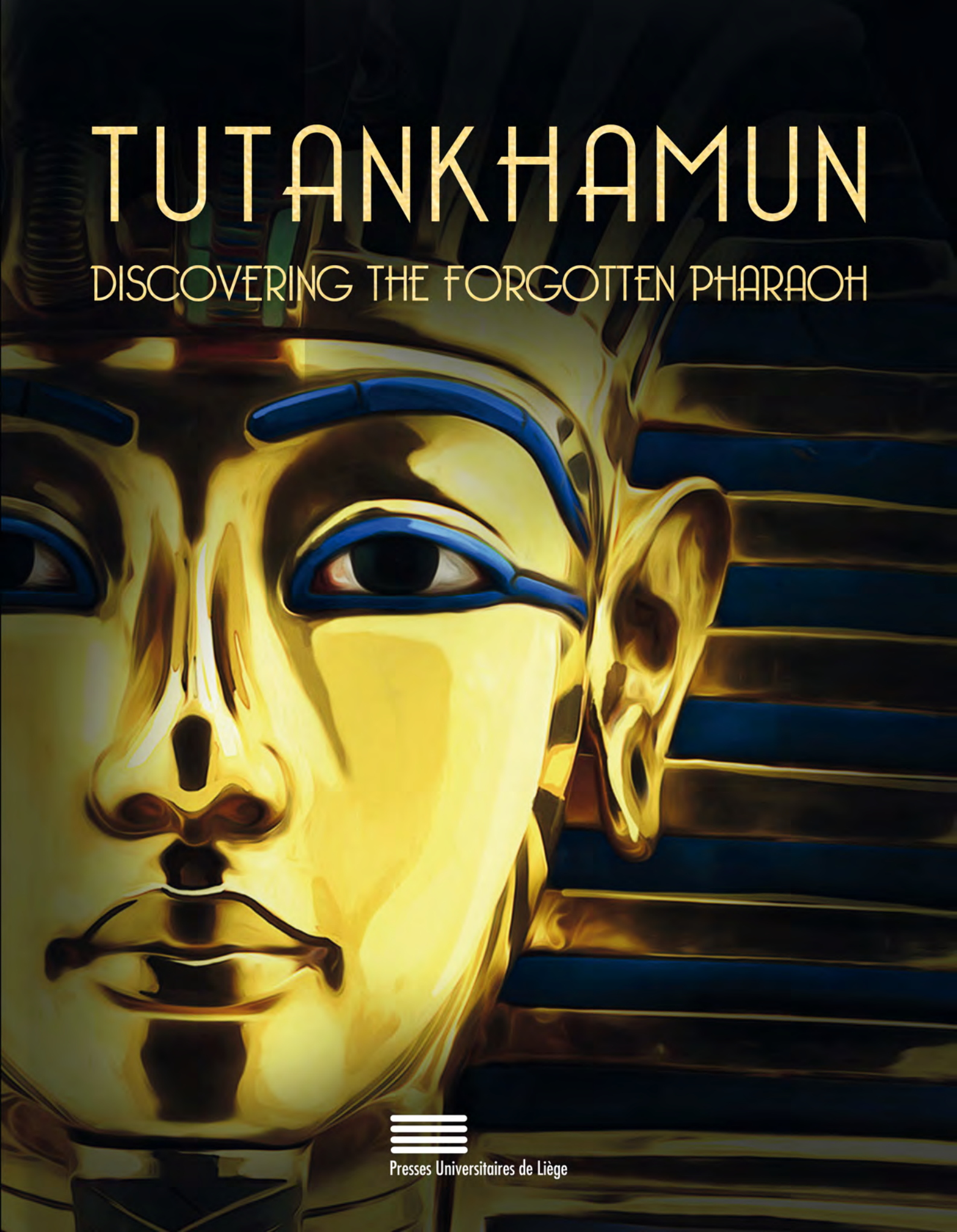


TUTANKHAMUN

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH



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Collection *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 12

TUTANKHAMUN
DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH

Catalogue edited by

Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY

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Jean-Lou Stefan

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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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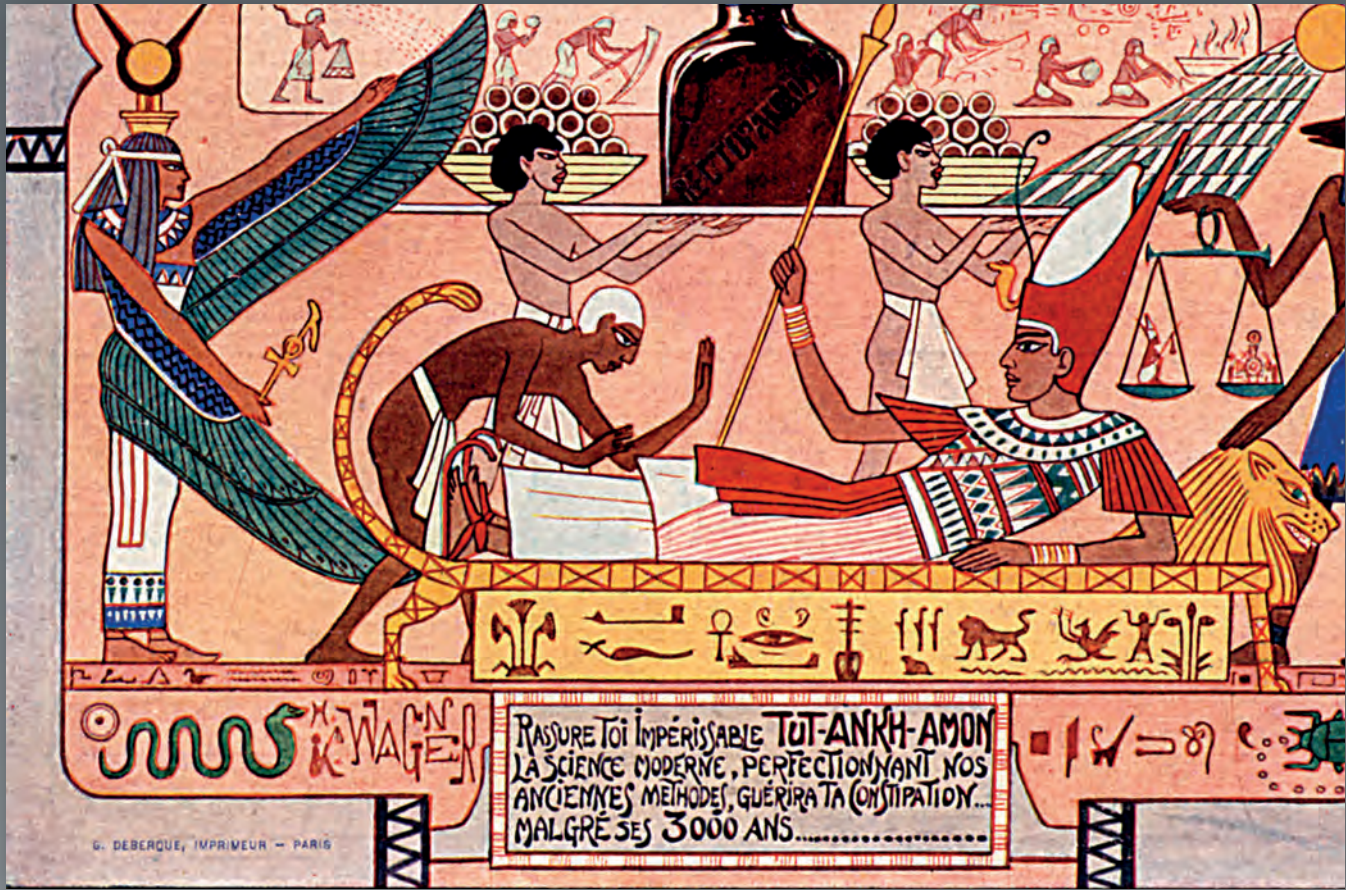
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WAGNER

RASSURE TOI IMPÉRISSABLE TUT-ANKH-AMON
LA SCIENCE MODERNE, PERFECTIONNANT NOS
ANCIENNES METHODES, GUÉRIRA TA CONSTIPATION...
MALGRÉ SES 3000 ANS.....

G. DEBERGUE, IMPRIMEUR - PARIS

Resurrecting Tutankhamun

Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY

Tutankhamun.

The Man behind the Mask

It will soon be a century since Tutankhamun's name became one of the most evocative in history. Whose ears don't now prick up at the sound of these four syllables? The pharaoh's name recalls, above all, the idea of boundless treasure, gold, adventure and mystery: in short, all Pharaonic Egypt united in a single symbol. Is there anyone who has never seen a picture of the golden mask (or one of its modern replicas) with its piercing blue-rimmed eyes? From the moment of its discovery, the king's funerary mask became an icon of pure beauty, magic, wealth, and glittering, eternal youth. In the popular imagination, it stands on its own for Egypt and its pharaonic past.

The name Tutankhamun is rare: as far as we know, "our" Tutankhamun is the only one to have borne this name (cf. the essay written by D. Farout in this volume). In French, its pleasant sound makes it familiar to children; in English, it's often affectionately shortened to King Tut. As 2022 approaches, many events look set to celebrate the centenary of the discovery of his tomb: these include several exhibitions, as well as the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum, where all of Tutankhamun's funerary equipment is expected to be exhibited. The century will soon be up, but we may still think: "Only a century!" Indeed, before 1922, almost nobody knew of this young pharaoh, now so celebrated. What did he do to deserve this popularity, to the point of out-ranking the glorious names of Ramesses, Thutmose and Senusret within the collective imagination — names celebrated by the Egyptians themselves, by classical authors, and honoured by Early Modern intellectuals? Is his fame only due to the discovery

of his tomb? Why are we so struck by the image of Tutankhamun, and what makes us fall in love with him? We say "love" given that this is not just a matter of scientific curiosity, but also a question of feeling that moves most of us.

First of all, his story could come out of a novel. The boy pharaoh lived during one of the most unsettled periods of Egyptian history. He grew up in the shadow of two legendary figures: Akhenaten and Nefertiti, who overturned a system which had governed Egypt for thousands of years. In spite of the campaign of *damnatio memoriae* that followed their reign, they continue to attract attention. Tutankhamun's father Akhenaten is one of those historical figures that incites our wildest fantasies. His mother Nefertiti has been an iconic figure since the 1920s, an archetype of unconditional elegance, femininity and formal perfection.

The young Tutankhamun was at the heart of palace conspiracies and of religious and political reforms. The consanguineous unions between members of his family — between cousins, father and daughters, and brothers and sisters — are intriguing, repulsive and attractive at the same time. Nowadays, inbreeding is considered to be among the causes of those alleged malformations that affected the young pharaoh. Just like his parents, Tutankhamun was an exile from history. His name was chiselled off monuments everywhere to make him disappear from memory. However, his being sentenced to oblivion only adds to his fascination. There is nothing like a *damnatio memoriae* to push one unexpectedly to the height of celebrity!

Tutankhamun's name also recalls the story of the search for a mythical treasure. The lengthy investigation carried out by Carter, who succeeded in finding the tomb just before his funds ran out, only added to the aura surrounding the pharaoh. Not to mention the imaginary curse that supposedly laid low those who had violated the tomb. Of course gold is fascinating, but Tutankhamun's is not the only treasure ever unearthed by archaeologists. Astonishing discoveries have been made in other intact sites and tombs, both in Egypt and elsewhere, but none evokes treasure like Tutankhamun. He is the pharaoh of all excesses: 110 kg of solid gold in his innermost coffin; 11 kg in his mask; more than 5,000 objects placed within his tomb, remaining untouched for almost 3300 years. The reigns of the Ramessides, the wars against Assyria and Persia, Alexander the Great's conquest of the Middle East, the Roman subjugation of the Mediterranean, the advent of Christianity and Islam, the plunder and reuse of the tombs within the Valley of the Kings and in the Theban necropolis, Napoleon Bonaparte's victory against the Mamluks, the decipherment of hieroglyphs, and the Egypt's modernization by Mohamed Ali... countless events took place in Egypt while Tutankhamun's funerary goods remained undisturbed. Immobile in darkness at the heart of the mountain, they would patiently wait thirty-three centuries before light would be cast on them again.

However, it is not just the sheer amount of wealth that captivates us. Over and above its great quantity, Tutankhamun's treasure is possibly that which best matches our tastes. Already in 1922, it fit with the Art Deco style, and, in turn, inspired it.

And this craze has never died down. The art of the time of Tutankhamun, pacific and radiant, refined and beautifully balanced, relaxes the spectator, as if it combined all the qualities of universal beauty. Moreover, it expresses the positive attitude of the ancient Egyptians towards the afterlife: a serene, contented view of eternity.

Although he inspires fantasies, Tutankhamun, in contrast to figures such as Cheops or Cleopatra, still has a physical presence. His body survived in the midst of his treasures. The king is still really here. Many of us have been able to approach the glass coffin that now houses the mummy within his tomb: we are able to look on the damaged face of the little king, and we do so not without tenderness.

Tutankhamun embodies the public's fantasies. Just as we think we have got to know him, he becomes more mysterious. Each new discovery stokes our appetites to learn more, as more is unveiled. So, over 80 years after Carter's investigation, modern, scientific technologies have made it possible to use the king's DNA to identify his parents and to look into the possible causes of his death — which took place at a crucial moment in Egyptian history — and even to pursue the illusory quest to reconstruct his face. We have come to know so much — perhaps even more than what we know about Ramesses II — about a pharaoh who died so young that we always end up craving to know even more about him. We want to get closer to the individual, and we want to find new ways to find out more about the life, looks, and personality of this young king. The more we love to learn about him, the more we are taught to love him.