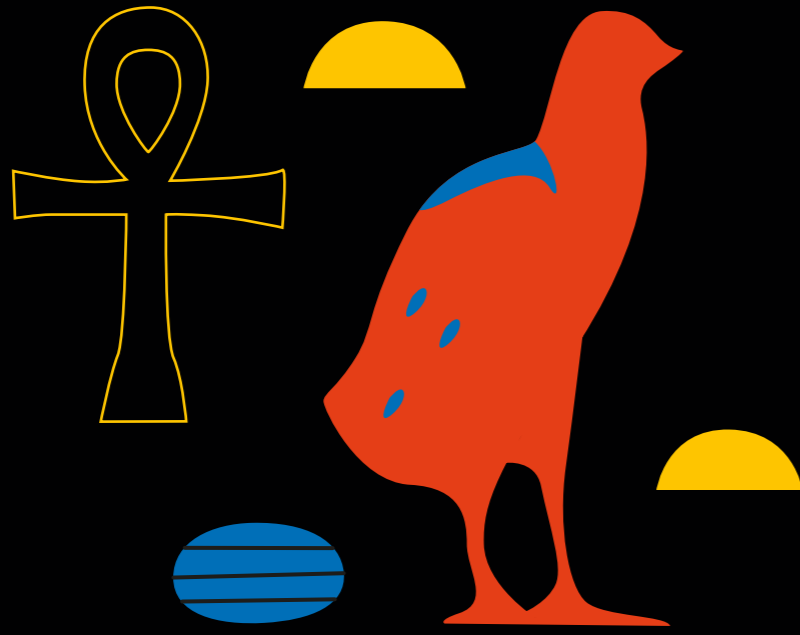
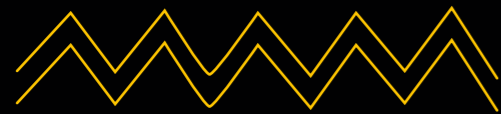


# PHAROAH AND LOATHING



HISTORY'S CLOAK AND DAGGER RACE FOR THE SPOILS OF ANCIENT EGYPT PROVED TO BE AS MUCH OF A POWER STRUGGLE IN ITS TIME AS THE HIERARCHIES IT REVEALED FROM THE PAST. RETURNING TO THE TIME WHEN RESEARCHERS FIRST UNLOCKED THE SECRETS OF THE GREAT EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS, **CHRIS WRIGHT** DECODES THE REAL-LIFE INDIANA JONES STORIES OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND DISCOVERS THAT MANY OF THESE BATTLES REMAIN TODAY

PHOTO: CORBIS (OPPOSITE PAGE)



The heat is stuffy and stifling in the low and narrow tunnel as Howard Carter, an English archaeologist, levers out stones from a sealed, underground doorway. He calls for a candle, to check if there are foul gases coming from the other side — it's been sealed off for more than 3,000 years, after all. Behind him, three men and a woman are waiting, silent but breathless. Carter pulls a few more stones out and peers in, waiting for his eyes to become accustomed to the candlelight. There is a long pause. Behind him Lord Carnarvon, the man who has funded this dig, can take it no more. This search has lasted almost a decade in the dry Egyptian rock. "Can you see anything?" he asks anxiously. "Yes," says Carter. "Wonderful things."



THE ENGLISH EGYPTOLOGIST HOWARD CARTER DISCOVERED TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB IN THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS, EGYPT IN 1922 (PREVIOUS PAGE) AND IN 1923, OPENED THE KING'S STONE SARCOPHAGUS (THIS PAGE)

in southern Egypt, and the northern royal cemeteries were curiosities — tangible reminders of a vanished, almost mythical age."

"And of course they're aware of that antiquity, they know," says Collins, whose immersion in this world is so deep that it feels natural to talk about it in the present tense. "They have lists of

## WHEN TUTANKHAMUN WAS AROUND, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN LOOKING AT THE PYRAMIDS LIKE THE BRITISH LOOK AT THE TOWER OF LONDON: ANCIENT AND MYSTERIOUS AND WEIRD

kings, successive generations stretching back to the beginning of time, and that time is unbroken, because you can see the monuments there."

So it is no surprise that Egyptians looted from other Egyptian tombs because they were as curious about their forefathers as we are today. And through it all, through Roman civilisations, and Greek, and ancient Chinese dynasties, through Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam and Christianity, Alexandra the Great and Genghis Khan and everyone since, the Egyptians have remained incredibly, timelessly fascinating.

Over the centuries many others have stolen, excavated and salvaged — the distinctions between them are not always clear — with the Napoleonic era particularly significant. It was during this time that Napoleon's troops unearthed what we now call the Rosetta Stone, which at first appeared to be building-site fill and is today perhaps the single most

It is 1922 and the greatest moment in modern archaeology has just occurred. Carter and Carnarvon have found the tomb of Tutankhamun, whom the world will come to know as the Boy King; the last of the pharaohs to be discovered in the Valley of the Kings, where 500 years' worth of Egyptian rulers were entombed from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is a moment that will enrapture the world, whose people will embrace ancient Egypt into their reading, their art, their

decoration and their fashion. It will stand as the greatest archaeological find of modern times, dramatically increasing our understanding of one of history's most revered cultures. It will bring to an end the uneasy era of the tomb excavator, since it is clear that no other find like this remains to be unearthed. And it will be followed, at various stages, by the deaths of many involved — Carnarvon within six weeks and Carter not until 1939, but with the rest of his life having been subsumed

to the burden of cataloguing his finds. To this day, people share stories about a curse.

### THE TOMB RAIDERS

Today, whenever we look back upon that era of excavating the tombs of the pharaohs, we think of Carter, though really he was the last in a long line of plunderers. It starts, arguably, with the Egyptians themselves. "Certainly, most of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings had been plundered in antiquity in

Ancient Egypt itself," says Dr Paul Collins, who is sitting with *Discovery Channel Magazine* in a book-filled office of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England. Collins is the Jaleh Hearn Curator for Ancient Near East, which makes for a hell of a business card. He's also the co-curator of a new exhibition on the discovery of Tutankhamun.

"We know that because the Greeks and the Romans talk about visiting the tombs," Collins says. "They were great tourist attractions to

the Romans, particularly when they occupied Egypt, and the graffiti all over these tombs in Latin and Greek shows they were as intrigued by them as we are. But, even then, they were empty."

This is the thing about Ancient Egypt: the sheer scale of its distance in time from us, and the extraordinary period that it covered. When Tutankhamun was around, he would have been looking at the Pyramids like the British look at the Tower of London:

they would have been more than a thousand years old, ancient and mysterious and weird. "Long abandoned by their priests, they lay open and stripped of their contents, their precious mummies vanished," writes Joyce Tyldesley in *Egypt: How a Lost Civilisation Was Discovered*. "At their feet crouched the once-mighty Sphinx, now buried up to his noble neck in windblown sand. Pyramids were out of fashion. Kings were being buried in secret rock-cut tombs

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



**ABOVE:** BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGIST HOWARD CARTER EMERGES FROM THE TOMB OF THE EGYPTIAN PHARAOH TUTANKHAMUN HOLDING A BOX OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS  
**LEFT:** A VIEW OF LUXOR BETWEEN THE RAMESSEUM AND THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT IN THE NILE VALLEY, EGYPT



valued treasure in the British Museum. That's because it carries a decree written in three languages — Ancient Greek, Demotic, and Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs — and proved to be the key to decoding and understanding hieroglyphics, the picture-based language of the ancient Egyptians.

Carter arrived on the scene towards the end of an era rich in characters but not so blessed with scientific method. The most extraordinary of them was surely Giovanni Battista Belzoni — or The Great Belzoni, as he was sometimes known — who is as close as we can get to the idea of a tomb-raiding, courageous Indiana Jones in Egyptian archaeology.

#### MOVING AND SHAKING

Belzoni's story is a great one. He started out in life as a hairdresser in Padua in northern Italy then led an itinerant existence around Europe before earning a living as a theatre strongman known as "The Patagonian Sampson", whose party piece was to carry 12 full-grown men upon his shoulders in the shape of a pyramid. (How's that for premonition.) He acted, conjured and played a glass harmonica. "He pops up in a circus in London, in a theatre in Perth where despite his strong Italian accent he plays Macbeth, in Plymouth where he once again supports a human pyramid, and in Edinburgh where he bravely, some might say foolishly, acts alongside a live bear," writes Tyldesley.

He turned up in Egypt in 1815 to try to sell water-lifting equipment, but like an increasing number of people in this era, he was very interested in the monuments around him. Ever since Napoleon had — perhaps literally — put Egypt on the map, the wealthy had begun to add Egypt to the Grand Tour, wherein "a small but persistent trickle of Europeans in search of a frisson of adventure made their way southwards, sailing in native boats, sleeping in tents, donning native dress, and retuning home to publish lengthy, inaccurate and very popular guidebooks," Tyldesley writes. "More often than not, they returned home with

souvenirs." And it was through this growing love of souvenirs that Belzoni would make his name.

"They were at that moment when they were thinking big," explains Collins. "This is the imperial age, when you can move sculptures on a grand scale which would not have been possible before, and afterwards politically and logistically wasn't possible." Several things were happening at once. As well as private collectors, museums like the Ashmolean, the British Museum in London, and the Louvre in Paris, were collecting antiquities, and paying fairly good money for them. And, for the first time, the big things could be moved. "It's only really in the 19<sup>th</sup> century where there is the imperial presence that gives politically enormous influence in these countries, and the logistics of sailing and steaming ships that can transport this stuff are available," explains Collins. "That means

**AS WELL AS PRIVATE COLLECTORS, MUSEUMS LIKE THE ASHMOLEAN, THE BRITISH MUSEUM, AND THE LOUVRE WERE COLLECTING ANTIQUITIES, AND PAYING FAIRLY GOOD MONEY**

you've got a combination where the Belzonis can function and become famous as a result. He was able to work the system and move enormous monuments around the world."

And become famous he did, although he makes many modern archaeologists queasy with his methods and casual attitude towards the priceless. Consider this passage from his autobiography, in a tomb near Luxor:

"After the exertion of entering... I sought a resting place, found one, and contrived to sit; but when my weight bore on the body of an Egyptian, it crushed it like a band-box. I naturally had to recourse to my hands to sustain my weight, but they

found no better support; so that I sunk altogether among the broken mummies, with a crash of bones, rags and wooden cases... every step I took crushed a mummy in some part or other."

Still, he is responsible for the provision to museums of some truly extraordinary things that might otherwise have met a worse fate. The most remarkable is also in the British Museum: a colossal head known as Younger Memnon, a statue of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty King Ramesses II. This piece had attracted attention before. Napoleon's troops had tried to take it, and had been about to dynamite the head from the shoulders — you can still see the hole they drilled in the shoulder in order to do it — before giving up on the whole idea after working out it weighed eight tonnes. Belzoni, not to be deterred, hired 80 men to put it on to a wooden sledge and roll it a couple of miles to the Nile, a process which took 16 days. It is a monument so fabulous it inspired Percy Bysshe Shelley to write his most beloved poem, *Ozymandius* (see page 51). The title of the poem being the Greek name for Ramesses.

Fortunately, by the time Carter came along, he had a more fastidious mentor to learn from. "Carter had brief training by the great Egyptologist Flinders Petrie, and it was Petrie who revolutionised the field of Egyptology," says Collins. "He was the one who brought a real scientific approach. Before him and after him, people were simply just digging, and not making the detailed, accurate records that Petrie said were necessary, not just to understand the material as it was discovered, but to reconstruct it afterwards and think about its broader context. Something of that may well have rubbed off on Carter." To scholars of the period, Petrie, not Carter, is the one they tend to revere. "He did more than anyone else to turn Egyptology from a glorified form of treasure hunting into a reputable science," writes Tyldesley.

## DIGGING FOR GOLD

Carter, in any event, seems in hindsight to have been the right man at the right time. Collins says: "Carter was by nature an incredibly meticulous and detailed man, and it was a fortuitous combination of his own approach to life — on the whole he was a very difficult person to work with — and this emerging approach to archaeology as a science."

Carter was active for many years in Egypt before he ever got near the Valley of Kings. An amateur, a wealthy American

## IT TOOK TWO ENTIRE SEASONS OF WORK TO CLEAR THE CORRIDORS OF RUBBLE, MUD AND STONES THAT HAD BEEN WASHED INTO THE TOMB

retired lawyer called Theodore Davis, held the concession for the area within which Tutankhamun would eventually be found. Davis actually came within about two metres of finding the steps before eventually giving up and coming out with the famously wrong proclamation: "I fear the Valley of the Tombs is now exhausted."

Carter had actually worked for Davis early on, in 1902, uncovering the missing tomb of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaoh Tutmosis IV the following year. His diaries from this time give us a sense of the day-to-day miseries of what sounds like such a glamorous profession. To get to one tomb, unromantically now called KV20, it took two entire seasons of work to clear the corridors of rubble, mud and stones that had been washed into the tomb. He wrote:

"The air had become so bad, and the heat so great, that the candles carried by the workmen melted, and would not give enough light to enable them to continue their work; [so] we

were compelled to install electric lights, in the form of hand wires... As soon as we got down about 50 metres, the air became so foul that the men could not work. In addition to this, the bats of centuries had built innumerable nests on the ceilings of the corridors and chambers, and their excrement had become so dry that the least stir of the air filled the corridors with a fluffy black stuff, which choked the noses and mouths of the men, rendering it most difficult for them to breathe."

Carter was then sent elsewhere, working in the country's north, where he found himself hounded out of employment after taking the side of Egyptian guards who had got into a brawl with some drunk Frenchmen. Carter, a proud and stubborn man, was ordered to apologise to the French and refused to do so. His consequent resignation led him to three difficult years of being an artist and part-time dealer before his path crossed with that of Lord Carnarvon, a rich aristocrat who had married into the wealthy Rothschild family. The Lord had become interested in Egypt after injuring himself so badly in a speeding car that he needed warm dry air to help him fight off chest infections. With Carnarvon providing the funds and Carter the expertise, they spent several years making modest but useful finds in the Theban necropolis until the First World War got in the way.

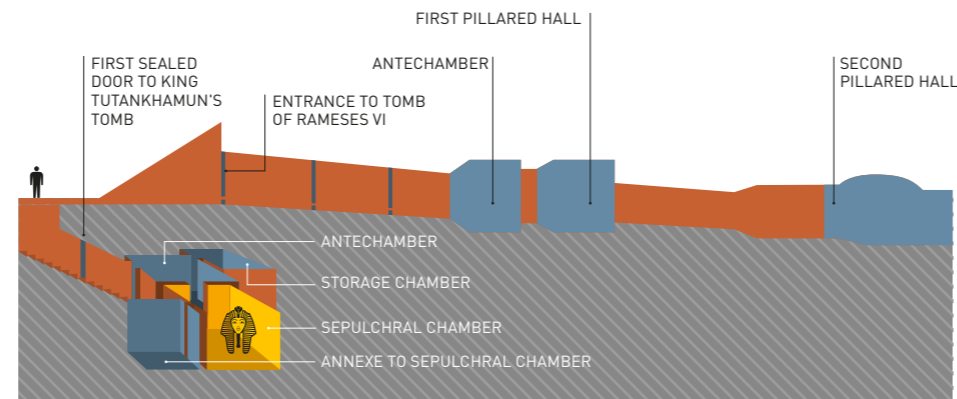
Davis, meanwhile, had been plundering his way through the Valley of Kings looking for the tomb of Tutankhamun. To this day, archaeologists and scholars are grateful that he never found it. He had no interest in documenting what he found, and certainly not a scientist's rigour in preservation.

There are three reasons that Tutankhamun remained elusive for so long. One is the fact that he was an utterly insignificant king, in the context of Egypt's 3,000 years of dynasties. This seems remarkable when we consider how venerated he is in our world today. Tutankhamun, who was part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, is thought to have reigned for just nine years before dying young, perhaps at 18 years old. As Jon Manchip White puts it:

AN AERIAL VIEW OF HOWARD CARTER'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE TOMBS OF THE PHAROAHS RAMESSES VI AND TUTANKHAMEN (BETTER KNOWN AS KING TUT), VALLEY OF THE KINGS, THEBES, EGYPT, 1922

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

## HIDDEN TOMB



ENTRANCE TO TOMB OF RAMESSES VI

ENTRANCE TO TOMB OF TUTANKHAMUN

## THE CURSE



The death of Lord Carnarvon shortly after the opening of the burial tomb was the start of an enduring story about a curse. In the months and years afterwards, a number of people connected to the tomb in one way or another died too. Examples included George Jay Gould, who visited the tomb and died shortly afterwards of fever; Archibald Douglas-Reid, a radiologist who X-rayed Tutankhamun's mummy and died in January 1924 from an unknown illness; and Arthur Mace, one of Carter's team who helped with conservation of items in the tomb, who died of arsenic poisoning in 1928. Then various people more peripherally linked to the tomb or its finders found themselves connected to the curse: Carnarvon's half-brother who died in 1923, also from blood poisoning; another half-brother, who died in 1929 from malarial pneumonia; Carter's personal secretary Richard Bethell, who was found smothered in his bed in 1929; and political figures of the time, such as Prince Ali Kamel Fahmy Bey of Egypt, who was shot by his wife in 1923, and Lee Stack, the Governor-General of Sudan, who was assassinated in Cairo in 1924.

Any scholarly examination of the facts makes a curse seem unlikely. In 1934 Herbert Winlock, an American Egyptologist, set out to track down the 26 people who had been present at the tomb opening, and found that only six of them had died within a decade. Of those who had first crawled into the burial chamber, yes, Carnarvon had died — but he had been ill for years, and had in fact ended up in Egypt specifically because of his illness — whereas Carter lived another 16 years and Lady Evelyn, Carnarvon's daughter, lived until 1980.

Part of the problem was misinformation. A number of newspapers, starved of information by the *Times* deal, had drummed up tales of

## THE CURSE

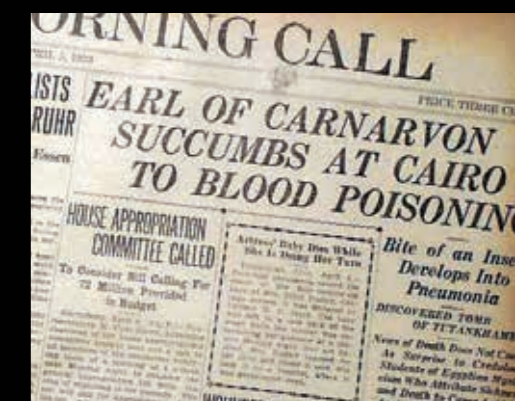
ancient curses, with several accounts stating that there was a curse carved over the entrance.

The most common telling of the carving has it like this: "Death shall come on swift wings to him who toucheth the tomb of Pharaoh." It wasn't true. That carving does not exist. But, such was the age, it felt like it *could* be true. After all, everything else about the story was fantastic, so why not this? As Carnarvon's sister Winifred Burghclere later wrote about her brother: "A story that opens like Aladdin's Cave and ends like a Greek myth of Nemesis cannot fail to capture the imagination of all men and women who, in this workaday existence, can still be moved by tales of high endeavour and unrelenting doom."

It was all, as Tyldesley writes, "a drama on an epic scale", and it also came at a time when people were doubting religious truths. "Western Europe, in the aftermath of the First World War and the devastating flu epidemic that followed it, had lost the rock-solid certainty of unquestioning Christian faith," she says. "Instead there was an unfocused wave of interest in all things supernatural and occult, including Egyptian religion."

Into this willing audience appeared the famous author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who somewhat unhelpfully suggested that Carnarvon had been killed by what he called an Elemental, created by Ancient Egyptians. This was all taken up with some sincerity by the world's press. At the *Ashmolean* you can see the front page of the *Sunday Times* (the Australian version) from May 20, 1923, with a headline: "The Curse of Osiris", with the sub-heads: "Superstitious Legend Round Lord Carnarvon's Death", "Marie Correlli's Poison Theory" and "Conan Doyle Puts Suspicion on Tut-ankh-Amen".

Collins describes the curse story as the product of "a perfect storm. You've got the press clamouring for an angle. You've got the wealthy aristocrat who has everything going for him, who has founded the greatest discovery in the world and then dies under mysterious circumstances. It's at a moment when spiritualism is enormous, when people are thinking about the afterlife and going to séances to try to speak to the dead. And then you've got this mysterious world of Egypt, of extraordinary gods and goddesses and journeys to the underworld. Out of all that emerges the idea of the curse."



"The pharaoh who in life was one of the least esteemed of Egypt's Pharaohs has become in death the most renowned." Consequently, one had to be something of a scholar to know that he had ever existed, and hence to look for him: several tombs over the years have featured lists of kings, which one can now see in the Louvre, British Museum and in Egypt itself, and in most cases they miss Tutankhamun out completely.

The second reason is because of where the tomb turned out to be. It was right underneath another tomb: that of Ramesses VI. The builders who dug that tomb poured all of their rubble on top of what would later turn out to be the entrance to Tutankhamun's.

**"AT LAST HAVE MADE WONDERFUL DISCOVERY IN VALLEY. A MAGNIFICENT TOMB WITH SEALS INTACT. RE-COVERED SAME FOR YOUR ARRIVAL"**

They even built huts on top of it too, and much later, an access road for tourists visiting the Valley. The reason Davis stopped where he did was because it was feared that excavations there would disrupt tourism flows. Also, Tutankhamun, having died suddenly, seems to have been buried suddenly too, in a tomb much smaller than that of most royals, which made it inconspicuous to tomb raiders through the ages.

And the third reason was that Davis thought he had already found him. In his excavations, he, or his hired archaeologist, Edward Ayrton, came across several things linked to the boy king: a cup bearing his name; then a small pit containing the remains of his embalming materials. In 1909 they found a small, undecorated chamber with a couple of minor things linked to Tutankhamun within. Remember that there was no expectation of finding anything dramatic for someone who was considered a minor king. So Davis concluded this pit was the lost tomb of Tutankhamun, perhaps plundered in antiquity. And so he gave up. In 1914 his concession expired. Carnarvon took it up.

#### A SLOW JOURNEY

It took them years to find Tutankhamun. First, the Great War interrupted all digging, so it wasn't until 1917 that they could really start. Then, progress was hopelessly slow. By 1922, with Carnarvon having run out of money, "he said to Carter, 'That's it,'" says Collins. "'We've found absolutely nothing. One mummified cat from 1914 to 1922.'" They had shifted thousands of tonnes of rubble.

But, poring over a map of the Valley of Kings, they realised that there was one square of it left that they had not explored. Carter offered to pay the costs of one final season himself. "And Carnarvon, a great gambler, said: 'let's go for it,'" says Collins. "And within three days of going back, they had found it."

What they found initially was a step, which became a flight of 16 steps leading down to a blocked doorway. "Demonstrating admirable self-control," writes Tyldesley, "Carter re-covered the stairwell to hide the tomb from thieves, swore his workmen to secrecy, and then crossed the river to the Luxor telegraph office where he sent a coded message to Lord Carnarvon in England."

The message said: "At last have made wonderful discovery in Valley. A magnificent tomb with seals intact. Re-covered same for your arrival. Congratulations. Carter."

It took Carnarvon and his daughter three weeks to get out there, and one can only imagine what Carter must have been going through during this time. Still, he had learned a lot about patience, and would learn plenty more in future too. Re-clearing the stairway and door, they found very good and very bad news.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



THE GOLDEN FUNERARY MASK OF TUTANKHAMUN, INLAID WITH LAPIS LAZULI, OBSIDIAN AND TURQUOISE. THE MASK WAS AN ESSENTIAL ITEM OF THE ROYAL BURIAL EQUIPMENT SERVING AS AN IMAGE THAT THE SOUL COULD ENTER AND OCCUPY DURING THE AFTERLIFE IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO THE BODY



VARIOUS ANTIQUITIES FROM THE TOMB OF THE PHAROAH TUTANKHAMUN, INCLUDING (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) A GILT WOOD STATUETTE OF THE KING ON A BOAT WITH A HARPOON; CLOISONNE NAME PENDANT; GOLD FINGER STALLS; A MIRROR CASE IN THE FORM OF AN ANKH, THE SIGN OF LIFE, MADE OF GILT WOOD INLAID WITH GLASS-PASTE; THE HEAD OF A FUNERARY COUCH IN THE FORM OF A SACRED COW; AN ALABASTER CANOPIC SHRINE; A FOLDING HEADREST IN PAINTED IVORY DECORATED WITH THE HEAD OF THE PROTECTIVE SPIRIT BES; THE KING'S FLY-WHISK



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; CORBIS

The good: Tutankhamun's name was on the tomb. The bad: the tomb had already been opened and resealed, at least twice, in antiquity. Would there be anything left there to find?

Beyond the door was a corridor, which had to be cleared of rubble and limestone chips. On November 26, Carter and Carnarvon found themselves in front of a sealed doorway leading to the antechamber. And this is where we started our story, with Carter and a candle blinking into the gloom, trying to work out why there was a glinting shine coming back at him — and realising that it was coming from gold.

## IT LOOKS AS IF SOMEONE HAS FOUND ALL THE BOUNTEOUS THINGS A PHARAOH MIGHT NEED IN THE AFTERLIFE AND CHUCKED THEM IN A HEAP

Today, we can see photographs taken by the talented Harry Burton of what lay within, once they unblocked the doorway fully. Not to be unkind, but it looks like a spare room stuffed with clutter: a jumble sale, as Collins says. Maybe it's because early robberies took place and the guards restacked things carelessly, but it looks as if someone has found all the bounteous things a Pharaoh might need in the afterlife and chucked them in a heap. There were three large, animal-shaped beds; the wheels of several dismantled chariots, boxes, vases, food, drink and furniture.

It was clear, instantly, that the treasures they had found would also be a burden. Carter was not the sort of man to barge in without documenting precisely

what he had found and taking measures to protect it. Carter says in his autobiography: "Excitement had gripped us hitherto, and given us no pause for thought, but now for the first time we began to realise what a prodigious task we had in front of us, and what a responsibility it entailed."

He set about assembling something of an A-Team of Egyptological specialists — Burton the photographer plus a conservation expert, an engineer, an architect and a chemist. They used nearby empty tombs to provide them space to work. The tomb of Seti II became a workshop and laboratory. The tomb of Queen Tiy became Burton's darkroom. Ramesses XI's resting place became the lunch canteen. With the team assembled, it took seven weeks to empty the antechamber, with each object numbered, photographed, planned, recorded and drawn. Then they were given more



**ABOVE:** IN 2007, EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES EXPERTS MOVED KING TUTANKHAMUN'S MUMMY FROM ITS ORNATE SARCOPHAGUS IN THE TOMB WHERE IT WAS DISCOVERED, TO A NEARBY CLIMATE-CONTROLLED CASE FOR BETTER PRESERVATION  
**LEFT:** A GROUP OF UNIFORMED GUARDS STAND AROUND THE GOLD DEATH MASK OF THE EGYPTIAN KING TUTANKHAMUN ON DISPLAY AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM IN 1972  
**FAR LEFT:** AN ARTWORK SHOWING THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE SARCOPHAGUS OF THE EGYPTIAN PHAROAH

### OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.

And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

treatment in the tomb-cum-lab, packaged in wadding and bandages, and sent to Cairo.

### A CURSED TREASURE?

By February 1923, it was time to open the next sealed entrance: to the burial tomb. With similar tension and wobble-candled expectation as when he chipped into the door of the antechamber, Carter did the same with this new doorway. But the results, if anything, were even better. "An astonishing sight... for there, within a yard of the doorway, stretching as far as one could see and blocking the entrance to the chamber, stood what to all appearance was a solid wall of gold."

It was incredible. A huge, floorless gilt shrine, filling the burial chamber. Upon investigation, it would turn out to be four shrines, one inside the other, with a sarcophagus inside them.

In some respects, this would be as good as it got for Carter and Carnarvon: this moment of exhilaration, finding ancient, priceless, beautiful wonders that nobody had seen for three millennia. For what followed would, one way or another, end the careers and lives of both of them, albeit at a very different pace.

First, publicity about the finds led to a huge swarm of visitors, both tourists and journalists; the latter group were deeply antagonised by an exclusive deal that Carnarvon had signed with *The Times* newspaper, making them more belligerent and, in many cases, less accurate. Carter would write: "The tomb drew like a magnet. From a very early hour in the morning the pilgrimage began. Visitors arrived on donkeys, in sand-carts, and in two-horse cabs, and proceeded to make themselves at home in The Valley for the day." Not long after the opening of the burial tomb, the decision was made for everyone to take a 10-day break. The tomb was re-buried for security, and everyone took some time away to recharge.

Carnarvon and his daughter went south to stay in Aswan, and while there, he was bitten on the cheek by a mosquito. Back in Luxor, he accidentally sliced the

scab off the bite while shaving. Then he started to feel unwell, and headed to a Cairo hotel, the Continental-Savoy, to get well. But he did not. He got blood poisoning, then pneumonia, and in the early hours of April 5, he died. They say that at the moment of death, the lights went out all over the city. This is where the idea of a curse first started (see box on page 45).

The loss of Carnarvon meant that much of the diplomacy

**"THREE THOUSAND YEARS AND MORE HAD ELAPSED SINCE MEN'S EYES HAD GAZED INTO THAT GOLDEN COFFIN." ON TOP OF THE MUMMY WAS A MAGNIFICENT GOLD MASK**

around their work now fell to Carter. This was disastrous, since he was pretty much the last person who should have been given that role. Not long after the coffin was taken from the innermost shrine in January 1924, confirming at last that they had discovered an intact royal body, Carter got into an argument so severe with the Egyptian government that they downed tools, closed the tomb, and work stopped for a year.

Also, while the discovery would be the greatest moment of Carter's life, it would also end his career, in the sense that there would never be time to do anything else again. "In many ways it may well have been what killed him," says Collins. "He was a very difficult man to work with, and that's why he never managed to publish his account in a scientific manner. He died of an illness, worn out by the effort

of trying to do this enormous job without any assistance, because nobody else wanted to work with him to do it, or vice versa."

Still, before Carter surrendered the rest of his life to documentation, there was one more great delight to come: getting to the mummy within the sarcophagus.

### THE GREAT REVEAL

Tutankhamun had been buried in three coffins. The outermost one was wooden, coated in plaster, and covered in gold, decorated with semi-precious stone. The second, linen-shrouded, was garlanded gold as well. The third, within, was made of solid gold. In October 1925 its lid was lifted.

"At such moments the emotions evade verbal expression, complex and stirring as they are," wrote Carter. "Three thousand years and more had elapsed since men's eyes had gazed into that golden coffin." On top of the mummy was a magnificent gold mask.

Today, this burial mask is the iconic symbol of Tutankhamun, and indeed all of Egyptology, second only to the Pyramids and Sphinx as a representation of the extraordinary capacity and ability of this ancient people. You can see it in the National Museum in Cairo, if you can ever get through the crowds around it, and seeing it is something you never forget. The sheer artistry of it, the smoothness of the golden cheek, is such that it seems wholly inconceivable to have been possible three millennia ago. It is truly a work of art.

In November 1925 came an autopsy and unwrapping of the mummy, leading to some early conjecture on his cause of death, although modern times and techniques have brought many more theories, one common theory being that he was killed in a chariot accident.

Strangely, our understanding of Tutankhamun has a lot to do with the precise time he was found. There are two reasons for this: what was happening in Egypt, and what was happening everywhere else. Egypt had just become independent from

Britain, and had a nationalist government which maintained control over anything that was excavated from then on. Had the tomb been discovered any earlier, whatever was in it would likely have been distributed all over the world, in museums and private collections. "With Tutankhamun we have this extraordinarily unique ability to look at a complete tomb," says Collins. "No other one exists."

Then there's what the world was like in post-war 1920s. It is fascinating to look at the memorabilia that emerged from Tutankhamun's discovery. There are albums, for example

*Old King Tut was a Wise Old Nut*, as well as biscuits, ashtrays, cups, King Tut lemons and then Egyptian-styled carpets, curtains, wall hangings, hairstyles, fashions, everything. The West simply absorbed Tutankhamun and the Ancient Egyptians.

"It's that moment when you've got a lot more freedom emerging, in America in particular. Women now have the vote and there are all sorts of social upheavals," says Collins. "There's the old guard saying that the world will come to an end, and the new guard looking for a brave new world where

the aristocracy will no longer have complete control, and democracy is emerging.

At the same time a world of technology is appearing that enables this newfound democratic world to have a voice, through Hollywood, through newspapers, through the telephone. And after the great tragedy and horror of the First World War, you've got a hope for the future, in which everyone is able to participate. And that means the excitement of Tutankhamun can be open to everybody."

Today, you can go and see the treasures from that tomb

in a stuffed and dated museum in Cairo. Soon, modern political dramas notwithstanding, they will be in a new state-of-the-art museum near the Pyramids. Meanwhile in the Valley of the Kings, they have built a whole new replica of the tomb not far from the real one. The hope is that the false one will discourage people from going to the real one, which may soon be closed. But, for the moment at least, Tutankhamun's body is still there, in a glass-covered box to preserve him from further decline, the only one of the Pharaohs to lie in his original tomb. ●



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

THE DISCOVERY OF TUTANKHAMUN IN 1922 CREATED A WORLDWIDE APPETITE FOR EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES, WITH MUSEUMS AROUND THE WORLD NOW DISPLAYING THEIR TREASURES

## SHOULD WE EXCAVATE?



By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the antiquity laws were finally being tightened to prevent some of the mercenary archaeology-cum-looting of previous years. "Now everything officially belonged to Egypt, but excavators might, in acknowledgement of their work, receive a part of their finds at the discretion of the authorities," writes Egyptologist Joyce Tyldesley.

This, at least, kept Egypt's treasures in the country, but at that stage it was not in much of a position to look after them. Finds at the time were displayed in the Bulaq Museum in Cairo, which was hopelessly overcrowded already. Petrie had discovered a unique wooden sarcophagus from a Graeco-Roman cemetery and given it to the museum, which, for lack of room, had left it outside, where it fell apart in the hostile conditions. "The museum," says Tyldesley, "was so over-full that it was selling unwanted antiquities to tourists in the museum shop."

"The obvious solution — leaving Egypt unexcavated, her finds naturally preserved under her sand — was no longer an option," says Tyldesley, because of the thriving black market in antiquities that now existed, and the inability to afford guards at every site.

So that became the rationale for excavation and for taking ancient treasures out of Egypt. But what about the bodies? These were, after all, real people, albeit unfathomably old. Even in Carter's time, there was some unease about this. "There was a growing unease over the archaeologist's automatic assumption that the dead had no rights," writes Tyldesley. "Lord Carnarvon had deliberately sought out Tutankhamun; he had been preparing to reveal him to the world. But surely it was fundamentally wrong to desecrate a grave, no matter how ancient that grave might be?"

Today, Collins says: "We don't do that now, of course, because we've got the technology not to do it. The sorts of questions we're asking of the mummies are very different from those from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century when they were being unwrapped. Now we can do it with CT scanning to such a level of detail there's no requirement to invade the body itself."

But he notes the contradictions in our attitudes to treatment of dead bodies. "There's a sense in people's minds that there is a cutoff — in terms of their distance in time from us," he says.