

INTERVIEW WITH...

ZAHI HAWASS



Dr Zahi Hawass is probably the best known Egyptologist in the world today. The former Egyptian Minister for Antiquities and Director of Excavations at Giza, Saqqara, Bahariya Oasis and the Valley of the Kings, he has spent the last thirty years raising awareness of Egypt's archaeological heritage. In this very candid interview with Matilda Hickson, he explains that while archaeology is now his great passion in life, this wasn't always the case.

I read that you initially wanted to be a lawyer, but studied Greek and Roman archaeology at University. When did your interest in archaeology/ Egyptology begin?

When I was a young man, I was impressed by an actor who played the role of a lawyer who drove a nice car and I thought that I wanted to be like him. At the age of fourteen and half, I went to Alexandria University and joined the Faculty of Law. But when I started to read the assigned text books, I realised that I would never like this. So the next day, I went to return the books and switched my major from the faculty of law to the faculty of arts. I sat in the cafeteria and asked other students about which department to join within the faculty, as there were over

twenty departments, and they told me there is a new department of archaeology. When I asked what you could do with a degree in archaeology after graduation, they told me they work as translators. I stayed for four years but I was not a good student, I barely passed. I didn't like studying archaeology either.

After graduation, and by law, the government provides a job for everyone, whatever their ability. So I joined the antiquities department at the age of twenty. When I started working there, I found my colleagues had no ambition, they just sat and did nothing and left the foreigners to do all the work. So I decided to leave and studied to become a diplomat, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would not accept me.

I went back to my old job at the antiquities department and the head of the department insisted that I go and excavate, and when I said no, he threatened he would file a case against me and take five days off my salary. So I had to leave my girlfriend in Cairo and go to the desert and I didn't know anything about excavating. We had studied it in college as a theory, but we had never done any fieldwork.

I was working at a major Greek site, but I used to sit in the tent drinking coffee all day while the workers would carry on without me. One day the overseer of workmen came to see me. He was an expert from Qift and his name was Rayes Doctor, (Rayes means overseer and his name was Doctor even though he could not read or write), and he was an expert in excavating. He began to teach me how to clean the tomb, and then in the middle of the tomb there was a statue of Aphrodite, made of faience. I sat and cleaned around it and that's when I started to think to myself that this was my new love.

I had to support my new-found passion with knowledge, so I took a diploma in Egyptology at Cairo University and I decided to do more research. So, I took a Fulbright fellowship to study for a Masters and Doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania and was there for seven years until I graduated. And all this happened because I developed a passion for archaeology.

Did you have the opportunity to visit many of your wonderful historical sites when growing up?

When I was a child, I used to come to Cairo to visit my aunt and the only site I used to see was the pyramids. We would play soccer next to them, but no one taught me anything about the site, so I was not interested in the pyramids at that time, and I was not interested at all in visiting any archaeological sites when I was a child.

You instigated and led the Egyptian Mummy project. Tell us about more about this fascinating project.

When I began to search for the mummy of Hatshepsut, I began to collect all the unidentified mummies that belonged to a king, queen or princess from the Valley of the Kings. These



included the two mummies from tomb of KV 35 and the two from KV 21 and the mummy in KV 60. I also collected the mummies that were stored in the upper floor of the Cairo Museum. I collected twenty altogether. I hoped and believed that one of these mummies was that of Hatshepsut, but I never imagined I would actually discover her mummy.

I placed the mummies in room 44 of the Cairo Museum and I started conducting CT scans. At the same time, I collected all the artefacts belonging to Hatshepsut. These included the alabaster jar, the sarcophagus and the canopic wooden box that was found in the cachet of the mummies in Deir el-Bahari. The latter had inside the liver of the queen and her name was written on the outside of the box.

The presence of these objects in the cachet without the mummy showed, in my opinion, that they started moving the objects belonging to the Queen, and the mummy was moved to a place for re-wrapping before being moved to the mummy cachet, and for some reason this never happened and it remained where it was temporarily kept. I talked to Dr. El-Leithy and I told him to bring the liver box so we could scan it using the CT scan. As we were looking at the scans, Dr. Abdel el-Rahman said to me 'look and tell me what do you see'. So, I answered that I saw the liver and part of a stomach. He told me 'no, look again', and when I looked again, I found a tooth, a molar, with one of the roots still attached.

It was interesting to see a molar inside the box with the liver. I think that Hatshepsut had problems with her teeth and during the mummification, one of her teeth fell and the embalmers took it and put it in the box. Dr. Asharf Seleem, the radiologist and Dr. El-Beheiry, the dentist, began to look at the teeth of all the mummies that we scanned and we found one mummy with a cavity that surprisingly fitted with this tooth exactly, the cavity had one root still attached while the other was missing. That was the best moment any archaeologist in the world can dream of! One tooth had led us to the discovery of the mummy of Hatshepsut, although it was not only the tooth that proved that this was the mummy of Hatshepsut, but other evidence as well.

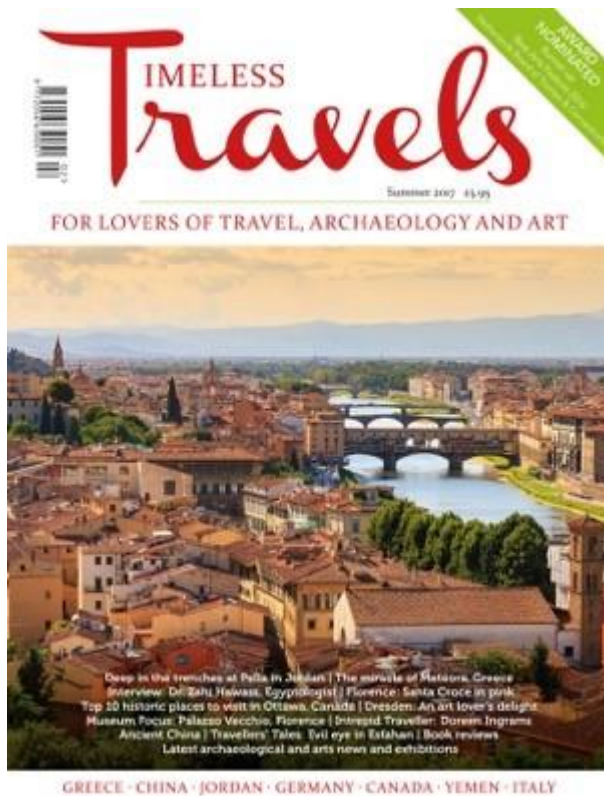
For example, the mummy was found in KV 60 and the objects found inside KV 60 all showed that they were made for royalty. KV 60 was also the tomb for the wet nurse of Hatshepsut and the fact that it is located near the tomb KV 20, the tomb of Hatshepsut. We found more details about the mummy: she died at the age of 55 and she had suffered from diabetes and died of cancer. To find the mummy of Hatshepsut was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. I ordered for her placement in the Cairo Museum for everyone to see her and know the amazing story of her discovery.

The second important discovery was to find the family of Tutankhamun and it was like a puzzle to search for the mummy of his father, as it was Akhenaten not Amenhotep III as some had previously thought. This was because when Tutankhamun visited Thebes, he called Amenhotep III by the name 'father', but philologists later debated that the word for father is the same for grandfather in ancient Egyptian. Tutankhamun's mother was the daughter of Tiya and Amenhotep III, and we have her mummy, but we still do not have a name for her. She was in KV 35 and she married her brother Akhenaten, according to the DNA analysis.

The most interesting story that I discovered through CT scans and DNA analysis, was the story of Ramses III. We know from the Harem Conspiracy that he was not murdered from the plot against his life. But when we put the mummy under the CT scan, we found a sharp knife wound showing his throat had been slit and his fingers had been cut off with an axe. According to the papyrus, his son Pentawere, who was involved in the plot, was sent to hang himself. We had found the mummy of a young man called Unknown Man E in the Cairo Museum and we believe it to be the mummy of Pentawere. We found evidence of hanging on his neck, his mouth was wide open, and the body was covered in goatskins, which was impure for the ancient Egyptians. These were the most interesting stories.

Our next season in the middle of this year, we hope to continue the project and our first task is to search for the mummy of Nefertiti, because we believe it to be the mummy with the head in KV 21. We will also look in Saqqara for the bones of her sister Mutnedjmet who married Horemheb and was buried in his tomb in Saqqara. Also we will see if Ramses I's mummy in the Cairo Museum is really Ramses I or not, by comparing it with the mummy of his son Seti I, and we also plan to examine the mummies of the 19th and 20th Dynasties.

If you would like to read more of this interview which includes questions such as:



Can you tell us more about the search for the 'hidden doors' inside the great pyramid?

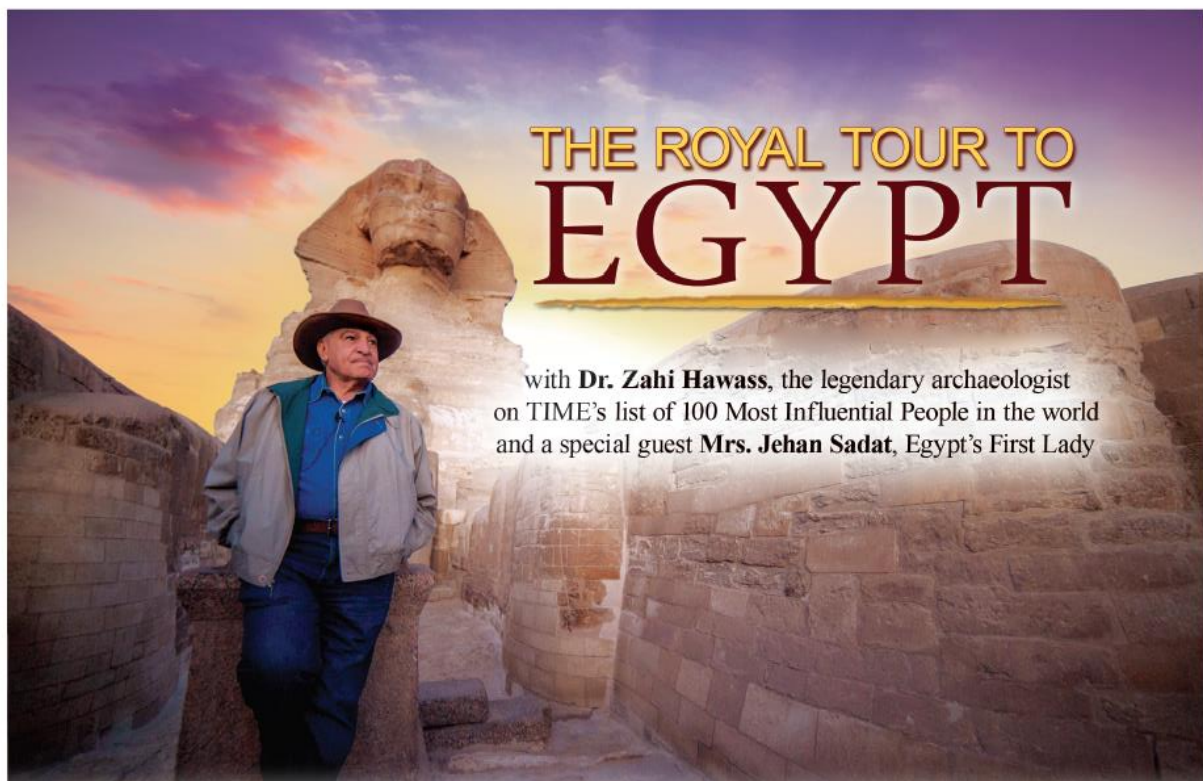
You have made a number of discoveries throughout your career. Do you have any favourite ones?

Was there a secret chamber in Tutankhamun's tomb as proposed by Nicholas Reeves?

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At the end of this interview, *Archaeological Paths* company published an advertisement of our Royal Tours to Egypt with Dr. Zahi Hawass:



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www.archaeologicalpaths.com



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