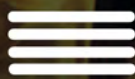


# TUTANKHAMUN

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

Exhibition organized at the Europa Expo space  
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2020

The exhibition “Tutankhamun. Discovering the Forgotten Pharaoh” was produced by the scr1-fs EUROPA EXPO and realised by the non-profit organisation Collections & Patrimoines.

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## Acknowledgements

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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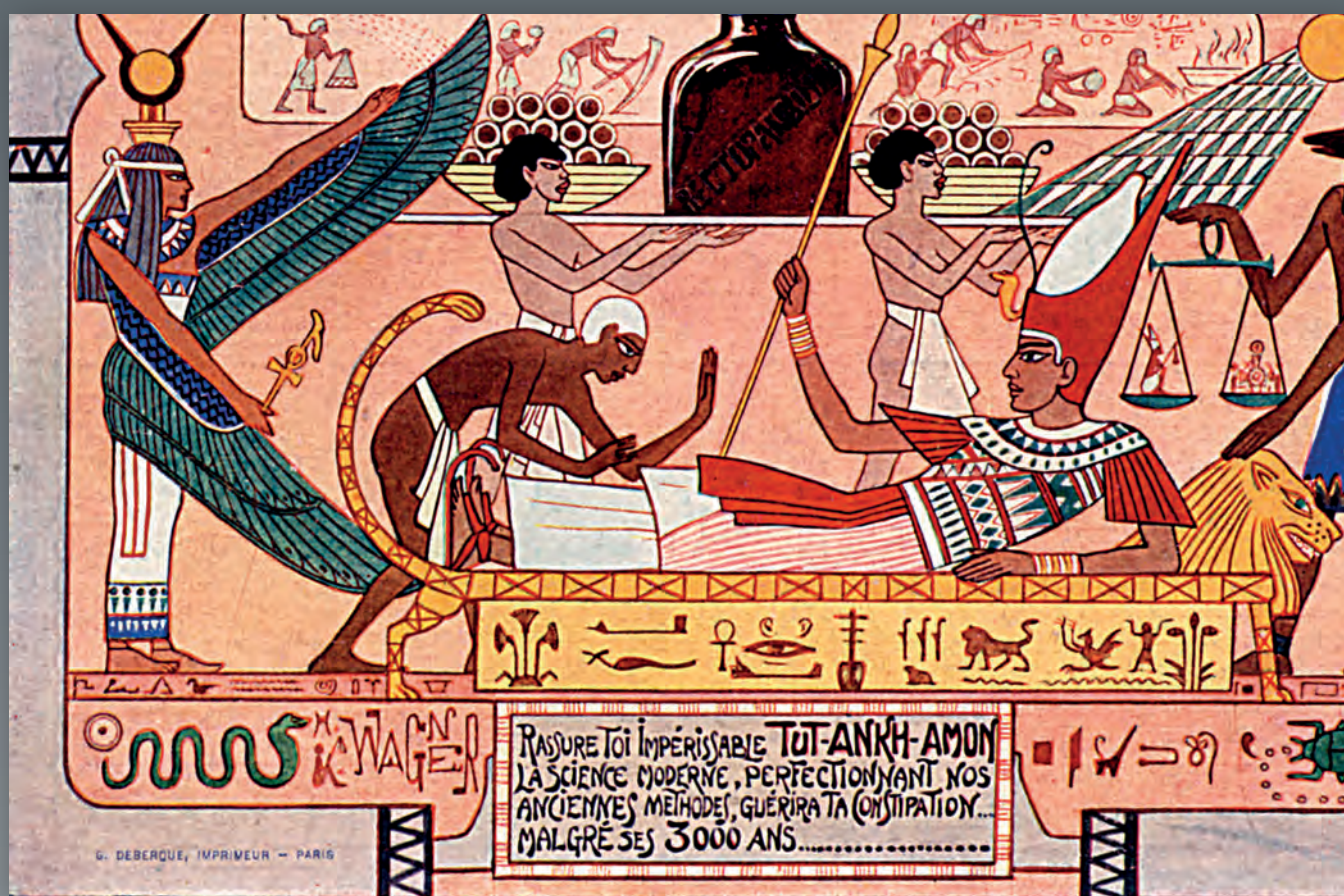
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# Resurrecting Tutankhamun

Jean-Michel BRUFFAERTS

# A Queen, an Egyptologist and a Pharaoh

At the end of 1922, the news quickly spread around Belgium and the whole world: in Egypt, to be precise, in the Valley of the Kings, the British archaeologist Howard Carter and his patron Lord Carnarvon had unearthed the almost intact tomb of a pharaoh from the Eighteenth Dynasty: Tutankhamun. The Belgians start to discover a new passion. This was especially the case of Jean Capart, the founder of Belgian Egyptology. Intrigued by the first dispatches from Luxor, he

was convinced that the journalists could only have speculated on the importance of this tomb, and he was impatiently awaiting the chance — perhaps in the future? — to discover it himself.

Given his authority as curator of the Egyptian antiquities at the Musées Royaux du Cinquanteaire in Brussels, and his role as professor in Egyptology at the University of Liège, he fired up the public's curiosity by gladly answering those questions concerning the “forgotten pharaoh”. He emphasized the sparkly and creative character of the Amarna Period, in which Tutankhamun was born, and stated to whomsoever lent his ear, that this was “indeed the most meaningful archaeological discovery of modern times”. In January 1923, the Belgian magazine *Le Flambeau* published the text of a lecture given by Capart under the title *Le Nouveau trésor découvert en Égypte*. Once Queen Elisabeth, the wife of King Albert I of Belgium, had the chance to read it, her curiosity was aroused too. Indeed, the Queen had been a long-lasting *aficionada* of Egypt, a country she had already visited twice: during her adolescence (probably in 1891) with her aunt and godmother, the Empress Elisabeth of Austria (better known as Sissi) and, in 1911, with her husband. More recently, on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1922, a week before Howard Carter entered the tomb of Tutankhamun for the first time, she visited the Cinquanteaire, where Jean Capart guided her through an exhibition dedicated to the centenary of the decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion. In a swirl of enthusiasm, she decided to return to Egypt and participate in the adventure personally. Notwithstanding the private nature of this trip, the Anglo-Egyptian authorities invited her to chair the official inauguration of the funerary chamber of



Fig. 1: Queen Elisabeth of Belgium on the Nile (1930).



**Fig. 2:** Queen Elisabeth visiting the tomb of Tutankhamun. Behind her: Lady Evelyn Herbert, daughter of Lord Carnarvon (Valley of the Kings, February 18, 1923).

Tutankhamun. Elisabeth left Brussels on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1923, with her eldest son, the Duke of Brabant (and future King Leopold III) and the Egyptologist Jean Capart, who would have acted as a guide. Less than one week later, the Queen arrived at the Winter Palace, the lavish hotel on the eastern bank of the Nile, where Lord Carnarvon was residing together with several members of the Tutankhamun Team. One of her ladies of honour, the Countess Guislaine de Caraman Chimay, joined them shortly after.

In the early afternoon of February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1923 Queen Elisabeth and her entourage left the Winter Palace and crossed the Nile, before arriving in the Valley of the Kings. Hoping to catch a glimpse of the royal team, tens of thousands of people gathered along the windy street connecting the dock to the Valley of the Kings. Shortly after 2.00 pm, the entourage arrived at a location where a military contingent paid homage to them. They were welcomed in the name of King Fuad, by the Minister of Public Works, Abdul Hamid Soliman Pasha, as well as Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter. Many important people were present, among whom the British High Commissioner, Edmund Allenby, and the General Director of the Antiquities Service of Egypt, Pierre Lacau. In spite of the scorching heat, Elisabeth wore a cream-coloured silk dress with pink embroideries, and a winter coat made of white fox fur: the Queen's

outfit was immediate reason of amusement among the journalists, who wondered if she had not mistaken Tutankhamun for Nanook of the North, the heroic protagonist of the first documentary about the Arctic which had been released a few months earlier. Everyone gathered around the stone railing that protected the entrance to the tomb, with photographers and camera operators framing the historic moment in which the Queen of the Belgians, preceded by Howard Carter, and followed by Lord Carnarvon, entered the eternal dwelling of Tutankhamun.

After wandering around the antechamber and taking a look at the annexe, the Queen moved towards the funerary chamber. With an electric torch in his hand, Howard Carter invited her to slip in first, while he took care of the findings laying on the ground. Hence, it was the turn of Prince Leopold and Jean Capart. Elisabeth glanced to the east side of the funerary chamber, where she noticed the Treasure Room dominated by Anubis, the jackal divinity: while Carter was explaining the centrality of this room within the tomb, the Queen laid her eyes on an ivory fan embellished with ostrich feathers; once outside of Tutankhamun's tomb, half an hour later, she felt a slight discomfort, and was forced to sit down. When she finally regained consciousness, she was heard to repeat several times: "It's wonderful!"



Fig. 3: Queen Elisabeth, King Albert and King Fuad at the Egyptian Museum (Cairo, March 12, 1930).

Back at the Winter Palace, the Queen released a short interview to the news correspondent of *The Times*, to whom she confessed her deep emotion at having participated in this opening ceremony, and assured him that she would never forget how she felt after that unique event.

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, the Belgians returned to the Valley of the Kings. After having visited again the burial of Tutankhamun, they headed to the tomb belonging to the pharaoh Sety II, where Howard Carter and his team had set up their storeroom and laboratory. The Belgians observed them in the process of inventorying and restoring the newly discovered objects. There, they had the chance to get a sneak peek of the famous throne of Tutankhamun, considered by many to be the most stunning example of ancient art. Two days later, a milestone event in the history of Belgian Egyptology was set: while sailing on a felucca down the Nile, Jean Capart presented to the Queen his project to provide Belgium with a centre for the study of Egyptology and Papyrology. In other words, he asked her to create a fund — in memory of her journey — through which this aim could be achieved. Elisabeth accepted immediately. Hence, Capart was left with the task of finding generous donators: first and foremost Yassa bey Andraos Bichara, the Belgian consular agent in

Luxor, and Henri Naus bey, the (Belgian) director of the powerful Société Générale des Sucreries et de la Raffinerie d'Égypte.

During her stay in Egypt, Elisabeth often visited the Tutankhamun Team, and had Jean Capart himself teach her the basics of Egyptology. Her enthusiasm seemed to be growing day after day, nevertheless her inclination to touch the discovered objects was cause for irritation among the archaeologists: if, at the beginning, they came across as being enchanted by her presence, they ended up wanting her gone. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, the Queen visited the team one last time. It was awfully quiet in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Capart bears witness: “Everyone was moved, there was not much talking. It would have just been hot air...” At that point, Howard Carter opened the door of the first chapel, while allowing the second one to be half-seen. As for Lord Carnarvon, he did something he should have never done: he cut a section of the funerary cloth belonging to Tutankhamun and offered it to the Queen, who quickly squeezed it into her pocket.

The Queen and her entourage returned to Brussels on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1923, when Lord Carnarvon died. Six months later, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth was officially established under the joint High Patronage of the Queen





**Fig. 4:** Howard Carter and Queen Elisabeth at the bedside of Tutankhamun (Valley of the Kings, March 24, 1930).

of Belgium and King Fuad I of Egypt. Managed by Jean Capart for quarter of a century, it always sought “to achieve its aim of promoting the development of Egyptological studies in Belgium”. How? By enriching the Egyptological and Papyrological libraries of the *Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire*, putting together photographic archives on ancient Egypt, organizing exhibitions, conferences, symposia (the *Semaines égyptologiques et papyrologiques de Bruxelles*), publishing works of scientific and educational relevance, together with an established journal (the *Chronique d’Égypte*), alongside with participating actively in the Elkab excavations (Upper Egypt).

Seven years later, in 1930, Queen Elisabeth and Jean Capart visited once again Tutankhamun and his discoverer Howard Carter, this time accompanied by King Albert. In the meantime, the foundation under the patronage of the Queen had acquired international fame and transformed Brussels into one of the capitals of Egyptology until the Second World War. Its success will forever bear the mark of the enthusiasm aroused during the legendary winter of 1922–1923, caused by the meeting between a Queen, an Egyptologist and a pharaoh.

#### FURTHER READING

Bruffaerts 1998, 3–35; Bruffaerts 2006, 28–49.



**Fig. 5:** Jean Capart playing senet with Queen Elisabeth on board the liner Ausonia. Painting by the Countess Ghislaine de Caraman-Chimay, Queen’s lady of honour (April 1930).