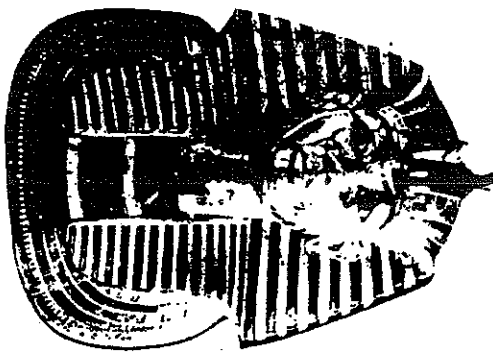


# The Curse of the Pharaohs

## Death awaited the discoverers of Tutankhamun's tomb

**D**eath will come to those who disturb the sleep of the Pharaohs... That was the warning found inscribed in the tomb of the Egyptian boy king Tutankhamun at Luxor when it was opened in February 1923 - for the first time in 3,000 years.



The man who led the expedition to Egypt to excavate the ancient tomb was an Englishman, 57-year-old Lord Carnarvon. And the Curse of the Pharaohs was well known to him. He knew what had happened to the man who, in the late 19th century, had brought another Pharaoh's coffin back to England. Arthur Weigall, one of the men in Lord Carnarvon's team, had told him all about the owner of that coffin: 'No sooner had he obtained the coffin than he lost his arm when his gun exploded. The ship in which the coffin was sent home was wrecked. The house in which it was kept was burnt down. The photographer who took a picture of it shot himself. A lady friend of whom the owner was very fond was lost at sea. The list of accidents and misfortunes charged to the spirit connected with the coffin is now of enormous length.'

But before the expedition went down into the tomb of Tutankhamun, Weigall heard Carnarvon make light of the Curse. Weigall warned: 'If he goes down in that spirit, I give him two months to live.'

Carnarvon's scorn of the Curse was perhaps only bravado. For two months earlier, he had received a letter from a well-known mystic of the day, Count Hamon. The cryptic message read: 'Lord Carnarvon not to enter tomb. Disobey at peril. If ignored will suffer sickness. Not recover. Death will claim him in Egypt.'

The English nobleman was so concerned about this warning that he twice consulted a fortune-teller - who twice forecast Carnarvon's early death in mysterious circumstances.

And within two months of breaking into Tutankhamun's tomb, Carnarvon

was dead. Moreover, within six years, 12 more of those who had been present when the funerary chamber had been breached had also died prematurely. And over the years that followed, the Curse of the Pharaohs claimed several more victims among those who had been associated with the fateful expedition. One of them was the man who had twice warned Carnarvon of disaster Weigall.

The sinister saga began in April of 1923 when one morning Carnarvon awoke in his Cairo hotel room and said: 'I feel like hell.' By the time his son arrived at the hotel, Carnarvon was unconscious. That night he died. His death was attributed to a mosquito bite - which was noted to be in the same place as a blemish on the mummified body of King Tutankhamun.

Carnarvon's son was resting in an adjoining room at the moment his father died. He said: 'The lights suddenly went out all over Cairo. We lit candles and prayed.'

Shortly afterwards there was another death at the hotel. American archaeologist Arthur Mace, who had been one of the leading members of the expedition, complained of tiredness, suddenly went into a coma and died before doctors could even diagnose what was wrong with him.

Deaths followed one upon another. A close friend of Carnarvon, George Gould, rushed to Egypt as soon as he heard of the earl's death. He died within 12 hours. Radiologist Archibald Reid, who X-rayed Tutankhamun's body, complained of exhaustion. He went home to England and died shortly afterwards. Carnarvon's personal secretary on the expedition, Richard Bethell, was found dead in bed from apparent heart failure. British industrialist Joel Wool was one of the first visitors to the tomb. He died soon afterwards from a mysterious fever. By 1930, only two of the original team of excavators who had broken into the tomb were still alive.

The Curse of the Pharaohs was still taking its toll half a century later. In 1970, the sole survivor of the Tutankhamun expedition, 70-year-old Richard Adamson, gave a television interview to 'explode the myth of the death curse.'

Mourners at a funeral in Moinești, Rumania, were astonished to see a face peering down on them from the open coffin as it was being carried shoulder-high across a road outside the cemetery.

The 'body' - a woman - then leaped out of the coffin and ran off down the road. She ran straight into the path of a car, was knocked down and killed.

## THE WORLD'S GREATEST MISTAKES

He told viewers: 'I don't believe in the myth for one moment.' Afterwards, as he left the Norwich television studios, his taxi collided with a tractor, throwing him out on to the road. A passing lorry missed his head by inches.

It was the third time that Adamson, who had been security guard to Lord Carnarvon's expedition, had tried to put paid to the legend. The first time he spoke against it, his wife died within 48 hours. The second time, his son broke his back in a plane crash. After the third occasion, Adamson, recovering in hospital from head injuries, said: 'Until now, I refused to believe that there was any connection between the Curse and what happened to my family. But now I am having second thoughts.'

A year later, the Curse of the Pharaohs struck again, but this time Tutankhamun had no hand in it. British Egyptologist Professor Walter Emery was digging for the tomb of the god of medicine, Imhotep, at Sakkarah, near the Pyramids, when he uncovered a statue of Osiris, the god of death. The professor was handling the statue when he fell dead from a cerebral thrombosis.

Fears of the Curse of the Pharaohs were revived in 1972 when the golden mask of Tutankhamun was crated for shipment to Britain for an exhibition at London's British Museum to mark the 50th anniversary of the tomb's discovery.

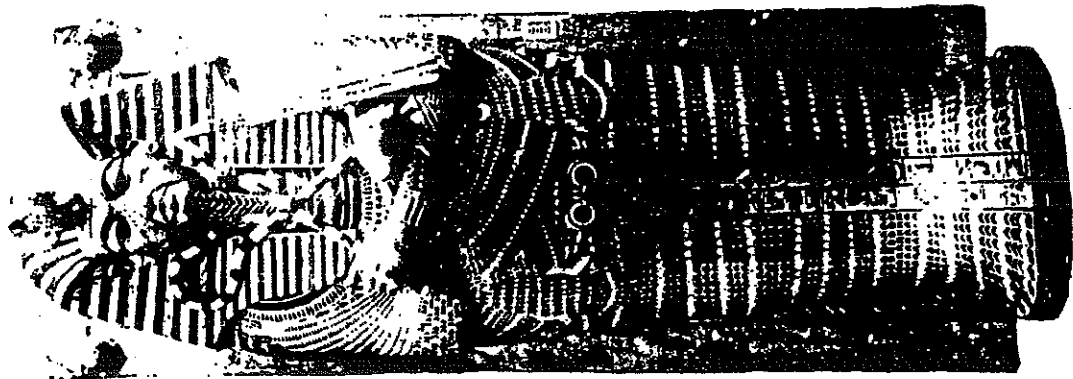
In charge of the operation was Dr. Gamal Mehrez, director-general of the antiquities department of the Cairo Museum, where he was responsible for the safe keeping of 20 ancient mummies. Dr. Mehrez did not believe in the Curse — not even after his predecessor had suddenly died within hours of signing an agreement to send the treasures of Tutankhamun to Paris. Mehrez said: 'I, more than anyone else in the world, have been involved with the tombs and mummies of the Pharaohs. Yet I am still alive. I'm the living proof that all the tragedies associated with the Pharaohs are just coincidence. I don't believe in the Curse for one moment.'

On February 3, 1972, the shippers arrived at the Cairo Museum to remove the crated golden mask of Tutankhamun and prepare it for its journey to London. That day, Dr. Mehrez died. He was 52. The cause of his death was given as circulatory collapse.

Unperturbed, the organisers of the exhibition continued with the arrangements. A Royal Air Force Transport Command aircraft was loaned for the job of transporting the priceless relics to Britain. But within five years of the flight, six members of the plane's crew were to be struck by death — a fortune.

During the flight, Chief Technical Officer Ian Lansdowne jokingly kicked a box containing Tutankhamun's death mask. He said: 'I've just kicked the most expensive thing in the world.' That leg was later in plaster for five months, badly broken after a ladder inexplicably collapsed under Lansdowne.

The aircraft's navigator, Lieutenant Jim Webb, lost all his possessions after



Above The mummy of Tutankhamun.

Above right Lord Carnarvon (left)

entering the tomb of Tutankhamun.

Right The Earl of Carnarvon.