inspectorate of Saqqara, not far from Cairo. But shortly after taking office, on January 8, 1905, a diplomatic incident broke out, the handling of which prompted him to resign from his post. Without a job, he soon returned to Luxor, where he eked out a living from the sale of his watercolors, when he was not showing tourists around or working as an advisor for museums or as an archaeological illustrator, notably for T.M. Davis.



It was in this difficult situation that Gaston Maspero, in 1907, introduced him to the fifth Earl of Carnarvon (1866–1923) who was looking for an archaeologist to conduct excavations in Egypt, where he had spent his winters since a 1901 car accident significantly weakened his health. The duo thus formed excavated all over Egypt, Carnarvon buying the concessions and financing the work, while Carter took care of the field operations with some success. But Carter had a plan and a goal, which he shared with his rich patron from the moment they met: to return to the Valley of the Kings and excavate the intact tomb of a nearly unknown young king named Tutankhamun.

His clues were as follows: in the winter of 1905–1906, just a few months after Tutankhamun's edict concerning the restoration of the ancient cults was discovered in Karnak, Edward R. Ayrton, working for Davis, found “under a rock” in the heart of the Valley of the Kings a small faience bowl with the name of that king; less than two years later, about one hundred fifty meters to the east, the same Ayrton cleared an unfinished pit (called KV 54) in which jars had been stored containing equipment related to funerals, but also seals of the necropolis and wrappings mentioning the enigmatic pharaoh and suggesting that he must have been buried nearby in the Valley of the Kings; finally, in the same central area of the necropolis, in January 1909, Davis's next archaeologist, E. Harold Jones, unearthed a pit leading to a single chamber (KV 58), where he found a few remains, fragments of gold leaf with the names of the mysterious Tutankhamun and his direct successor, Ay. The American billionaire soon concluded that “he” had discovered Tutankhamun's looted tomb and published tomb KV 58 under this title in 1912. Howard Carter did not share Davis's hasty conclusion and, based on the interpretation that his young colleague of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Herbert E. Winlock (1884–1950), made about the KV 54 cache [see A. Devillers's essay on this subject], he was convinced that Tutankhamun's tomb remained to be discovered and was likely to be intact, or nearly intact.

Fig. 4: Howard Carter as an epigraphist of the *EEF* at Deir el-Bahari.

Fig. 5: the path leading to the Valley of the Kings at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.









Fig. 6: Arthur Weigall, Chief Inspector of Antiquities of Upper Egypt, and his wife, Hortense, Theodore M. Davis and the archaeologist Edward R. Ayrton. Photograph taken by B. Stone in 1907.

The only problem was that the Valley of the Kings concession remained in the hands of T.M. Davis. When he grew tired of “his” excavations in Egypt, declaring in 1912 that “the Valley of the Tombs is now exhausted,” and abandoned his concession in early 1915, Carnarvon was quick to acquire it. Carter then began to investigate every part of the necropolis where tombs from the time around Tutankhamun had been found, focusing particularly on the heart of the Valley of the Kings, where the concentration of these hypogea was the largest. It was precisely in the middle of this area that the burial of the young king awaited him. It would take them six excavation seasons to reach it because Tutankhamun’s final resting place was almost four meters below the entrance to the tomb of Ramesses V usurped by Ramesses VI (KV 9), whose access was preserved for tourists. Davis’s successive excavators had missed it several times. The last of them, Harry Burton (1879–1940), Carter’s future collaborator, stopped less than two meters from the tomb of the child-king during the last season financed by the American billionaire,

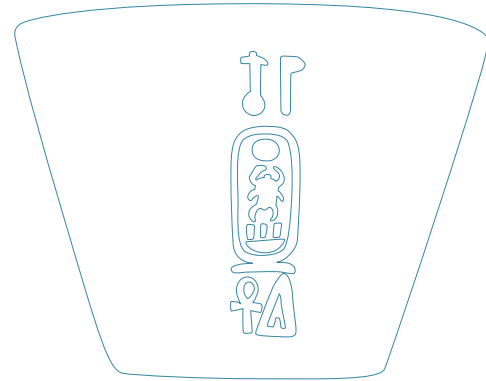


Fig. 7: faience vase in the name of Tutankhamun discovered by E.R. Ayrton in 1905-6. Drawing S. Connor.

in 1914, in order to preserve the passage for visitors to KV 9. It was this stratigraphic position, in the lower part of the valley, under the huts of later workers and covered by the rubble of the digging out of the tomb of Ramesses V and VI, that allowed Tutankhamun’s tomb to remain practically intact (despite at least two successive intrusions, probably shortly after the king’s burial) and to escape the systematic plundering of the royal necropolis at the turn of the first millennium BC [see S. Bickel’s essay on this].

The rest of the story is well known and is the stuff of legend: the discovery of the first steps leading to the tomb on the third day of the final excavation season granted by Lord Carnarvon on November 4, 1922; the arrival of the British patron and his daughter, Lady Evelyn, nineteen days later; the opening of the antechamber door on November 26 and Carter’s famous reply to Carnarvon asking if he saw anything, “Yes, wonderful things!”; the worldwide frenzy that ensued; the official opening of the king’s burial chamber on January 16, 1923; the death

Fig. 8: the entrance to the tomb of Tutankhamun, in the foreground, on the right, below the one to the tomb of Ramesses V-VI (KV 9), which protected its access for a long time. Photograph H. Burton © MMA.



of Lord Carnarvon on the following April 5; Carter's repeated troubles during the ten years it took him to empty the tomb of its contents; and, finally, the decline into which he sank until the end of his life, on March 2, 1939, at the age of sixty-four, having proved incapable of carrying out the definitive publication of his fabulous discovery.

The fortunes and misfortunes of this unlikely archaeologist, who appeared to be destined for a career as a draughtsman, resemble in many ways a Greek tragedy under the direction of Nemesis. But

by his persistence, which some have sometimes called stubbornness, and thanks to his knowledge about the Valley of the Kings and Egyptian archaeology, Howard Carter has bequeathed to us an amazing treasure, which consists less in the some two hundred fifty kilograms of gold from Tutankhamun's funerary equipment than in the real treasure trove of information that it has delivered to us and is still delivering to us and that forms the core of this exhibition.

*Final steps of tomb found.*