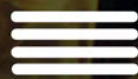
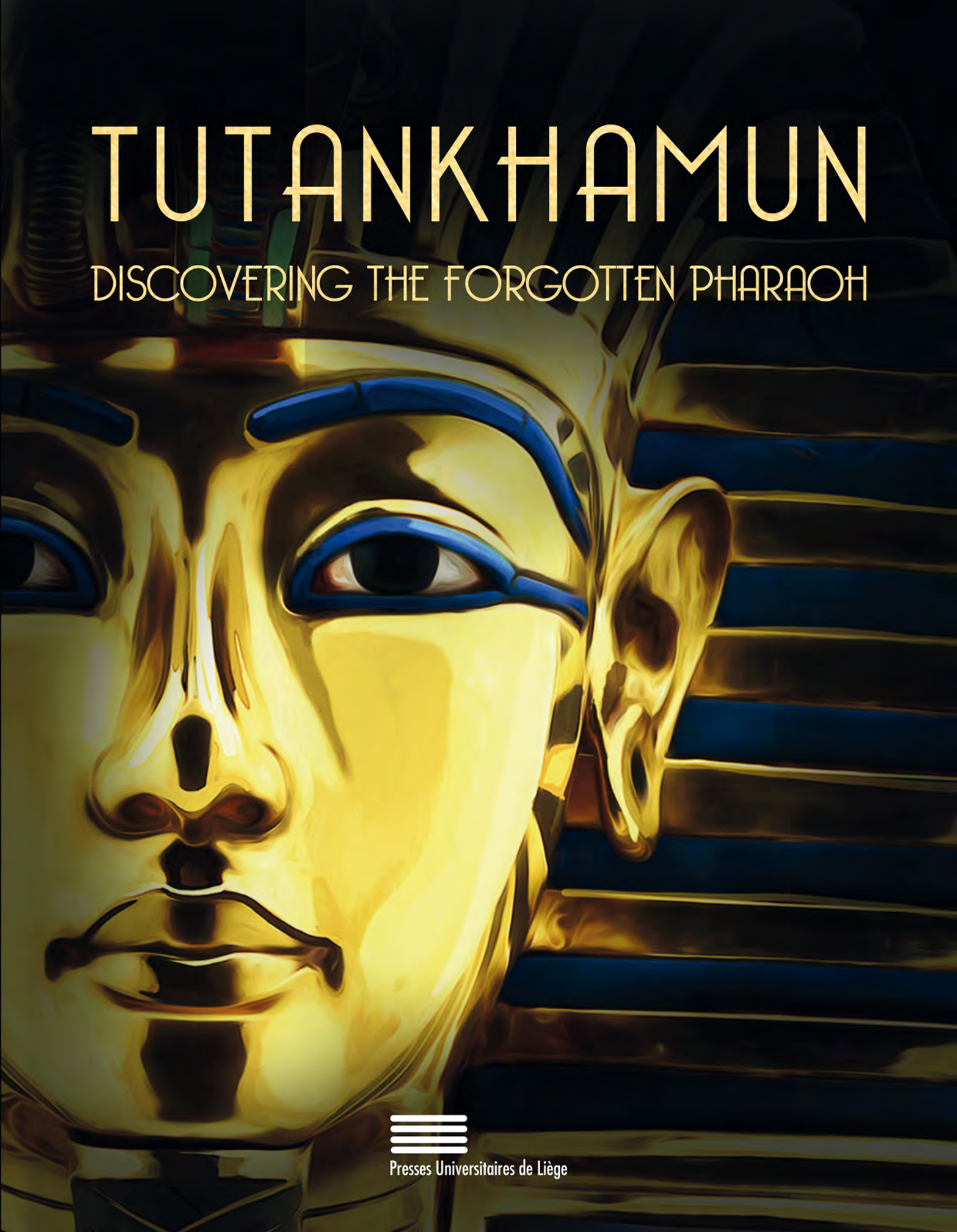


TUTANKHAMUN

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH



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Collection *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 12

TUTANKHAMUN
DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH

Catalogue edited by

Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY

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Commissioner: René Schyns

Curators: Dimitri Laboury and Simon Connor

Managing Director: Alain Mager

Operational and financial management: Marie Kupper

Technical Director: Agostinho da Cunha

Human Resources Department and ticketing: Rosabella Sanchez

Scientific Committee: Jean-Michel Bruffaerts, Simon Connor, Alisée Devillers, Pierre Hallot, Dimitri Laboury, Hugues Tavie, Claudia Venier

Conception: Dimitri Laboury, Simon Connor, Alix Nyssen, Guy Lemaire, René Schyns

Artistic direction: Christian Merland, Sophie Meurisse, Geneviève Schyns

Direction of the reconstitution of pharaonic sets: Hugues Tavie

Communication: CARACASCOM.com, Manfred Dahmen, Lionel Halleux

Attaché of direction: Youri Martin

Computer graphics: Michael Van Raek

Texts, legends and audio guides: Eddy Przybylski

Shelf Coordinator: Laurent Dillien

Workshop manager: Julien Sevenants

Set designers: Ahmed Hassan, Maurice Lai, Joëlle Luremonde, David Hermans, Maïti Simon, Daniel Voisin, Philippe Weerts

Lights: Carlo Casuccio, Renaud Lavigne

Carpenters: Stefano Azzalin and Benjamin Bouillot

Fitters: Mike Tambour, Pascal Norga, Nicolas Detrooz, Alain Parmentier.

Ironwork: Pierre Leboulange

Sound engineer: Serge Winandy

Technicians: E.M.C. Filippo Pultrone

Translation of texts in the exhibition: Vanessa Davies, Maud Slingenberg; COLINGUA

Audio guides: RSF/TRILLENium

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Agostinho da Cunha, untimely seized by the Abductor, as ancient Egyptians called it.

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Death Comes
as the End




Head of Tutankhamun's mummy.
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Mosquitos in Egypt

Egyptian sources, though so voluble about wildlife in both iconographic and textual domains, are rather silent about insects (Vernus and Yoyotte 2005; Meeks 2010). The hieroglyphic system is a good example of this point. Apart from the two famous cases of the royal bee () and of the sacred scarab beetle (), insects play only a marginal role in hieroglyphic writing. Insect signs are only used when the name of one of these insects is written, and they appear at the end of the word as a “classifier” representing the said insect or its category (e.g., “winged creature”), after its name is written out with phonograms.

The mosquito is no exception to this rule. While data is scarce, there is still enough to say that it was ambiguously perceived in pharaonic Egypt. Negatively, of course, it is the prototypical bug that must be protected against, especially in the Delta (Papyrus Sallier 2, 8,1–2) and after dark (Papyrus Anastasi 4,12,9). To this end, the Egyptians used different strategies: applying recently extracted moringa oil (Papyrus Ebers 97,21–98,1), sleeping high up in breezy locations or surrounding yourself with nets, which were used during the day for fishing and at night as mosquito netting, as Herodotus reports (Book II, 95). A net discovered in a funerary context (in the tomb of Hetepheres, mother of Cheops), as well as the existence of four-poster beds seem to confirm the words of the “Father of History,” although the netting must then have been used in several layers and its mesh particularly fine in order to achieve a certain degree of effectiveness. It must be noted that the association between mosquitos

and malaria is not explicit in the many medical texts addressing fevers and their treatment, even though some cases of fever were certainly transmitted by our blood-thirsty friends (Gyóry 2010).

The Egyptians seem to have used precisely this ironic metaphor in their word for mosquitos. The term used to refer to these insects is  *hnmw* (*šolms* in Coptic), normally plural in pharaonic texts. It is related to a group of words formed from the four consonants *h-n-m-s*, which refers to the idea of friendship (and perhaps originally kinship). Mosquitos are your troublesome “buddies” at a party that are not easy to shake off.

In any event, like other living beings, they are part of the universe that the god Amun-Re took care to create (Papyrus Boulaq 17, 6,5–6) and might even have been perceived positively, if we believe the unique evidence of a late amulet cut from white and green jasper ([fig. 1](#); Arnold 1995). If it is not just a bee, this amulet could represent a fly, perhaps a mosquito, with a *pschent*-crowned falcon head. Like the fly of valor that was awarded as a decoration to the most deserving officers in the army, or the bee that became a symbol of the royalty of Lower Egypt, the mosquito could have, thanks to its qualities of perseverance and tenacity, been elevated to divine and royal status among his companions.

Stéphane POLIS

FURTHER READING

Arnold 1995, 48; Gyóry 2010, 81–84; Meeks 2010, 273–304; Vernus & Yoyotte 2005.