

'Tutankhamun is nothing': How a great king was usurped by a teenager



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He was Ancient Egypt's unrivalled builder, warrior and begetter of children – historians believe he fathered at least 100. But in the annals of popular history, the great Ramses II has long been overshadowed by a teenager.

This irks archaeologist Mostafa Waziry from Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. "Tutankhamun is nothing," he said. "He died at the age of 18, or something. He did nothing to Egypt. Just a little boy playing with horses and chariots."



Dr Mostafa Waziry, the secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities at the Australian Museum. DEAN SEWELL

Waziry hopes any lingering confusion about the pharaonic pecking order will be swept away by *Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs*, an exhibition of animal mummies, jewels and sarcophagi due to open at the Australian Museum in November.

While visiting Sydney to promote the exhibition before tickets go on sale on July 17, Waziry said Tutankhamun's fame only arose from his tomb being found unlooted a century ago. "His tomb is the poorest in the Valley of the Kings," he said.

"If you were to look at the tomb of Ramses – oh wow, what a tomb. He's the greatest because of what he did to the history of Egypt. Wars? He was the greatest warrior. For the number of buildings or constructions or temples or kiosks or chapels, Ramses is the greatest."



Mostafa Waziry with an artefact found near the Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, south of Cairo in 2020. AP

Historically, Australians have flocked to visiting exhibitions of ancient artefacts. A 1988 show, also called *Gold of the Pharaohs*, held attendance records at the Art Gallery of NSW for almost 25 years, followed closely by a show featuring China's Terracotta Army in 1983.

A 2021 exhibition of treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb – which was to have crowned the Australian Museum's \$57 million renovations – had been expected to draw 800,000 visitors before it was cancelled in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sydney will be the fourth international stop for the exhibition, which features Egyptian-owned artefacts and is run in co-operation with the Egyptian government.

Waziry said he would not raise the question of Australian ownership of Egyptian artefacts, such as the Mummy Room in the University of Sydney's Chau Chak Wing Museum, during his tour, saying it was once legal for archaeological teams in Egypt to keep half of their discoveries.

"I don't mind if we have Egyptian artefacts in Australia," he said. "They have thousands of pieces in the Louvre Museum. I don't care. We have obelisks in Italy, in England, in America. They are for me like ambassadors in those countries."

But there are four artefacts Waziry would like returned to Egypt; the Rosetta Stone, the Dendera Zodiac at the Louvre, the bust of Nefertiti at the Berlin Museum, and the statue of pyramid architect Hemiunu in Hildesheim, Germany. "They are unique," he said.

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