

The Pharaoh Whose Tomb Awed the World

Discovering King Tut

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The discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamun, a relatively minor pharaoh, with its fabulous treasures virtually intact, took the world by storm. Detailed descriptions and photos of the unfathomable treasures found not only electrified the academic-archaeological community but wowed the common person. Everyone could now see for the first time the unbelievable wealth and pomp that surrounded the monarchs of the ancient world's most famous and imposing empire.

Read about the discovery of the tomb. Learn about its significance in the annals of history and the eyes of the Torah.



It all began with a wild joyride. Middle-aged British nobleman Lord Carnarvon (his full title was “George Edward Stanhope Molyneux Herbert, Fifth Earl of Carnarvon”) was completely enamored with the freedom the newly invented horseless carriage offered. He would frequently set out on the road to enjoy a pleasure ride in the newfangled machine. His habit of speeding (he was known to accelerate and pass pedestrians at the unheard of speed of 20 MPH!) landed him in court a number of times.

One day in 1901, while enjoying a ride in Germany, Lord Carnarvon’s reckless abandon was disrupted by a serious accident. The crash left the Briton’s health shattered, and even after his recovery he remained prone to frequent illness. Lord Carnarvon’s doctor recommended that he avoid the damp and cold English winters.

The natural remedy was Egypt, then part of the vast empire of British colonies around the world. In 1903, the nobleman began spending the winters in the dry, warm environment of North Africa. While in Cairo, he looked for ways to pass the time and discovered that he had a passion for archaeology. His ample savings meant he could afford to sponsor uncertain archaeological digs without worrying about failure.

During his first season of exploring, Lord Carnarvon was rewarded with nothing more than a small coffin bearing a mummified cat (Egyptians sometimes worshipped cats as a representation of one of their deities). He decided then to team up with an experienced archaeologist, and his subsequent partnership with Howard Carter proved extremely rewarding. In fact, it led to the most stupendous discovery in the field of Egyptology: the intact tomb of King Tutankhamun.

Note: Problems With Traditional Egyptian Chronology

It is important to emphasize that traditional Egyptian chronology is by no means undisputed and infallible. Even today, it is built primarily on the work of one ancient historian, Manetho, who lived in the third century BCE, a thousand years *after* the height of the Egyptian empires. We refer to it only to the extent that it provides, in a general way, a glimpse into the world that our ancient forbearers found themselves in.



Street scene of Cairo in the 1920s.

Napoleon: Founder of Egyptology

Study of the culture and remains of ancient Egypt is fairly new. Ancient Egypt had largely been forgotten by Western civilization. In fact, knowledge of Egypt’s glorious past was limited more or less to the legends surrounding its last Ptolemaic regent, Queen Cleopatra, and the fall of Egypt to Rome in the year 30 BCE.

Only the Great Pyramids of Giza and the vast ruins of the temples at al-Karnak and Luxor, Medinet Habu and Abu Simpel were left to tell their silent tales of grandeur from a forgotten era. But there were precious few visitors to the barren desert to listen to them. Some of these great edifices were completely unknown to Europeans.

It was the fascination of the legendary French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte that changed all that. He arrived in Egypt at the head of his conquering army in 1798 with the intent of disrupting British commerce with the Ottomans in the region. After a smashing victory over the army of the ruling Mamluks just within sight of the pyramids, Napoleon’s army went on to conquer Cairo. A devoted enthusiast of culture, Napoleon brought with him scholars and scientists who first began to thoroughly document the remains of ancient Egyptian culture.

It was Napoleon’s expedition that discovered one of the most important artifacts in the history of archaeology, the Rosetta Stone, near Rashid (Rosetta), Egypt. Until its discovery, there were numerous samples of hieroglyphic writing whose meaning remained unknown. These were found on the walls of temple ruins and on the stone steles that the pharaohs had erected to advance their glory. Nevertheless, the ability to read hieroglyphs had been lost for nearly two millennia. The Rosetta Stone provided the key that eventually allowed cryptographers and linguists to crack the code of the hieroglyphs.

The Rosetta Stone

The Rosetta Stone is a black slab dating to the year 196 BCE. It is inscribed with a statement glorifying King Ptolemy V in honor of the first anniversary of his coronation. The priests of Memphis (a city in Egypt) praised the king for his efforts to improve living conditions for his people. He had implemented measures such as waiving debts and freeing people from compulsory military duty.

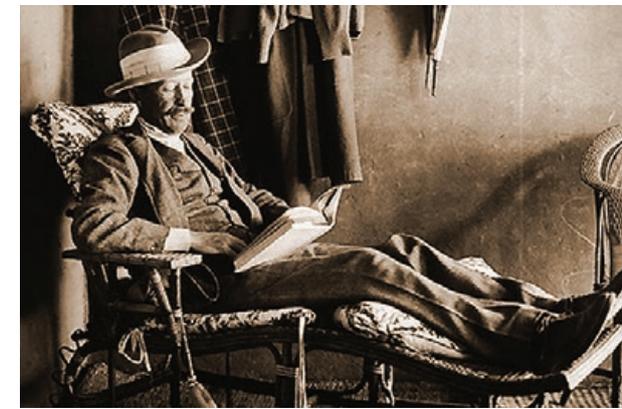
What made the stone exceptional was that it was inscribed in three distinct languages. The lowest section was written in ancient Greek, which was readily understood by scholars. The last sentence of the Greek inscription stated that the proclamation was to be recorded in “the sacred, the



Painting depicting Napoleon.



Painting depicting Napoleon in Egypt.



Lord Carnarvon relaxes.

native and the Greek letters.” This indicated that the writing above the Greek was in demotic, a simplified Egyptian script, while the uppermost section repeated the same proclamation a third time using hieroglyphs.

Although the British—who defeated Napoleon’s army in Egypt in 1801—took the stone

