



## A PASSION FOR (ANCIENT) EGYPT: THE TWO SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS

An interview with **Dr Wolfgang Wettengel** and **Dr Martin von Falck** on the special allure of the project, the historical role of its protagonist and what personally motivated them to take part

How does one end up studying such an exotic subject as Egyptology?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** A trip to Egypt was what decided it. I was captivated by the relics from the Pharaonic era. From that time on, I wanted to know more about the people who created this tremendous civilisation, the mindset behind it.

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** Due to my interest in history I am fascinated by every ancient culture, but I developed a special relationship with Egypt because I lived there for six years. The transition from the beliefs of Stone Age man to a civilisation that invented writing and flourished for thousands of years made Egypt a model for the development of humanity. Whether our civilisation will last for 3,000 years is not yet certain.

Does the knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians have any significance nowadays?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** The land on the Nile is considered to be the source of many things. It was then that the intellectual and spiritual foundations of ethics and religion were established that we are still building on today. From teachings that were passed down from generation to generation, for example, leaders were expected to be incorruptible and prudent. Our belief in the divine power of life to overcome death is rooted in the cult of the sun god Ra and Osiris, the god of resurrection. And the notion of a last judgment in the afterlife where one has to account for one's life has influenced the moral code in the Western world for thousands of years.

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** The Egyptians "invented" very practical things too such as the twelve-hour day, which we still use to tell the time today, or monumental stone building. Our alphabet even stems from the Egyptian one; writing, arts and crafts, organisation and state – in all these areas, Egyptians developed their own solutions and systems.

To return again to the religion of Ancient Egypt – how would you assess the Amarna period during the reign of King Akhenaten?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** You mean, the radical, religious revolution that Akhenaten initiated? Akhenaten's ideas may really have influenced later oriental, monotheist beliefs in one creator God as we find in the Abrahamic religions. Akhenaten's Amarna period left its mark on the cultural memory which can still be felt today.

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** In the early twentieth century when Howard Carter discovered Tutankhamun's tomb, western intellectuals regarded Akhenaten and his belief in one God, the manifestation of the sun disk Aten as being ahead of his time. However, what was largely ignored at that time was the dark side of the revolution – in order to establish his monotheism, Akhenaten showed no signs of tolerance, often resorting to violent and destructive acts directed at the old temples, gods and cults. We need to reopen the discussion on this fundamentalism which is still influential today – especially now in the face of religiously motivated violence. It is important to be aware of where it comes from.

Would you agree that Tutankhamun was a politically insignificant Pharaoh?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** To be precise, there is one aspect to the treasure of Tutankhamun that has been largely ignored up until now. Some of the paintings contain a considerable amount of exciting cultural and historical information on this period of social change. For example, images of the afterlife from the world of the middle classes

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** The era of Tutankhamun needs to be looked at differently today. The young Pharaoh and his ministers faced the almost impossible task of ending the upheaval that Akhenaten's radical fundamentalism had started in the country. This was the greatest accomplishment of the reign of this King who died at such a young





were used in the royal death cult of Tutankhamun for the first time, which indicates that a process of democratisation had begun. And in the myth of the sacred cow which appeared for the first time on the first shrine of the burial chamber, a serious crisis is mentioned, a corrupted people whose depravity almost led to their destruction. This was a reaction to the critical reign of Akhenaten from which they had learned a lesson. In the literature of the time we see the development of a new, timeless archetype.

age – an achievement that is often underestimated today. Even when we consider the numerous statues of gods that were newly created at this time, we are still only left with a distant echo of the extensive reconstruction work that was necessary.

Is that why you, as Egyptologists, have focussed so intensively on Tutankhamun?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** As was already mentioned, it is now time to take a more differentiated and fair approach to the evaluation of Tutankhamun's achievements. Such an ambitious project as **TUTANKHAMUN – HIS TOMB AND HIS TREASURES** has the further attraction of providing us Egyptologists with an opportunity to present an exciting aspect of archaeology to a wide audience – while at the same time conveying a great deal of knowledge about Ancient Egypt in an entertaining way.

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** Anyone who intensively researches Tutankhamun quickly realises how many questions remain unanswered, how much there is still left to learn even though it seems as if everything has been written, said and filmed about this child King. One quickly comes to terrain that is anything but simple. Tutankhamun is and will continue to be a huge challenge.

Was this the reason why you were professionally interested in participating in this exhibition project?

**DR WOLFGANG WETTENGEL:** The organiser of the exhibition has very ambitious goals which are important to us as well. Because of this it was easy to get involved. We also want to make archaeology alive and at the same time provide accurate information.

**DR MARTIN V. FALCK:** This groundbreaking project will most certainly have an impact. An exhibition like this should not, however, replace classic museum exhibitions. And yet it is likely to become increasingly difficult to transport the fragile originals in the future because of protection laws. The exhibition is thus very topical. It would be completely impossible today to recreate a scene with originals from Tutankhamun's tomb that could bring to life the exciting adventure of the tomb's discovery in 1922.



**Dr Wolfgang Wettengel** (photo on left) studied Egyptology, Ethnology and Medieval History at the universities in Munich and Heidelberg, where he attained his doctorate. He lectured for many years in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Applied Sciences Landshut and was responsible for various exhibitions, for example, on the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, the tomb of the Pharaonic artisan Sennedjem from the time of Ramesses II, the Book of the Dead of the scribe Ani as well as the travelling exhibition of a full-scale reconstruction of Tutankhamun's tomb. His numerous published works range from a publication on the Papyrus d'Orbiney and the royal ideology of the Ramesside period (Freiburg [CH]/Göttingen, 2003) to an exhibition series on the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm (Reimlingen, 2007) and *Mythos Tutanchamun* (ed.) with contributions by Jan Assmann, Erik Hornung and others (Nördlingen, 2000).

**Dr Martin v. Falck** (photo on right) studied Egyptology, Coptology and Classic Archaeology and completed his doctorate at the University of Münster. He has been

working in Hamburg for the Edfu project at the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen since October 2005; a lecturer in Egyptology at the WWU Münster (since 2002), the University of Hamburg and the LMU in Munich (2007). Since 1992 he has worked as a curator of the Egyptian collection at the Gustav Lübcke Museum in Hamm; he participated in excavations in Egypt (Western Thebes, 1991) and Germany (1985, 1990); curated countless exhibition projects (including the Edfu project within the framework of "Sprache – Schrift – Bild. Wege zu unserem kulturellen Gedächtnis"; "Pharao siegt immer – Krieg und Frieden im Alten Ägypten"; "Ägypten. Schätze aus dem Wüstensand – Kunst und Kultur der Christen am Nil"; "Mythos Tutanchamun – und Faszination") as well as important collections and institutions (such as the museum Forum der Völker in Werl, the Gustav Lübcke Museum in Hamm, and at the Ikonenmuseum in Recklinghausen). He has also published numerous works, for example, on the Book of the Dead of Qeqa from the Ptolemaic period (Wiesbaden, 2006) and on the aforementioned exhibitions and collections.