

# DAUGHTER OF EGYPT

## Book Club Kit

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Dear Reader,

A solid gold mummy-shaped coffin bearing the Pharaoh Tutankamun's likeness. A falcon-shaped gold necklace inlaid with lapis lazuli and amber to adorn the boy king. These are just a few of Tutankamun's treasures that first lured me into the realm of ancient Egypt. But they aren't the reason I got hooked. No, that honor belongs to the Pharaoh Hatshepsut, one of a very few women to fill the role and certainly the mightiest. The question of Hatshepsut's rise and systematic eradication from monuments and records haunted me, and as I began to formulate my own theories, I struggled with the best way to tell her story.

And then I learned about Lady Evelyn Herbert. Daughter of one of the great patrons of archaeology, Lord Carnarvon of Highclere Castle, Evelyn had been trained in the history and excavation of ancient Egypt by none other than famous archaeologist Howard Carter. On her first excavation in Egypt, after the Great War ended, they were on the hunt for one of the few remaining, undisturbed royal tombs, possibly that of Tutankamun.

An idea struck me. What if, as they set out on the dangerous path to discover the tomb of Tutankamun, Evelyn and Carter were also desperate to find Hatshepsut and solve her mysteries? What if, like Hatshepsut herself, Evelyn found herself pitted against the male-dominated world she inhabited and in conflict with her family about who owns the past? And what if Evelyn's only true ally was her love, as was the case with Hatshepsut?

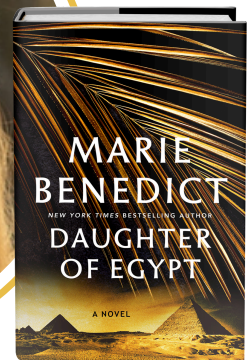
With this, *Daughter of Egypt* was born. Two women millennia apart. Two wildly different cultures. But one identical passion to make the right choices, no matter the challenges as their legacies intersect.

*Marie Benedict*

MARIE BENEDICT



Photo Credit: Anthony Musmanno



# DAUGHTER OF EGYPT

## AUTHOR Q&A

**In *Daughter of Egypt*, you interweave the stories of two very different women hailing from very different eras—Lady Evelyn Herbert from 1920s Highclere Castle and Pharaoh Hatshepsut from the Eighteenth Dynasty of ancient Egypt. Why did you decide to entwine the histories of these two women? Put another way, what was the inspiration for this novel?**

I suppose it all stems back to my longstanding fascination with *both* of these time periods. Since childhood, I've adored all things ancient Egypt—youthful tours of museum collections with gleaming Egyptian artifacts took care of that—as well as the stories of the early archaeologists who discovered those tombs. I dreamed about becoming a female Indiana Jones! As I got older and became more serious about studying the past, I learned about Hatshepsut, one of a very few female pharaohs and certainly the mightiest, who was systematically erased from history after her death. My desire to unpuzzle Hatshepsut's mystery grew, and when I read about Lady Evelyn Herbert's involvement not only in archaeology generally but in Tutankamun's excavation specifically, an idea formed. What if I could interconnect the histories and legacies of these two incredible women, allowing me to linger in the eras I love? What if Lady Evelyn was on the hunt for Hatshepsut's tomb—to bring back to life, if you will, a woman and a history that someone was desperate to erase? That became *Daughter of Egypt*.

**Even though Lady Evelyn Herbert and Pharaoh Hatshepsut come from wildly disparate worlds, they both face challenges unique to their gender. What does that path look like for each of them?**

Hatshepsut's journey from princess and high priestess to pharaoh seemed nearly Herculean from the start. In fact, if I hadn't already known that she reached that zenith, I might have deemed it impossible; after all, a female pharaoh was practically without precedent. Life in ancient Egypt was heavily prescribed and ruled by ritual and law, and the way in which Hatshepsut had to play the long game and turn those rituals on their head—even utilizing previously immutable iconography for her own purposes—was nothing short of astonishing. Whether or not she was ultimately successful in her plan is a mystery solvable only through fiction, but certainly, for a time, Hatshepsut prevailed. As for Lady Evelyn Herbert, she too faced challenges; the acceptable course for an aristocratic young woman like herself wouldn't involve a passion for archaeology.

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## AUTHOR Q&A

Her tenacity in obtaining an education in Egyptian history and excavation techniques and in participating in the digs was remarkable, no matter how long she remained in the field. But Hatshepsut and Evelyn were not the only astonishing historical women in the novel who had to rise up against societal expectations. Madame Safiya Zaghloul, the “mother of Egyptians” and wife of the Egyptian revolutionary and statesman Saad Zaghloul, overcame strict prohibitions against women entering Egyptian political life. She actually became a celebrated female leader and an influential force in Egypt’s independence from British rule by harnessing the power of her fellow women.

**Can you share a bit about your process for researching and writing *Daughter of Egypt*?  
What, if anything, surprised you?**

In some way, I feel like I’ve been preparing to write Hatshepsut’s chapters for decades. I’ve been amassing books and articles and maps and academic tomes on ancient Egypt and Hatshepsut as well as visiting museums with collections for years and years. So when it came time to recreate her existence—as best as possible given the limitations on available information and the passage of time—I had resources at my disposal already (including some terrific books about her, such as Kara Cooney’s *The Woman Who Would Be King*). That said, I recognized that, although I am not a scholar in the field, I wanted to do Hatshepsut justice. So I consulted Egyptologist Dr. J. J. Shirley, a professor, the Director of the TT110 Field School & Objects Project in Luxor, Egypt, and managing editor of the *Journal of Egyptian History*. I found her expertise to be priceless in creating Hatshepsut’s story. And, of course, I had an overabundance of information about the discovery of Tutankamun’s tomb, and I am particularly grateful for Howard Carter’s firsthand accounts on this topic and others.

Regarding Lady Evelyn Herbert, I’ve spent a fair amount of time researching the interwar years, particularly in Great Britain, for other novels, such as *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*, *The Mitford Affair*, and *The Queens of Crime*. For greater comprehension, I immersed myself in all things Highclere Castle, a stand-in for Downton Abbey (thoroughly enjoying the wonderful books by the current Countess of Carnarvon, especially *The Earl and The Pharaoh*, and finding useful the autobiography by Evelyn’s brother, *Memoirs of the Earl of Carnarvon*). I thought I understood

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the general landscape until I turned my attention to colonial Egypt. This was an area of the past I knew little about, and researching it required immense amounts of background reading to arrive at a workable understanding. There, I delved into Egypt's complicated history under the rule of other governments, and specifically, into the situation in the post-World War I era when Egyptian citizens had grown tired of being a staging ground for other countries' battles. I stumbled across a long-out-of-print memoir by an American woman touring Egypt at this precise time period—*A Woman Tenderfoot in Egypt* by Grace Thompson Seton—and I found it so helpful I included her as a character in the book.

Research also required tours of Highclere Castle and Egypt, of course . . . but if I could only find a time portal, I'd really be set.

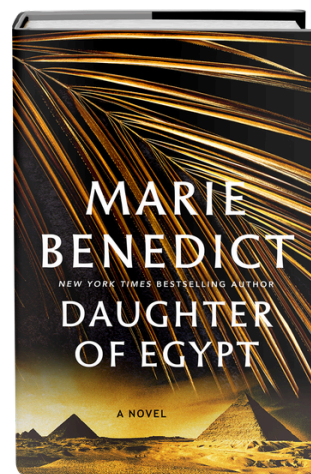
**The question of who owns history—here, in the form of artifacts—is at the heart of *Daughter of Egypt*. Can you talk about what that means to you, and how it factors into the novel?**

To whom does the past belong? This issue has preoccupied me since my days as college history major. It started as a consideration of who should “own” the relics and artifacts and artwork of the past, an ever-changing assessment largely conducted by ruling entities and their laws, one that usually disregarded the moral quandary imbedded in the question. In my early years as a lawyer, my own deliberation on this issue took a largely legal bent, and I represented Native American tribes in their efforts to have artifacts restored to them. And, in fact, my first novel focused on the courtroom efforts by families of Holocaust victims to get back artwork that had been stolen by the Nazis. Over time, however, as I realized how often the past is retold by those in control, my consideration expanded, and I began to ask the bigger question of who owns the *telling* of the past, not only its objects. In *Daughter of Egypt*, I hope to raise for readers these different variations on the question of who “owns” history—its artifacts and its recounting.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

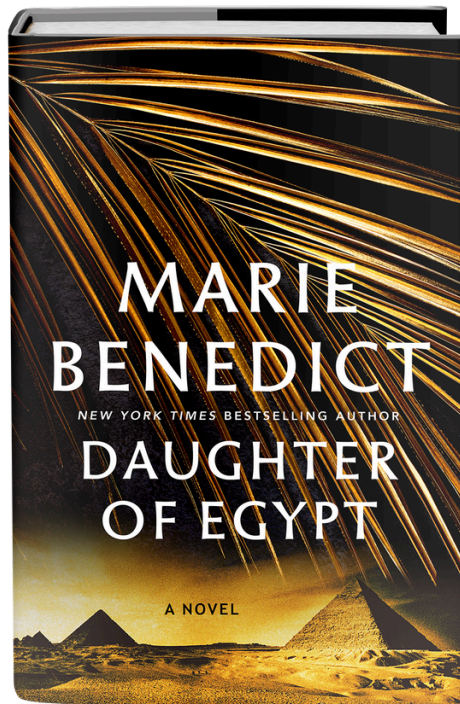
1. When *Daughter of Egypt* opens, the Great War—known to us now as World War I—has ended, and both England and Egypt are in a period of tremendous change. How much did you know about this time period in England and continental Europe? How familiar were you with the impact the Great War had on Egypt? Is this an era about which you needed to educate yourself?
2. Highclere Castle is famous as the real-life location of Downton Abbey. The castle and the family who own it, however, have a fascinating and important history. Had you heard of the Carnarvons, for whom Highclere Castle has been the seat since the 1600s? What, if anything, did you know about them and their realm?
3. For many people—their first introduction to ancient Egypt and its archaeology comes through the splendors found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankamun. Was this the case for you? Did you find the role of the esteemed Carnarvon family in unearthing this singular discovery—Lady Evelyn Herbert, in particular—surprising? Did their excavations and those of this time period differ from the way you envisioned them?
4. Egypt and its history are at the very core of the novel—not only ancient Egypt but also Egypt during this critical juncture. Did you have any specific reaction to the colonial nature of 1920s Egypt or the rise of the movement for independence?
5. *Daughter of Egypt* weaves together the story of Evelyn and her desire to uncover the tomb of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut with the story of Hatshepsut herself. Had you ever heard of Hatshepsut? Did the depiction of her in the novel shift any understanding you may have had about ancient Egypt? What legacy do you think Hatshepsut may have left behind?



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

6. Did you see any parallels between Evelyn and Hatshepsut, despite the fact that the worlds and times they inhabited were so very different? What similarities exist between their concerns and the issues faced by people of today?
7. How did you respond to the way in which Hatshepsut and Evelyn's stories concluded in *Daughter of Egypt*? Were you satisfied with the path that Evelyn chose? How did you feel about the manner in which Hatshepsut's reign—indeed, her life insofar as most people knew—ended? As you may know from the Author's Note, the cause of Hatshepsut's death and the reason for her erasure from monuments, sculpture, and even papyri throughout Egypt remains a mystery.
8. Woven throughout the novel is the question about who owns the past and its artifacts, and how it is remembered. Discuss this critical issue, one that is both historical and modern.



Scan the QR code to hear Marie Benedict discuss the inspiration behind *Daughter of Egypt*!

# KING TUT MARTINI

Soon after the discovery of Tutankamun's tomb in 1922, a global fascination with all things ancient Egypt took hold. "Tutmania," as it was called, gave rise to a craze for clothing, artwork, design, and music with an ancient Egyptian theme; even food and drink got swept up in the wave. This movement continued on and off for decades, sparked by events like the famous tour of the Tutankamun artifacts from 1976 to 1979. In honor of one such exhibition, *The Toronto Star* published the recipe for a King Tut Martini — or King Tuttini — as follows:

*Mario Benedict*

MARIE BENEDICT

## INGREDIENTS

Ice

1 oz vodka

1/2 oz Goldschlager

1 oz butter ripple liqueur

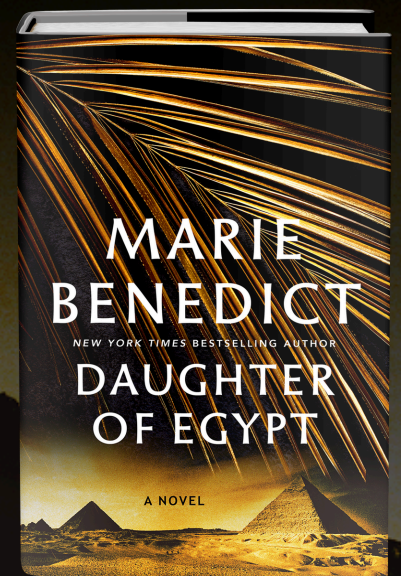
Splash of cranberry juice

## INSTRUCTIONS

Pour ice into a cocktail shake and then add all the other ingredients with the exception of cranberry juice. Shake and strain into a martini glass, and then add the cranberry juice.



Photo Credit: Michael Stuparyk



# STEP INTO THE PAST...

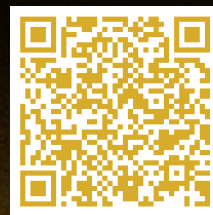
*Daughter of Egypt* is, in part, about one of the only female pharaohs (and one of the most successful in terms of the breadth and peacefulness of her reign) and her ascent to the throne. Because Hatshepsut's rise to power went against all societal norms, she had to harness the power of storytelling and iconography to justify her singular reign. In her temples in her capital in Thebes (modern-day Luxor), she used images, reliefs, and sculptures to demonstrate how her rule was sanctioned by the gods — and how the gods awarded her rule through successful trade and agriculture. Many of these sites and structures figure prominently in Hatshepsut's chapters in *Daughter of Egypt*. Marie Benedict visited Egypt and captured images of what remains of Hatshepsut's legacy. Let's take a look...

Hatshepsut's crowning jewel is the mortuary temple at Luxor, considered a masterpiece of ancient architecture. It is carved into cliffs of Deir al-Bahari and includes colossal statues of Hatshepsut styled as a male pharaoh complete with crown and the objects of rule, capable of succeeding in the role.



# STEP INTO THE PAST...

These are images and reliefs from Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, which celebrates her successes and the divine nature of her rule. Once the temple was a riot of color and images, and in the images that remain, we can see the story that Hatshepsut was trying to tell about her achievements and her divine selection to Pharaoh. Evidence of the intentional destruction of Hatshepsut's images can also be seen, a mystery which Marie solves through her fiction. In fact, only one cartouche of her name is still visible. Local archaeologists believe it was left behind by a worker who protested the destruction of her name and likeness.



Scan the QR code to hear how Hatshepsut's image was erased from some reliefs by her successor and one-time co-ruler, Thutmose III.

# STEP INTO THE PAST...

Directly across from the mortuary temple is the Karnak Temple, the largest religious complex ever built. Together with the other structures in Luxor, it would have been used for ceremonies and festivals, including some depicted in *Daughter of Egypt*. There can be found several structures proclaiming Hatshepsut's rightful rule, including her beautiful Red Chapel. It was demolished in antiquity and reconstructed in 1997 using its original materials. Its reliefs show events that occurred during the reign of Hatshepsut and include a rare image of her daughter, Nefure, who is an important figure in *Daughter of Egypt*.

Hatshepsut's obelisk, one of the tallest in Egypt and carved from a single block, was built to honor the god Amun. The scenes on its surface show her in both her male and female pharaonic form — and also contain images of her father.



# STEP INTO THE PAST...

In *Daughter of Egypt*, Lady Evelyn Herbert inhabits not only the rarified setting of Highclere Castle but also the complicated, exotic, and sometime scintillating world of 1920s Egypt. From the remote, desert regions in the Valley of the Kings where she undertakes archeological excavations — including that of Pharaoh Tutankamun — to the swanky hotels where she and her family return after long, hot, dusty days on digs or long nights in the social whirl of Cairo.

The Mena House Hotel in Cairo (top left), built in 1886 and known for its spectacular views of the pyramids, was a social hub for wealthy English people who were in Egypt for the winter season. Lady Evelyn stayed there and also attended social events there.

While in Luxor, Lady Evelyn and her family always stayed at the Winter Palace Hotel, built in 1905 on the east bank of the Nile. It was the place to see and be seen for a certain group of tourists and affluent archaeologists, and it became the hub for all things Tutankamun once the discovery was made.



# STEP INTO THE PAST...

The Valley of the Kings — a desert valley surrounded by rock and limestone cliffs, situated on the west bank of the Nile outside Luxor (formerly known as Thebes) — became the primary location for the rock-cut tombs of pharaohs, their families and nobles beginning with Hatshepsut's father. Currently, around 65 tombs have been found in the area, and it was the focal place for much excavation in Lady Evelyn's time. Her father Lord Carnarvon got the concession to dig there just before the war, and they focused their efforts there.

The tomb of Tutankamun was discovered here in the Valley of the Kings by Lady Evelyn, her father, and Howard Carter. Although the interior was not nearly as lavish as some of the others seen here, it contained the greatest treasures. It is the only opened tomb to still contain the mummy.



# STEP INTO THE PAST...

These images from the VERY newly opened (November 2025) Grand Egyptian Museum, the largest and most spectacular archaeological museum in the world. It is an architectural wonder itself, and there, for the first time in history, all of the treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb are assembled together.

