Also by Toby Wilkinson

Aristocrats and Archaeologists (with Julian Platt)
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The Nile
The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt
Lives of the Ancient Egyptians
The Egyptian World (editor)
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Genesis of the Pharaohs
Royal Annals of Ancient Egypt
Early Dynastic Egypt

A WORLD BENEATH THE SANDS

The Golden Age of Egyptology

Toby Wilkinson

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large among the expatriate community: 'If you see two Anglo-Egyptians in deep conversation, you will find that five times out of ten they are discussing steamship lines, their virtues and iniquities.'[61]

But the sands of time were fast running out on British rule in Egypt. Just a year after Cecil's memoir, the Egyptians' longing for self-rule would be brought to a head – not by a nationalist politician or a popular uprising, but by the greatest archaeological discovery ever made in the Nile Valley.

ELEVEN

Wonderful things

Howard Carter (first from left) meeting his patron Lord Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn Herbert on their arrival at Luxor railway station in November 1922, accompanied by the provincial governor.

Our sensations and astonishment are difficult to describe as the better light revealed to us the marvellous collection of treasures.[1]

HOWARD CARTER, 1922

The name of Tutankhamun barely features in the annals of nineteenth-century Egyptology. None of the classical authors, on whose accounts of Egyptian history most European scholars relied, made mention of him at all. Nor did he feature in the king list compiled from ancient sources by the third-century BC Egyptian priest Manetho and preserved in later fragmentary copies. Only after Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphics in 1822 made it possible to read ancient Egyptian inscriptions directly for the first time did antiquarian visitors to Egypt begin to notice occasional, brief texts that mentioned a little-known pharaoh bearing the throne name Nebkheperura and the birth name Tutankhamun. In the later 1820s, during Wilkinson's twelve-year sojourn in the Nile Valley, he travelled into the Eastern Desert between the river and the Red Sea; at the remote site of Bir Abbad, east of Edfu, his eagle eyes noted a stone block bearing the names of Tutankhamun. In 1828, Wilkinson made another discovery that mentioned the same pharaoh: a tomb cut into the hillside of western Thebes that had been created for a high official named Huy – a viceroy of Kush, the king's personal representative in Egyptian-controlled Nubia – during the reign of Tutankhamun.

While Wilkinson was exploring the deserts and hills of Upper Egypt, his friend Lord Prudhoe (later the fourth Duke of Northumberland) was venturing even further afield, to Upper Nubia. At the ancient religious capital of Gebel Barkal, near the Fourth Nile Cataract, Prudhoe collected two magnificent statues of recumbent lions, each carved from a single block of red granite. Reused and reinscribed by a Nubian ruler, Amanislo, in the third century BC, the beasts had originally been carved by the pharaoh Amenhotep III a thousand years earlier. One of them bore a dedicatory inscription of Tutankhamun, recounting how he had renewed the monument in honour of its original patron, his grandfather Amenhotep III. In 1835, Prudhoe presented both lions to the British Museum, where they had the distinction of becoming the first two objects to be registered in its nascent collection of Egyptian antiquities. (They bear the registration numbers EA1 and EA2.) Thus far, Tutankhamun was no more than a minor footnote in the unfolding history of ancient Egypt.

Further evidence for the existence and achievements of this king had to wait until Mariette's excavations of the Serapeum in the 1850s. The third of the great bull burials uncovered in the underground vaults had, it transpired, been carried out during the reign of Tutankhamun; a few objects from the burial found their way to the Louvre, part of the steady stream of artefacts dug from the sands of Saqqara with which Mariette repaid his Parisian employer. Another four decades later, one of the more notable discoveries made by the hapless Emile Amélineau during his disastrous excavations at Abydos was a box of gilded wood, bearing Tutankhamun's royal cartouche. But it was Petrie's dig in the winter of 1891–2 at the site of Amarna that made the real breakthrough, shining new light on the history of Akhenaten's reign and its immediate aftermath, at the end of the eighteenth dynasty. Numerous inscribed objects

from the ruined city, including the Amarna Letters that Erman had purchased for the Berlin Museum, mentioned Nebkheperura Tutankhamun by name, and made it clear that he was Akhenaten's son and successor. Moreover, the evidence suggested that the royal court had remained at Amarna under Tutankhamun, at least during the early years of his reign. Suddenly his absence from the king-lists made sense: Akhenaten's royal revolution had been so radical, such a break with centuries of pharaonic tradition, that, after his death and the restoration of orthodoxy, he and all his associates had been expunged from history as if they had never existed. What the ancient Egyptians had tried so hard to suppress was, only now, being rediscovered, thanks to the meticulous efforts of Egyptologists.

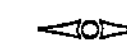
With the dawn of the twentieth century, the name of Tutankhamun started to crop up, if not everywhere, then certainly more frequently. Suddenly, this little-known pharaoh began to emerge from a hundred generations of obscurity to take his place among the kings of Egypt's golden age. In 1905, investigations in the temple of Karnak, north of Luxor, uncovered a great stone slab, covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions. At some point in its long history, the stela had been earmarked for reuse; it still bore a series of deep incisions down its front, where workmen had tried to cut it into pieces. But enough survived of the text to enable scholars to translate it. It turned out to be a dedicatory inscription celebrating the restoration of Karnak, and the other temples of Egypt, following their abandonment under Akhenaten. The king responsible for this glorious renaissance was none other than Tutankhamun. For those who knew how to interpret it, the 'Restoration Stela' gave a clear indication that Tutankhamun had broken with the teachings of his father, and the city of Amarna, and had restored Thebes as both the religious capital of Egypt and a centre of royal activity.

A further, chance discovery, that same archaeological season, confirmed the fact: while digging in the Valley of the Kings for the Davis mission, Ayrton found, concealed under a rock, a small faience cup bearing the name Nebkheperura. Two years later, Davis and Ayrton discovered a hole in the ground above the entrance to the tomb of Seti I. 'Pit 54', as they termed it, contained a cache of materials left over from the embalming of a royal mummy – not just any royal mummy but, according to the hieroglyphic inscriptions on some of the objects, the mummy of Tutankhamun. This seemed unequivocal evidence that, not only had Tutankhamun been active in Thebes, he had also been buried in its royal necropolis, the Valley of the Kings. Now the hunt was on for his tomb. In January 1909, Davis discovered what he had been looking for: a small, undecorated chamber (numbered KV58), abandoned in antiquity and filled with mud, but crucially containing a stone *shabti*, fittings from a horse's harness, and several fragments of gold foil bearing the names of Tutankhamun and his wife Ankhesenamun. Davis proudly announced his discovery in the resulting publication:

> The finding of the blue cup with the cartouche of Touatânkhamanou, and not far from it the quite undecorated tomb containing the gold leaf inscribed with the names of Touatânkhamanou and Ankhousnamanou . . . and the pit containing the jars with the name of Touatânkhamanou, lead me to conclude that Touatânkhamanou was originally buried in the tomb described above, and that it was afterwards robbed, leaving the few things that I have mentioned.[2]

For Davis, this was not merely a triumph but the culmination of his nine years of work in the Valley of the Kings. 'I began my work of exploration in 1903,' he recounted, 'and between that date and 1909, I found seven important inscribed tombs . . . also nine uninscribed tombs, one of them containing the beautiful gold jewellery of Setuî and Taouasrît, one with pieces of gold leaf with the names of Touatânkhamanou and Aîya, and a small alabaster figure.'[3]

In the published account of what was to be Davis's last major discovery, a chapter on the life and reign of Tutankhamun was contributed by no less a scholar than Maspero, the grand old man of Egyptology. He began it by confessing: 'Very little is known about the origin of this king . . . The length of his reign is unknown.'[4] In the few succeeding pages, the much-admired director of the Antiquities Service and Egyptian Museum listed the major monuments attributable to Tutankhamun's reign – the lions from Gebel Barkal, the tomb of Huy, the Restoration Stela, and the objects found by Ayrton and Davis – before summarizing: 'Such are the few facts we know about Touatânkhamanou's life and reign.'[5] As for Davis, he famously concluded 'the Valley of the Tombs is now exhausted'. In February 1914, at the end of Davis's final season in Egypt, his workmen stopped digging into the floor of the valley, fearing that further work would undermine the adjacent path.[6] In any case, Davis could not imagine for a moment that the ancient Egyptians would have cut a royal tomb into the valley floor where it would be vulnerable to flooding. With the discovery of KV58, he was sure that the Valley of the Kings really had given up the last of its secrets.



The man who would prove Davis spectacularly wrong – and, in the process, cause him to be all but forgotten – was his former employee, a man who happened to be working nearby in the hills of western Thebes. Howard Carter had worked for Davis a decade earlier, and had taken part in the excavation of

the tomb of Hatshepsut. By 1914, Carter was one of the most experienced archaeologists of his age. But his journey to prominence had been anything but smooth. Born in Brompton, London,[7] into a comfortable middle-class family, he spent much of his childhood in Norfolk. Like Champollion and Petrie before him, Carter suffered from ill-health as a child, and was consequently educated at home. As with his great Egyptological predecessors, the freedom to follow his own interests and explore his passions was, in retrospect, a key factor in his later success. Carter's father was an accomplished painter, specializing in animals, and passed on his skill to his son. Howard soon became a talented watercolourist, also preferring natural history subjects, and he found plenty of inspiration for his work in the countryside around the Carter family home in Swaffham. Rural Norfolk also had another advantage: the county boasted a number of aristocratic families who might, directly or through their connections, offer preferment to a budding young artist. The patrons who took an interest in the young Howard Carter were Lord and Lady Amherst of nearby Didlington Hall. By chance, Lord Amherst was not only a man of considerable means, he was also a keen amateur antiquarian who used his wealth to sponsor excavations and collect antiquities. Through a series of judicious purchases, and his own trips to Egypt, he amassed one of the finest private collections of ancient Egyptian artefacts in England, which he proudly displayed at Didlington. Carter must have seen some of the objects on his visits: his first encounter with the civilization of the pharaohs, the study of which was to consume the rest of his life.

In 1891, at the age of seventeen, Carter was given his first break. At Lady Amherst's recommendation, he was taken on by Newberry (who, alongside his archaeological duties, acted as an agent for Lord Amherst, buying choice Egyptian antiquities when they came on the market) as an assistant member

of staff of the Archaeological Survey of Egypt. Newberry was a botanist by training; his knowledge of plant remains had proved useful to Petrie on his digs in the late 1880s. With this experience, and through connections at the EEF, Newberry was subsequently given his own expedition, the Archaeological Survey mission to Beni Hasan. At this site in Middle Egypt, there was a series of fine, decorated tombs cut into the cliffs overlooking the Nile. The job of recording their beautifully preserved, complex and detailed reliefs required not just epigraphic skill but also the eye of a trained artist. In Howard Carter, the Amhersts believed they had found the ideal candidate. In late 1891, therefore, Carter travelled for the first time to Egypt, and worked for several weeks at Beni Hasan under Newberry's supervision. Carter's talents as a copyist and painter quickly confirmed his patrons' judgement, and he was soon switched to another of Lord Amherst's funded excavations, Petrie's dig at the nearby site of Amarna. In the space of a few weeks, Carter began to build his knowledge of the late eighteenth dynasty, to familiarize himself with the names of its shadowy rulers: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Tutankhamun.

Petrie, for his part, was distinctly underwhelmed by the new addition to his team: 'Mr Carter is a good-natured lad whose interest is entirely in painting and natural history: he only takes on this digging as being on the spot . . . and it is of no use to me to work him up as an excavator.'[8]

But Carter had been bitten by the Egyptian bug, and was only too delighted to be retained by the Archaeological Survey to work on their other missions. He resumed his work at Beni Hasan and nearby el-Bersha the following season (1892–3) before moving to Deir el-Bahri – the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut in western Thebes – as official expedition draughtsman, working under Naville. During the next six

years, while copying all the scenes and inscriptions in the temple, Carter gained a deep – perhaps unparalleled – knowledge of the surrounding area. Wandering the hills, valleys and embayments, he developed an unerring eye for potential archaeological sites, and came to know every inch of the Theban necropolis: Deir el-Bahri, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, the Valley of the Kings.

After half a dozen seasons at Deir el-Bahri, Carter gained his second lucky break in 1899. Maspero's much-heralded return as director of the Antiquities Service ushered in a major reorganization of senior posts. Carter, with his proven abilities as a copyist, his training under Newberry, Petrie and Naville, and his deep understanding of Thebes, had all the necessary credentials, and he was duly appointed chief inspector of antiquities for Upper Egypt, a newly created post and one of the most important roles in Egyptian archaeology. He did not disappoint. Maspero's initial impressions were perceptive: 'very active, a very good young man, a little obstinate'.[9] Taking up his position in January 1900, Carter set to work at once with his customary energy and dedication. The administration of the Upper Egyptian inspectorate was reformed, and electric light installed at the major tourist sites. The results of this particular project were transformative. Davis's companion, Emma Andrews, recorded in her diary a visit to the tomb of Amenhotep II shortly after the power had been switched on:

> We entered Amenhotep's tomb – now lighted with electricity, showing arrangement and decoration delightfully . . . Carter has arranged the whole thing most artistically. A shrouded electric light is at the head of the sarcophagus, throwing the fine face into splendid relief – and when all the other lights were extinguished, the effect was solemn and impressive. Carter has done

> wonderful work . . . No more stumbling about amongst yawning pits and rough staircases, with flickering candles dripping wax all over one.[10]

Nor was Carter merely concerned with restoration and display. He plunged himself into a series of hands-on excavations, uncovering and recording royal tombs for the Antiquities Service and for various private sponsors. In 1900, working for two local Egyptians, Chinouda Macarios and Boutros Andraos, Carter revealed a previously unknown tomb (KV42) dating to the early eighteenth dynasty. The next year he discovered another empty tomb and a series of small finds. It was when he started working for Davis, in the winter of 1902, that Carter's archaeological instincts really proved their worth, culminating in the discovery of the richly appointed tomb of Thutmose IV (KV43) in 1903 and the clearance of the tomb of Hatshepsut (KV20) the following season. In the latter, Carter showed not only his deep commitment to archaeology, but also his willingness to risk life and limb in the furtherance of Egyptological enquiry. Davis was hugely impressed, if a little incredulous, recounting in the subsequent publication:

> The long, patient, tiresome, and dangerous work executed by Mr Carter, the difficulties which he overcame, and the physical discomforts which he suffered, are not fairly described in his modest official report . . . 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 . . . Braving all these dangers and discomforts, Mr. Carter made two or three descents every week, and professed to enjoy it.[11]

Such dedication did not go unnoticed, and in 1904 Carter was promoted to chief inspector of antiquities for Lower Egypt. (The north of the Nile Valley, with the iconic monuments of Giza, Alexandria and the Memphite necropolis, was considered more prestigious than Thebes and the south.) It was a vote of confidence by Maspero, but a calamitous move for Carter. The ever-observant Emma Andrews had summed up Carter as 'always so pleasant – in spite of his dominant personality'.[12] That character trait, which other less generous commentators dubbed an irascible temper, soon got Carter into trouble. In January 1905, only a few months into his new job, Carter was at Saqqara, inspecting the Serapeum. Though a popular tourist destination, it had not yet benefited from the installation of electric light. A group of French tourists, coming to see for themselves the greatest discovery of their compatriot Mariette, objected to paying an entrance fee; then, on finding there were no candles to illuminate the subterranean galleries, demanded their money back. Carter refused, an argument ensued, and punches were thrown. Realizing that he had overstepped the mark, he sent a telegram at once to Lord Cromer, explaining the situation and pinning the blame squarely on the tourists:

> My Lord I am exceedingly sorry to inform you that a bad affray has occurred today here Mariette House Saqqara 5 p.m. with 15 French Tourists who were here in a drunken state The cause of the affray was started by their rough handling both my inspector + gaffirs As both sides have been cut and knocked about I feel it my duty to inform ~~you~~ Lordship immediately + will report the matter to you personally tomorrow morning. Carter Service of Antiquities.[13]

Ever anxious to avoid a diplomatic incident, especially with the French, Cromer summoned Carter and demanded an explanation. To smooth ruffled feathers and prevent any escalation, Cromer asked Carter to apologize. Carter, certain that he had acted within his rights, refused. The only way open to him was to resign, not just as chief inspector, but from the Antiquities Service entirely. He later admitted: 'I have a hot temper, and that amount of tenacity of purpose which unfriendly observers sometimes call obstinacy, and which nowadays . . . it pleases my enemies to term . . . *un mauvaise caractère*. Well, that I can't help.'[14]

In November 1905, Carter returned to his old stamping ground of Thebes and, for the next two years, eked out an existence as a guide and jobbing watercolourist. His former patron, Davis, gave him work recording the objects from the newly discovered tomb of Yuya and Tjuyu. At other times, Carter supported himself by selling his paintings to well-heeled tourists. For example, in the winter of 1907–8, the ailing eighth Duke of Devonshire was travelling up the Nile with a small party that included his personal physician (and amateur Egyptologist), Ferdinand Platt. On a visit to Thebes, Platt met the impecunious Carter, and described the encounter in a letter home:

> Carter has done some very beautiful work. What he does is to copy some of the best Egyptian figures or scenes very accurately as to the matter of outline and general colour. He leaves out all the cracks and damage and restores what is left. But the great charm is that he shades the colours to make it look real; for instance the golden vulture head dress of a queen he has shaded in such a way that without altering the drawing in the least it looks like real gold . . . After lunch I went with Carter to the

> Tombs of the Queens and saw the tomb of Queen Nefert-Ari, the wife of Rameses II . . . She was a beautiful woman and Carter's painting brings this out in a wonderful way . . . If I had the money spare I would buy this particular picture without a moment's hesitation. As you can imagine Carter's loss of his appointment is a serious thing for him, and he was and is I believe very hard up. I told the Duke about him and he has asked me to go over to Medinet Habu with him to see Carter's sketches as he wants to help him by buying some. I am very glad to have been the means of doing this.[15]

In the end, however, it was not the Duke of Devonshire who turned Carter's fortunes around, but another English aristocrat wintering in Egypt that season: a man who was attracted to Luxor, not just for its restorative climate, but for its antiquities and its promise of undiscovered treasures.

George Edward Stanhope Molyneux Herbert, son and heir of the fourth Earl of Carnarvon, was born in 1866 at Highclere Castle, the family's magnificent country seat on the Hampshire–Berkshire border, remodelled in high Gothic Revival taste by Charles Barry in the 1840s while the architect (who had travelled up the Nile in 1818) was also engaged in rebuilding the Houses of Parliament. Herbert's mother died when he was just nine years old, leaving him the valuable estates she had inherited from her forebears, the earls of Chesterfield. This made Herbert – known initially by his courtesy title of Lord Porchester – independently wealthy. At Eton and Cambridge, the young 'Porchy' paid little attention to his studies, focussing instead on his primary interest – sport – and a growing fascination for archaeology.[16] When he succeeded to the earldom, on

the death of his father in 1890, he enjoyed free rein to indulge his passions. He travelled the world, visiting North and South America, Asia and Europe; he even attempted (but did not complete) a circumnavigation of the globe by sea.

By the time he reached his late twenties, he had spent much of his considerable inheritance and racked up huge debts. Fortunately, as for many British aristocrats of the time living well beyond their means, salvation appeared in the form of a wealthy bride. Almina Wombwell was the illegitimate daughter of the millionaire banker Alfred de Rothschild. As part of her marriage settlement in 1892, her father paid off all Carnarvon's debts and settled the vast sum of £300,000 on the couple. Carnarvon picked up where he had left off, indulging his love of sport by building up a major stud at Highclere, and betting on his own horses. His obsession with speed also led him into the nascent world of fast cars. It was to prove a turning point in his career. A motoring accident in Germany[17] left him injured and prone to persistent bouts of painful rheumatism, exacerbated by the cold wet winters of England. Seeking respite from his discomfort and a new hobby to occupy his time, Carnarvon had no hesitation in following his doctor's advice and joining the steady stream of well-heeled patients who repaired for the winter months to warmer, drier climates. In January 1903, in San Francisco's Bohemian Club, Carnarvon met a former US senator by the name of Jeremiah Lynch who had recently been to Egypt and had published a book of his travels.[18] Inspired, no doubt, by Lynch's account, Carnarvon decided to make Egypt his winter home. So it was that, towards the end of the year, Carnarvon set off to spend the first of many seasons in Luxor, in the Winter Palace Hotel on the banks of the Nile.

The earl was not a man to stand still: he needed a project to occupy his energies. During his stay in Luxor in 1905, he was present for Davis's discovery of the tomb of Yuya and

Tjuyu, with its remarkable contents and 'the glitter of gold'. The excitement of archaeology struck a chord with Carnarvon, and before long he followed Cromer's advice and decided to take up Egyptology himself. (He later claimed that, 'It had always been my wish and intention even as far back as 1889 to start excavating.'[19]) Carnarvon duly applied to Maspero for a concession; the director of the Antiquities Service was only too happy to oblige, welcoming privately funded excavations as a way of supplementing the Service's stretched resources. Carnarvon's permit was for an area of the Theban necropolis known as Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. It was situated on the west bank of the Nile, but easily accessible from the Winter Palace (Carnarvon's hotel of choice). Carnarvon may have been attracted by the romance of archaeology, but he was not well suited to its daily rigours. Indeed, he is said to have described excavation in Egypt as 'an occupation for the damned'.[20] The heat, dust and flies were a persistent irritation, and he took to sitting in a large, screened cage to watch his workmen dig. On occasions, he was joined by his wife, 'dressed for a garden party rather than the desert, with charming patent-leather, high-heeled shoes and a good deal of jewellery flashing in the sunlight'.[21] Even for the inhabitants of Luxor used to Western tourists in their three-piece suits and voluminous dresses, the fifth Earl and Countess of Carnarvon must have presented a queer spectacle.

After six weeks' work on his first excavation, Carnarvon had little to show for his efforts except an empty chamber and a rather unprepossessing mummified cat. But archaeology seemed to offer the prospect of adventure, and he was keen to take on a more promising site. Rivalry no doubt played a big part in his calculations. In February 1907, as his own disappointing excavations were drawing to a close, Carnarvon and his wife were entertained on board the *Beduin* by Theodore

Davis and Emma Andrews. The contrast between Carnarvon's paltry results and Davis's continued success – he had just discovered a tomb in the Valley of the Kings which he believed to be that of the fabled Queen Tiye – could not have been starker. For an English aristocrat, to be outdone by a nouveau riche American businessman was especially galling, and the atmosphere between Carnarvon and Davis was strained. Carnarvon later declared: 'I should not speak to the man again.'[22]

Carnarvon's problem was not his own lack of archaeological prowess – Davis possessed little more – but his lack of an experienced excavator to direct the work. Davis had always employed trained archaeologists: Newberry, then Carter, then Weigall. So, when Carnarvon wrote to Maspero later in 1907 requesting a new concession, the advice came back loud and clear: hire a good director – not just any director, but one of the most experienced. Maspero had a specific suggestion: Howard Carter. Before resigning from the Antiquities Service, Carter had proved his strengths as an archaeologist. Despite his hot-headedness, there was no doubting his abilities. And so, following Maspero's advice, Carnarvon approached Carter. The deal was struck and the partnership was forged – a partnership that would last the rest of Carnarvon's life and result in the greatest archaeological discovery of all time.

Almost immediately, Carter's training and expert eye began to bear fruit, and Carnarvon's fortunes as an archaeological patron were transformed. With Carter in charge, Carnarvon's second digging season was marked by a series of notable finds, including a writing tablet bearing an account of the battles against the Hyksos at the beginning of the New Kingdom. (The 'Carnarvon tablet' remains, to this day, our most important single source for this crucial turning point in ancient Egyptian history.) Further discoveries followed in subsequent winters, including several private tombs, another temple built

by Hatshepsut, a series of Ptolemaic vaulted tombs, and an extensive necropolis. Together these finds justified the publication of a lavish, heavily illustrated volume to mark the first five seasons of the Carnarvon–Carter partnership, *Five Years' Explorations at Thebes* (1912). In the preface, the patron paid fulsome tribute to his archaeologist: 'Mr Howard Carter has been in charge of all operations, and whatever successes have resulted from our labours are due to his unremitting watchfulness and care in systematically recording, drawing, and photographing everything as it came to light.'[23] Within a decade, this 'unremitting watchfulness and care' would prove vital, and would be tested to the limit.

Although Carnarvon and Carter were focussed principally on Thebes, their curiosity and thirst for new discoveries led them to explore other, more remote sites as well. Thus, in 1912, while continuing to dig at Thebes, they decided to carry out some exploratory work at the isolated Delta village of Sakha, site of the ancient Graeco-Roman city of Xoïs, which had lain abandoned and largely unvisited for centuries. Unfortunately, conditions for excavation were less than propitious, and they had to abandon their efforts after just two weeks, 'on account of the number of cobras and *cerastes* [horned vipers] that infested the whole area'.[24] The following season, having tried and failed to win the concession for the pyramid field of Dahshur, Carnarvon and Carter turned their attention to another promising spot in the Delta, Tell el-Balamun. Once again, however, their hopes were dashed and they finished the season with little to show for their efforts except some silver jewellery.

Whatever the accounts of classical authors might have suggested, it seemed that the sites of the Ptolemaic and Roman age in the north of Egypt held little promise for archaeologists, and were hardly worth the investment of time and resources. There really was only one site where the efforts of excavation

were more or less guaranteed to be rewarded, and that was Thebes. In Carnarvon's own description: 'No ancient site has yielded a greater harvest of antiquities than this famous stretch of rocky land.'[25] Moreover, everyone knew that the plum concession in the whole Theban necropolis – and hence in the whole of Egypt – was the Valley of the Kings. For now, however, the concession was firmly held by Davis. His string of spectacular discoveries made it highly unlikely that he would relinquish his rights any time soon.

All that changed within the space of a few months in the spring and early summer of 1914. In February, Davis's workmen downed tools, their patron convinced that the valley had nothing more to reveal. A few weeks later, Davis formally relinquished the concession, handing it back to the Antiquities Service. Meanwhile, Carter had not been idle in promoting his credentials. During the early weeks of 1914, the appearance of illicit antiquities in the markets of Luxor suggested that locals had been plundering a newly discovered tomb in the hills of western Thebes. Using his unparalleled knowledge of the area, Carter tracked down the tomb in question – it turned out to have been created for Amenhotep I and his mother Ahmose-Nefertari – and carried out his own, exemplary clearance. His swift action and expert archaeological skills won plaudits. Back in Cairo, Maspero was preparing to retire for good and return to Paris. Eager, no doubt, to ensure that Egypt's most prized archaeological site remained in good hands, Maspero showed his magnanimity and good judgement. In June 1914, in his very last act as director of antiquities, he awarded the concession for the Valley of the Kings to Carnarvon. Carter's indiscretion at Saqqara had been forgiven, if not forgotten. After years of waiting and manoeuvring, the ultimate prize had fallen into Carnarvon's hands.

Not that he was able to enjoy it in person: the outbreak of

the First World War kept him in England. All attempts to get back to Egypt were thwarted. Carter, by contrast, had remained behind in the country, to offer his services and knowledge as a diplomatic courier. Conveniently, this also allowed him the time and space to undertake limited excavations. On 8 February 1915, he formally started work under the new concession, excavating the tomb of Amenhotep III in the western branch of the Valley of the Kings. Once again, his meticulous approach yielded valuable results, rescuing a number of overlooked finds from the debris of earlier digs. The following year he cleared an unused tomb in the cliffs above the valley; prepared for Hatshepsut while she was still queen, it yielded nothing except an abandoned sarcophagus. But, all the while, Carter was honing his already intimate knowledge of the valley, identifying the most likely spots where an undiscovered tomb might yet lie concealed. As a boy, he had been inspired by reading Belzoni's memoirs, and had dreamed of finding a lost tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Carter later admitted: 'Ever since my first visit to Egypt in 1890 it had been my ambition to dig in The Valley, and when . . . I began to excavate for Lord Carnarvon in 1907, it was our joint hope that eventually we might be able to get a concession there.'[26]

In 1916, Breasted, the giant of American Egyptology, published his landmark book *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. It placed particular emphasis on the history of pharaonic Egypt, although one pharaoh passed without a single mention: Tutankhamun. The obscure king of the late eighteenth dynasty simply did not merit inclusion. But Carter remained convinced that the pharaoh's final resting place might yet reveal itself.

Davis had found three vital clues – the faience cup, the mud-filled chamber with fragments of gold leaf, and the embalming cache – all of which bore the name of Tutankhamun, and all of

which pointed to his tomb being located somewhere in the Valley of the Kings. In KV58, Davis thought he had found the missing tomb; but Carter, with his superior Egyptological training, thought otherwise. As he later explained: 'With all this evidence before us we were thoroughly convinced in our own mind that the tomb of Tut.ankh.Amen was still to find, and that it ought to be situated not far from the centre of The Valley.'[27]

Earlier archaeologists had sought to find new tombs by sinking pits through the accumulated rubble and rubbish on the valley floor. By 1917, however, Carter knew that only way to locate the tomb of Tutankhamun – if it still existed – was to clear the remaining section of valley all the way down to the bedrock.[28] And so, motivated by a single goal, in the autumn of that year he set to work.

Over the next five years, with an army of workers and a grim determination, Carter oversaw the systematic clearance of the remaining, unexcavated section of the valley. Altogether, his team moved some 150,000–200,000 tons of rubble and loose chippings, carried away by means of a Decauville railway, specially installed for the purpose. Five years of strenuous and expensive work yielded little: a few finds, and no tombs. Carnarvon started to lose faith and interest. Even his fortune was not inexhaustible, and in the fruitless search for the undiscovered tomb of a largely unknown pharaoh it seemed he was merely throwing good money after bad. By the summer of 1922, he had decided to call it a day and concentrate on his horse racing. But Carter, spurred on by a conviction as solid as the bedrock of Thebes, felt in his bones that he was on the right track. That summer, he decided to take the highly unusual step of travelling to Highclere in person, to plead his case with Carnarvon and beg the earl's support for one more season. Reluctantly, Carnarvon agreed.

After the excitements of the Davis years, and the retirement and death of Maspero, Egyptology in the immediate aftermath of the First World War was in the doldrums. Among the millions of young men killed during the conflict were a number of promising archaeologists, while leading figures on both sides had lost sons. The British army had deliberately flattened the German House at Thebes in an act of retribution, and, even after the armistice, German expeditions found themselves banned from working in the Nile Valley. By 1921, even Gardiner had overcome his hostility towards Germany and was missing its contribution to Egyptology. Nearly three years after the end of the war, he wrote to Erman: 'What a fatality it is, how disastrous for the science, that Germans cannot be working in Egypt still.'[29] (It would be another eight years before the German Archaeological Institute reopened and German excavations resumed in Egypt.)

By contrast, some American missions had returned to the Nile Valley after the war. Foremost among them was an expedition funded by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and directed by Herbert Winlock. Winlock had studied at Harvard and began excavating in Egypt for the Met in 1906; but when war was declared he was evacuated back to New York and enlisted in the US forces, serving as a major. Only when hostilities ceased was he able to return to civilian life and to his work as an archaeologist, and he resumed digging at Deir el-Bahri in the winter of 1919, continuing the work begun by Naville a generation earlier. No less an authority than Petrie praised Winlock's field technique, while Weigall went further, describing the young American as the most brilliant archaeologist of his generation.[30] Winlock's skill as an excavator was rewarded with a succession of important finds: the tomb of Meketra with its extensive collection of wooden tomb models, in that first post-war season of 1919–20, followed two years later by a remarkable archive of letters penned by an Egyptian farmer named Heqanakht in *c.*2000 BC. As Winlock's friend, John Wilson, put it, the letters 'bring us face to face with the ancient Egyptian, not in the frozen dignity of his tombs and temples, but in the homely busyness of his kitchen and his fields'.[31]

But such notable American discoveries did nothing to lift the gloom that had settled over British archaeology in Egypt. The cause was as much political as cultural. Although hundreds of thousands of men from the British Empire had fought – and died – for king and country, there was a strong sense that the old imperial rivalries had led the world to disaster. While the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris prepared to mark the centenary of Champollion's decipherment with official meetings and receptions, Britain's imperial power was ebbing away. The future of its colonies and protectorates, Egypt included, looked uncertain – and so too did the future of the expatriates and archaeologists who had treated Egypt as their playground for the best part of forty years.

This post-imperial malaise was vividly captured in the writings of Arthur Weigall, who had more reason than most to look back on the pre-war years with a sense of deep nostalgia. Weigall had joined the Egyptian Research Account as a student of Petrie's in 1901, and had been lauded by his mentor as 'the most capable student we have ever had'.[32] Within three years Weigall's meteoric rise – assisted by his close friendship with Cromer – had taken him from research student to inspector-general of antiquities for Upper Egypt (in succession to Carter). Moreover, Weigall's connections extended beyond the upper echelons of the British establishment across the Atlantic: he counted Theodore Roosevelt among his friends. With his network of influential acquaintances, Weigall's views were keenly sought and his writings had influence on British policy

towards Egypt. But the Nile Valley did not treat him kindly: in 1914, after a decade in post as inspector-general, he suffered a nervous breakdown and returned to England, turning his back on archaeology. In its place, he 'occupied his spare time by painting designs for stage scenery',[33] in the London theatre, and by writing novels, song lyrics and reactionary articles for the *Daily Mail.*

Weigall's most extensive surviving work, written in 1922 (and published the following year), is a book entitled, with headline-grabbing intent, *The Glory of the Pharaohs*. But the title is misleading: Weigall's account was, in fact, a critical discourse on the discipline of archaeology, as practised in Egypt in the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is revealing, both of the turning point at which Egyptology now found itself, and of the contradictions and challenges that faced Britain as the colonial power in a country that clamoured for independence. Weigall had learned his trade from Petrie, and he continued to espouse the notion that, by 'roughing it', the body could be 'toughened'. He boldly asserted that: 'the study of archaeology in the open helps to train up young men in the path of health in which they should go. Work in the Egyptian desert, for example, is one of the most healthy and inspiring pursuits that could be imagined.'[34]

Nonetheless, he reserved special scorn for Petrie's brand of asceticism: 'It is not roughing it to eat canned food out of the can when a plate might be used: it is either hypocrisy or slovenliness.'[35] With only a little more self-restraint, he observed:

> If the experiences of a digger in Professor Petrie's camp are to be regarded as typical, they will probably serve to damp the ardour of eager young gentlemen in search of ancient Egyptian treasure. One lives in a bare little hut constructed of mud, and roofed with cornstalks or corrugated iron . . . For seven days in the week one's work continues, and it is only to the real enthusiast that work is not monotonous and tiresome.[36]

Weigall was at his most passionate and iconoclastic when writing about the tension between Western archaeology and native Egyptian sentiment. He advocated keeping Egyptian monuments in Egypt, and was much more outspoken than most contemporary commentators, declaring:

> the craze for recklessly dragging away monuments from Egypt to be exhibited in western museums for the satisfaction of the untravelled man is the most pernicious bit of folly to be found in the whole broad realm of Egyptological misbehaviour . . . No curator should endeavour to procure for his museum any antiquity which could be safely exhibited on its original site and in its original position.[37]

He also argued fiercely against the trade in illicit antiquities, which he accused museums of fuelling: 'It is felt . . . that the objects exhibited in European museums have been rescued from Egypt and recovered from a distant land. This is not so. They have been snatched from Egypt and lost to the country of their origin.'[38]

Budge, one suspects, would not have been amused.

In his views on the limitations of archaeology, Weigall was both ahead of his time and unfashionable: 'The archaeologist, so eager to add to his knowledge by new discoveries, should remember that there is already quite enough material on hand to keep him busy for the rest of his life.'[39] Why, he asked, 'add to the burden of Egypt by increasing the number of monuments which have to be protected?' In his opinion: 'The longer an

excavation is postponed the better chance there wll be of recording the discoveries adequately.'[40] The Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society must have squirmed to read one of their own protégés advocating such views.

Weigall's writings were deeply influenced by the trauma of the First World War. He found in ancient Egypt an escape from the horrors of the early twentieth century, and it was when describing the attractions of distant antiquity that he became most lyrical:

> To the Past we must go as a relief from To-day's harshness; for the Past is spread out before us as a children's garden, where jolly laughter and sudden, quick-ended tears are to be experienced; where the waters are alive with mermen and the woods are filled with brownies; where nymphs and fairies dwell among the flowers, and enchanted castles crown the hilltops; where heroes die for fame, and the victors marry kings' daughters. There in that garden we may forget the mature cruelty and the sins of the present time; for if there be wickedness in the Past, we may usually name it the thoughtless mischief of childhood . . . One contemplates with positive relief the tortures and massacres of the distant ages, for they are child's play as compared with the reasoned brutality of these wicked olden days in which we now live.[41]

He was, at the same time, mindful of the modern Egyptians' growing sense of their own nationhood – aspirations to which those who knew the country well could not be insensible: 'In Egypt, where scientific excavations are conducted entirely by Europeans and Americans, one has to consider . . . one's duty to the Egyptians, who care not one jot for their history, but who, nevertheless, as the living

descendants of the Pharaohs should be the nominal stewards of their ancient possessions.'[42]

This combination of condescension towards other peoples and grudging acceptance of their right to self-determination characterized colonial attitudes towards Egypt in the years after the First World War. Ever since the Napoleonic invasion, Egypt's traditional leadership structures had been steadily eroded under the pressure of Western influence. A succession of rulers, from Muhammad Ali to Fuad, had sought protection or investment from Western powers in return for ceding sovereignty. The British invasion of 1882 had met with only minor resistance, but the apparent Egyptian passivity towards foreign occupation had lulled the British into a false sense of security. Only a few in the British establishment recognized the inherent injustices of occupation, and could see the writing on the wall.

The colonial authorities had first attempted to contain Egyptian nationalism before the war, through Gorst's more liberal approach; but this had been deemed a failure and had been replaced by Kitchener's more traditional, paternalistic attitude. This did not work either. The nationalist uprising of 1919 caught the British authorities by surprise. So did the passive resistance led by Zaghlul in 1921, modelled on Gandhi's civil disobedience in India. That same year, the British opened an airport at Heliopolis; the Royal Air Force began flying mail routes from Cairo to Baghdad, while Imperial Airways launched a Cairo to Karachi service. But even modern communications could not save the Empire.

The colonial authorities calculated that significant concessions to the Egyptian nationalists might yet prevent an all-out revolution and preserve a degree of British influence. London's proposal was for the protectorate to be replaced by an Anglo-Egyptian treaty, granting Egypt independence as a constitutional monarchy. Britain would retain the right to maintain an

army in Egypt, a financial adviser, and a permanent official in the ministry of justice, and to protect the rights of foreigners resident in Egypt. It was, in other words, self-determination in name only. With great fanfare, Egyptian 'independence' was declared on 28 February 1922. Two weeks later, Sultan Fuad assumed the title King Fuad I.

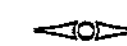
Archaeology was not immune to these political developments. The director of the Antiquities Service, Lacau, immediately announced that henceforth all finds would be claimed for Egypt, with only duplicates given to the excavators at the Service's discretion.[43] The measures were not universally popular. Petrie, predictably, railed against the new strictures, seeing in them the latest skirmish in the Anglo-French rivalry that had characterized Egyptology since the days of Young and Champollion:

> The issue of new and arbitrary conditions by Lacau was a repetition of what former French Directors of Antiquities had tried to do, by ignoring their subordination to the Ministry in Egypt, and trying to establish an autocracy . . . This attempt had been checked before . . . by the strength of British management. Now that Britain was leaving much more to Egyptian direction, there was not the same check, and French autocracy was left uncontrolled.[44]

The new regulations meant that, without the prospect of new acquisitions, foreign museums would no longer be interested in supporting digs in Egypt. For Petrie, this was intolerable. In a fit of pique he decided to stay in England for the winter season of 1922–3 to tackle a backlog of publications and muster opposition to Lacau's decision. He called a joint meeting of the Egypt Exploration Society, the Metropolitan

Museum of Art and the British School of Archaeology in Egypt, resulting in a formal protest being sent to the Council of Ministers in Cairo, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Lord Allenby, and Lacau himself. In response, the introduction of the new law was suspended for two years.[45] Even so, Petrie decided to confine himself in future to 'excavations in which there was little likelihood of finding anything of value'.[46]

Not that the prospect of discovering further treasure beneath the sands of Egypt was thought particularly likely. As Weigall noted that same season: 'There is painful disillusionment awaiting the man who comes to dig in Egypt in the hope of finding the golden cities of the Pharaohs or the bejewelled bodies of their dead.'[47]



Digging in the Valley of the Kings seemed to many a particularly thankless task. As far back as 1869, Mariette had written: 'There is every reason to believe that the excavations . . . however persevering, will not yield results commensurate with the difficulties caused by the remoteness of the location and the want of a water supply.'[48] Over half a century later, Weigall summed up the task thus: 'There is much drudgery to be faced, and for a large part of the season's work it is the excavator's business to turn over endless masses of rock chippings, and to dig huge holes which have no interest . . . At other times a tomb-chamber is reached and is found to be absolutely empty.'[49]

In the autumn of 1922, after five seasons of systematic but fruitless work, Carnarvon's reluctance to persevere was understandable. One final season, and he would call it a day.

Carter arrived in Luxor on 28 October and excavations resumed on 1 November. Just three days into the dig, the workmen uncovered a step cut into the valley floor. Twenty-four hours later, a flight of twelve descending steps had been exposed,

leading to a blocked doorway covered in plaster and impressed with the seals of the ancient royal necropolis. Carter could scarcely believe his eyes: 'The design was certainly of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Could it be the tomb of a noble buried here by royal consent? Was it a royal cache, a hiding place to which a mummy and its equipment had been removed for safety? Or was it actually the tomb of the king for whom I had spent so many years in search?'[50]

On 6 November, Carter ordered the staircase to be refilled with rubble and he sent the now-famous telegram to his patron in England: 'At last have made wonderful discovery in Valley; a magnificent tomb with seals intact; re-covered same for your arrival; congratulations.' Carnarvon cabled back the reply: 'Possibly come soon,' followed, a little later, by, 'Propose arrive Alexandria 20th'.[51] That gave Carter and his excavation team 'a fortnight's grace', and they devoted it 'to making preparations of various kinds, so that when the time of the re-opening came, we should be able, with the least possible delay, to handle any situation that might arise'.[52]

Carnarvon, accompanied by his daughter Lady Evelyn Herbert, arrived at Luxor by train on 23 November, to be greeted by Carter and the provincial governor. The next day, patron and archaeologist watched together as the staircase was cleared to its full depth, revealing the whole of the plastered doorway. Now there could be no doubt what they had found: 'On the lower part the seal impressions were much clearer, and we were able without difficulty to make out on several of them the name of Tut.ankh.Amen.'[53] In due course, the blocked doorway was dismantled, only to reveal a sloping tunnel, filled from floor to ceiling with limestone chippings. As workmen struggled in the dusty confined space to clear the tunnel, a second doorway was encountered, likewise covered with sealings naming Tutankhamun. To Carter and Carnarvon's horror, this

inner doorway, like the first, showed signs of earlier forced entry. Robbers had clearly entered the tomb in antiquity. The question was, had they left anything behind?

By four o'clock in the afternoon on 26 November, the corridor had been fully cleared. Carter, watched by Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn, an English engineer Arthur 'Pecky' Callender, and the Egyptian overseers, prised some of the stones out of the top of the second doorway. Carter's journal entry for that 'day of days'[54] relates what happened next:

> Candles were procured – the all-important tell-tale for foul gases when opening an ancient subterranean chamber – I widened the breach and by means of the candle looked in, while Ld. C., Lady E, and Callender with the Reises waited in anxious expectation. It was sometime before one could see, the hot air escaping caused the candle to flicker, but as soon as one's eyes became accustomed to the glimmer of light the interior of the chamber gradually loomed before one, with its strange and wonderful medley of extraordinary and beautiful objects heaped upon one another. There was naturally short suspense for those present who could not see, when Lord Carnarvon said to me 'Can you see anything' I replied to him Yes, it is wonderful.[55]

In Carter's published account of the discovery, which appeared the following year (written with the 'literary help' of the novelist Percy White, professor of English Literature at the Egyptian University), the episode had acquired a touch more drama and panache:

> At first I could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber causing the candle flame to flicker, but

presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold – everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment – an eternity it must have seemed to the others, standing by – I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, 'Can you see anything?' it was all I could do to get out the words, 'Yes, wonderful things.'[56]

Carnarvon, with more typical British understatement, described it as 'a most extraordinary sight'.[57]

Breaking through the doorway, Carter entered the chamber beyond. Even for a man who prided himself on his meticulous, detached professionalism, the experience conjured up powerful emotions:

> Three thousand, four thousand years maybe, have passed and gone since human feet last trod the floor on which you stand, and yet, as you note the signs of recent life around you – the half-filled bowl of mortar for the door, the blackened lamp, the finger-mark upon the freshly painted surface, the farewell garland dropped upon the threshold – you feel it might have been but yesterday. The very air you breathe, unchanged throughout the centuries, you share with those who laid the mummy to its rest.[58]

Carter summed up that day as 'the most wonderful I have ever lived through, and certainly one whose like I can never hope to see again'.[59] As the first person to enter the tomb of Tutankhamun in modern times, he experienced 'the exhilaration of discovery, the fever of suspense . . . the strained expectancy

– why not confess it? – of the treasure-seeker'.[60] Soon, however, other thoughts came to the fore, as the magnitude of the discovery – and of the work that lay ahead – began to dawn. In Carter's words, 'our brains began to reel at the thought of the task in front of us'.[61] Neither archaeologist nor patron had been prepared for 'the greatest find ever made',[62] and they were 'wholly unprepared to deal with the multitude of objects'[63] – 5,398 in total. As Carnarvon put it: 'There is enough stuff to fill the whole Egyptian section upstairs of the B. M. [British Museum].'[64] 'Carter,' he confidently predicted, 'has weeks of work ahead of him.'[65]

Fortunately, Egyptologists around the world were quick to offer assistance. Breasted, who had visited the tomb shortly after its discovery, helped in the clearance and worked on the seal impressions. Albert Lythgoe, curator of the Egyptian department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, cabled Carter as soon as he heard about the discovery, to offer any assistance needed. Carter gratefully accepted, and was soon joined in the Valley of the Kings by the museum's photographer, Harry Burton, and two architects, Walter Hauser and Lindsley Foote Hall, who drew all the objects in situ. (Hauser and Hall subsequently left, finding Carter difficult to work with.) Gardiner arrived within weeks, to start work on the inscriptions. Eventually, the excavation team comprised an unprecedented, multidisciplinary team of experts: alongside Carter, Callender, Breasted, Burton, Hauser, Hall and Gardiner, there were Arthur Mace (Lythgoe's associate curator at the Met), Alfred Lucas (director of the chemical department of the Egyptian government), Newberry (now honorary reader in Egyptian art at Liverpool University), Douglas Derry (anatomist at the Cairo Anatomy School), L. A. Boodle (botanist from Kew Gardens), G. F. Hulme (Geological Survey of Egypt), James Ogden (jeweller), and Battiscombe Gunn (epigrapher and philologist).

It would take them seven weeks to clear the antechamber, and a total of seven seasons to record, conserve and clear the entire tomb.

Following the official opening of the tomb on 29 November 1922 and the official inspection by Lacau the following day, Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn left for Cairo and made their way back to England. Carter, too, repaired to Cairo for ten days while bespoke steel gates were made for the tomb. The discovery had made headlines around the world, and as a result the site was plagued with visitors. As Breasted remarked, the discovery:

> broke upon a world sated with post-First World War conferences, with nothing proved and nothing achieved, after a summer journalistically so dull that an English farmer's report of a gooseberry the size of a crab-apple achieved the main news page of the London metropolitan dailies. It was hardly surprising therefore that the Tutenkhamun discovery should have received a volume of world-wide publicity exceeding anything in the entire history of science.[66]

Back home in London, Carnarvon was invited to a private audience at Buckingham Palace where he recounted the adventure to King George V and Queen Mary. Unused and ill-suited to worldwide media attention, Carter expressed the forlorn hope that: 'Whatever our discoveries next season may be, we may be allowed to deal with them in a proper and dignified manner.'[67] It was not to be. Instead: 'The seasonal volume of mail at the Luxor post office was doubled and trebled . . . The two leading hotels of Luxor set up tents in their gardens' to accommodate the hordes of visitors.[68]

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb had a profound impact on the Egyptians themselves. Coming just eight months after

Egypt's declaration of independence, it was inevitable that the find and its aftermath should become entangled with nationalist politics. To Egyptians, the richness and sophistication of the boy-king's treasures offered 'vindicating proof of past glory and inspiration at a critical moment in their struggle for independence'.[69] Interest in Egypt's pharaonic past, which had hitherto been the preserve of Western archaeologists and a few native scholars, was suddenly propelled into the mainstream of Egyptian cultural and political thought.[70] The teaching of pharaonic history was introduced in government schools, a state university was founded, programmes were introduced to train Egyptian Egyptologists, and the Antiquities Service and Museum – for so long bastions of Western influence – were steadily Egyptianized.[71]

Above all, the unearthing of a tomb so extraordinarily rich in objects marked a turning point in the history of Egyptian archaeology, when the old system of dividing finds between the archaeologist and the state came to an end. Carnarvon's 1914 permit to excavate in the Valley of the Kings had specified an even distribution of finds, except in the event of an unrobbed tomb being found. The Egyptian authorities now invoked that exception, and sought to retain the entire contents of the tomb as part of Egypt's patrimony. Carter, Breasted and their ilk were aghast, believing that only trained (Western) Egyptologists could properly appreciate and care for Egyptian antiquities. Moreover, they regarded the moves by Fuad's government and Lacau's Antiquities Service as 'either nationalist political posturing or crass opportunism in anticipation of future tourist revenues'.[72] But the world – and Egypt with it – had moved on since the days of Champollion and Lepsius. Mariette's vision – for a national museum that would curate and safeguard pharaonic artefacts on behalf of the Egyptian people – had come to pass. In an era of renewed Egyptian national pride, in a newly

independent country with a spring in its step, figures like Petrie and Budge looked like relics of the past. When the first object was removed from Tutankhamun's tomb on 27 December 1922, it was taken not to Highclere Castle or the British Museum, but to the Egyptian Museum in the heart of Cairo.

Exactly a century after the decipherment of hieroglyphics first opened a window on remote antiquity and allowed the ancient Egyptians to speak again, the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, coming hot on the heels of Egyptian independence, prompted the country's modern inhabitants to rethink their relationship with their own past and chart a new course for the future. It would be a future which the Egyptians themselves, rather than Westerners, would determine.

EPILOGUE

The future of the past

Carter with King Fuad I and Egyptian officials in the Valley of the Kings.

It is the business of the archaeologist to wake the dreaming dead: not to send the living to sleep.[1]

ARTHUR WEIGALL, 1923

The worldwide publicity that attended the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in November 1922 reached fever pitch the following year with the official opening of the burial chamber. As the *New York Times* reported:

> There is only one topic of conversation . . . One cannot escape the name of Tut-Ankh-Amen anywhere. It is shouted in the streets, whispered in the hotels, while the local shops advertise Tut-Ankh-Amen art, Tut-Ankh-Amen hats, Tut-Ankh-Amen curios, Tut-Ankh-Amen photographs, and tomorrow probably genuine Tut-Ankh-Amen antiquities. Every hotel in Luxor today had something a la Tut-Ankh-Amen . . . There is a Tut-Ankh-Amen dance tonight at which the piece is to be a Tut-Ankh-Amen rag.[2]

The 'Egyptomania' that the discovery sparked in Europe and America was accompanied by a national awakening in Egypt itself. The boy-pharaoh from ancient Egypt's golden age became an icon of the country's new independence.[3] Egyptian nationalist politicians paid well-publicized visits to the tomb, discovering that the magic of ancient Egypt could

be as powerful a weapon for contesting Western influence in the twentieth century as it had been for bolstering it in the nineteenth.[4]

The team brought together by Carter to study, record and conserve the thousands of objects from Tutankhamun's tomb marked a new departure in Egyptian archaeology. The expedition was the first to have its own chemist (Alfred Lucas), and the sheer number of different specialisms required to do the tomb and its contents justice signalled the end of the heroic age of gentleman amateurs. Also gone were the days when a single scholar – a Young or Wilkinson, Champollion or Mariette – could hope to encompass the whole discipline of Egyptology. The sheer number of discoveries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had outstripped the ability of any one individual to keep pace with and master such a raft of new knowledge.

The orgy of treasure-seeking in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic expedition had resulted in countless thousands of objects entering European collections, to be admired as curios and objets d'art; but the proper interpretation and understanding of Egyptian antiquities – as insights into pharaonic civilization – only really began with Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphics in 1822. His achievement allowed ancient Egyptian culture to emerge out of the fog of Classical myth and esoteric legend into the spotlight of serious scientific enquiry, to be studied and appreciated as a sophisticated culture in its own right and on its own terms. At the same time, Wilkinson's careful observations on the ground in Egypt brought new breakthroughs in understanding. He recognized the pyramids of Giza for what they really were – the tombs of fourth-dynasty kings – while his accurate drawings of the scenes in the Tombs of the Nobles at Thebes rounded out the picture of pharaonic culture by illuminating the daily life of the ancient

Egyptians. As Wilkinson was the first to observe, their manners and customs were as rich and varied as those of any other people, ancient or modern. Hunting and fishing, music and dance, arts and crafts, banquets and festivals: all were recorded in intimate detail on tomb walls, but it took a man of Wilkinson's curiosity and diligence to bring them back to life.

Building on these foundations, scholars in the middle of the nineteenth century were able to bring a sharper focus to the study of ancient Egypt, elucidating the different periods of its long history and charting the development of its extraordinary art and architecture. Thanks to the efforts of Lepsius and his expedition, Egyptian civilization gained some texture and nuance: instead of being seen as a single, amorphous entity, it came to be understood as a succession of distinct epochs of cultural creativity (which were named the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms), each with its own recognizable artistic style. In the 1850s, Mariette's excavations unexpectedly revealed the degree to which ancient Egypt had maintained close relations with, and been influenced by, its neighbours. The burial of King Kamose at Thebes, with its objects of Levantine inspiration; the reliefs depicting an ancient voyage to Punt (modern coastal Sudan), discovered in the Theban temple of Hatshepsut; and the lion-headed sphinxes, found at Tanis in the Nile Delta, with their strange Asiatic features: this succession of notable finds demonstrated that the pharaohs had not only traded with other cultures, but had also absorbed influences from abroad. Ancient Egypt had not, after all, been the pristine 'civilization apart' that earlier scholars had assumed (or wished).

With the establishment of the Antiquities Service in the late 1850s, new discoveries came thick and fast.[5] The Pyramid Age was revealed in all its glory by a series of beautiful objects unearthed from cemeteries at Saqqara, Giza and Meidum: a

life-sized wooden statue of a high official, nicknamed by the workmen who found it Sheikh el-Beled ('village elder'); the majestic diorite statue of King Khafra, uncovered in situ in his pyramid temple; delicately carved wooden relief panels from the tomb of Hesira, a dentist at the court of a third-dynasty king; the exquisite statues of husband and wife, Rahotep and Nofret, found in their tomb chapel, undisturbed for over three thousand years; and the beautifully observed painting of geese from a nearby tomb. Antiquities Service excavations also revealed the world's oldest body of religious writings, the Pyramid Texts, enabling scholars to appreciate the antiquity and complexity of ancient Egyptian beliefs; and a cache of royal mummies, allowing faces to be put to some of the great names of antiquity.

From the 1880s onwards, Petrie's focus on small finds – the objects thrown away or disregarded by earlier archaeologists – and on meticulous, systematic excavation led to some of the most elusive and fragile remains being discovered, recorded and studied. His unerring eye and enquiring mind revealed for the first time the long prehistory of ancient Egyptian civilization, by finding a series of unassuming shallow graves, cut in the low desert north of Thebes and dating back to the early fourth millennium BC; rescued the precious mummy portraits from Hawara, which testified to the artistic and cultural sophistication of a hybrid Graeco-Egyptian culture at the end of ancient Egypt's immense time span; and unearthed delicate paintings in the royal palaces at Amarna, illuminating life in the royal court under the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten during Egypt's 'golden age' (*c.*1350 BC). Petrie also had the luck – or judgement – to find the only known instance of the word 'Israel' in Egyptian hieroglyphics, on a reused slab of stone. But, by the late 1880s, the study of ancient Egypt was no longer seen as a branch of biblical history, but as a fully formed discipline with its own questions to answer.

As knowledge grew, so further discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were able to add yet more colour and detail. The Amarna Letters, discounted as forgeries by many, but recognized and acquired by Erman for Berlin, turned out to be an invaluable diplomatic archive, charting relations between Egypt and her neighbours at a time of great intrigue and power politics. A cache of delicate royal jewellery, found by de Morgan at Dahshur, illustrated Egyptian craftsmanship at its zenith. A ceremonial stone palette, dug from the mud by Quibell, turned out to have been commissioned by Egypt's very first king, Narmer (*c.*3000 BC), to celebrate his rule over a united realm. And the tomb of Kha, excavated by Schiaparelli at Thebes, yielded the greatest array of objects belonging to a private individual ever found in one place – basketry, furniture, clothing, food: the perfectly preserved possessions of a man who lived over twenty centuries ago.

By the time Davis, then Carter and Carnarvon, began to dig in the Valley of the Kings, ancient Egypt was no longer just an amalgam of garbled classical accounts, no more a mythical realm of esoteric knowledge, but a complex and vibrant civilization, every bit as innovative and sophisticated as Greece or Rome – the crucible of great feats of artistic and architectural achievement, but inhabited by real people.

While assisting Carter in the Valley of the Kings, Gardiner, the foremost philologist of his generation, published his landmark *Egyptian Grammar*. It was, and remains, the seminal text on the ancient Egyptian language. It is not, however, easy reading. Would that Gardiner, or myriad Egyptologists in the century since, had heeded the comments of Weigall, also writing in 1923: 'It is the business of the archaeologist to wake the dreaming dead: not to send the living to sleep.'[6] But it

would be Gardiner's heirs rather than Weigall's, specialists rather than generalists, who would chart the future of the discipline. In embracing scientific rigour, Egyptology would lose its panache.

The sense that Carter's discovery marked the end of an era was only strengthened by the sudden and tragic death of his long-term patron and friend, Lord Carnarvon. Returning to Luxor in early 1923, after a whirlwind of interviews and audiences in England, Carnarvon was bitten on the cheek by a mosquito, allegedly while crossing the Theban plain to or from the Valley of the Kings. He subsequently nicked the top of the bite while shaving, and it became infected. Blood poisoning set in, and on 14 March he was transferred to Cairo, where he developed pneumonia. Concerned friends and colleagues hoped for the best while fearing the worst. On 20 March, Gardiner wrote to his wife: 'Our great sorrow during the last few days has been Carnarvon's serious illness. He . . . is not yet out of danger. It is difficult to think that only last Friday he and I dined and spent the evening together. It would be terrible if – but I just won't think of it.'[7]

Just over two weeks later, Carnarvon was dead. His body was brought back to Highclere and buried on Beacon Hill – the site of an ancient earthwork – overlooking the estate. His death gave rise to speculation about the 'pharaoh's curse', a myth that has proved hard to dislodge in the century since.[8] Carnarvon's sister, Lady Burghclere, recognized at once that: '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.'[9] Carter persuaded Carnarvon's widow to take over her late husband's concession, so that the clearance of the tomb could continue, uninterrupted. She agreed, but the old deference by the Egyptian authorities towards aristocratic English patrons had gone forever.

In 1923, even as Petrie was being knighted by King George V 'for services to Egypt' (not 'Egyptology'), the Egyptian government was re-establishing the Cairo School of Egyptology, which had lasted only three years during its first incarnation. That had been back in the 1880s, as Petrie was beginning his career in archaeology. In a bitter irony, the announcement coincided with the death of Ahmed Kamal, the first Egyptian to undertake scholarly work in Egyptology. He did not live to see his ultimate wish – for Egyptians to administer their own Antiquities Service (in which he had served faithfully for thirty-five years) – but he had done more than most to hasten the day.

Egypt's new constitution was promulgated on 19 April 1923, and the following year, after parliamentary elections resulted in a government dominated by nationalists, the Antiquities Service promptly cancelled Carter's permit to work in the Valley of the Kings. The symbolism was clear for all to see. Eventually, after much wailing and gnashing of teeth, the concession was restored in 1925, but on the Egyptian government's terms. *The Times* lost its monopoly (negotiated by Carnarvon) on news coverage of the excavation, while the Carnarvon estate had to formally renounce any claim to a share of objects from the tomb.

The one area where Westerners continued to exercise significant influence was at the Egyptian Museum. The building had been designed by a Frenchman, bore the names of exclusively Western Egyptologists, and was still the preserve of a largely European curatorial staff. But under their leadership, the building, as opposed to the antiquities inside it, had not been particularly well looked after. Only twenty years old, the roof had already started to leak and the basement flooded regularly when the Nile rose. Moreover, nobody back in 1902 had envisaged that the museum would one day have to accommodate

so vast a collection of objects as had recently been unearthed in Tutankhamun's tomb. By the 1920s, the museum was overcrowded and in a bad state of disrepair. The Egyptian government had other, more pressing priorities for public investment, but Western Egyptologists were aghast, and decided to take matters into their own hands. In 1925, Breasted persuaded his benefactor, John D. Rockefeller, to promise funding for a brand new museum – a grand, riverside building in ancient Egyptian revival style. There was one condition: that Western scholars would be guaranteed control of the museum and its associated research institute for a period of thirty-three years. The Egyptian government refused.[10]

The days of Western interests infringing on Egyptian sovereignty in the name of archaeology were gone forever. Breasted, like Carter, had shown himself hopelessly out of touch with Egyptian national sentiment.[11] In a rare show of Egyptological discord, Reisner bitterly opposed the Rockefeller scheme. In the end, Rockefeller directed his philanthropy towards the building of the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem, and gave additional funds to the Oriental Institute, allowing for the construction of Chicago House.

Plans for a new, Western-controlled Egyptian museum may have been thwarted, but the existing museum continued to be run by European – specifically French – directors, right up to the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy. Etienne Drioton – the last in an unbroken line stretching back to Mariette in the 1850s – was forced from office after the revolution of July 1952. In a further gesture of anti-imperialism, the British army barracks at Qasr el-Nil, right next to the museum, were razed to the ground (to be replaced by the Nile Hilton, the first of Cairo's modern hotels). The Suez debacle, four years later, merely confirmed and cemented the permanent loss of British and French influence in Egypt. For better or worse, the fate of the

Antiquities Service and Egyptian Museum, and with them the direction of archaeology in Egypt, would henceforth be controlled by the people of the Nile Valley, not by foreigners from distant shores.