

# NILE



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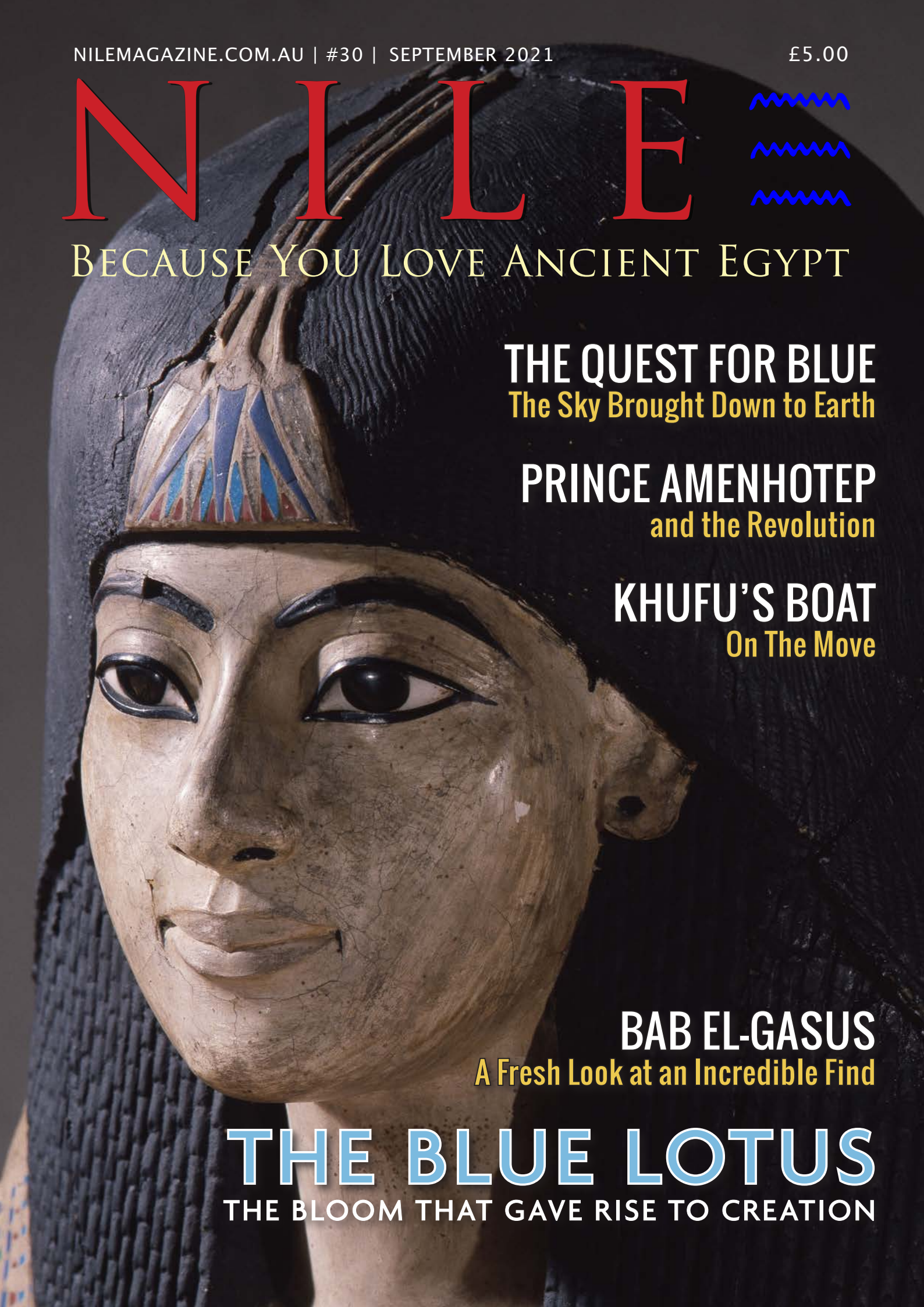
**THE QUEST FOR BLUE**  
The Sky Brought Down to Earth

**PRINCE AMENHOTEP**  
and the Revolution

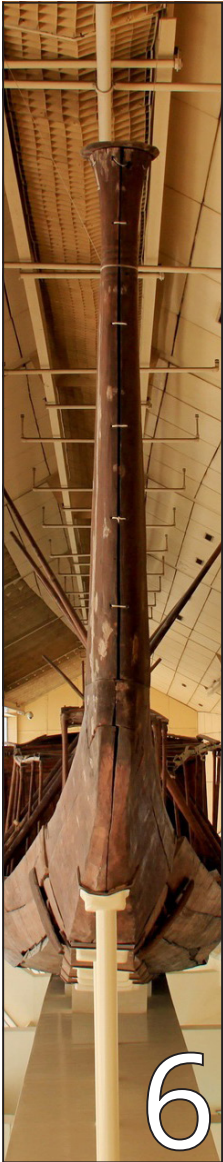
**KHUFU'S BOAT**  
On The Move

**BAB EL-GASUS**  
A Fresh Look at an Incredible Find

**THE BLUE LOTUS**  
THE BLOOM THAT GAVE RISE TO CREATION



# NILE



## A NEW HOME FOR KHUFU'S BOAT

Jeff Burzacott

As old as the Great Pyramid, Khufu's first "Solar Boat" was discovered almost 70 years ago. Its future, however, was uncertain. But what was riskier—the erratic climate of its onsite museum or moving the entire 45-tonne wooden boat to a new home? They chose to move it.



## THE QUEST FOR BLUE

Tom Verde

Egyptian Blue first appeared around 3250 B.C.—over 600 years before the Great Pyramid was built. Tom Verde looks at the world's first synthetic pigment.



## PRINCE AMENHOTEP and the REVOLUTION

Jun Wong

Around 1350 B.C., King Amenhotep IV was pondering a controversial name change—to Akhenaten. Jun Wong looks at the ideology of this revolutionary pharaoh, and the messages his new artistic style was intended to convey.



## THE AWAKENING OF BAB EL-GASUS

Rogério Sousa

The largest undisturbed tomb ever discovered in Egypt was unearthed in 1891. Here was a communal tomb containing 153 coffin sets. Rogério Sousa looks at Bab el-Gasus, and finds that the "Gate of the Priests" still has a lot to tell us.



## LOOKING BACK

Jeff Burzacott

A special extended *Looking Back* that explores how ancient Egypt's famous monuments became instruments for propaganda during World War I.

# NILE

## COVER STORY



## THE BLUE LOTUS

Khadija Hammond

Funerary masks present the deceased in a perfect, eternal state. This particular one has a serene quality that is simply mesmerising. This cartonnage mask belonged to a high official at the end of the 18th Dynasty, around 3,300 years ago. As a symbol of rebirth, a lotus bloom hangs over the front of his wig. This indicates that this man has been elevated as a pure, divine spirit.

But why a lotus? **Khadija Hammond** explores the flower's place in ancient Egyptian myth and medicine, as well as its central role in living forever.

# 16

CINQUANTEAIRE MUSEUM, BRUSSELS. ACC. NO. KMKG E.6884  
PHOTO: WERNER FORMAN ARCHIVE/HERITAGE IMAGES / ALAMY.COM

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**W**ELCOME TO NILE MAGAZINE #30. This issue is dedicated to the force of nature we knew as Jane Akshar, who passed away suddenly in Scotland in early September. Like many, many others, your editor enjoyed the hospitality of Jane's Flats in Luxor, which she built with her Egyptian husband, Mahmoud, and helped provide guests the experience of a lifetime in Luxor.

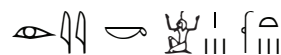
Together with her friend Joanne Stables, Jane founded *Accessible Egypt* to campaign for greater disability access to Egypt's major heritage sites. We featured Jane and Joanne's *Accessible Egypt* in issues #10 (Oct. 2017) and #15 (Aug. 2018). Their fighting spirit saw paths upgraded with smoother pavers and ramps installed at Karnak Temple, with other sites to come.

Karnak's new facilities were inaugurated in April 2018 by Egypt's Minister of Antiquities and Tourism, Dr. Khaled al-Anany (shown here shaking hands with Jane), and the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Dr. Mostafa Waziry (on the right). Naturally, Jane is in her element: the centre of attention.

Thank you, Jane. As the blessing inscribed on King Tutankhamun's 'Wishing Cup' (JE 67465) goes:



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May you achieve millions of years...



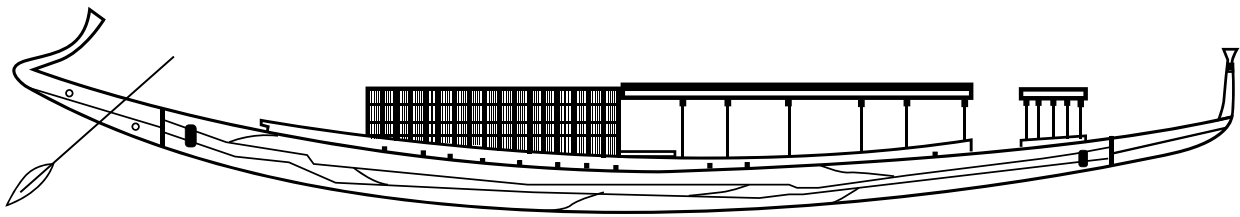
your eyes looking upon the beautiful place."

Jeff Burzacott ☰

editor@nilemagazine.com.au

# KHUFU'S BOAT ON THE MOVE

A NEW HOME AT THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM



© JEFFREY ROSS BURZACOTT

*The afternoon Giza sun casts a shadow from the Pyramid of Khafre onto that of his father, Khufu.*

*Discovered over 60 years ago in pits beside the Great Pyramid were two full-sized wooden boats, carefully dismantled and stacked over 4,500 years ago. The eastern boat has been wowing visitors since it was reconstructed*

*and unveiled in its custom-built boat museum (the building on the right) in 1982. The western boat has been slowly emerging from its pit, piece by piece, with a view to reconstruction in time. Soon, both the Solar Boat Museum and the tent warehouse (providing climate control for the western boat) will come down.*

**O**n August 6th this year, the grand wooden boat that probably delivered the mortal remains of King Khufu to the sacred precinct of his Great Pyramid, was itself transported in grand occasion. Khufu's "solar boat"—as old as the Great Pyramid itself—travelled from its purpose-built museum on the south side of the pyramid to its new home: the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Moving a 4,600-year-old boat, held together solely by

rope and wooden joints, meant a delicate 10-hour journey after months of careful planning and rehearsal.

## WHY THE MOVE?

The sealed pit in which Khufu's great boat was found had kept it safe for millennia. Its timbers were sturdy enough to withstand reconstruction and being supported under its own weight. By comparison, the museum built to showcase

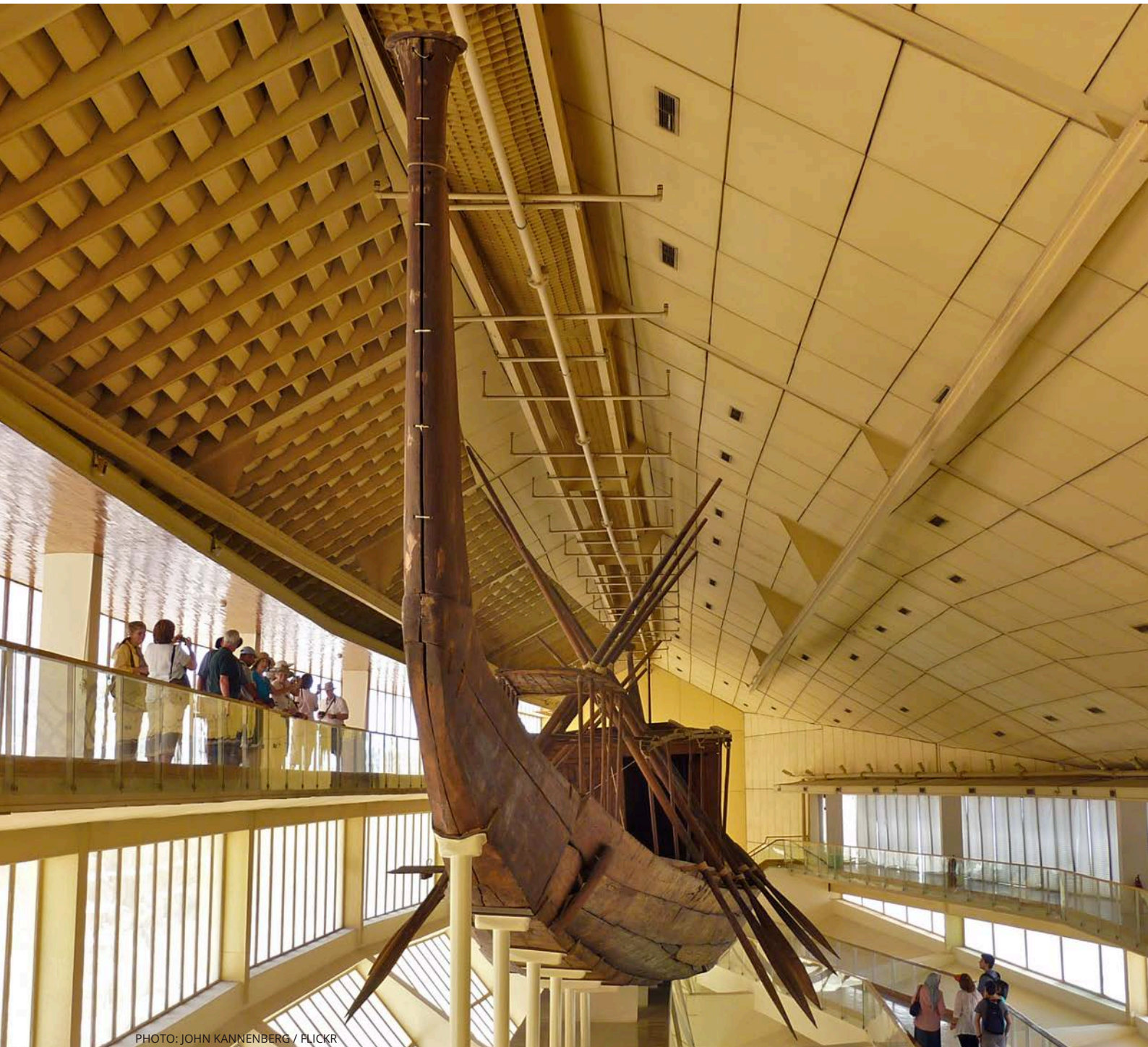


PHOTO: JOHN KANNENBERG / FLICKR

*Khufu's ships show us that the ancient Egyptians' talent in shaping wood was every bit as great as their colossal works in stone.*

*The debate regarding the purpose of the ships has been ongoing since they were discovered. Were they symbolic solar barques, designed to carry Khufu across the sky,*

*taking his place beside Re? Or were they funerary vessels used to carry the king's body on the final voyage to his pyramid? Or perhaps even both?*

*If the boats did see active service, it is likely they were towed by smaller craft—12 oars is rather inadequate for a vessel with a waterline length of over 32 metres.*

this ancient marvel was inadvertently leading to its gradual deterioration. While the bedrock pit had maintained a constant environment like a cocoon, the airy, modern museum, with its glass walls, saw temperatures fluctuate wildly between day and night, exposing the wood to daily stresses of expansion and contraction. Incredibly, when it rained, the water leaked onto the boat. For the long-term safety of the ancient boat, something needed to be done.

## THE DISCOVERY

In 1954, Egyptologist Kamal el-Mallakh was clearing debris from the southern side of the Great Pyramid, when he uncovered two sealed rectangular pits carved into the bedrock, running parallel with the face of the pyramid. The roof of the eastern pit was formed by 41 massive limestone blocks, sealed tight with mortar. Beneath them was an astounding discovery: a full-sized cedarwood ship. It had



PHOTO: WERNER FORMAN ARCHIVE / EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, CAIRO / HERITAGE IMAGES / ALAMY.COM

*This tender moment between Tutankhamun and his queen, Ankhesenamun, comes from the lid of an ivory box (JE 61477) found in the Annex chamber of the king's tomb. It is probably now part of the Tutankhamun Gallery in the new Grand Egyptian Museum at Giza.*

*These delicate figures, carved in ivory and then painted, show the young king accepting a gift of long-stemmed*

*papyrus and lotus flowers from his queen.*

*The Egyptian sun god Re was said to have been given life by breathing in the perfume of a lotus flower. Showing Tutankhamun inhaling the same fragrance was a way of associating the king with the sun god. And in the same manner as Re, Tutankhamun could be reborn every day, thus securing his eternity.*

## NEFERTEM: THE OVERLOOKED CREATOR GOD

In the beginning, was Nun—the abyss—seething with dark matter. This matter was like water but was not water, for water had yet to be created. For unimaginable eons, Atum waited, secure within the bud of a blue lotus, dreaming of the new creation. Then, in a dazzling moment infused with light, the flower breached the surface of Nun, where it revealed a being of exquisite beauty. This was Atum in childlike form—the Sunchild. He stepped forth from the lotus and began the creative process—life itself streaming forth as the rays of the sun.

One can imagine this lustrous tale of creation being told and retold throughout Egyptian history—just one of

a number of Genesis stories from up and down the Nile that somehow happily coexisted in the Egyptian mind. Ptah, for example, was the main god in Memphis, Amun in Thebes, and Hathor in Dendera. Heliopolis was the city of the sun, dedicated to the sun god Re, who became associated with Atum's blinding appearance, and was especially revered by Egypt's pharaohs. Re's story was the most prominent and widely held. From the 4th Dynasty reign of King Djedefre, each king's birth name became their "Son of Re" name.

The Heliopolis origin story also elevated the lotus as a primordial being—the god Nefertem— birthing the first creator god by the fertile "waters" of Nun. In this sense, Nefertem brought life to the creator god Atum/Re.



*Ageless and perfumed—thanks to the lotus. This is Tawosret, who appears in the tomb of her son, Irynefer (TT 290) at Deir el-Medina, the royal tomb builders' village near the Valley of the Kings at Luxor.*

*Tawosret's white wig tells us that she reached a ripe old age, which was something to be proud of in an era when reaching past your 40s was impressive. Aside from her*

*hair, however, Tawosret appears eternally youthful—the lotus on her headband providing the regenerative spark to be reborn with every sunrise. Indeed, Tawosret has been revived as an 'akh' spirit, able to cross the threshold between the worlds of the living and dead.*

*Irynefer, by the way, served under two kings—Seti I and Ramesses II—in the early 19th Dynasty.*

also with the sun god who emerged from it. William C. Hayes was a former curator of the Egyptian Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and explained that the daily rebirth of the sun in the early dawn was “a phenomenon in which the earliest Egyptian recognised the symbol of his own resurrection after the night of death. It is not difficult to see how the blue lotus came to be regarded as the manifestation of this idea.

“Each morning during the three days of its existence, the flower lifts itself out of the murky waters of the swamp and, under the warmth and light of the rising sun, opens its petals and returns to life.”

While symbolising the eternal journey of death and rebirth, perhaps the Egyptians also saw in the lotus a flower that emerged in the morning light, and faced the east, not only to greet the rising sun and mimic its behavior, but also to worship it.

It is worth pointing out at this point that the Egyptian blue lotus is not really a lotus, it is a water lily: *Nymphaea caerulea*. However, since the misnomer is so entrenched, we'll stick with it here.

One of the main differences between lotuses and lilies is a quality of the latter that helped connect them with death and rebirth: when they die, lily flowers wilt and fall beneath

(BELOW)

The blue lotus is often represented in New Kingdom faience chalices. This collection of lotus-shaped chalices is in the collection of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Such chalices acted as mediators between the divine and the individual—the liquid inside was infused with the magical properties of the vessel's shape and decoration.

The ingredients in the following remedy for jaundice include lotus leaves soaked in a concoction that included "sweet beer". Having the patient drink the potion from a lotus-shaped cup would enhance its healing properties.

Whether the lotus was included in the recipe for its soluble narcotic qualities (see page 24) or as a symbol of health and regeneration is not known.



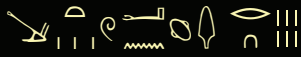
"Another (remedy): Leaves of lotus, 1/8;



wine 1/16; powdered jujube (Christ's Thorn) 1/8;



figs 1/8; milk 1/16;



juniper fruits 1/16;



terebinth resin (incense) 1/64; sweet beer 1/16;



left overnight in the dew; strained; drunk for 4 days."

(Ebers Papyrus, Remedy 479. University of Leipzig Library, Germany. Reign of Amenhotep I, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1515 B.C.)

(OPPOSITE)

This delicately-carved stela is dated to the 18th-Dynasty reign of King Amenhotep III (ca. 1375 B.C.). It was carved for luf-er-bak, a Theban noble, who stands at the right accompanied by his wife, Nebut-iunet, and two sons. Nebut-iunet wears a closed lotus at her brow, as do the female relatives seated below at a funerary banquet. Both luf-er-bak and his youngest son, Userhat, carry floral funerary offerings containing lotuses.

Nebut-iunet also wears a perfumed funerary cone to indicate that she was exquisitely anointed in the aroma of the gods, and fit to be in the presence of her deceased husband in his reborn and divine state.

In art, the lotus appears alongside any gender or class. In the New Kingdom, however, there was a special association with the lotus around women with an erotic suggestiveness. The divine bloom is included in 'Love Poems' such as recorded on the Papyrus Chester Beatty I:



"Long of neck, luminous of chest;



true lapis lazuli is her hair.



her arms putting on gold,



her fingers like lotuses. . . .



she fastens my heart in her embrace."

(Papyrus Chester Beatty I [Chester Beatty Library and Gallery, Dublin], dated to the Ramesside 20th Dynasty, ca. 1160 B.C.)



© THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM, BALTIMORE. ACC. NO. 48.414 (SECOND ON THE RIGHT) AND 48.416





PHOTO: VLADIMIR MELNIK / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Some of the most infamous images from ancient Egypt appear in a crypt beneath the Temple of Dendera, just north of Luxor, built during the later Ptolemaic Period (1st century B.C.). These are the “Dendera Lightbulbs”. The scenes portray human figures next to and supporting bulb-like objects reminiscent of giant light bulbs.

Did the ancient Egyptians possess the technology to generate electricity to power such bulbs? Of course not.

What we see here is the creation of the cosmos, represented by the elongated bulb, springing from a lotus blossom. The “filament” is the god Harsomtus (Hor-sema-tawy), who at Dendera was identified with Ra in his form as a snake. The serpentine Harsomtus/Ra emerges from the “socket”—a lotus flower.

Yes, we are looking at a shimmering object radiating out beams of light, but it isn't a lightbulb.

Wentworth Eaton lamented the plight of an Egyptian lotus that he encountered far from its homeland. It is a sad fact today that while the blue lotus can be found in botanical gardens worldwide, it is rare in Egypt.

The blue lotus once grew wild, as well as being planted in artificial pools, its yellow stamen mimicking the sun within the blue sky of the petals. Today, however, due to land reclamation, the bloom is found growing wild only in the Delta and is seriously endangered. It is our goal to reintroduce this magical flower again.

Bakr Fahmy, who runs *Blue Lotus Guest House* in Saqqara raises the blue water lily in ponds on the property, and from this stock, we are establishing pools and cultivating the plant in Luxor. I was overjoyed to see how huge the flowers grow here in Upper Egypt. They love the scalding bright sunlight, and are the size of dinner plates.

The ancient Egyptians referred to the beginning of creation as *sep tepy* (𓂏𓂐𓂑𓂒): “the First Occasion”. And

they knew something about their “Big Bang” that we don't today: what it smelt like: lotus flowers. We hope that our efforts mark a new First Occasion for the Egyptian blue lotus, whose ancient veneration is captured by Arthur Wentworth Eaton in the last stanza of his poem:

“And thou didst symbolize the deathless power  
That under all decaying forms lies hid,  
The old world worshipped thee, O Lotus flower,  
Then carved its sphinx and reared its pyramid!”

N

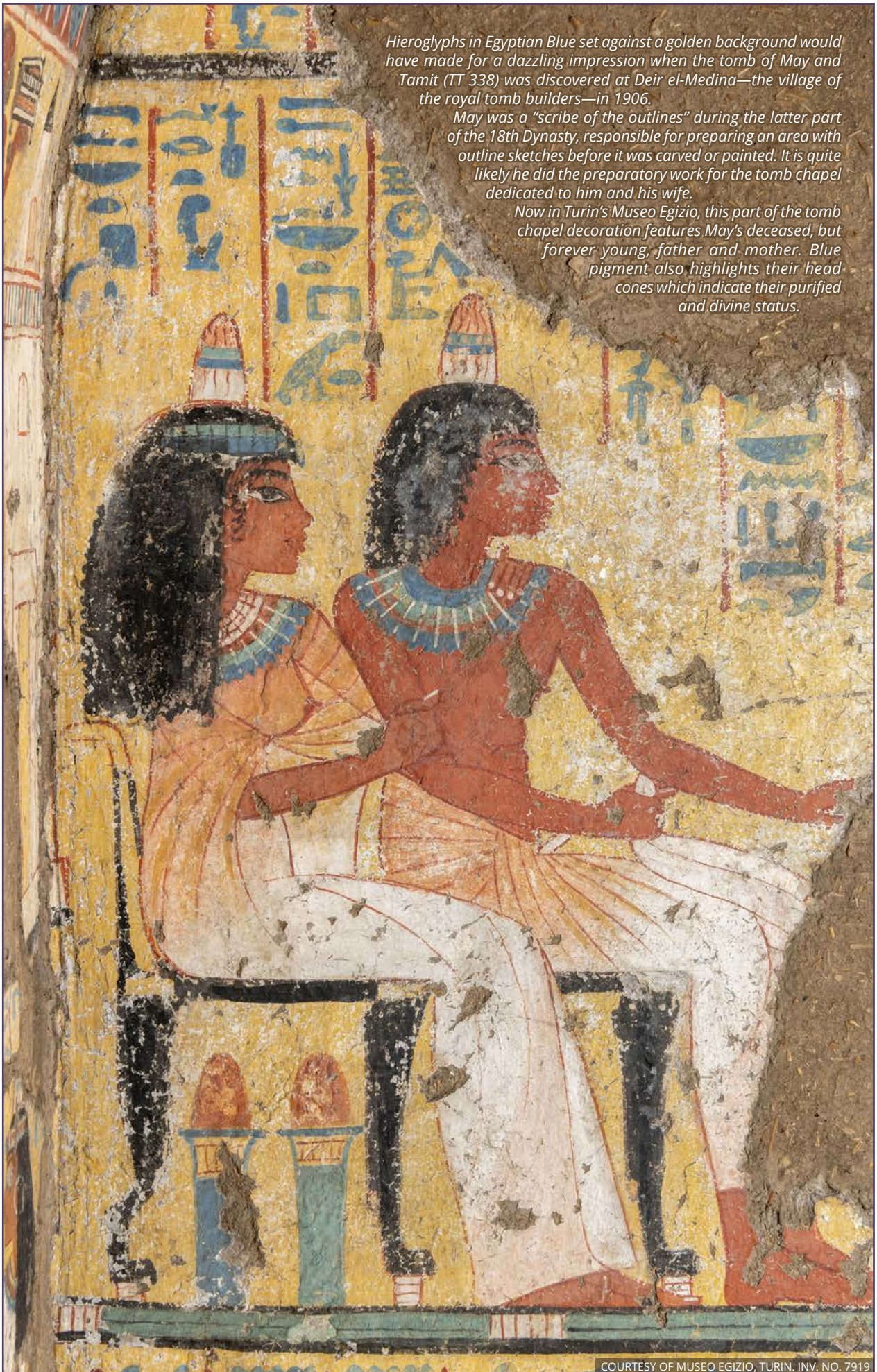


**KHADIJA HAMMOND** lives in Luxor and is a long-time scholar of ancient Egypt. She is co-director of Team Bastet—the project that aims to restore the Great Temple of Bastet in Zagazig, along with her husband, Dr. Elsayed Hegazy.

Hieroglyphs in Egyptian Blue set against a golden background would have made for a dazzling impression when the tomb of May and Tamit (TT 338) was discovered at Deir el-Medina—the village of the royal tomb builders—in 1906.

May was a “scribe of the outlines” during the latter part of the 18th Dynasty, responsible for preparing an area with outline sketches before it was carved or painted. It is quite likely he did the preparatory work for the tomb chapel dedicated to him and his wife.

Now in Turin's Museo Egizio, this part of the tomb chapel decoration features May's deceased, but forever young, father and mother. Blue pigment also highlights their head cones which indicate their purified and divine status.



COURTESY OF MUSEO EGIZIO, TURIN. INV. NO. 7919



PHOTO: HEMRO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Using blue to represent the heavens, Egyptian artists of the 1st-century B.C. produced stunning ceiling reliefs in the Temple of Hathor at Dendera. The huge amount of blue needed meant that without artificial Egyptian Blue, scenes like this would have been impossible.

This scene, featuring the waxing moon supported on a pillar, decorated with the healing Eye of Horus, is from the temple's outer hypostyle hall. According to Egyptian mythology, the god Horus lost his eye during a battle with Seth (the murderer of his father, Osiris). The eye was subsequently healed by Thoth, who is shown at the right-hand side of this scene. The destruction and healing of the eye was symbolically coupled by the ancient Egyptians to the waning and waxing of the moon. To the left of the moon are 14 stairs with gods who are connected to the 14 days leading up to the full "healed" moon. From right to left they are Min, Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Nephthys, Hathor, Horus, Tjenenyet (consort of the war god Montu), and Iunit (also a consort of Montu).

Consummate problem solvers that they were, they arrived at a solution: invent the world's first synthetic pigment, the colour blue.

The technical name for what the Egyptians created is calcium copper silicate ( $\text{CaCuSi}_4\text{O}_{10}$ ) a composition that happens to match that of the rare, sapphire-blue mineral, cuprorivaite. The recipe for what came to be known as "Egyptian Blue" called for mixing chalk or limestone with a copper-rich mineral, typically malachite, together with silica-rich sand and an alkali flux, as a bonding agent. Available fluxes included potash, a potassium compound derived from wood ashes, and natron, a naturally occurring sodium carbonate. (Historians lean towards natron as the more likely candidate, since it was readily available and

routinely used by the Egyptians in other applications like mummification to desiccate corpses.) When fired at extremely high temperatures—between 1,470 and 1,650 degrees Fahrenheit (798 and 898 degrees Celsius)—the result was a richly blue, opaque, glass-like material called frit. Ground to powder and mixed with a binder, such as oil, the frit produced an enduring paint that varied in intensity from a deep, rich lapis blue (hence its Egyptian name) to lighter, pastel shades, depending on how finely it was ground, much like the grade of olive oil dilutes with each subsequent pressing.

It was commonly thought that Egyptian Blue made its debut around 2550 B.C. Research by Corcoran, however, established a much earlier date, nearly to the beginning of



pharaonic times, owing to previously unknown chemical properties of the pigment. In 2009, scientists discovered that Egyptian Blue emits near-infrared wavelengths. Though invisible to the naked eye, the emissions are detectable under red light and appear glowing white on objects, even after the paint has faded. In this way, researchers at the British Museum detected traces of Egyptian Blue on the Parthenon's Elgin Marbles, confirming for the first time that the figures in the famed classical Greek frieze were once painted.

Armed with this data, Corcoran examined a 5,000-year-old Egyptian bowl in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and was able to establish that a symbol of a scorpion on the bowl was painted with Egyptian Blue sometime around 3250 B.C., making it the earliest known use of the pigment. That's around 650 years before the age of Egypt's great pyramids. "Its significance is that it documents that the technology to produce Egyptian Blue was known at a very early date," Corcoran says. "It also points to the very symbiotic relationship in ancient Egyptian society between art and technology."

With an endless supply of blue at their disposal, the ancient Egyptians liberally used it on the wall paintings of temples and tombs to represent the Nile or the deep blue

background of the night sky, offset by twinkling golden stars. As Corcoran points out, it also highlighted the funeral masks of pharaohs while scribes dipped their reed pens into small pots of the pigment to add richness and depth to hieroglyphic texts.

While they were on a roll, Egyptian craftsmen also found that they could produce objects that emerged from kilns self-coated in a brilliant, turquoise blue glaze by combining silica (again, either sand or crushed quartz) with small amounts of sodium, calcium, and a bit of water. (The Mesopotamians may have already developed the technique in the late 5th-millennium B.C. and passed it on to the Egyptians; other scholars believe the transmission went the other way around.)

Known as faience (aka Egyptian porcelain), the craft was yet another testament to the ancient Egyptian fondness for blue and exceptional skill at summoning it from the raw materials at hand.

"It's only in the last century or so that we have an understanding of how faience was actually made," says potter Amy Waller who mimics ancient Egyptian techniques to produce modern versions of faience in her Bakersville, North Carolina studio. While she has mastered the technique of recreating small pendants, earrings and the like,



*This is a shabti of Yuya, the father of Queen Tiye, wife of the 18th-Dynasty pharaoh Amenhotep III. The statuette would ensure that Yuya enjoyed a hassle-free afterlife by performing any disagreeable manual tasks that he might be called upon to do.*

*The shabti was crafted from beautifully grained hardwood and left unpainted except for the hieroglyphic inscriptions, striped headdress, broad collar and parts of his face. Egyptian Blue has been used to great effect throughout.*

*It may be that the decision to use blue and yellow pigment on the headdress and collar was inspired by the connection that the Egyptians made between the colour blue and the life-giving luminescence of the sun's rays that filled the sky and reflected upon the Nile. Indeed, the spell carved into the small figure that animates the shabti is introduced by the words, "Shine shabti, this shabti, toward this one blessed of the Good God, noble Yuya."*

*Also coloured blue and yellow are the two symbols that Yuya holds in his hands: the tyet (protection) and the djed (stability).*

*As parents-in-law of the king, Yuya and his wife Tjuyu were granted burial in the Valley of the Kings and provided with funerary equipment from the finest royal workshops, as demonstrated by this superbly carved shabti on which even the knees are subtly indicated.*



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART  
THEODORE M. DAVIS COLLECTION, BEQUEST OF THEODORE M. DAVIS, 1915  
ACC. NO. 30.8.57

*Jun Wong*

# *Prince Amenhotep and the Revolution*



*This plaster model, attributed to King Akhenaten, was found in the ruins of the workshop of the royal sculptor, Thutmose, at Amarna. Today it is part of the Amarna collection of Berlin's Neues Museum (Acc. No. ÄM 21351).*

© STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, ÄGYPTISCHES MUSEUM UND PAPYRUSSAMMLUNG. PHOTO: SANDRA STEIB

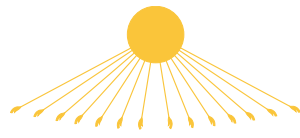
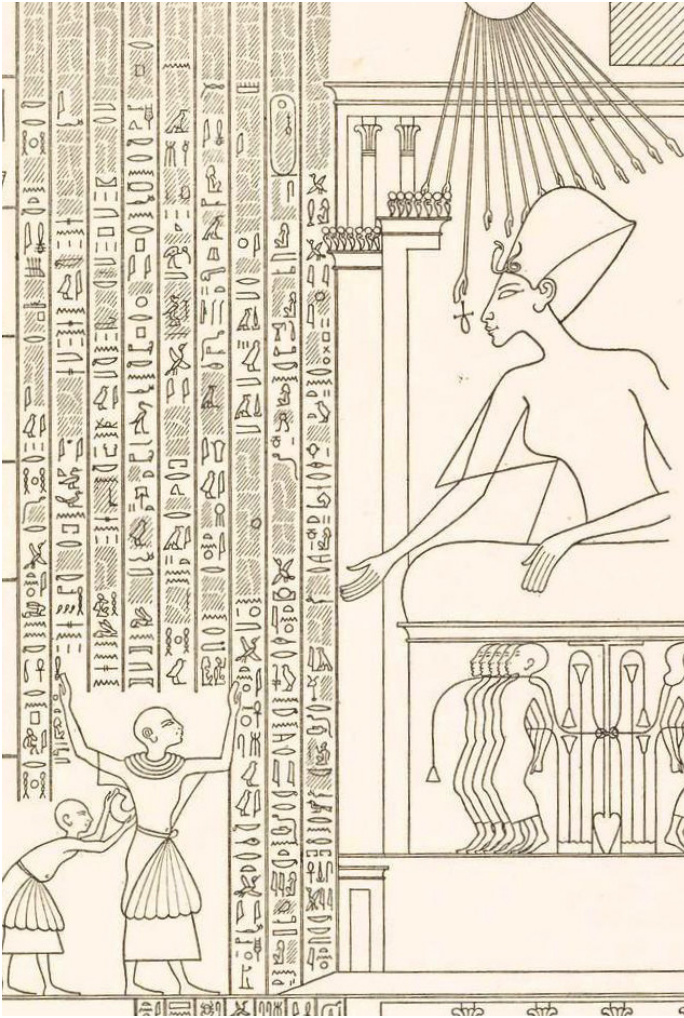


PHOTO: WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE / ALAMY.COM



This “Window of Appearance” scene appears in the Tomb of Tutu (TA 8), who was Akhenaten’s Overseer of Works and Royal Treasurer—a powerful man within Akhenaten’s court at Amarna.

Here we see Akhenaten receiving Tutu at the royal palace and appointing him as Chief Servitor by gifting him a gold shebyu collar, which Tutu is shown wearing.

This scene was published by French Egyptologist Urbain Bouriant in 1903.

Depictions of temples became common in elite tombs during the reign of Akhenaten, perhaps an indication of their increased accessibility. A distinctive feature of Amarna temples are the large number of offering tables which implies some form of communal feasting, although the extent of public participation remains debatable. The placement of the offering tables both within and outside the temple proper may suggest an intention to stratify access. Such events might have served to compensate for the discontinuance of traditional festivals honouring the old gods.

Stelae depicting the royal family are commonly found in houses at Amarna. These objects would have served to popularise the ruler’s image, with the underlying message being the displacement of the traditional divine triads. Accompanying this development was the dramatic reduc-

tion in sculptures depicting non-royal individuals. These were presumably deemed obsolete as only the royal family could adore the Aten directly.

### *Dream, if you can, a courtyard* TIME AND ‘NATURALISM’ IN AMARNA ART

In one of the more memorable lectures I have attended, the instructor began by showing a photograph from a seven year-old’s birthday celebration. The main subject was seated before a cake, surrounded by young and adult guests who were smiling at the camera. The class was asked to give their immediate impression of the photograph, and most of us gave similar answers—that the image evoked feelings of joy and reminiscence.

The next slide showed a typical Egyptian banquet scene, and we were asked to surmise what an ancient observer would have felt. The point made was a simple one—for the contemporary observer, the connotations of Egyptian art was likely straightforward and subliminal. As Egyptologist William J. Murnane noted, scholars of Egyptian art often seek to draw from these scenes “more than they were ever intended to convey”.

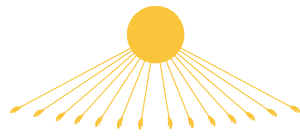
The banquet scenes (opposite) were framed by a range of schemata that only the ancient Egyptians would have fully appreciated—it is unlikely that all “blind harpists” were actually blind, although they probably evoked a certain archetype, much like how the mention of a tenor may conjure up images of a bearded, portly male in the vein of Luciano Pavarotti. Images of unguent cones and offerings trigger pleasurable scents, much of which were filled in by the observer’s memories and experience. Such scenes provide a curated view of an event, where the details are extensive but not necessarily revealing. We have all been part of a photograph like the one that was shown to my class, even though the details of each celebration would have varied greatly.

Another peculiarity shared by the birthday photograph and banquet scenes is that the subjects were rarely shown consuming food. Such a depiction was perhaps deemed indecorous in Egyptian art, although a notable exception is found in the Amarna period. A scene from the Tomb of Huya (opposite) depicts Nefertiti, Akhenaten and his mother, Queen Tiye eating. Meanwhile, in birthday celebrations, scenes of food consumption are typically captured in candid photography.

Whether recording royal expressions of emotion or streamers on a flagpole flying in the breeze, the art of Akhenaten focused on the here-and-now, capturing the moment like a snapshot. Previous artists had recorded daily activities in an idealized, timeless form that would serve the deceased in the hereafter.

—Rita Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun* (1999)





**THE HEAT BETWEEN ME AND YOU.** Informal scenes of the royal family are characteristic of tombs at Tell el-Amarna. Enjoying this royal banquet beneath the rays of Aten is Nefertiti (left), Akhenaten and his mother, Queen Tiye (right). Unusually, the Amarna king and queen are shown

eating—this was a first for ancient Egyptian royalty. French artist Émile Prisse d’Avennes visited Amarna in 1859 and recorded its scenes with a romantic flourish. This one is from the Tomb of Huya (TA 1), who was the Overseer of the Royal Harem and Steward of Queen Tiye.

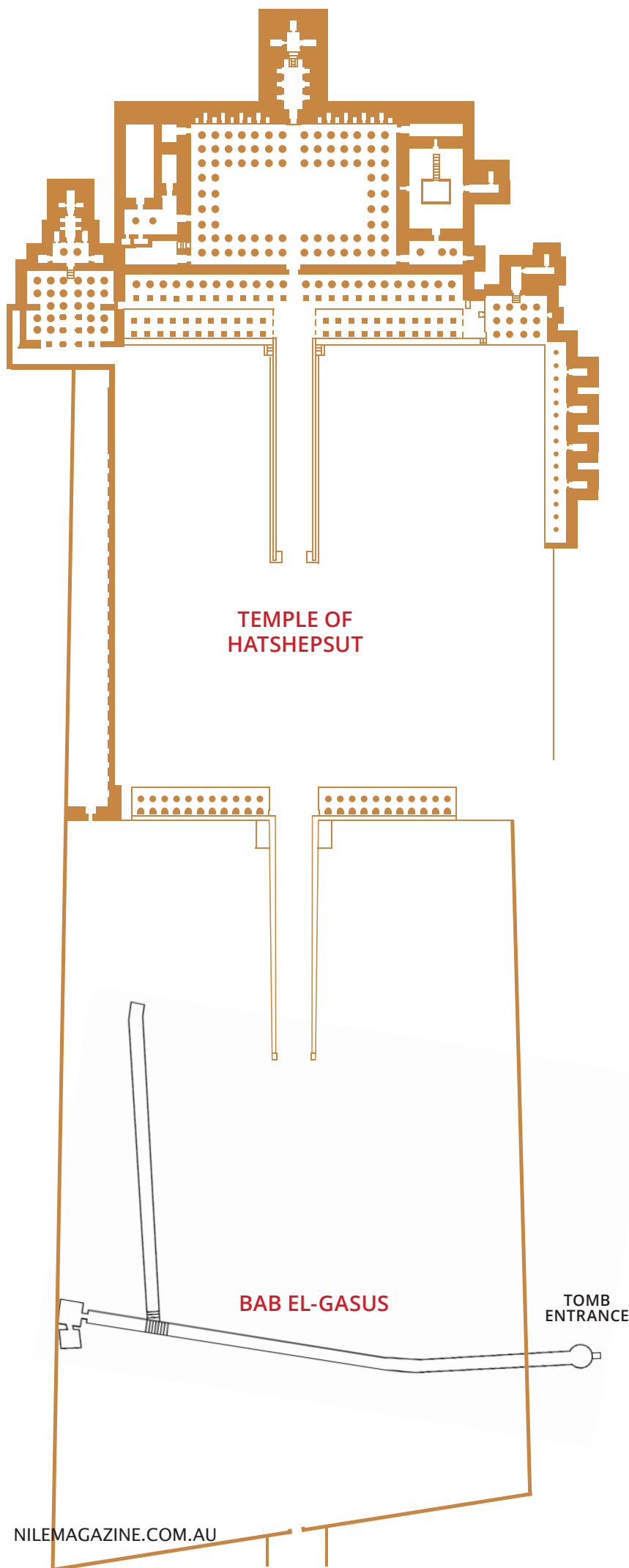


© JAAP JAN HEMMES

Egyptian tomb chapels are often painted with scenes of funerary banquets that depict the use of unguent cones on people’s heads, lotus blossoms, music, and alcohol, all of which contribute to the extraordinary sensory experiences of these events. It is likely that the banquets provided a

setting where the living could communicate with and honour the dead.

This scene is from the 18th-Dynasty Theban tomb of Nakht (TT 52), who was a temple scribe during the reign of Akhenaten’s grandfather.



The cache tomb of Bab el-Gasus was dug beneath the first court of Hatshepsut's cult temple at Deir el-Bahari, which had been built around 500 years earlier.

The choice of location for the tomb was likely no random selection. Deir el-Bahari is directly across the Nile from the great Temple of Amun at Karnak, the heart of religious activity and centre of power for the Amun priesthood and their families, generations of whom would be interred within Bab el-Gasus.

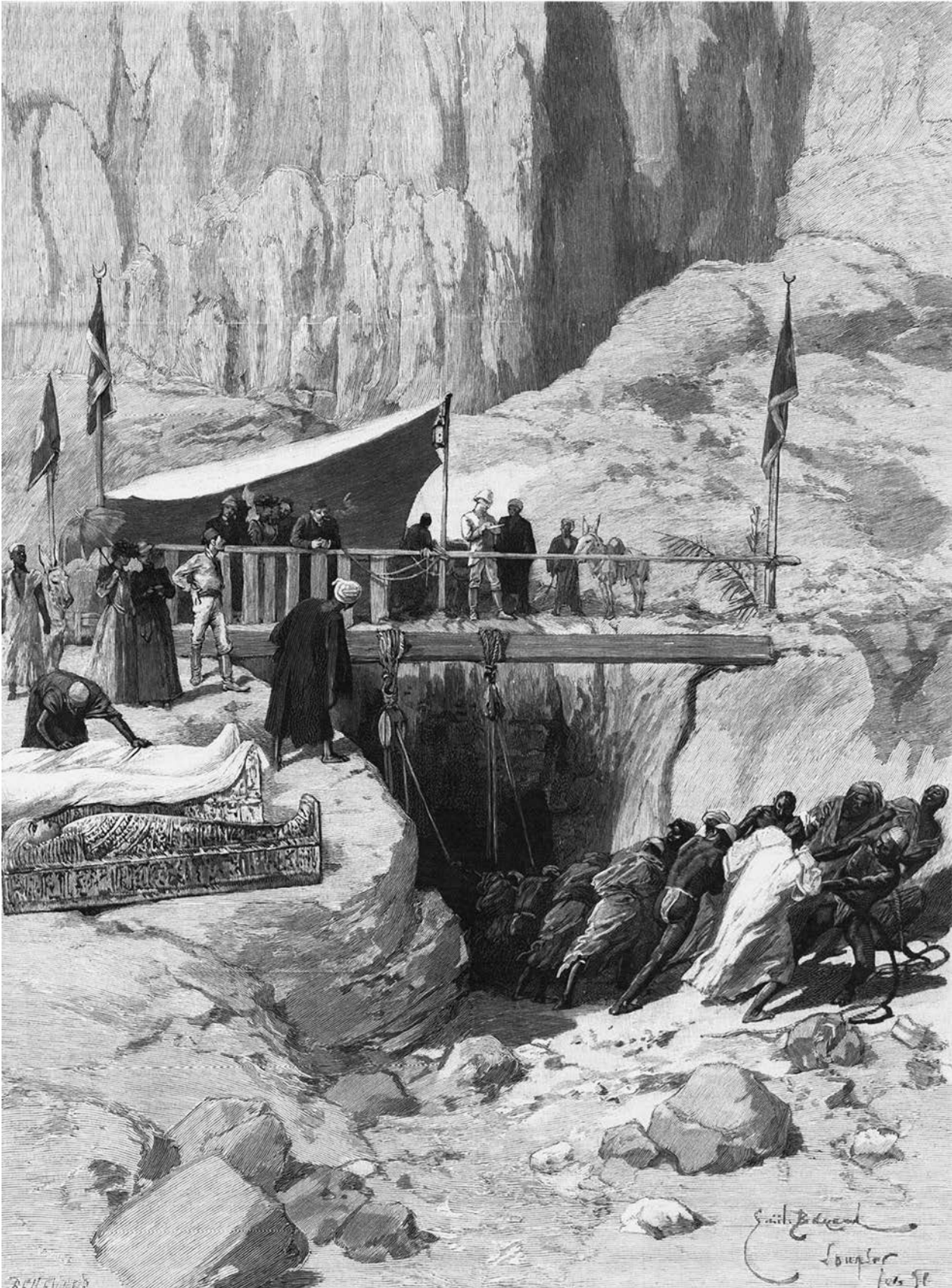
Hatshepsut herself had chosen the site purposefully: Deir el-Bahari was already occupied by the nearby Temple of Mentuhotep II—an 11th-Dynasty pharaoh and founder of Egypt's Middle Kingdom. By aligning her temple with Mentuhotep's, Hatshepsut was making a statement about her descent from the lineage of powerful kings.

As an area charged with powerful political and religious connections, Deir el-Bahari made an ideal site for the Amun priesthood to safeguard both their mortal remains and their afterlife ambitions.

It was January 1891 when Mohammed Abd el-Rassul, the same person who unveiled the Deir el-Bahari Royal Cache (DB 320), told Eugène Grébaut, the head of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, that he suspected that he had found a new tomb. At this stage, however, no one had any idea of what lay below Hatshepsut's First Court.

Clearing away the surface rubble, Grébaut encountered a series of limestone slabs which covered a layer of mud-bricks and then a second layer of stone slabs. Below was a deep shaft that had been filled with limestone chips. At the bottom was a mud-brick wall, through which Grébaut made a hole just large enough to peer through. Stretching into the gloom was an enormous corridor, the sides of which were stacked with elaborately decorated coffins. Here was the burial place of the 21st-Dynasty priests and temple chantresses of Amun in Thebes.

Due to the sheer size of the find, some of these antiquities were offered to countries with which Egypt enjoyed diplomatic relations, and in 1893, 17 lots of coffins and shabtis were shipped to the respective countries. Today, material from Bab el-Gasus can be found scattered all around the world.



An imaginative portrayal of the removal of the coffins from Bab el-Gasus. This engraving by Émile Bayard was published on the cover of the French newspaper *L'illustration* in April 1891. Eugène Grébaut is depicted below the tent leaning against the balustrade. Georges Daressy is recording the objects.

Émile Bayard worked as a journalist for *L'illustration*. He wintered in Egypt and was fortunate to be in Thebes when he heard of the finds at Bab el-Gasus, and was able to provide an eyewitness account: "The removal of the coffins has provided me with a subject for a drawing. The outer coffins display a wealth of decoration unparalleled

elsewhere.... (and) looked as if they had been made only yesterday.... such is their extraordinary state of preservation. It defies the imagination.... But what will most likely never be seen again is the transport of these coffins to the Nile.... Nothing, not even my drawing, can do justice to this amazing spectacle.... It is an unforgettable sight."

Despite Bayard being an eyewitness to the excavation, he chose to illustrate the tomb entrance as being cut into the hillside rather than a vertical shaft. Perhaps it was because it allowed him to create the spectacle of the local workers hauling the coffins out, dressed, as he described, "in their most picturesque costumes or often naked."



*The outer coffin of the God's Father of Amun, Bakenmut, arrived at the British Museum in 1893—part of Lot 4 of the Bab el-Gasus division of finds.*

*Bakenmut holds in his hands wooden amulets in the form of the Djed pillar and the Tjet amulet (a knotted piece of cloth), associated with the deities Osiris and Isis*

*respectively. Knots were widely used as amulets because the Egyptians believed they bound and released magic.*

*The text on his coffin tells us that Bakenmut enjoyed the position of God's Father of Amun at Thebes. This was a priestly title which ranked Bakenmut above an ordinary priest but not as high as a High Priest.*

*(Continued from page 52.)*

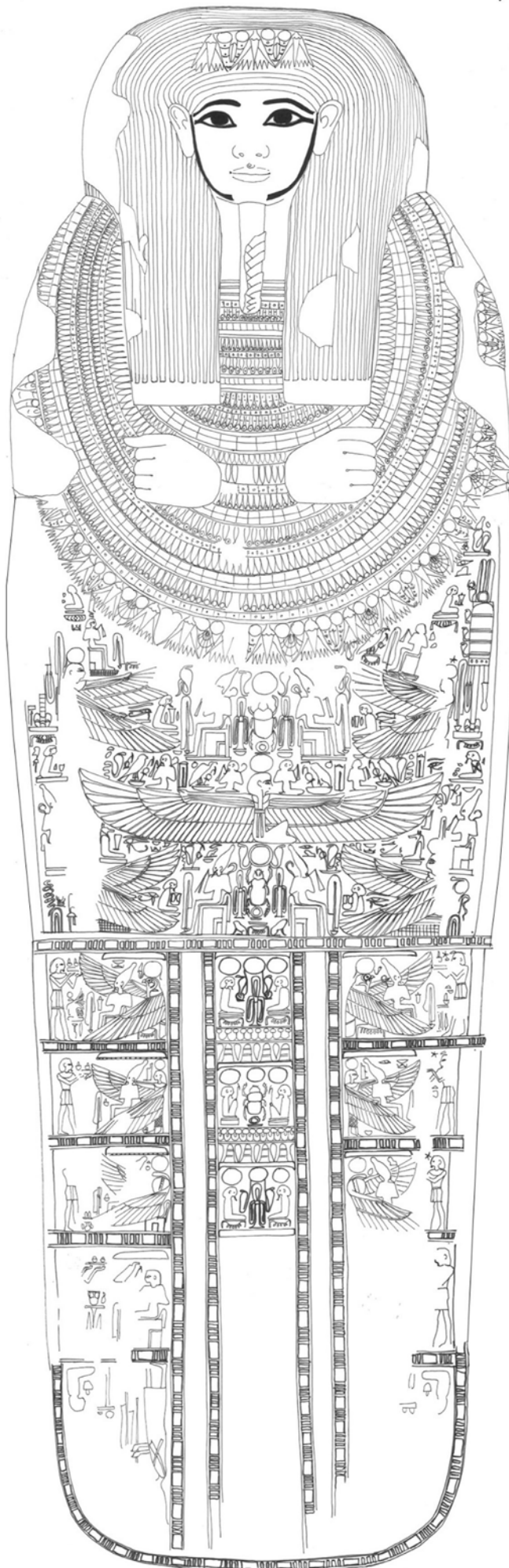
Reinforcing the impression of a hurried burial, when the tomb was sealed, with its 153 coffin sets resting in its galleries, Bab el-Gasus was still well below storage capacity. It could have easily held at least another 70 coffin sets, if not more, but was likely closed quickly to prevent the occurrence of further damage to the main burials kept in the burial chambers. Even so, a 'last visit' to the Burial Chambers took place shortly before the tomb's final closure, as a ladder was improvised by propping a coffin lid against the wall to provide access to the funerary chambers. Nearly 3,000 years later, the excavators would find the lid still in position, with the footboard, hands and face scratched from having served as a stairway.

The tomb, today known as the Tomb of the Priests of

Amun, or Bab el-Gasus, was sealed with extreme care. In fact, it was so well concealed that it was found in pristine condition in 1891, providing us the largest undisturbed tomb ever found in Egypt.

## THE DISCOVERY

The Tomb of the Priests of Amun was discovered in 1891, just ten years after the nearby "Royal Cache" of Deir el-Bahari. This collection of New Kingdom royals and priestly nobles had already been resourcefully "explored" and exploited by a local family, the Abd el-Rassul clan, before Antiquities agents claimed it. This same family would play a decisive role in the discovery of Bab el-Gasus.



DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR

The intact doorway of the tomb was opened on 4th February 1891. It revealed a long undecorated corridor hewn out of the rock, 1.70 to 1.90 meters wide, and of a similar height. The corridor was filled with scores of anthropoid coffins, and it was immediately clear that this was a collective burial holding a vast number of individuals. The coffin sets had been arranged against the walls, usually in pairs, with one coffin set on top of the other, leaving a space along the centre for easy access to the innermost areas of the tomb. When Daressy entered the tomb, the heat was stifling, but “it did not smell bad,” he stated. The tomb had provided excellent conditions for the preservation of the burial sets for almost 3,000 years, and the objects were in perfect condition.

Between the coffin sets, in no apparent order, were wooden Osiris statues and canopic jars. The floor was littered with the remains of floral garlands, broken shabtis and fragments of coffins. Shabti-boxes were located randomly in the galleries, sometimes far from the original burial assemblage. Some collections of shabtis were found in baskets, while others had simply been left on the floor.

The next day, the archaeologists began clearing the tomb by first removing the funerary accessories. Inside the galleries, Daressy prepared the coffin sets and recorded their position as they were lifted outside by a gang of workmen under the supervision of Eugène Grébaut. A fascinating photo recently released by the Collège de France shows the only known photographic record of this operation (see page 56).

The objects were then loaded onto a government steamer anchored at the riverbank. Twice a day, a procession of bearers carried the finds across the flood plain to be loaded onto the steamer. Émile Bayard, a French traveller visiting the site—and the only outsider allowed to enter the tomb—witnessed the impressive cortège of 200 men carrying 30 lavishly-decorated coffins. These men sang to accompany their steps as they journeyed down to the Nile, forming, in his words, an “unforgettable vision.”

With some of the objects now in the steamer and others remaining in the tomb, Grébaut had to assure the protection of both. He thus employed armed guards as well as the crew of the steamer to assure the safety of the find. Daressy himself took personal care of the security of the tomb. During this period, he slept in a tent near the entrance to the shaft.

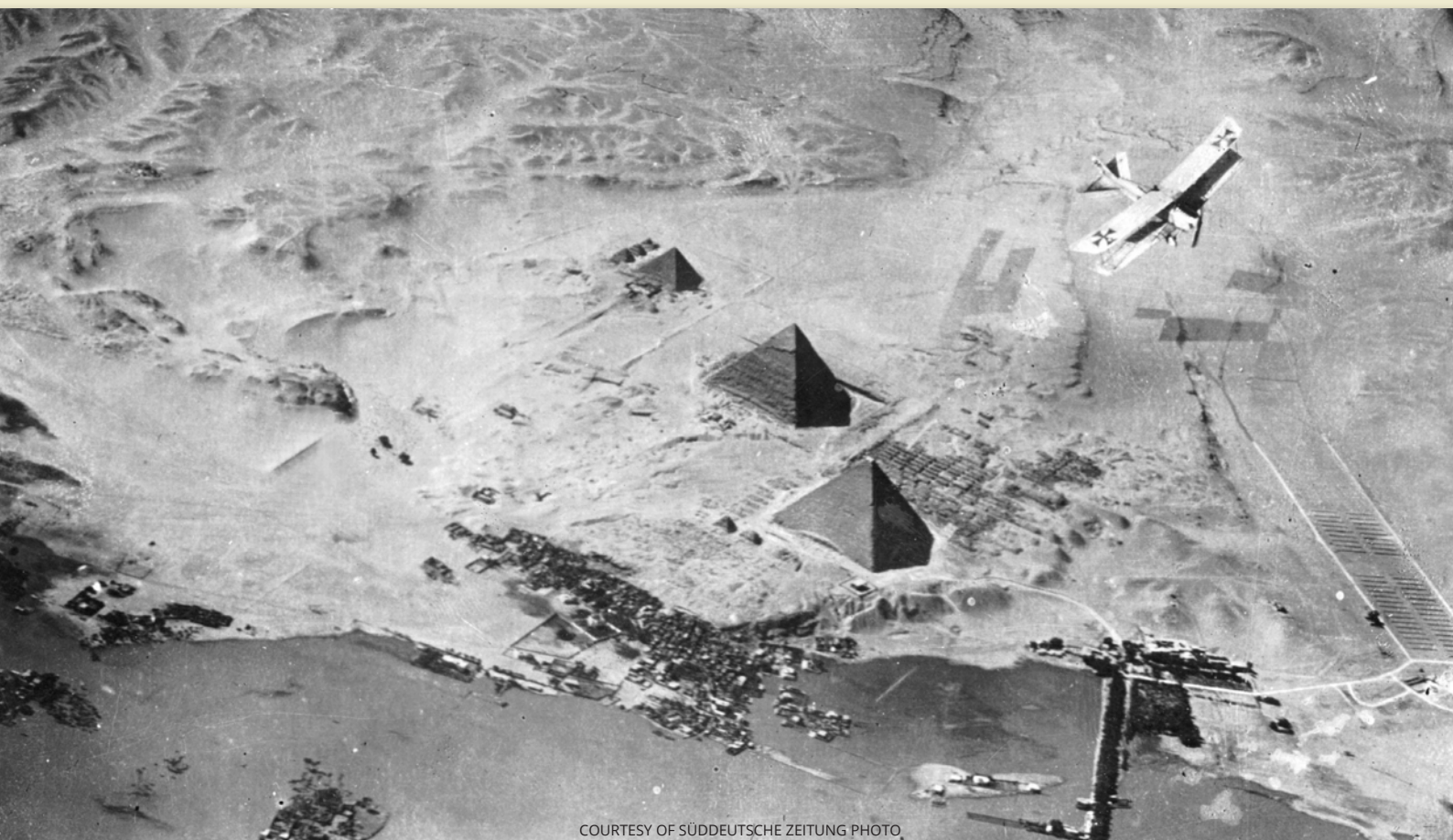
The whole clearance of the tomb was done quickly. It took only nine days (5–13 February, 1891) to secure

*This anonymous outer coffin is now in the Museo Egizio in Florence. The owner's name was never inscribed despite the empty space left by the decorators for that purpose. The clenched hands, however, indicate that the coffin was made for a man. At this time, coffins intended for women bear hands that lie flat against the surface of the lid.*

*However, traces of a headdress—likely a vulture headdress—suggest that this coffin began service for a royal woman and has been reused and adapted.*

# LOOKING BACK

## Vintage Images of Ancient Egypt



COURTESY OF SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO

*A genuine fake. This is a real 1916 German wartime photograph of the Giza Plateau, with a fake biplane added. Two clues reveal that the aircraft wasn't originally there: the conflicting shadows and the stationary propeller.*

*The photograph appears to have been taken around midday, with the pyramids casting shadows from their northern side. Even the diminutive Great Sphinx, still largely swamped by sand, casts a similar shadow. On the biplane, however, the sun appears to be shining directly from the east. Assuming there was but one sun in*

*the sky, all of these shadows should all appear parallel.*

*It can also be seen that the biplane's propeller is stationary. In 1916, film exposures were far too slow to capture a propeller in rotation, so when this photo was taken, the propeller had to be stationary. (Given that this was a mission far into enemy territory, it would be likely that the pilot would have shut the engine off.)*

*In any case, as mentioned below, we know this flight was a solo mission, and only one aircraft was in the sky at the time: the one taking the photograph.*

**T**aken in 1916, this may be the first photograph of the Giza Pyramids taken from an aeroplane. The floodwaters of the Nile inundate the lower-lying ground. The photo isn't 100% original, however: it's a photomontage created for German propaganda during the First World War.

On the 13th of November, 1916, a German Rumpler C.I biplane took off from Beersheba, in what was then Ottoman Palestine. Onboard were two German officers: pilot Lieutenant-General Richard Falke and observer Lieutenant Emil Schultheiß. They performed reconnaissance over the Suez Canal and Cairo before bombing the Cairo train station in retaliation against an Australian air raid on Beersheba two days earlier. Before the men returned to base, however, they took the opportunity to take in the pyramids where Schultheiß captured the photograph shown above and opposite.

While the background is a genuine German image made at the time of the raid, the bombing was a solo

mission, and so the biplane couldn't be included in the shot. The aircraft was added in later to rattle the Allied forces and leave no doubt about German capabilities in the sky. Copies of the composite image were reportedly later dropped at a British airfield.

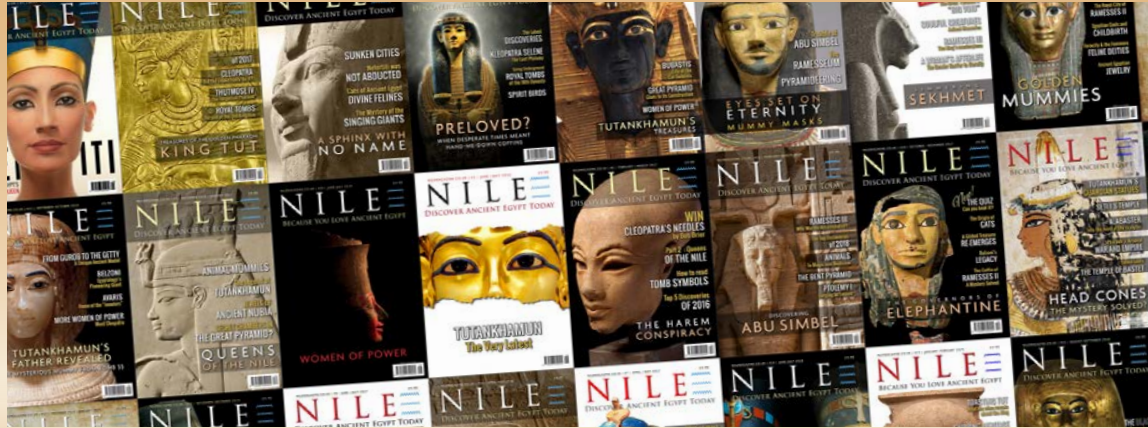
At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Egypt faced a conflict of loyalties. Although the country was formally part of the Ottoman Empire, it had been occupied by the British for over 30 years. So when the Ottomans joined the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary in November 1914, the British acted swiftly to change the status of their occupation. In December 1914, Britain declared Egypt a protectorate of the British Empire.

World War II again saw Egypt serving as the base for British garrisons, and while Giza's Great Sphinx was subsequently sandbagged against the threat of collateral damage (see NILE #21, Sept.–Oct. 2019), the 1916 German reconnaissance was the closest that any enemy forces got to the pyramids in either world war.

# NILE

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