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Tutmania: An Exploration of Western Portrayals of King Tutankhamun and Orientalism in
Egypt.

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Abstract

Since his discovery on November 4, 1922, King Tutankhamun has been turned into a symbol of ancient Egyptian culture by the Western world. Through Orientalist representation, the West has ensconced Tutankhamun into their own visualization of ancient Egypt that is removed from most historical realism. He has become a symbol for a distant and exoticized past, which further contributes to the romanticization of ancient Egypt by the West. Tutankhamun has had a profound influence on numerous Western cultural outlets including art, fashion, architecture, film, music, and much more. This is because Tutankhamun, or at least his Western portrayal, has captivated the imagination of the Occident. He has come to embody an idealized past filled with mystery, curses, and treasure. The Western world has turned Tutankhamun into a marketing tool using sensationalism and Oriental tropes of Egypt. This paper will explore the ways in which this has happened since his discovery, as well as discuss the role that Howard Carter had in all of it. Tutankhamun's discovery happened right after Egypt achieved independence from Britain, and for the first time a former colony got to keep every artifact of a European archaeological find.

Introduction

This past summer I went to the “King Tut: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh” exhibit with my family at the California Science Center in downtown Los Angeles. Myself and hundreds of other museum visitors walked around the exhibition floor looking at the ancient artifacts that archaeologist Howard Carter had carefully removed from the pharaoh’s tomb almost a century ago. But while I was at the exhibit, I could not get one particular thought out of my head. Why is it that some 3000 year old dead person is treated like an international celebrity? His tomb was found almost a century ago, so it is old news now. Despite this, millions of people have attended Tutankhamun exhibits over the years and will be familiar with him if he comes up in conversation.

King Tutankhamun today is just as popular, if not more so than he was back in 1922 when he was first discovered. He has been featured in a Saturday Night Live musical skit by Steve Martin (SNL 1978). A giant bust of his head sits atop an Egyptian sphinx in front of the famous Luxor Hotel, located in Las Vegas. Inside, there is even a re-creation of his tomb and a gift shop where one can purchase “authentic” Egyptian artifacts (Jeffrey 2004: 254-255). His discovery served as inspiration for the 1932 classic horror film *The Mummy* (Freund 1932). There is countless amounts of Tutankhamun themed merchandise out there as well: clothes, toys, jewelry, cologne, souvenirs, pencils, magnets, and a great manner of other novelties (Brier 2013). There is no denying that the world, the West in particular, is seemingly obsessed with the boy king. But why? This paper will explore the phenomenon known as Tutmania, and how it has become a part of Western society and culture.

People are not just obsessed King Tutankhamun, but ancient Egypt in general. Scholars refer to the obsession with Egyptian culture as Egyptomania (Brier 2013), and Tutankhamun was by no means the start of it. People have been fascinated with ancient Egypt since Roman times (Ashton 2004), but this paper will not trace Egyptomania that far back. It will only focus on Tutankhamun's discovery, and the time after it leading up to the present day. This paper will pay particularly close attention to the West's involvement in Egyptomania, and how it relied on Oriental tropes to further perpetuate Tutmania by turning Tutankhamun into a marketing tool. Through the use of Orientalism, the West has fitted Tutankhamun into their own visualization of ancient Egypt that is removed from most historical realism. He has become a symbol for a distant and exotified past, which further contributes to the romanticization of ancient Egypt by the West.

This paper will start with a literature review of Saidian Orientalism and Egyptomania. Orientalism is an integral part of this paper, so it is important to understand the scholarly literature on it. From there it will go on to discuss Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb in 1922, and how Tutankhamun rose to international fame through media sensationalism. It will also include a discussion of the rumored pharaoh's curse over the tomb, and how it was created by the Western media to further perpetuate Tutmania. Following this, the paper will explore the various ways in which Tutankhamun has influenced Western society and culture. The final section will discuss how Egypt's perceptions of death captured the Western imagination, which continued to fuel this fascination with ancient Egypt.

The central argument of this paper will be on the relationship between Egyptomania and Saidian Orientalism (Said 1978). The two main works it will draw on the most are Edward

Said's *Orientalism*, and Bob Brier's *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs*. The West has been involved in King Tut's discovery since the beginning. In fact, King Tut is a Westernized abbreviation of his full Egyptian name. The West has used him to convey their own preconceived notions on ancient Egypt: portraying it as an exotic and distant land filled with mystery, curses, and ancient treasures. The West has based much of its perception of ancient Egypt on heavily Orientalized archaeological finds, while "modern scholars recognize that ancient peoples were complex entities made up of diverse cultural and physical characteristics, which often do not appear in the archaeological record" (Wood 1998: 191).

Similarly, the West has also painted a romanticized vision of what it means to be an archaeologist. Howard Carter, the man behind Tutankhamun's discovery, had to deal with waves of tourists and journalists that compromised his work space to see inside the tomb and further perpetuate Tutmania. This "tourist archaeology," undermines the scientific and historical significance of actual archaeological research. Tourist archaeology is a Western practice of attracting visitors to foreign dig sites for money, rather than for educational purposes (Wood 1998: 195). Carter detested this sort of practice, and he wanted to conduct his research in peace (Carter & Mace 1977). He spent years meticulously documenting every artifact within Tutankhamun's tomb, but he received little scholarly appraisal for his work (Carter & Mace 1977: intro xxvii).

Tutankhamun's discovery exposed the West to a totally foreign conception of death. The culture of ancient Egypt encourages Westerners to explore a topic that is largely obscured within their culture. People are fascinated by mummies because of how well they are preserved. When

one looks at a mummy it is not a skeleton, but a recognizable human being (Brier 2013: 9). The body of King Tutankhamun was remarkably well preserved considering how old it was. His body still had dried out skin on it, and many facial features such as his nose and lips were still present and intact. This led to Westerners viewing Tutankhamun in exhibits as more of an artifact, rather than a human being that was alive 3000 years ago.

Egyptomania is an Occidental obsession with the Orient, the latter being Egypt. This paper will explore the Oriental manifestations of Egyptomania in the Western world, particularly in America. Tutankhamun's discovery also came at a crucial time in Egypt's history. Less than a year before it happened, Egypt became a sovereign nation and was no longer a British colony. It was around the same time that the British Empire began to weaken, and lose its imperial grasp on many of its colonized territories around the world (Darwin 1986). Egypt was a part of this trend. The discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb is significant because it marked the first time the Egyptian government got to keep all the artifacts, even though it was found by a British archaeologist (Wood: 1998, 183). In years prior, it was finders keepers for the most part when it came to archaeological finds in colonized territories. For many years, European academic and political influence was the dominant authority on Egyptian culture and society. With its newfound independence, the Egyptian government was determined to hold onto its cultural heritage, and to not let it end up in a European museum. This discovery set a precedent for Western empires like Great Britain to be more respectful of the culture and history of other nations, even if they were former colonies.

Literature Review of Orientalism and Egyptomania

Within the realm of scholarship, many academics point to Edward Said as the father of Orientalism. He was a postcolonial philosopher, and much of his work examined and criticized the way in which the Western world viewed the East. Said is widely considered to be one of the most influential cultural figures of the late 20th century. In his 1978 book *Orientalism*, he argued that scholarly literature from Europe and America held many false preconceived notions that stereotyped, romanticized, and exoticized the Eastern world. He believed that the way Western scholars viewed the East was totally inaccurate, and that this thought process created misleading images of the East which did not accurately reflect reality. Said wrote that “the Orient was almost a European invention... I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in the European Western experience” (1978: 1). Said defined the “Orient” as the stage that the West has placed the entire Eastern world upon. The Orient is essentially the constructed identity that the West has given the East.

Said argued that the West’s biased and misleading notions on the East interfered with a true understanding of Eastern culture and society. He pointed out that the West turned the East into a sort of cultural “other,” which separated them from their own culture and further reinforced the dominance of Western civilization over the world. Cultural dominance for Said was a fundamental part of Orientalism. He wrote “the Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ in all those ways considered common-place by an average European, but also because it *could* be - that is, submitted to being - *made* Oriental” (Said 1978: 5-6). The West asserted its cultural dominance over the East by reframing themselves as

superior, and the Orient as inferior. In *Orientalism*, Said sought to point out the superiority complex that the West had created for itself to justify imperial and colonial actions in the East. Said argued that “Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (1978: 7). He proposed that the West had made itself a leading authority on Eastern culture. This allowed the West to justify its own cultural superiority, which led to a manner of racist and dogmatic views of the Oriental. This paper will illustrate how this was done in Egypt with King Tutankhamun.

Much Western scholarship was ultimately political at its core, and intellectually biased to further Western ideologies. Said argued that many British, French, and American scholars were writing for the sake of empire, and actively encouraging Western countries to colonize the East. He wrote “as the study of imperialism and culture (or Orientalism) is concerned... nearly every nineteenth century writer was extraordinarily well aware of the fact of empire” (Said 1978: 14). For Said, the West was not only colonizing the East physically, it was also dominating these cultures through the use of scholarly writing.

Imperialism is both physical and ideological. An example of this can be seen in Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.” Kipling was an English journalist born in India, and many of his writings encouraged colonialism by framing the peoples of the East as inferior and that they needed to be civilized by the West (1899). Western scholars were actively undermining the East by proclaiming themselves as experts of Eastern culture, thus justifying their own cultural superiority. Said refers to this as “*strategic location*, which is a way of describing the

author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about..." (Said 1978: 20). In doing this, Western scholars were also able to establish their own intellectual dominance.

In his writing of *Orientalism*, Said was influenced by the works of a number of other scholars. One of Said's main influences was social theorist Michel Foucault. Foucault has written extensively on social interactions, power dynamics, and how knowledge is constructed within the cultural discourse of society. In the introduction of *Orientalism*, Said directly credits Foucault in helping him to better illustrate his ideas. He states:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient... by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism (Said 1978: 3).

Foucault defines discourse as a truth producing practice that creates objects of knowledge. The effects of discourse cannot be observed by thinking in terms of how it is possessed, and every discourse contains some kind of power dynamic (Foucault, 1972-1977). In the case of Orientalism, the discourse is between the West and the East. The West is exerting power over the East on the basis of scholarly writing, by proclaiming themselves as experts of Eastern culture. In turn the East is portrayed as inferior, which justifies colonial and imperial action from the West.

In his writing of *Orientalism*, Said was also influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci. He is best known for his concept of cultural hegemony, which is the domination of a society by a ruling class who manipulate culture so that their own ideologies become the accepted cultural norm (Gramsci: 1971). Said combined the ideas of Gramsci with Foucault's concept of

discourse to formulate Orientalism. In doing this, Said nuanced the understanding of Orientalism by illustrating the relationship between the “Orient” and the “Occident,” and by showing the ways in which the West marginalizes the East (Kumar).

Before Said’s *Orientalism* was published in 1978, there were a number of other scholars that were thinking and writing about similar concepts. Two such scholars are Bernard Cohn and David Kopf. Years before Said’s work, “Cohn had already anticipated the arguments of Foucault and Said in his work on representations of Indian society” (Kumar). Cohn used empirical and ethnographic knowledge to examine how colonialism had impacted various Indian villages and their caste systems. He observed that colonialism had become the dominant state of thought within India (Cohn: 1968).

Kopf’s work openly acknowledged some of the benefits it had upon India. He wrote about how Indians and their British colonizers acculturated themselves with one another to strengthen their social ties. Orientalism for Kopf was a two way street, that affected both the Orient and the Occident. He believed that Orientalists served as cultural links between East and West. For Kopf, British Orientalism in India was more a mutual respect for each others culture, rather than this notion of cultural dominance argued by Said in later years (Kopf: 1969).

So how do Said’s notions of Orientalism tie in with Egyptomania? The relationship between these two cultural phenomenon is a central theme of this paper, and they are related in many ways. In terms of scholarship, Orientalism can be observed through the field of Egyptology. Before Egypt gained its independence it was a British colony. Egypt became independent in February of 1922. Interestingly, this was less than a year before the discovery of King Tutankhamun’s tomb in November of the same year.

Egyptology is the study of ancient Egyptian history, language, literature, religion, architecture and art. At the time of King Tutankhamun's discovery, Egyptology was a field dominated by European scholars. Western intellectual dominance in Egypt was very prevalent, and the professors at Egyptian universities were almost exclusively European (Wood 1998: 182). This European domination of Egyptian history can be largely traced back to Napoleon. Said describes Napoleon's campaign in Egypt as "the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one" (Said 1978: 42). Since then, Western academics have "played a prominent role in the uncovering of Egypt's past... [consequently] Egyptians were systematically prevented, by Europeans, from studying their own ancient history" (Wood 1998: 181).

Europeans had made themselves "experts" on Egyptian culture and history, which told Egyptians that they knew their culture better than them. This Western domination of Egyptian history was still happening at the time of Tutankhamun's discovery, even after Egypt gained its independence. After all, he was discovered by a British archaeologist funded by a wealthy aristocrat that sought to keep many of the tomb's artifacts for his own private collection (Wood 1998: 183). Because of this, "the tomb and its contents soon became a flashpoint of political conflict" (Wood 1998: 182). The question of who got to keep Tutankhamun and have rights to the tomb became a heated point of contention. It soon turned into a conflict of interests between Carter and the Egyptian government. The dispute "came to a head in February of 1924 when Carter and his European associates in effect 'went on strike,' sealing the tomb... to protest government interference. In retaliation the French director of Egyptian Antiquities Service had the tomb seized and declared that contrary to past practice all the contents of the tomb must

remain in Egypt” (Wood 1998: 183). Carter eventually took the issue to court, but he was told the same thing. Tutankhamun and all the contents of his tomb would remain in Egypt, but Carter was eventually given permission to resume his excavation of the tomb in the fall of 1924.

The Sensationalization of Tutankhamun and Tourism in Egypt

When word of Howard Carter’s discovery made it to the Western media, they knew it would be a story that the entire world would want to hear about. Journalists and photographers flocked to the Valley of Kings in great numbers, and set up camps outside the excavation site. They actively reported on Carter’s excavation process to an audience that craved more news on the tomb.

[See Figure 1]

Pictured here is Howard Carter and several other workers removing artifacts from the tomb entrance. The press waited outside the tomb’s entrance for days at a time waiting for the chance to snap a picture of an artifact being removed from the tomb. The artifacts were the clear focus of the media’s attention. Newspaper articles on Tutankhamun often featured drawn illustrations and pictures of the beautiful and ornate artifacts coming out of the tomb because the media knew what the public wanted to see, the exotic possessions of an Egyptian pharaoh. The relics of an Oriental past shrouded in mystery, lost to the sands of time for thousands of years.

[See Figure 2]

This segment from the Denver Post is a perfect example of how the media captured the public’s attention. It features drawn illustrations of four artifacts, and the headline immediately lets the reader know that it is about Tutankhamun’s tomb. The popularity of King Tut only further

perpetuated the media's involvement in the discovery. The press was constantly fueling Tutmania because it was good business. The more people they got invested in this Western narrative of the discovery, the more copies they would sell. In these newspapers, the Western media had a tendency to portray Tutankhamun's possessions as commodities rather than historical artifacts.

The discovery of King Tutankhamun attracted more than just reporters and photographers. The sensationalism created by the press lured many tourists to the tomb as well, and they joined the ranks of the journalists camped outside the excavation site. There was an explosion in Egyptian tourism, and the majority of people that visited the tomb were European. After all, "tourism, like Orientalism, is the quest for the exotic other..." (Slyomovics 1989: 147). Howard Carter, the man behind Tutankhamun's discovery, had to deal with waves of tourists and journalists that compromised his work space to see inside the tomb. This "tourist archaeology," undermines the scientific and historical significance of actual archaeological research. Tourist archaeology is a Western practice of attracting visitors to foreign dig sites for money, rather than for educational purposes (Wood 1998: 195). Many Westerners went to Egypt upon hearing of the tomb's discovery to experience the wonders of the Oriental past, and to be able to boast about their trip.

[See Figure 3]

The exotic nature of King Tutankhamun's tomb was very appealing to wealthy Europeans, which is one of the main reasons tourism to Egypt became so popular. Howard Carter says that "the desire to visit the tomb became an obsession of the tourist... those who had seen the tomb boasted of the fact openly, and to many of those who had not it became a matter of personal

pride to effect an introduction somehow” (1977: 145). Tourists would go to great lengths just to get a look inside the tomb. Howard Carter had to deal with many people that would do everything in their power to gain entry to the tomb. He recalls that: “there were certain visitors whom for diplomatic reasons we had to admit, and others whom we could not refuse without giving serious offence, not only to themselves, but to the third parties whose introduction they brought. Where were we to draw the line... work in the tomb was being rapidly brought to a standstill” (Carter and Mace 1977: 145-146).

Carter did not understand the obsession that people suddenly had for Tutankhamun, and he wanted to be able to work without having to deal with reporters and tourists every waking moment. They not only interfered with his work, but they also presented a serious threat to the wellbeing of the artifacts within the tomb. Carter says that: “the presence of a number of visitors creates serious danger to the objects themselves... the tomb is small and crowded, and sooner or later - it actually happened more than once last year - a false step or a hasty movement on the part of a visitor will do some piece of absolutely irreparable damage” (Carter and Mace 1977: 146). As an archeologist, Carter needed to put his foot down on the tomb visits. They had become too much of a hassle, and he felt obligated to do so for the safety of the artifacts. Carter did not like turning people away from the tomb, but he had no other choice since he had work to do. Carter writes: “yet, surely, the claims of archeology for consideration are just as great as those of any other form of scientific research... why, because we carry on our work in unfrequented regions instead of in a crowded city, are we to be considered churlish for objecting to constant interruptions? I suppose the reason really is that in popular opinion archeology is not work at all. Excavation is a sort of super-tourist amusement...” (1977: 148). Like with

Tutankhamun, the West had also created a romanticized image of what it meant to be an archaeologist.

It is clear to see that King Tutankhamun and his “treasures” were the center of the West’s attention. Tutankhamun took the spotlight, and Howard Carter faded into the background as just the man who found him. Anthropologist Jon Manchip White elaborates on how Carter never received much acknowledgement for his research:

Although he laboured in Egypt so long and so diligently, he received no recognition of any kind from the British government... no British university bestowed on him and honorary degree. He was fiercely independent, an awkward man to deal with, and had stepped on many toes, but it seems a pity that the snobbery and jealousy of his colleagues and his countrymen should have shown itself in such a wretched lack of magnaminty. Yale and Madrid alone afforded him a token of gratitude (Carter and Mace 1977: intro xxvii).

The sensationalism of Tutankhamun created by the press was the main reason Howard Carter’s work went largely unappreciated. Tutankhamun was a relatively insignificant figure of Egypt’s history, yet he became the center of the West’s attention rather than Carter. He ascended to the throne at the age of nine, but ruled for only ten years before dying at nineteen. Mediums such as newspapers allow the public to hear about major scientific discoveries, but their significance is often undermined by cultural sensationalism. In the case of Tutankhamun, much of this sensationalism was fueled by Oriental tropes that the West had of Egypt. Even when Carter’s beloved friend Lord Carnarvon died following the tomb’s discovery, the Western media seized the opportunity for a new story to expand upon this Oriental narrative.

The Pharaoh's Curse

George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon, died on April 5, 1923. Coincidentally, he met his untimely demise a few months after the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb. Once the press got word of this they quickly reframed Lord Carnarvon's death as the result of a curse that had been laid upon King Tutankhamun's tomb. Now of course, most people would be very skeptical of such a claim. A pharaoh's curse was hard to believe, but with the sensationalism of Tutmania many people began taking interest in such an outcome. The press claimed that there were numerous Egyptian curses inscribed on the tomb walls. Anyone that would dare disturb the pharaoh's resting place would soon meet their end (Bard 2007: 230). These claims were greatly exaggerated for dramatic effect in newspapers as selling points. Below is an example from the Detroit News published the day after Carnarvon's death which clearly portrays how the press would capitalize on the pharaoh's curse.

[See Figure 4]

People love a good story, regardless of its plausibility. Curses, mummies, treasure, the find of the century was quickly turning into the story of the century as well. Tutankhamun's discovery was shaped by the Western press into an Oriental narrative on ancient Egypt, laden with exaggerated claims and falsehoods.

Despite what the press was saying, the reality of the situation was that "Lord Carnarvon was bitten on his cheek by a mosquito, and he nicked the bite while shaving. The opening became infected, and he developed pneumonia. Antibiotics had not yet been discovered, and the earl... died in Cairo" soon after (Bard 2007: 230). Reality will not sell more newspapers though, so the press did everything in their power to keep the public hooked on a fictional

narrative loosely based on actual events that happened regarding the discovery. The pharaoh's curse is the perfect example of the relationship between the East and the West. Even while the curse rumor was spreading around following the Earl's death egyptologists were debunking the curse myth. On April 6, 1923, Egyptologist D. D. Luckendill wrote in the Detroit News that ““an Egyptian King wasn't worried about what men were going to do long after his death... his interests were purely spiritual”” (Detroit News 1923). The modern origins of Egyptian curse tales can be traced back to European culture.

The ancient Egyptians did not care about cursing their tombs to deter grave robbing, it was not part of their belief system or of any concern to them. Egyptian curses are purely a cultural phenomenon of the West, and have no scientific evidence to back them up (Day 2006). They are entirely reliant on superstition. The pharaoh's curse was created by Western journalists, and the ancient Egyptians had no reason to put curses upon their burial sites. The media's use of Oriental sensationalism to sell more newspapers was one of the main ways that Tutankhamun was used in the West for capitalist purposes, but there are many other ways in which he was turned into a marketing tool.

The Marketing of Tutankhamun in the West

In the years following the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, the Western world turned him into a cultural marketing tool. He came to embody a Western envisionment of ancient Egypt. This phenomenon can be seen clearly in the United States. Tutankhamun influenced numerous cultural outlets including art, fashion, architecture, film, music, and much more. The impact that he had on Western civilization cannot be overstated, and the physical manifestations

of Tutmania are vast. This paper will list several examples that are of significant cultural interest, the first of which is the classic horror film *The Mummy* released in 1932.

Initially, *The Mummy* starring Boris Karloff was not even intended to be a film about a mummy. Most classic horror films like *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* are based off of books, but not *The Mummy*. It was an original screenplay written by John L. Balderston, a journalist who had been to the Valley of Kings to cover the discovery of King Tutankhamun. The original screenplay followed the many past lives of a woman named Helen. Her first life was as “an Egyptian princess, then a first-century Christian martyr, next an eighth century barbarian queen, a medieval lady, and then a French aristocrat. But as the film neared completion, it became clear that to capitalize on the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb, the focus should be on the mummy, so these scenes of previous lives were cut” (Brier 2013: 177). If it were not for the discovery of King Tut, this film would have been drastically different on release back in 1932. Even some of the props from the film are replicas of the artifacts from the tomb. *The Mummy* was a great financial success, which can be accredited to the Tutmania at the time of its release. To this day, *The Mummy* is revered as a classic horror film that inspired numerous other Egyptian themed movies in the years to come (Brier 2013: 176-178). The influence of Tutmania affected far more than just the silver screen. Tutankhamun was good business, and the music industry jumped on the bandwagon as well.

Shortly after King Tutankhamun’s discovery, sheet music about him began appearing for sale throughout the West. Perhaps the most notable piece of sheet music was “Old King Tut,” which was released in 1923. Here is an excerpt from the song:

They opened up his tomb the other day and jumped with glee.
They learned a lot of ancient history:
His tomb instead of tears,

Was full of souvenirs.
 He must have traveled greatly in his time.
 The gold and silverware that they found hidden there,
 Was from hotels of every land and clime (J.W. Jenkins Sons Music Company 1923).

Again, here one can clearly make out the Oriental image that the West is creating of Tutankhamun and his tomb. They are commodifying his possessions by describing them as “souvenirs,” and they also point out the gold and silver as well to add to this envisionment of a tomb filled with ancient treasures. This song was released prior to the tomb’s opening, which explains why Tutankhamun is portrayed as an old man in the title.

[See Figure 5]

The cover for the “Old King Tut” sheet music depicts him as an old man with a wrinkled face drinking from a glass of wine, but when Howard Carter opened Tutankhamun’s sarcophagus the pharaoh was just a boy. No one knew this when the song was written because the publishers were so eager to sell copies to keep up with the hype of Tutmania. In addition to music, the influence of Tutmania also pervaded into the art of the 1920s and 30s (Brier 2013: 169-170).

Tutmania led to the development of various new art styles. In many ways, “Egyptomania is first and foremost a matter of the creative response of Western artists toward *ancient* Egyptian art and culture” (Curran 1996: 739). Art historians refer to this period as the Egyptian revival movement. During this period, “Egyptian motifs would become an integral part of the language of Art Deco, a style that would dominate the decorative arts until the mid-1930s” (Ickow 2012). Art deco is a decorative art style, which can be seen in the furniture and architecture of the 1920s. This artistic phase eventually led to the Egyptian theater movement in the United States. Egyptian themed theaters began appearing across the country, and the most famous one is located in Hollywood, California. Hollywood has played a significant role in putting forth

Orientalist imaginations of ancient Egypt (Francaviglia 2011: 237), so it is only fitting that the most famous Egyptian theater is located there.

Grauman's Egyptian Theater opened in 1922 the same year as the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb. This is no coincidence, "Tut is very much a part of a second wave of Egyptomania, especially in the United States. The Art Deco of the 1920s takes many cues from ancient Egyptian architectural styles. Many Hollywood theaters of the period were inspired by exotic lands including Graumans Chinese and Egyptian theaters" (Yurgens 2013). The entire theater inside and out is themed in the Egyptian revival style inspired by Howard Carter's expeditions to the Valley of Kings.

[See Figure 6]

This is a picture of the theater taken in 1922, the year of its opening. Grauman's Egyptian was one of the first of its kind, and "was the 'prototypical Egyptian movie palace' and thus served as the inspiration for numerous theaters that opened elsewhere in the country..." (Francaviglia 2011: 237). The interior walls are decorated in hieroglyphs, and the building is full of Egyptian statues and pillars. In addition to its decorative Egyptian theme, the theater was also the site of the first ever Hollywood movie premiere. Grauman's Egyptian Theater is an incredibly significant historical and cultural place within Hollywood, and it is indeed a product of its time because its architecture was inspired by Tutmania. Americans loved King Tut, so the theater themed itself after his discovery to stand out and attract more people with its exotic Oriental appearance.

Even the fashion industry was affected by the Tutmania of the 1920s. Egyptian styled dresses became increasingly prevalent in women's fashion, and the Egyptian revival of the early

twentieth century started incorporating Oriental themes into dresses and jewelry (Francaviglia 2011: 239-240). Dresses featuring gold inlaid patterns reminiscent of Egyptian royalty became very popular during this time period. Here is an example of one such dress from 1926.

[See Figure 7]

The fashion industry was also feeding off the popularity of King Tut, and it made sense to people for Egyptian themed attire to be considered attractive. Everyone loved Egypt in the 1920s, so why not dress the part as well (Slyomovics 1989).

The discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb happened almost a century ago, but Westerners are still fascinated with it. What has kept this Tutmania alive for so long into the twenty-first century? Today, Tutankhamun exhibits have allowed him to still be relevant in the West. People never grow tired of hearing about Tutankhamun it seems, and "the public is still fascinated by objects from Tut's tomb. Never have so many people gone so repeatedly to exhibitions on a single topic, and the history of this love affair gives us a clue about Egyptomania's future" (Brier 2013: 194). Tutankhamun is just as popular now as he was back in 1922 when Carter found him it seems. One can see this just by looking at exhibition attendance rates. The first exhibition "called *Tutankhamun Treasures* opened at the Smithsonian Museum... it was a great success, traveling to 18 cities in America and 6 in Canada. In Japan, 3 million people saw the boy king's treasures. In Paris, more than a million lined up for their chance" (Brier 2013: 194). Tutmania was not an isolated cultural phenomenon of the 1920s, and in many ways it is still happening. Our fascination with him seems to get renewed with every generation of people because they too get enveloped in the craze. Later, "between 1976 and

1979, more than 8 million Americans in seven cities saw the exhibition” (Brier 2013: 196). The Tutankhamun exhibit keeps Tutmania alive in the West, and it tours America every decade or so.

Americans love to hear the story of how he was found, and his tomb provides us with a lense into an exotic and distant past. Tutmania has been a part of Western culture since the discovery, and the most recent “turning point seems to have come in the late 1970s, when the exhibit ‘The Treasures of Tutankhamun’ traveled across the country on a whirlwind of publicity that inspired an ‘Egyptian craze’ in movies, television shows, mystery novels, and trinkets of every kind and description” (Curran 1996: 739). At its core, Tutmania is supply and demand economically speaking. Tutankhamun exhibits are still incredibly successful because there is a demand for them in the West. Museums have capitalized greatly on this, since “Egyptomania is not only popular: it sells. Postcards and reproductions of Egyptian works are consistently among the most popular items sold by museum shops...” (Curran 1996: 745). In many respects, Tutmania is a marketing tool just as much as it is a cultural craze. Tutankhamun exhibits have attracted millions of visitors over the years that have *paid* to see the artifacts in person. While these exhibits do serve an educational purpose, the gift shop at the end of them cannot be overlooked as a part of this Oriental marketing scheme.

How Egyptian Beliefs on Death Captivated the Western Imagination

Westerners are interested in Tutankhamun for a multitude of reasons, but there is one that has been largely overlooked. Tutankhamun has been dead for over 3000 years, so the Western world has also become fascinated with the Egyptian burial process. Egypt was one of the few

ancient civilizations to mummify their dead, which allowed bodies to be preserved incredibly well. Bob Brier writes that mummies allow us to:

Confront death in a non threatening way. Where else can a child - or adult - stare at a dead body? Usually a dead body is a sign that someone has been lost... with a mummy we are not looking at a loser; we have a winner, someone who is 3,000 years old and isn't just dust or a pile of bones in a coffin. We are looking at a recognizable human being who was walking and talking just like us, but 30 centuries ago... (2013: 9).

The perceptions of death and the burial process in Western civilization differ greatly from those of ancient Egypt. In the West, death is a sensitive subject socially speaking. Western countries are individualistic and secular in nature, so it makes sense for death to be avoided at all cost. In the West, “death is prejudiced as a ‘pornographic’ event that should be veiled” (Lee 2008: 745). In the Western collective conscious, death is seen as a very sad and tragic event. Much of Western medicine is focused on prolonging life as much as possible for the individual, and actions like suicide are viewed as serious social issues. The Western world has a very negative outlook on death, and it has been “trying to eliminate it from the picture of normal and daily life” (Aramesh 2016). This is because the Western world places such great value in life, whereas the ancient Egyptians put greater value in the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians recognized that life was only temporary, but that death was permanent. In ancient Egypt, if one lived a good and moral life the Gods would allow their soul into the Field of Reeds. The Field of Reeds was “a mirror image of one’s life on earth. The aim of every ancient Egyptian was to make that life worth living eternally and, as far as the records indicate, they did their very best at that” (Mark: 2016). Egyptians spent much of their lives preparing for the afterlife. In the case of Tutankhamun, he was buried according to the life he

lived. He was a pharaoh, so his tomb was massive and filled with everything he would ever need or want in the afterlife.

The Egyptian burial process differs greatly from the Western burial process. Ancient Egyptians were more individualistic and traditional with their burial practices, whereas the West is more uniform and modern. This is because death in the West is “highly problematic for the modern individual, but not at all problematic for modern society - hence the lack of ritual surrounding it today” (Walter 1991: 307). Funerals in the West are remarkably uniform because we place very little cultural importance on death. This “ritual uniformity to a certain extent reflects [Western] values of conformity... which does not bolster a shared ideology concerning the existence and nature of an afterlife as it does in many other cultures, e.g. mummies of ancient Egypt” (Palgi and Abramovitch 1984: 411).

The Egyptian way of death and burial process provides valuable insight into our own Western practices and beliefs. King Tutankhamun’s discovery exposed the West to a completely foreign conception of death, and people were fascinated by it. His tomb decontextualized Western conceptions of death, and allowed people to learn about ancient Egypt from a gravesite. That is what funerary archeology studies, and it “makes a very real and valuable contribution to modern society, providing one of the few ways that people can experience a corpse and so explore their own mortality and with it their place within the larger human story” (Sayer 2010: 481). Much can be learned about a society by examining how it disposes of and commemorates the deceased. Death is a fundamental part of the human experience, but Westerners for the most part ignore it until they approach the end of their lives. It is important for people to come to

terms with their own mortality, and to recognize that “our experiences of dying have been shaped by ancient ideas about death...” (Kellehear 2007: 251-256).

When Westerners see mummified remains on display in museums they are very open minded. They are comfortable with a museum putting a dead person on display. A study published in the Institute of Archaeology found that “the vast majority (82.5%) of 300 respondents questioned in the summer of 2002 at three British museums displaying ancient Egyptian human remains supported the idea of having these remains on display” (Kilmister 2003: 57). Mummies provide Westerners the academic context to explore death, but this interferes with the agency of the dead. In doing this, people are viewing dead bodies as artifacts rather than as human beings that were once alive. Western exhibits on ancient Egypt dehumanize bodies by putting them in display cases under theatrical lighting. In a sense, Tutankhamun exhibits have fetishized a dead person by putting him on display with all of his most prized possessions.

Conclusion

Egyptian history is a subject that has largely been controlled by Europeans since Napoleon’s campaign into Egypt. Tutankhamun himself was found by a British archaeologist that sought to give many of the tomb’s artifacts to his sponsor Lord Carnarvon, a wealthy European. His discovery came at a pivotal point in Egyptian history following the country’s independence from Britain. It set an important precedent in archaeology that the cultural heritage of countries should be respected and left within its place of origin, regardless of the nationality of the person that found it. Although Tutankhamun and the contents of his tomb

belong to Egypt, the West has constructed its own cultural representation of him that reflects their own views on ancient Egypt. Tutankhamun has served as a cultural proxy to observe the Oriental discourse between Egypt and the West, as illustrated by Edward Said.

The West has turned Tutankhamun into an Oriental symbol of ancient Egypt. This Western visualization of him is removed from most historical realism, and is emblematic of a distant and exotified past filled with mystery, curses, and ancient treasure. This ancient past has been re-imagined by the Western world through romanticism and through the use of Oriental tropes on Egypt. Tutmania at its core is an Oriental discourse in which the West has exotified and commodified the culture of Egypt. Tutankhamun has had a significant impact on Western culture and society, and has subsequently been turned into an Oriental marketing tool. He has been integrated into a great variety of Western cultural outlets including film, music, art, fashion, architecture, and newspapers. Tutankhamun has become a celebrity of the Western world, and he has achieved global fame through media sensationalism, exhibits, tourism, and marketing. His global fame can largely be attributed to this Oriental marketing, and he has proven to be good for business because of the significance he carries within the Western cultural imagination. It seems that with every new generation of Westerners the fascination with Tutankhamun is rekindled, which will only further perpetuate this Oriental discourse for years to come. While it is easy to get caught up in the excitement of a pharaoh's tombs filled with treasure, it is important to recognize that Tutankhamun was at one point a living human being. Western cultures should endeavor to respect all archaeological finds because they are invaluable pieces of cultural heritage. More importantly, Westerners should focus on historical fact rather than fiction or sensationalism in the narratives they construct on Eastern cultures.

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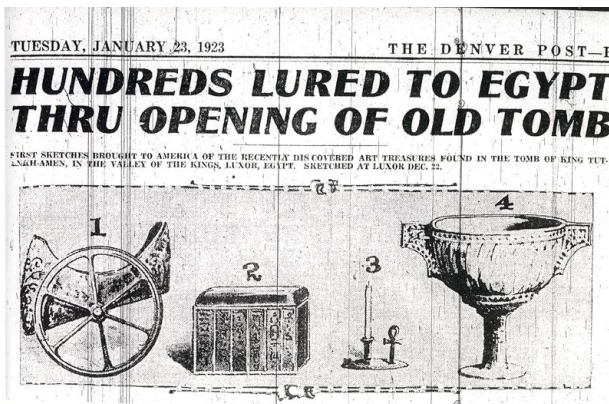
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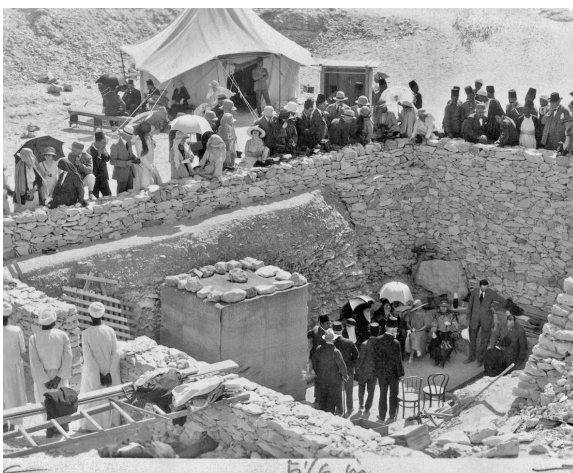
Figures



1. (Burton and Allen 2006)



2. (The Denver Post 1923)



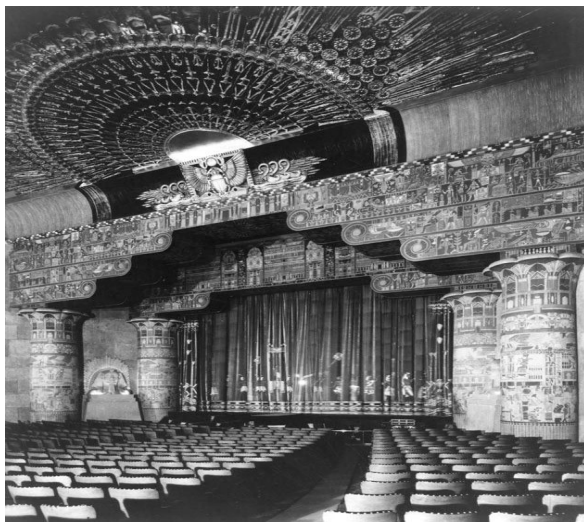
3. (Burton and Allen 2006)



4. (The Detroit News 1923)



5. (J.W. Jenkins Sons Music Company 1923)



6.



7.