



# **The Millionaire and the Mummies: Theodore Davis's Gilded Age in the Valley of the Kings**

*John M. Adams*

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Egypt, The Valley of the Kings, 1905: An American robber baron peers through the hole he has cut in an ancient tomb wall and discovers the richest trove of golden treasure ever seen in Egypt.

At the start of the twentieth century, Theodore Davis was the most famous archaeologist in the world; his career turned tomb-robbing and treasure-hunting into a science. Using six of Davis's most important discoveries in archaeology—from the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut's sarcophagus to the exquisite *shabti* statuettes looted from the Egyptian Museum not too long ago—as a lens around which to focus his quintessentially American rags-to-riches tale, Adams chronicles the dizzying rise of a poor country preacher's son who, through corruption and fraud, amassed tremendous wealth in Gilded Age New York and then atoned for his ruthless career by inventing new standards for systematic excavation in the field of archaeology. Davis found a record eighteen tombs in the Valley and, breaking with custom, gave all the spoils of his discoveries to museums. A confederate of Boss Tweed, friend of Teddy Roosevelt, and rival of J. P. Morgan, the colorful "American Lord Carnarvon" shared his Newport mansion with his Rembrandts, his wife, *and* his mistress. The only reason Davis has been forgotten by history to a large extent is probably the fact that he stopped just short of King Tutankhamen's tomb, the discovery of which propelled Howard Carter (Davis's erstwhile employee) to worldwide fame just a few short years later.

Drawing on rare and never-before-published archival material, *The Millionaire and the Mummies*, the first biography of Theodore Davis ever written rehabilitates a tarnished image through a thrilling tale of crime and adventure, filled with larger-than-life characters, unimaginable treasures, and exotic settings.

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