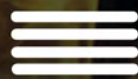
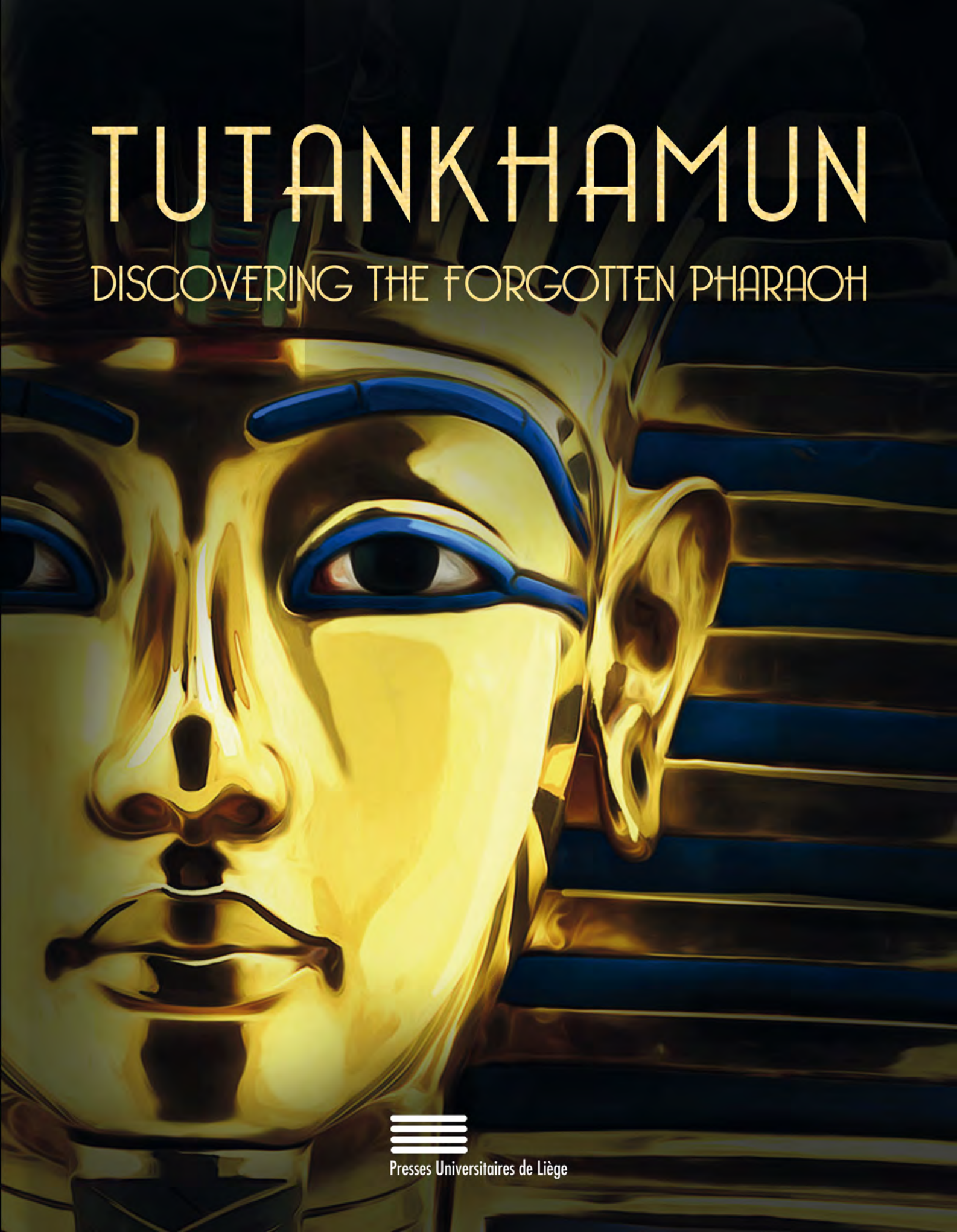


# TUTANKHAMUN

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH



Presses Universitaires de Liège

Collection *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 12

**TUTANKHAMUN**  
**DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN PHARAOH**

Catalogue edited by

**Simon CONNOR and Dimitri LABOURY**

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Jean-Lou Stefan

The anonymous private collectors who entrusted us with their pieces.

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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# Living at the Court of Tutankhamun

Claudia VENIER

# “Show Me Your Chair, I’ll Tell You Who You Are.” Palace Furniture

The luxurious palaces of the late Eighteenth Dynasty were home to rich pieces of furniture. These can be studied from the originals, known mainly from tombs, and by the representations that the Egyptians made of them on the walls of their monuments or in statuary. In general, stools, chairs, folding chairs and cushioned seats are the most common pieces of furniture in the homes of dignitaries. When the occupants can afford it, a bed is also present with its bedside equipment — a headrest — similar to the one in the Mariemont Museum. Wooden chests and wicker baskets were used to store fabrics (including clothing), toiletries or jewelry. As for pottery, it was used to store food. All this equipment has a utilitarian and functional role despite the attention given to the aesthetics of these often finely crafted furnishings.

Far from being mere accessories, the furniture in palaces and houses informs us about the social status of the owners of the place. In a society where people sat on mats on the ground, seats were originally a privilege of the elite, especially the king and his close entourage, and were gradually appropriated by all the well-to-do social classes. During the Eighteenth Dynasty, styles benefited from foreign influences, and the number of users increased although the use of a seat remained a mark of dignity. This is particularly visible in the spelling of the lexeme *shepses*, which means “to be noble” or “respected” . It

incorporates the hieroglyphic sign of the man sitting on a chair or, simply, the chair itself. The legs of this seat, like those of several examples in the exhibition, are theriomorphic. They are carved in the shape of the legs of a wild animal, in this case a feline. This is another symbolic component. Lions evoke majesty and the idea of protective power. In Egypt, therefore, a profound meaning beyond a decorative aspect is present in the very structure of these elements.

Not all seats are suitable for everyone. In pictorial representations and archaeology, there is a differentiation of status, but also of gender. Thus, the presence of a backrest, the height, number of legs and decoration are not innocuous elements. Some seat designs seem reserved for men. High-backed chairs, in general, are found mainly where men are buried, and low stools frequently appear next to women’s coffins. In the Theban Necropolis, for example, the tomb of Sennedjem and Iynerferti (TT 1) and that of Kha and Merit (TT 8) house different furniture for the owner and for his wife (the intrinsic quality and materials also seem to differ from one another). The royal architect Kha had to have a comfortably furnished and elaborately decorated house in Deir el-Medina. Craftsmen, on the other hand, seem to prefer the use of tripods in their workshops. The flared cylindrical foot stool was apparently mainly used by women. Nefertiti is, according to the sources that have come to us, the first queen represented

# Headrest





**Fig. 1:** wooden headrest. H. 17.3; W. 22; D. 4.3 cm. New Kingdom. Morlanwelz, Royal Museum of Mariemont, Ac.98/2. Photograph © Musée royal de Mariemont.



**Fig. 2:** the use of a headrest often seems difficult to imagine. Placed under the neck, if the sleeper lies on their back, it seems very uncomfortable. However, other positions may make it much more pleasant. Drawing S. Connor.

Until the Eighteenth Dynasty, beds were slightly sloping and had a plank at one end. Unlike the custom in our modern beds, this element did not serve as a headboard, but was intended for the feet as we learn not only from pictorial representations, but also the frequent presence of lion paws adorning the furniture legs and invariably oriented towards the sleeper's head, which would be at the spot where the animal's head would be found.

The headrest, *wrs*  in ancient Egyptian, is the equivalent of our pillow. It compensates for the height between the shoulder and the head of a person lying on the side. These headrests, used by both the living and the

deceased, have an apotropaic function. In daily life, they protected them from the dangers of the night, including nightmares and the evil spirits that could create them. In the afterlife, they ensured the awakening of the deceased by the association of their shape with the double hill, symbol of the horizon where the sun rises every morning . Wood is predominately used for making headrests in the New Kingdom and this copy is made of a single piece. A small cushion made up of several layers of folded fabric (just like mattresses) could be added to the headrest to soften its hardness.

**Fig. 3:** detail of the funeral procession. Tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181) – West Wall. Photograph © MANT–Uliège.





Fig. 4: *sema-tawy* motif on a stool found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Carter 467. Photograph H. Burton, courtesy of The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.



Fig. 5: stool unearthed in Tutankhamun's tomb. Reproduction of an original print by H. Burton, picture published in the *Illustrated London News* on March 3, 1923. Private collection, UK.

sitting on this type of seat. Such representations multiply afterward.

Furniture is generally made of wood of varying quality. The species can be local or imported from the Near East or sub-Saharan Africa. A material thus transported to the banks of the Nile acquires a very high value, which makes the furniture a luxury property. Plaster is used to compensate for irregularities in the most modest furniture, while the finest examples might be encrusted with ivory, glass, faience and semi-precious stones. They are usually covered, partially or entirely, with a delicate gold veneer. They also feature sculpted or engraved

motifs, which are not only decorative but also symbolic. The designs used for furnishings are the same in royal and private spheres. They differ only in the quality of the materials, the decoration and the work of the craftsmen.

The pictorial representations of the workshops inform us about the manufacture of this type of refined equipment. There are various fastening systems, some particularly sophisticated, involving tenon and joins to hold together the different parts or rivets made of metal alloys. Fragmentary furniture — such as the feet of the folding stool in the shape of duck heads — is particularly instructive

Fig. 6: carpenter using a bow drill to dig the fixing holes for the braiding of a chair. Theban tomb 100 of the vizier Rekhmiré (reign of Thutmosis III). Watercolor by Nina de Garis Davies (MMA 31.6.29). © Metropolitan Museum of Art.



# Stool and chair



Fig. 7: wooden chair. H. 67; W. 40; D. 49.9cm.  
New Kingdom, end of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Private collection, UK.



Stools are probably the pieces of furniture most commonly used by ancient Egyptians. Chairs, on the other hand, are reserved for people of greater social status despite their abundance in two-dimensional representations. The legs of these seats, regularly carved in the form of lion's paws placed on small pedestals, have a symbolic significance. The feline, which could still be found in Egypt at the time, is associated with the king and has a protective power. In order to best imitate nature, seats with theriomorphic feet have stretched forelegs and flexed posteriors. Used since the Old Kingdom, this motif became widespread in the Middle and New Kingdom. Its style also evolves over time. The shape of the small pedestals, especially the number of horizontal bands represented, is typical of the New Kingdom. The rounded and open back of the seat is also datable to this period.

The iconography and location of furniture inside tombs suggests that backed chairs were mainly used by men, while women more often used low stools. Their seat was braided and could be embellished with a cushion to provide greater comfort.



Fig. 8–9 : wooden stool. H. 24; W. 33; D. 33.4cm.  
New Kingdom, end of the Eighteenth Dynasty.  
Private collection, UK.

because one can see the systems of construction and attachment of the various elements. Animal glue was regularly used to assemble parts, such as leather seats. Moreover, Egypt's favorable climate, especially in tombs, has preserved many of the objects in impeccable condition. The presence of traces of wear on some pieces of furniture suggests that they were used by their owners during their lifetimes, while the fragility of materials used to make other objects, still in excellent condition, clearly indicates that they were made exclusively for funeral use.

Tutankhamun's funerary furniture seems representative of that found in the palaces of the Amarna period. It seems to reflect different stages in the young pharaoh's life (childhood, adolescence, coro-

nation, etc.), and includes palace furniture made for his predecessors and then adapted for funerary use. Within the sovereign's funerary furniture is a child's small chair and various items still bearing mentions of the deity Aten, although the king's titlature was modified on other objects from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun. One can only marvel at the quality and richness of this furniture. This set of more than 5000 objects includes different beds and funerary beds with the heads of animal deities, various seats and thrones (sacred and secular), footstools, low tables, coffrets, or little chests, and boxes. It seems that the contents of the many chests in the tomb were looted in antiquity, but the inscriptions they bear nevertheless allow us to imagine the luxuries

## Feet of a folding stool



**Fig. 10:** feet of a folding stool in the shape of ducks' heads. Inlaid wood. L. 50 cm. New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty. Private collection, UK.

Folding stools are attested from the Middle Kingdom and are particularly widespread in the New Kingdom. They are referred to in ancient Egyptian by the term of Semitic origin *isebut* 𓆎𓆏𓆑, which can also describe other types of seats. Folding chairs have the advantage of being light and easily transportable. Reserved for the upper classes, they are a mark of prestige. According to representations on tomb walls, these seats are used more by men than by women, who preferred other types of stools.

These two foot elements are joined in the center by a pivot. Their ends, carved in the shape of duck heads, are a very elegant motif popular during the Eighteenth Dynasty on this type of furniture. The curve of the animal's neck is regularly exploited in the aesthetics of various objects of daily life or intended for funeral furniture. Tutankhamun's treasure delivered several stools and chairs with identical or very similar feet.

The wood used is painted black to mimic a rare and expensive species imported from distant lands. In addition, the plumage of the animal's neck is suggested by ivory inlays. The eyes, which were originally also adorned are now small circular depressions.

they originally contained. One element that comes up many times in the iconography of the pharaoh's furniture is the *sema-tawy*. This open royal motif — composed of the lungs and trachea (*sema*) hieroglyph, representing union, and the knotted vegetal stems of the lotus (for the South) and the papyrus (for the North) — symbolizes the joining of the Two Lands and is present between the legs of all the seats and on some chests from the sovereign's coronation.

Among his sumptuous furnishings, Tutankhamun had an elegant coffret with open decoration. It opens upwards using copper hinges that attach the lid to the base. To close this coffret, two buttons — the first on the front panel of the base and the second on the top of the lid — were wrapped with a rope, which could be sealed with the clay stamp of a

royal seal, if necessary. In 1922, when the tomb was discovered, this coffret contained only four headrests and a piece of cloth.

More than 3,300 years separate us from the reign of Tutankhamun and yet, thanks to the warm and dry climate of Egypt, the vagaries of history and the determination of Howard Carter, we are fortunate today to still be able to admire the rich furniture that surrounded the young pharaoh and around which he lived an extraordinary life, which continues to fascinate us.

#### FURTHER READING

Bruwier 1993, 29–57; Killen 1994; el Gabry 2017, 51–57; Killen 2017.



# Sitamun chair



Fig. 11: watercolor by Howard Carter (1905): chair of Sitamun and chair with cushion (framed together). H. 59; W. 38 cm (with frame). Private collection, UK.

In 1905, James E. Quibell discovered in the Valley of the Kings the tomb of Yuya and Tuya, the parents of Queen Tiye, the paternal grandmother of Tutankhamun. Among the funerary furniture of this almost intact tomb was a chair with the name of Sitamun, the eldest daughter of Amenhotep III and Tiye. Howard Carter made an inventory of the objects unearthed in the tomb. At that time, the young archaeologist-illustrator also painted Egyptian-themed watercolors that he sold to tourists.

The back and the armrests of this chair are richly decorated. On the outer faces, protective deities are depicted, while on the internal panels in two symmetrical scenes, Sitamun receives a gold necklace. A procession approaching the princess also brings gold in the form of rings. The rear face of the back is decorated with feathers that evoke the throne of Horus and the fine craftsmanship of a royal seat that are attributed to this armchair. At the front, two female heads have been carved. They rise above the feet in the shape of feline paws and replace the lion heads that traditionally adorn kings' thrones.

The original chair is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.





Fig. 12: reproduction of the chair of Sitamun.  
H. 78; W. 54; D. 63 cm. Private Collection, UK.