

**SEARCHING**  
FOR THE  
**LOST TOMBS**  
OF  
**EGYPT**



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OF  
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 Thames & Hudson

*For my Dad, and in memory of my Mum*

Frontispiece: One of the colossal statues of Akhenaten discovered at Karnak and now on display in the Luxor Museum.

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## INTRODUCTION



### THE LIVING, THE DEAD, TOMBS AND REDISCOVERY

The tombs, mummies and spectacular grave-goods that have emerged from the sands of Egypt have come to define what Egyptology means to most people. This is a story about ancient Egypt, and what happened when people in that part of the world, thousands of years ago, died. It's about their belief in an afterlife, and how they buried their dead. It's well known that for the wealthiest and most important members of that society, and particularly for the man at the top – pharaoh himself – funerary preparations were very extensive, and at times this meant constructing elaborate, beautifully decorated and cleverly secured tombs to receive the remains of the dead.

Almost as captivating as the ancient ruins themselves are the stories of their rediscovery – the exploits of a huge cast of explorers, archaeologists, robbers and others who have sought out these tombs, motivated variously by the desire to understand the ancient past, to uncover works of art for people to look at in museums, or just to make a fast buck by discovering rare and beautiful treasures.

In particular, this is the story of a series of tombs that belonged to some of the most famous individuals in the ancient world: Imhotep, Nefertiti, Alexander the Great, Cleopatra and others. Their names have survived in the texts, in hieroglyphs and other scripts and languages, left on the walls of temples and the tombs of their contemporaries, on papyri

and other artefacts, and in the historical accounts composed by classical and later writers. The possibility of rediscovering the last resting places of these ancient celebrities, and perhaps even their mortal remains, has inspired many an archaeologist or historian to set out on an expedition to the ruin-rich deserts of Egypt. This is the story of those archaeologists' quests, and an examination of the possibility that some of the tombs in question might yet be found.

### Obsessed with death?

The ancient Egyptians have acquired a reputation for being obsessed with death, but it's probably undeserved, and as much about the kinds of archaeological evidence that have survived – and how they have been interpreted – as an accurate reflection of past preoccupations.

Western interest in Egypt's ancient past began to accelerate in the 19th century, following Napoleon's invasion of the country in 1798. At that time many ancient monuments were half buried in drift sand, or overtaken by more modern buildings that had sprung up in and around them, but they were nonetheless very visible. The team of scholars and scientists who accompanied the Napoleonic expedition produced a detailed record of its ancient monuments, a series of volumes published as the *Description de l'Égypte* between 1809 and 1829. Antiquities had already begun to leave the country by this point; by the time the British Museum opened in 1753, around 150 of the objects in its collection were Egyptian. As interest in acquiring such objects among the elite and those collecting on behalf of museums began to grow, excavations uncovered new sites and monuments. Among the most famous of the early Western excavators was Giovanni Battista Belzoni, an Italian who, following a career as a circus strongman, came to work for the British Consul General in Egypt, Henry Salt. Belzoni was among the first to begin digging and made some spectacular early discoveries, including the tomb of Sety I in the Valley of the Kings, and was also the first in modern times to enter the second pyramid, of Pharaoh Khafre, at Giza.

Cemeteries, and the tombs within them, tended to yield antiquities of the most spectacular kind and quantity, and so naturally attracted the most attention. It was immediately clear that the ancient Egyptians

believed strongly in an afterlife, and were very concerned to ensure that they got there, through a complex system of beliefs and rituals that, crucially for modern collectors, involved material possessions. The passage of the deceased from this world to the next was conceived as a journey, and the list of provisions with which the dead could be equipped seems to have been almost infinite, and was for most probably only limited by their financial wherewithal and that of their relatives. But most fundamentally of all, a place needed to be found to bury the body – for those who could afford it, an elaborate tomb.

The earliest burials in Egypt, during the Predynastic Period, were little more than shallow pits, covered with a mound of sand, into which the body of the deceased, wrapped in goatskins or mats, was placed along with various possessions – typically pottery vessels, ivory or bone combs, slate palettes and sometimes ceramic figurines. Over time, tombs began to take on a more formal, rectangular shape, the number of items placed alongside the body increased, and the finest examples came to be lined with mudbrick, and occasionally divided into two chambers. The tombs of the kings of the 1st Dynasty are found at Abydos, in Middle Egypt. These were square, brick-lined cuttings in the desert floor, in which a central chamber of wood was constructed. This chamber was surrounded on three sides by storage magazines. It is unclear what lay above these tombs, although a low mound seems likely, and the location of each tomb was marked by two stone stelae bearing the name of the deceased king.

The highest-status burials became larger and more elaborate over time. The number of chambers and provision of funerary equipment increased, and superstructures evolved into straight large rectangular structures, built of mudbrick, sometimes reaching 10 m (33 ft) in height. These superstructures are known as 'mastabas' (an Arabic word for the kind of wooden bench typically found in or outside Egyptian houses), and while many are simply filled with rubble, they sometimes housed chambers – in addition to any subterranean compartments – containing burial equipment, and often incorporated chapels on the exterior in which the bereaved could place offerings to the deceased.

At the beginning of the 3rd Dynasty, a crucial step was taken in the development of royal funerary architecture: the subterranean tomb of the first king of the line, Djoser, was surmounted by a square-based platform,

on top of which a sequence of further platforms of diminishing size was placed, creating a stepped structure. This was the ‘Step Pyramid’, the first example of the triangular building that defines ancient Egypt more than any other. The structure was also revolutionary in being the first monumental structure built of stone anywhere in the world. The Step Pyramid was part of a wider complex of buildings within a vast enclosure, providing not only for the burial of the king but also the maintenance of his cult beyond the end of his life, sustaining his spirit in the afterlife. His successors were to innovate and experiment almost constantly with this type of monument, as their chief architects and builders strove to create larger and more perfect ‘true’ pyramids, culminating eventually in the reign of the 4th Dynasty king Khufu with the largest pyramid of all, the Great Pyramid at Giza.

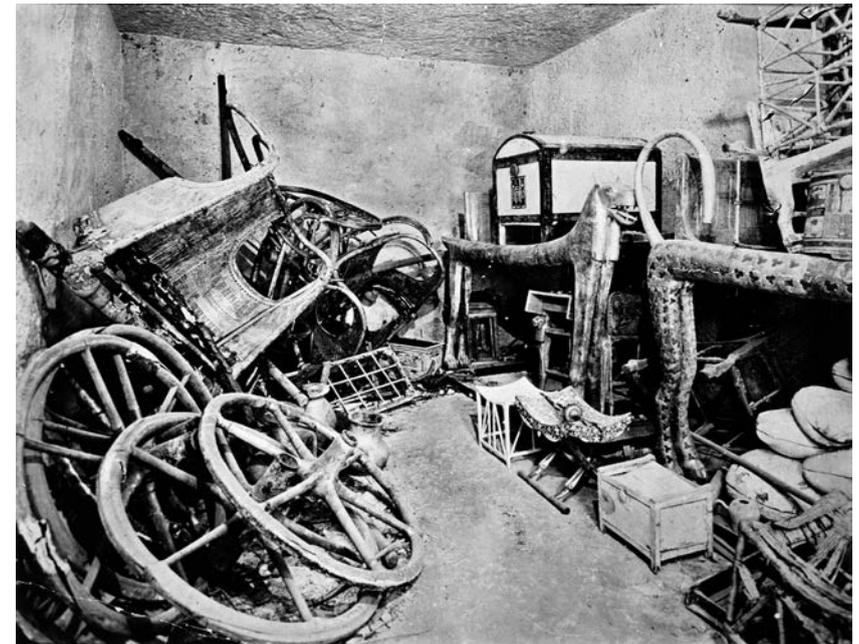
Non-royal individuals at this time continued to be buried in mastaba tombs, pyramids being reserved for royalty, and these eventually came to be lined and built in stone and elaborately decorated with reliefs. In addition, during the 4th Dynasty, some tombs began to be cut directly into the rock in the hills and cliffsides at the edge of the Nile Valley.

Pyramids continued to be the default form of burial for pharaohs throughout the Old Kingdom (the 4th, 5th and 6th Dynasties). There seems then to have been something of a hiatus during the succeeding 7th to 11th Dynasties, but the practice was revived in the 11th Dynasty, under Mentuhotep II Nebhepetre, and continued into the 13th.

At least some of the 16th and 17th Dynasty rulers, who were buried at Thebes, seem to have been buried in tombs marked with pyramid superstructures, but at a certain point early in the 18th Dynasty an important change occurred, one that is a defining feature of the New Kingdom. From the reign of Hatshepsut at the latest, the pharaoh came to be buried in a new necropolis hidden away in the high desert wadis to the west of Thebes, which in modern times has come to be known as the Valley of the Kings – perhaps the most famous cemetery anywhere in the world. Here, successive pharaohs cut their tombs deep into the bedrock, with often numerous chambers being built around one or more lengthy passageways, many of the surfaces of which were lavishly decorated with esoteric scenes of the king on his journey to the afterlife. Some had been left open since antiquity, but many more were uncovered

by archaeologists, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in the ultimate archaeological discovery: that of the undisturbed tomb of Tutankhamun by Howard Carter in November 1922.

That Tutankhamun’s tomb, and all the fabulous treasures he was buried with, had lain intact since he was buried was exactly how the Egyptians would have wanted it. Unlike earlier funerary monuments – particularly royal tombs surmounted by that most monumental of markers, the pyramid – the tombs of the Valley of the Kings were intended to be invisible once sealed. They lay far away from civilization, in a place that was otherwise entirely barren and unoccupied. They couldn’t be seen, and were difficult to get to; anyone who wasn’t a part of the official necropolis administration discovered in such an unlikely place would have found themselves with a bit of explaining to do. But part of the reason Carter’s discovery was such a sensation was that Tutankhamun’s tomb was exceptional in its unviolated condition. Although the ancients’ efforts to protect the tombs of the deceased was a significant factor in the evolution of tomb



The southern end of the antechamber in the tomb of Tutankhamun, shortly after the discovery.

## INTRODUCTION

design, they seem ultimately to have been wasted in the majority of cases – practically every tomb that archaeologists have found in recent times was first entered by robbers (ancient or modern).

But what if, in a few select cases, the ancients succeeded in keeping the tombs of their most revered citizens from the robbers? Does this explain why some are still lost, and if so, might it finally be archaeologists rather than plunderers who will be first to the prize?

### Provision for the afterlife

As the conventions of tomb architecture developed, so did the canon of funerary rites designed to aid the deceased on their passage to the afterlife. The body itself, before being laid to rest in the tomb, would be prepared for its everlasting survival. It was purified, embalmed, adorned with jewels and amulets to ward off evil spirits and wrapped in linen bandages – the process known as mummification. As part of the purification process, certain internal organs were removed and preserved separately, including the stomach, lungs, liver and intestines. These were then typically stored in a set of four containers, which we now call ‘canopic jars’, following an early misunderstanding that associated them with the worship of the Greek god Canopus. The mummy was placed inside a wooden coffin, or perhaps a set of nesting coffins. For the wealthiest, these would then be placed within a stone sarcophagus.

During the funeral, a complex set of rituals ensuring the rejuvenation and revivification of the deceased would be performed on the mummy by a priest, and the individual would be buried with all manner of furniture and other items they may have used in this life and would need again in the next, including food and drink, oils, unguents and incense, all contained within a bewildering variety of jars and vessels of various kinds. The deceased would even be provided with a crew of helpers, in the form of figurines called *shabtis* (an Egyptian word meaning something like ‘answerer’), which would symbolically perform tasks on behalf of the deceased in the next world. For those who could afford a full set, there would be one shabti for every day of the year, and a sort of supervisor for every ten – over four hundred in total. These shabtis would help the deceased maintain their homestead in the Netherworld, conceived as a



A group of shabtis from a Third Intermediate Period tomb. One foreman oversees each group of ten workers.

boundless field of reeds called Aaru, a pastoral idyll apparently representing the most beautiful aspects of the landscape that surrounded them.

Many such items, particularly coffins, and in many cases the walls of the tombs themselves, were elaborately decorated. Inscriptions would provide the name and titles of the deceased, and sometimes a little information about their accomplishments in life or their close relatives. Other elements of the decoration, both textual and pictorial, described aspects of the journey the deceased would make from this life to the next. The Egyptians seem to have believed that by articulating these things through the texts and images created by the sculptors and painters, they would be made real. All of this investment in providing things for the deceased – items made of the finest materials, and shaped by the most highly skilled craftsmen – ultimately performed a function. In part this involved the memorialization of the deceased, keeping their memory alive for the loved ones who were left behind. But more important was the resurrection of the individual, and their eternal survival, in the afterlife. It was thus not death as such that the Egyptians were preoccupied with,

but life, specifically the next life, which they conceived as being more or less an idealized form of this world.

The association in modern times of ancient Egypt with mummies – all decaying flesh and evil intent – speaks more to a contemporary, gory fascination with dead bodies, and while this was inspired by the mummies recovered from Egypt, the Egyptians would never have thought of them like this, but as rejuvenated individuals in the prime of life. A scene from the tomb decoration of an individual named Harwa, who lived in Thebes in the 7th century BC, illustrates this perfectly. Harwa is depicted in the company of the jackal-headed god Anubis, the overseer of the mummification process, who takes Harwa's hand as he leads him onwards. Here, Harwa is shown as an old man, with a sagging belly and breasts, symbolizing his long and successful (well-fed) life. This scene is followed by decoration in the next part of the tomb relating to the rituals performed on the mummy in order to prepare the body of the deceased for its journey into the afterlife, and beyond this point the scene of Harwa and Anubis is repeated, but now Harwa is shown rejuvenated: his belly and breasts are gone, and he has the slim figure of an athletic youth. *This* is how the Egyptians imagined themselves in death – not as terrifying monsters, staggering around inside their tomb looking for someone to strangle.

So it is true that the Egyptians invested a great deal of wealth and effort in equipping their dead for the next life. But there is more to it than that. The dead were generally buried not in the fertile Nile Valley, where everybody lived and worked, but in the surrounding desert, where the dry, lifeless conditions are perfect for the preservation of material of all kinds, particularly organic material such as wood, which would quickly perish in the wetter conditions close to the river and life of all kinds. And so it was in the cemeteries that the travellers, explorers, collectors and archaeologists who came to take an interest in the ancient remains found an extraordinary wealth of exotic and beautiful works of art. As interest grew and enthusiasts realized that there was more to be discovered with a little excavation, it must have seemed as though there was apparently

Left Jackal-headed Anubis takes the hand of the deceased, Harwa, and leads him on his journey to the afterlife. TT 37.

an infinite abundance of such treasures simply waiting to be carried off, just beneath the sand. It boggles the mind now to think just how much material there was within such easy reach at the beginning of the 19th century. To begin with, such excavations were practically a free-for-all. While permits were issued in some cases, vast quantities of material were removed from the ground without them, sometimes by those interested in keeping it for themselves but also by those who realized they could make a very good living uncovering things for sale to others. For decades, very few – if any – records were made of these excavations. There was no recognition yet of what could be learned not only from the objects themselves, but from where they were found – their archaeological context. In any case, for all the wealth and variety of new material being discovered, so much was either made specifically for the rituals of death and burial, or at least found in and around tombs and cemeteries, that it must have seemed as though the Egyptians were preoccupied or even obsessed with death.

### Settlements and the evidence for the real lives of the Egyptians

While this mythologized version of ancient Egypt continued to take hold in Hollywood and the popular imagination, from the second half of the 19th century onwards archaeologists began to seek *information* about the past, rather than beautiful objects alone. And as archaeological endeavour and techniques advanced, it became apparent that towns and cities, not just remote cemeteries, had survived; it would be possible to recover the material evidence of ancient ways of life, complementing the Egyptians' presentation of daily life in funerary art.

But urban sites presented a much greater challenge to early excavators. Domestic buildings were typically made of mudbrick, which has not survived as well as other materials, such as the stone used to build temples and tombs. This is not only because it is naturally less durable, but also because much ancient mudbrick was removed in the 19th century by excavators who failed to recognize its value. Much was lost, for example, in the clearance of ancient temples such as that in the centre of Luxor. An ancient town had grown up in and around the stonework, but centuries

of urban development were irretrievably lost in a single stroke as the authorities hurried to reveal the New Kingdom temple. The problem was exacerbated by local farmers, who saw an entirely different value in the ancient bricks – they were very useful as fertilizer for the crops. Furthermore, as settlements tended to be based along the banks of the Nile, where inhabitants benefited from the annual flood that irrigated and fertilized the land, many have disappeared as the river has moved, gradually swallowing up the ancient remains.

Even when they survive, mudbrick houses tend to present a greater challenge to excavators than tombs. They are often part of settlements that were occupied for decades and centuries, and have typically been adapted and rebuilt periodically. That many of Egypt's modern towns and cities lie on top of ancient settlements is a fascinating testament to the continuity of life in this part of the world, but has made it harder for us to access this kind of ancient material. But even in the case of more accessible sites, archaeologists have had considerable challenges to face in disentangling one set of walls from another, and from other debris and detritus accumulated in between. Archaeological material within them might also at first glance seem less promising than the kind of treasures found in the richer cemetery sites: the most commonly recovered object class is the humble potsherd. But these fragments have proved to be of critical value, as over time archaeologists came to amass a vast database of knowledge about their forms and materials, which could be used to establish the age of the original artefact, and, therefore, date the context in which it was found.

Ancient Egyptian settlements can sometimes look like featureless expanses of mud, and must have seemed less immediately rewarding research projects, particularly in the early days of archaeology. But such sites, and the work of investigating them, has been crucial in enhancing our understanding of ordinary people's lives in the ancient past. This approach was exemplified by Sir Flinders Petrie, who is sometimes referred to as the 'Father of Archaeology'. His first excavation in Egypt, in 1884, explored the important site of Tanis in the Delta (to which we will return in Chapter 5). The site was already well known for its temple, and a scatter of associated monumental sculptures, but Petrie was more interested in the city that lay around it. Petrie not only recognized the value of settlement

sites like this, but also invented new techniques to recover the new kinds of material they yielded, and had the energy and perseverance to gather, document, analyse and publish vast quantities of it, opening an entirely new window onto ancient Egypt in the process. In the 21st century the focus is shifting again: tombs provided a flavour of ancient Egypt in microcosm; towns and cities revealed a much broader perspective; and now, with a great deal of help from specialists in other fields, such as geology, we are beginning to improve our understanding of the natural environment in ancient times, and how it affected people's lives.

Many scholars have since made their careers out of 'settlement archaeology', but this is not to say funerary archaeology – the search for and study of tombs and burial equipment – has ceased. It continues to yield new discoveries and useful information about the ancient past. And although settlement archaeologists can sometimes be heard to complain that 'we don't need any more tombs!', many Egyptologists continue to be lured to cemetery sites by the greater promise of spectacular discoveries. We don't *need* any more tombs, of course. And I can understand why some archaeologists are much more interested in other kinds of archaeology in Egypt. But it is true that tombs have played an enormous part in helping us to understand what Egypt was like in ancient times, through the intricately detailed scenes of humans engaged in all manner of day-to-day activities – hunting, fishing, farming, craft production and leisure activities – and engaging with a vivid menagerie of animals, birds, fish and insects against the backdrop of various aspects of Egypt's built and natural environments. Tombs provide us with some of the most awe-inspiring works of art, architecture and technology, and some of the most compelling stories of discovery, in our field.

### Reconstructing the pharaonic era

The combination of funerary and settlement archaeology and study of the ancient literary sources has enabled Egyptologists to put the flesh on the bones of the chronological framework of pharaonic Egypt, a civilization that endured for three thousand years. The classic view of Dynastic Egyptian history sees this great civilization as having been through a series of peaks and troughs. The age of pyramid-building, which began

with the great technological leap that enabled the construction of the Step Pyramid – credited to Imhotep – is known now as the Old Kingdom (2550–2150 BC), and corresponds to the 4th, 5th and 6th dynasties. This was followed by the first of the three Intermediate periods. The second great flourishing of Egyptian civilization is called the Middle Kingdom (2020–1750 BC) and corresponds to the 11th and 12th Dynasties. This was followed by a Second Intermediate Period (1640–1532 BC), the last dynasty of which was the 17th, and which was followed by the New Kingdom (1539–1069 BC), which therefore began with the 18th. The end of the former, and establishment of the latter, did not happen in a single instant, but rather unfolded in various ways over a longer period of time.

The Old, Middle and New Kingdoms are conceived as periods of great achievement – when Egypt was powerful, made great leaps forward in art, architecture and technology, and expanded the frontiers of its territory – and the Intermediate Periods as periods of supposed decline – when it was weaker, sometimes divided and its accomplishments more modest by comparison. This is an extremely reductive and over-simplistic narrative, which masks a much subtler picture of constant change of all kinds. Nonetheless, this framework, created by historians over the last two centuries (contrary to the system of dynasties, which was an ancient idea), is useful to an extent.

The system of 'dynasties' was set down in its final form by Manetho, an Egyptian priest and historian living under the Ptolemaic rulers who wanted a Greek-language version of Egypt's long history. His grouping of kings into dynasties seems to have derived from an earlier system in use by the ancients at least as far back as the 19th Dynasty. The 'Turin Kinglist', or 'Turin Canon', is a list of royal names, in historical sequence, written on a fragmentary papyrus believed to have been written during the reign of Ramesses II, third ruler of the 19th Dynasty. This extraordinary document was acquired in Luxor by Italian antiquities collector Bernardino Drovetti in 1820 and sold to the Egyptian Museum in Turin in 1824. The earliest names in the sequence are those of gods and mythical rulers, but in the third column, known historical kings are recorded in chronological sequence, and separated by headers into dynasties that broadly correspond to those set down by Manetho. In addition to the names of the kings, the number of years each reigned for is given.

The Egyptians dated the historical events they recorded in scenes and inscriptions according to when during the reign of the present pharaoh they occurred. They used a solar calendar, dividing their year into three seasons – Akhet, the time during which the inundation would deposit water on the land, Peret, when the waters would recede and crops would grow, and Shemu, when the crops would be harvested – of four 30-day months, each season lasting 120 days in total. A further ‘five days upon the year’ were added to bring the total in the year to 365. When they needed to ascribe a date to a particular event, the formula would include the day, given a number from 1 to 30, the month, numbered 1 to 4, the season, in ‘Year X’ of the reigning king. The first three elements related to the solar calendar and were unaffected by the reign of the king, whereas the last would be re-set with the change from one pharaoh to the next; were a king to die on the first day of the first month of Akhet, the next day would still be the second day of the first month of Akhet, but in the ‘Year 1’ of the new king. Such dates are invaluable to Egyptologists in establishing the chronological placement of such events, but they are also our main means of establishing the length of the reign of each king. The Egyptians recorded neither the circumstances of the death of pharaoh, nor the date at which it happened. The ‘highest regnal date’ is therefore the best guide to the point at which any given pharaoh died, i.e. an inscription of year twenty in the reign of such and such a pharaoh shows that he must have reigned into his twentieth year (as the first day of pharaoh’s reign would be dated ‘Year 1’). Of course such dates are subject to change when new evidence is uncovered: if an inscription dating to the thirtieth year of the same pharaoh were to be uncovered, the length of his reign as recorded in the textbooks would have to be extended by ten years.

There is an additional significance to this: although we have a pretty good idea of the sequence of kings, thanks to Manetho and other king-lists, and the archaeological evidence, we do not often know exactly when their reigns began and ended. The earliest fixed point in Egyptian history is agreed to be 690 BC – the date of accession of Taharqa of the 25th Dynasty, whose reign ended in his twenty-seventh year, which we know, thanks to Assyrian sources that can be correlated with our calendar, fell in 664 BC. But this is relatively late in ancient Egyptian history, a

full twenty-five dynasties after the first pharaohs. Highest regnal dates provide our best source of information on the dates of the earlier kings; by adding up the highest dates for all the known kings prior to Taharqa in sequence, and counting backwards from 690 BC, we eventually arrive at a date of approximately 3000 BC for the accession of the first king of the 1st Dynasty, Narmer. Certain points in Egyptian history can be fixed by other synchronisms, like that which allows us to date the end of Taharqa’s reign, but events can otherwise not be dated with certainty; for this reason Egyptologists often prefer to use the regnal dates provided by the Egyptians themselves, as these at least provide a date that is reliable within the framework of the reign of the king in question.

When Jean-François Champollion’s decipherment of hieroglyphs allowed ancient Egyptian texts to be read for the first time, he and generations of archaeologists, philologists and scholars of various kinds began to gather evidence of the kings of Egypt. The royal names that have been found on countless objects and monuments have allowed us to put the flesh onto the bones of Manetho’s lists of kings and dynasties, constructing a reasonably sound chronology defined by the succession of pharaohs. In general, Manetho’s lists seem to correspond well with the primary evidence, although, as we will see, some of his names do not match any found elsewhere, while we have also recovered the names of kings of whom Manetho appears to have had no knowledge.

The names given by Manetho are Greek forms of the names given to each king at birth (known to Egyptologists as the ‘nomen’). These are the names most familiar to us, such as Ramesses, Amenhotep and Tutankhamun. Each king also had a series of other names referring to various aspects of the kingship, which from the Middle Kingdom comprised the nomen and four other names (the ‘fivefold titulary’). This tradition persisted into Roman times. The four additional names included the ‘Horus name’, typically written inside a rectangular enclosure representing a palace surmounted by a Horus falcon; the ‘two ladies’ name, following an image of two goddesses, the vulture, Nekhbet of Upper Egypt and serpent, Wadjet of Lower Egypt; the Horus of Gold name; and finally, that which appears most commonly along with the nomen, the ‘prenomen’, also known as the ‘throne’ or ‘coronation’ name, which generally followed the sedge plant and bee hieroglyphs that, with the

addition of two ‘t’ signs, is read as *nesu bity*, which we translate as ‘the King of Upper and Lower Egypt’ – the principal title of the pharaoh.

The use of the words ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ here is a reference to the Nile, which runs from Central Africa to the south of Egypt northwards, eventually reaching the Mediterranean. The boundary between Upper and Lower Egypt lay just south of the head of the Delta, the point at which the Nile splits into several different branches; the capital city of Memphis, which lay at the junction of the two lands, was the southernmost of the Lower Egyptian administrative districts. Upper Egypt was the territory to the south of this point (the Nile Valley), and Lower Egypt the lands in the north (the capital city of Memphis and the Delta). The Egyptians considered their country to have been formed by the union of these two lands, and the idea that they were held or bound together is a recurring motif of kingship throughout Egyptian history, most notably in the epithet, ‘the Lord of the Two Lands’, which was one of the most frequently cited in the titulary of the king. When referring to modern locations, the term ‘Middle Egypt’ is sometimes used to describe sites along the Nile Valley between the Faiyum Oasis and the province of Assiut, but its boundaries are not clear, and the territory in any case fell within what the ancients considered to be Upper Egypt.

The nomen was not necessarily unique: for example, there were four kings named Tuthmosis and four named Amenhotep in the 18th Dynasty, and eleven named Ramesses across the 19th and 20th Dynasties. Each can be distinguished from the others by their prenomen, which was unique. Thus, Djoserkare Amenhotep I can be distinguished from Aakheperure Amenhotep II, Nebmaatre Amenhotep III and so on. During later periods, things become more confused as both birth and coronation names recur. This has made reconstructing the history of the Third Intermediate Period in particular very tricky. In general, pharaohs are referred to by their birth name, followed where necessary by an ordinal number – Ramesses I, Ramesses II and so on – but their prenomen are sometimes called upon to avoid confusion. Egyptologists tend to use the Egyptian forms where possible, but the Greek forms have also made their way into modern literature: one might variously read that the Great Pyramid was built by Cheops or by Khufu. These are one and the same pharaoh, with the name given in the Greek and Egyptian forms respectively. In some cases, the

Greek forms are so much better established that sticking dogmatically to the Egyptian can be confusing: the 21st Dynasty pharaoh Psusennes is much better known by this, the Greek form of his name, and is almost never referred to as Pasebkaenniut.

According to Manetho, each king came to the throne following the death of his predecessor. But this leaves no room for those periods when other evidence tells us there was more than one reigning king – one ruling in one location, and another ruling elsewhere, or kings ruling simultaneously as co-regents, as was the case with the woman-king Hatshepsut and her nephew Tuthmosis III. Nonetheless, Manetho’s lists provide something of a starting point for our search for tombs: while the places where many of the known kings of Egypt were laid to rest have been identified, a number remain to be found.

### Vanished celebrities

Unashamedly, this book isn’t about the lives of the ordinary people in ancient Egypt. It’s about famous pharaohs and other ancient celebrities, their achievements, the spectacular wealth they may have accrued and been buried with, and the sometimes legendary circumstances in which they were buried – and how those circumstances might have contributed to the difficulties archaeologists have faced in finding them, despite their best efforts.

Imhotep, whose name is best known as that of the principal antagonist in the Hollywood films *The Mummy* (1932 and 1999), is perhaps one of the most significant figures in human history. An official of unusually high status at the court of his king, Djoser, of the 3rd Dynasty, we attribute the design and construction of the Step Pyramid to him. Not only was this the first pyramid in Egypt, it was the first monumental building to be built of stone anywhere in the world. This was no easy feat: erecting a building of stone on this scale – approximately 125 m (410 ft) along the base and 62 m (200 ft) in height – without it collapsing under its own weight required a thorough understanding of the forces and stresses involved, and mastery of design that would distribute the load evenly, resulting in a stable structure. It was a huge leap forward for humankind. Imhotep was remembered for millennia after his death, and even came

to be worshipped as a god. As a high-ranking court official, he must have been buried in a substantial tomb, and many centuries after his death, his devotees seem to have identified North Saqqara as the place of his burial, but despite many years of excavations in the area, the tomb has never been securely identified.

Amenhotep I was the second pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, at the very beginning of the New Kingdom. This great era was characterized by the expansion of the Egyptian empire, and some of the pharaonic period's finest achievements in art and grandest architectural feats. It is in part defined by the adoption of a new means of burying the royal dead, in a remote valley away from civilization, which we now call the Valley of the Kings. Amenhotep's tomb has never been found, yet official records of tomb inspections suggest it was still intact almost four centuries after his death. It cannot have remained so, however, as his mummy was eventually found, along with those of numerous other New Kingdom pharaohs, in the 'royal cache' tomb, TT 320. Archaeologists have long sought the tomb itself, but to no avail.

Akhenaten is one of the great characters of the ancient world. From the beginning of his reign he began a revolution in religion, art and politics, banning the worship of traditional gods in favour of one alone, the sun disc called the Aten. He also adapted centuries-old religious iconography to show not just this one god, but Akhenaten himself, often with his wife, Nefertiti, and their daughters, emphasizing his role and that of his family in the new religion. He smashed the rigid conventions governing the depiction of pharaoh, showing himself in a radically new way with exaggerated features that blur the lines between the male and female forms, suggesting to many modern observers that he may have suffered some terrible illness (see frontispiece and p. vi). Finally, he founded a new capital city at the site we now call Tell el-Amarna, and moved the entire administration there with him. Despite such comprehensive and wide-ranging change, Akhenaten's revolution lasted only a few years beyond the end of his reign, by which time there seems to have been something of a crisis of succession. At some point a boy named Tutankhamun, apparently the only male heir, came to the throne, but died only a few years later without children, thus ending the royal line. A number of individuals are known to have come to the throne after, and even during

the last years of, Akhenaten's reign, including possibly Nefertiti, whose image is famous throughout the world thanks to the discovery of a strikingly realistic-looking bust depicting her as a beautiful and confident woman at Amarna in 1912 and now in Berlin. Perhaps owing in part to the brevity of the reign of these individuals, and to the attitude of the authorities in the period after the restoration of the old ways, we seem to be missing much of the evidence of their burials, including at least some of their tombs. Might they still lie undiscovered, as Tutankhamun's did for three and a half millennia?

Herihor was an army general of the 21st Dynasty whose influence in Upper Egypt came to rival that of the pharaoh in the north, to the point that he eventually began to adopt some of the trappings of kingship and even enclosed his name inside a cartouche, the naming usually reserved for royalty. He reigned at a time when many of the tombs of the pharaohs of the preceding New Kingdom were stripped of their finery and the mummies reburied to guard against their desecration by robbers. Herihor's immediate successors and predecessors seem eventually to have been reburied themselves, but conspicuously almost no trace of any tomb or other evidence for the burial of Herihor survives, leading many to speculate that it still awaits discovery – and may even contain riches to rival Tutankhamun's.

The Third Intermediate and Late Periods, comprising the 21st to 30th Dynasties, are far less well documented than, for example, the New



The bust of Nefertiti discovered by a German expedition to Amarna in 1912 and now in the Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

Kingdom that preceded them. The country was fragmented for much of the period leading to a profusion of ephemeral kings, which archaeologists have struggled to reconcile with kinglists such as Manetho's. But a crucial leap forward was made just before the outbreak of the Second World War, when French archaeologist Pierre Montet discovered a cemetery of the 21st and 22nd Dynasty kings, several of whose burials were intact and preserved some of the most spectacular – if relatively little known – treasures from ancient Egypt (see pp. ix–xi). But gaps remain in the record of the tombs of these lines of kings and also their successors, including all of the tombs of the 26th Dynasty, a time of great achievements in art and of a unified and powerful Egypt, which must surely have been impressively provisioned.

Alexander the Great is rightly remembered as one of the greatest conquerors of any period, the vastness of his territory ensuring that his story has a relevance across Europe, North Africa and Asia. But of all the countries he visited, he was buried neither in his homeland, Macedonia, nor the city of his death, Babylon, but in Egypt. The country, the religion of its people and the might of the monuments erected to their gods had a powerful effect on Alexander. His burial there may have had more to do with the machinations of one of his generals, Ptolemy, following his death, but whatever the reason a powerful myth binding Alexander as a god himself to Egypt sprang up following his death and formed an important part of the basis for the establishment of a new Hellenistic Egyptian kingdom under Ptolemy and his successors. Though his tomb was revered for centuries, and was even visited by many of the great Roman emperors and classical authors, very little archaeological evidence for it has survived.

At the end of the Dynasty founded by Ptolemy, Egypt was ruled by another of the most famous figures in the ancient world: Cleopatra. The story of her life, relationships with first Julius Caesar and then Mark Antony, and the part she played in the Roman Empire, is well known the world over, thanks to the classical sources, but later also to Shakespeare, and then Hollywood. The classical texts provide fairly detailed information about the circumstances of her death and burial, including descriptions of the mausoleum in which she was buried, and yet this, too, is one of the tombs that eludes us. Could it be that its remains have already begun to

come to the surface, having been submerged off the coast of Alexandria for centuries, or was Cleopatra in fact buried elsewhere in secret at a location that might yet be revealed by archaeologists still looking for her last resting place today?

There is a certain mystery here – why haven't we found these tombs yet? What's going on? Could the thousands of votive offerings to Imhotep discovered at Saqqara have been left at the location of his tomb? What connection do the anonymous mummies found in KV 35 have to the undiscovered burials of the Amarna royals? And what are the chances that a sarcophagus of the last native Egyptian pharaoh, Nectanebo II, once actually held the remains of Alexander the Great in Egypt's capital city of Memphis?

### Ancient names and faces

It is possible to build a case to suggest where each one of these tombs might be. And in some cases, we might already have some of the evidence. As we have seen, the burial of any ancient Egyptian, no matter their status, comprised three essential parts: place (the tomb), equipment (the provisions that would aid the deceased in the afterlife) and body. In the vast majority of cases where we have any evidence of an individual's burial at all, we only have one of these three: we have found thousands of tombs of various kinds, but usually they have been found empty, subjected to robberies in ancient times; other evidence from the same interment might crop up elsewhere, the items having appeared in secondary contexts such as caches, or cropped up without provenance on the antiquities market (in those cases the items were probably discovered in or around the relevant tomb but illicitly, by plunderers, before any archaeologists got there). Thousands, if not millions, of items that would have accompanied burials have been recovered, but cannot be connected to any particular tomb.

In ancient Egypt, we can recognize an alignment with our modern preoccupation with celebrity. The Egyptians placed great importance on setting down the name of the individual at death – believed to ensure a person's continued existence in the afterlife – and the relative abundance of such inscriptions has allowed us to identify the owners of thousands of

tombs and items of burial equipment, including major historical figures like Ramesses the Great. The Egyptians' genius for preserving the bodies of the dead through mummification has also meant that human remains have survived incredibly well, allowing us to look at the very faces of the same people whose names we know from the inscriptions accompanying their burial.

What more human qualities can there be than a person's name and their face? Thanks to the Egyptians' skills and funerary practices, which focused on the survival of these elements of a person, and the archaeologists who have meticulously uncovered and recorded them, we can *know* the people of ancient Egypt in a way that is rare in archaeology.

Of course, this abundance of archaeological and textual material raises expectations. We are spoilt in Egyptology in being able to connect so many things to individual people, because hieroglyphs tell us their names; no circumstantial evidence – no amount of high-tech gadgetry, geophysics, magnetometry or ground-penetrating radar – will ever be enough to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that a particular tomb belonged to such-and-such a person; only when the name of the owner can be read can the identification be made with certainty. And as we shall see, some of our missing tombs might not be undiscovered, so much as unidentified.

### Undisturbed tombs...

Perhaps the most exciting prospect when hunting out an ancient tomb is the possibility that it might be *intact*. Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 was so thrilling in large part because the marvellous objects the young king had been buried with were still in place. Over three thousand years had passed between the sealing of the tomb by the priests of the necropolis and the moment when Carter broke through that same seal, looked beyond and saw 'wonderful things', and yet nothing had moved. I imagine that those intervening millennia simply disappeared for those who were lucky enough to see the tomb in the moments after it was first opened. Like a *Mary Celeste* for ancient Egypt, it must have seemed as though the priests had left only a few minutes before. There's something magical about stepping into a centuries-old scene, every object still precisely in its place – it forces you to consider

the actions of those who left them behind, which somehow brings you closer to the Egyptians themselves. In this way, even the 'houses of the dead' can seem to bristle with life.

Though I have never been fortunate enough to be a part of such a discovery, an experience I had in 2006, while working for the Italian Archaeological Mission to Luxor, directed by Dr Francesco Tiradritti, came close. During the previous year, Professor Lorelei Corcoran of the University of Memphis, Tennessee, and I had spent a season together documenting decorated fragments from the walls of the tomb of Pabasa, a high official buried at al-Asasif, not too far, as the crow flies, from the Valley of the Kings.<sup>1</sup> By this time, however, Professor Corcoran's time was taken up with her university's mission, directed by Otto Schaden, which earlier that year had announced the first discovery of a new tomb in the Valley since Carter's great moment in 1922. The new tomb was designated KV 63.

The Theban necropolis is probably the richest of the many ancient cemeteries in Egypt and comprises hundreds of tombs, with more being discovered each year as excavations continue to uncover new material. Here and elsewhere, numbering systems have been introduced in modern times to aid the identification of the tombs, which is particularly useful when the name of the owner is unknown. In Thebes, tombs of non-royal individuals are given a number preceded by the letters 'TT', which stand for 'Theban tomb'. Confusingly, the letters are occasionally changed to reflect more precise locations within the necropolis: for example, TT 320, which, famously, was found to contain the mummies of many of the pharaohs of the New Kingdom, is sometimes referred to as DB 320 because of its location in the area of Deir el-Bahri. Tombs in the Valley of the Kings are numbered according to a separate system, in which the prefix is 'KV' for 'Kings' Valley'. In this case, the system was introduced by the British Egyptologist John Gardner Wilkinson in 1821. He listed twenty-one tombs that were known to him, and tombs discovered subsequently were given numbers following this original list. Hence the numbering sequence, at least from KV 22 onwards, reflects the sequence in which the tombs were found. The tomb of Tutankhamun was the sixty-second to be discovered, and is thus KV 62. And so Otto Schaden's discovery, being the first in the valley since Carter's, is called KV 63. The tombs

in a separate branch of the Valley of the Kings are sometimes referred to by a 'WV' ('Western Valley') number, but the numbers are the same as those in the main Valley, hence KV 23 is also WV 23. Tombs in the so-called 'Valley of the Queens' are also given separate 'QV' ('Queens Valley') numbers, and there are further tombs including many now lost or only recently identified that have not yet been given numbers in any of the main sequences.

Schaden's discovery turned out not to be a tomb in the sense that we might usually mean, in that it was never used to bury anybody; rather, it was an undisturbed cache of embalming equipment, perhaps associated with the burial of Tutankhamun (see Chapter 3). To the Egyptians, the materials used in the preparation of the body, such as jars containing embalming oils or the salts used to purify the body, were themselves considered sacred, even if they were not to be buried with the deceased, and could not therefore be discarded carelessly. Instead, they were often given a burial of their own, referred to now as an 'embalming cache'. The best known of these is a deposit bearing the name of Tutankhamun found in 1907 in a shallow pit in the Valley of the Kings. This was initially mistaken for the remains of the tomb of Tutankhamun, and the pit given a tomb number, KV 54. It was only fifteen years later, when Carter discovered



The jumble of coffins and jars as found by Otto Schaden in KV 63.

the real tomb of Tutankhamun in another part of the Valley, that it was shown conclusively that KV 54 was not a tomb as such, but a cache.

I was invited with the rest of the Italian team to visit KV 63 before the objects were removed for cataloguing and conservation – my first encounter with a tomb left essentially intact since it was sealed. It may only have been a cache, but it was still quite a sight. The material – mostly a series of coffins of varying sizes, and some large jars – was obviously ancient, and from its disposition – everything somewhat piled up, without the care and attention we now accord anything this fragile and ancient – obviously still *in place*, exactly where it had been left, probably in the late 18th Dynasty. This was the first time I became aware that objects like this, far from being inanimate, could be very much the opposite, when their position conveys something of the actions of the last person to have handled them. I stood with the others at the bottom of the shaft, a few metres away from the material itself, and gawped, rooted to the spot. Professor Corcoran, arriving last, seemed amused: 'you know, you can go a little closer'. I wasn't conscious of having stood back, but I obviously had, too nervous, reverent even, to get any closer. It was like meeting an ancient past I had until then known only from a distance – from books, or objects I had seen in museums, behind glass – for the first time, and I was overcome. I went into the tomb a little blasé, thinking that I was more interested in other, less sensationalist aspects of Egyptology than a new tomb in the Valley of the Kings. But I came away with a different perspective, an altered understanding of why archaeology, ancient history and ancient things can be so compelling. I feel immensely privileged to have had that experience, and I hope some of that excitement, the thrill of connecting with the ancient past, might come across in the pages that follow.

### Modern mavericks

Many of the discoveries of the past were made at a time when archaeology in Egypt was, by modern standards, often as much a treasure hunt as a serious academic pursuit. Egyptology in the 21st century is a rigorous scientific discipline, practised by highly trained and talented individuals in controlled conditions. But that is not to say that there are not also a