

King Tut Biography

King (c. 1341 BCE–c. 1323 BCE)

King Tut is chiefly known for his intact tomb, discovered in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in 1922. Since then, his remains have held millions in awe over the mystery of his life and death.

King Tut - Mini Biography (TV-PG; 02:19) King Tut was the 12th king of the 18th Egyptian dynasty, in power from 1361 B.C. to 1352 B.C. After his death at 18, he disappeared from history until his tomb was found in 1922.

Synopsis

Born circa 1341 B.C.E., King Tut was the 12th king of the 18th Egyptian dynasty, in power from 1332 B.C.E. to 1323 B.C.E. During his reign, powerful advisers restored the traditional Egyptian religion which had been set aside by his predecessor Akhenaton, who had led the "Amarna Revolution." After his death at age 18, he disappeared from history until the discovery of his tomb in 1922. Since then, studies of his tomb and remains have revealed much information about his life and times.

Background

Tutankhamun, or better known as King Tut, was a pharaoh who accomplished little in his life. He did not expand Egypt's borders nor enjoy triumphant victories like the many pharaohs before him; however, he is the most recognized and probably the most famous pharaoh today. But why is he so famous? This answer can be attributed to the discovery of his tomb and his elaborate treasure.

Probably one of the best known pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Tutankhamun was a minor figure in ancient Egyptian history. The boy king of 18th Egyptian dynasty was the son of the powerful Akhenaten, also known as Amenhotep IV, and most likely one of Akhenaten's sisters. His short reign of eight to nine years accomplished little, but the discovery of his nearly intact tomb in 1922 has led many to unravel the mysteries to his life and death.

Early Life

Tutankhamun was born circa 1341 B.C.E. and given the name Tutankhaten, meaning "the living image of Aten." At this time, ancient Egypt was going through great social and political upheaval. Tutankhaten's father had forbidden the worship of many gods in favor of worshipping one, Aten, the sun disk. For this, he is known as the "heretic king." Historians differ on how extensive the change from polytheism to monotheism was, or whether Akhenaten was only attempting to elevate Aten above the other gods. It does seem, however, that his intent was to reduce the power of the priests and shift the traditional temple-based economy to a new regime run by local government administrators and military commanders.

As the populace was forced to honor Aten, the religious conversion threw ancient Egyptian society into chaos. The capital of Thebes was moved to the new capital of Armana. Akhenaten put all of his efforts into the religious transition, neglecting domestic and foreign affairs. As the power struggle between old and new intensified, Akhenaten became more autocratic and the regime more corrupt. Following a 17-year reign, he was gone, probably forced to abdicate, and died soon after. His 9-year-old son, Tutankhaten, took over around 1332 B.C.E.

Boy King in Power

The same year that Tutankhaten took power, he married Ankhesenamun, his half sister and the daughter of Ikhnaton and Nefertiti. It is known that the young couple had two daughters, both stillborn. Due to Tutankhaten's young age when he assumed power, the first years of his reign were probably controlled by an elder known as Ay, who bore the title of Vizier. Ay was assisted by Horemheb, ancient Egypt's top military commander at the time. Both men reversed Akhenaten's decree to worship Aten, in favor of the traditional polytheistic beliefs. Tutankhaten changed his name to Tutankhamun, which means "the living image of Amun," and had the royal court moved back to Thebes.

Foreign policy had also been neglected during Akhenaten's reign, and Tutankhamun sought to restore better relations with ancient Egypt's neighbors. While there is some evidence to suggest that Tutankhamun's diplomacy was successful, during his reign, battles took place between Egypt and the Nubians and Asiatics over territory and control of trade routes. Tutankhamun was trained in the military, and there is some evidence that he was good at archery. However, it is unlikely that he saw any military action.

Internally, Tutankhamun sought to restore the old order in hopes that the gods would once again look favorably on Egypt. He ordered the repair of the holy sites and continued construction at the temple of Karnak. He also oversaw the completion of the red granite lions at Soleb.

Death and Burial

Because Tutankhamun and his wife had no children, his death at age 19, circa 1323 B.C.E., brought further turmoil to the court. Evidence indicates that upon his death, Ankhesenamun contacted the king of the Hittites, asking for one of his sons as a husband. The Hittite king sent a candidate, but he died during the journey, most likely assassinated before he got to the royal palace. This attempt to forge an alliance with a foreign power was most likely prevented by Ay and Horemheb, who were still in control behind the scenes. Evidence shows that Ankhesenamun later married Ay, before disappearing from history.

Tutankhamun was buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings. It is believed that his early death necessitated a hasty burial in a smaller tomb most likely built for a lesser noble. The body was preserved in the traditional fashion of mummification. Seventy days after his death, Tutankhamun's body was laid to rest and the tomb was sealed. There are no known records of Tutankhamun after his death, and, as a result, he remained virtually unknown until the 1920s.

Even the location of his tomb was lost, as its entrance had been covered by the debris from a later-built tomb building.

King Tut's Tomb Discovered

Much of what is known about Tutankhamun, better known today as King Tut, derives from the discovery of his tomb in 1922. British archaeologist Howard Carter had begun excavating in Egypt in 1891, and after World War I he began an intensive search for Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings. On November 26, 1922, Carter and fellow archaeologist George Herbert, the Earl of Carnarvon, entered the interior chambers of the tomb. To their amazement, they found much of its contents and structure miraculously intact. Inside one of the chambers, murals were painted on the walls that told the story of Tutankhamun's funeral and his journey to the afterworld. Also in the room were various artifacts for his journey—oils, perfumes, toys from his childhood, precious jewelry, and statues of gold and ebony.

The most fascinating item found was the stone sarcophagus containing three coffins, one inside the other, with a final coffin made of gold. When the lid of the third coffin was raised, King Tut's royal mummy was revealed, preserved for more than 3,000 years. As archaeologists examined the mummy, they found other artifacts, including bracelets, rings and collars. Over the next 17 years, Carter and his associates carefully excavated the four-room tomb, uncovering an incredible collection of thousands of priceless objects.

Death Or Murder of King Tut

Was King Tut murdered or did he die from an illness? This age old question has continued to puzzle historians, Egyptologists, and scientists for many years. There are many different theories as to how he died and all of them continue to be controversial topics. Some will argue King Tut was likely murdered due to greed and power, while others believe he fell from his chariot or died from an illness. So many theories surround his death that it's impossible to rule out an exact cause of King Tut's death. With that information at hand, and centuries of forgotten facts, one thing is certain—there will continue to be many theories as to how King Tut died.

The Theory of Murder

If King Tut was murdered, some research and evidence point to a few limited servants that could have been responsible for his death. Their motives were likely centered on greed or the changing environment Akhenaten (King Tut's father) had created upon his death.

It was a known fact that Akhenaten brought about a major change in Egypt. He had pushed the idea of one god and this concept went against everything the Ancient Egyptians believed in. Though it is not known how Akhenaten transitioned Egypt into this new thinking, many believed the transition could have been hostile. Priests, who had temples, spent their whole life's worshiping and honoring their beloved gods. When Akhenaten acquired the throne he changed

their thinking and he might have forced them to shut down their temples and revert to his religion—which was unheard of at the time. As result of this radical movement, many historians believed this created an unstable environment that might have upset Akhenaten’s royal court and its citizens—the change was drastic and must have required a firm stance to change hundreds of years of thinking.

Akhenaten died when King Tut was a child and he was given the throne at a young age. If Akhenaten did create a hostile environment, his son would’ve had to deal with the new state of Egypt. To make matters worse, King Tut was a child and probably did not have the intellect to run Egypt. This would’ve meant that more experienced subjects of King Tut would have helped him—mainly Ay and Horemheb. Because these two officials had such a strong presence in King Tut’s life and had direct access to him, many stories surround them.

Just being the son of Akhenaten must have been difficult for a young boy who probably wanted to go about his business uninterrupted. This situation alone breeds hate from those who oppressed Akhenaten and his new teachings. They probably perceived King Tut’s death as a way out to restore Egypt to its old ways.

The Theory of Ay

One popular story stands out the most and this one is based on the relationship between King Tut and Ay. So much so, that this particular scandal continues to be a popular theory. It was said that Ay killed King Tut out of greed. Ay knew that by killing King Tut he would inherit the throne and become pharaoh. Coincidentally, King Tut does die at around 18 and Ay is given the throne. What also makes this story interesting is that a crack was found on the base King Tut’s skull possibly indicating that King Tut was indeed murdered.

A strong advocate of this theory is Bob Brier, an Egyptologist, from Long Island University. Mr. Brier revealed his findings January 17, 1997 in a conference held in California. Brier believes the motive is obvious and is more logical then the other stories surrounding King Tut’s death. Also, Brier points out that a ring that was discovered in Cairo in 1931. This ring showed that Ay and Ankhesenamun were married soon after King Tut’s death. Brier believes Ay forced Ankhesenamun to marry him because if she did not, Ay would not have been able to inherit the throne.

To continue this story, some Egyptologists believe that Ankhesenamun could have made a desperate attempt to save the throne. Some tablets, which are dated towards the end of the Amarna period, were discovered. These tables appeared to be from Ankhesenamun to the Hittites asking for help. The Hittites were enemies of Egypt at the time.

These tablets, dating back to the end of the 18th dynasty, revealed a possible last plea for intervention to the Hittites revealing a potential scandal. Some Egyptologist’s strongly associate this letter with Ankhesenamun as a last resort in the hopes of saving her throne and her status. She informed the Hittite king, Suppiluliumas, to send a son to wed her. She clearly stated her humiliation and her feelings of being worried. The queen pointed out the loss of her husband and

stated, “Never shall I pick out a servant of mine and make him my husband. I am afraid!” Was this servant Ay she was talking about? Many believe so.

The Hittite son who was sent to be married never made it to Egypt. He was assassinated on his journey to Egypt and the marriage never occurred. Ay could be the person to blame.

The Theory of Hormheb

The king's deputy, also known as Horemheb, may have also been responsible for the death of King Tut as well. The possibility that King Tut was getting older and probably ready to take powers into his own hands may have contributed to his early demise. For many years it was believed that Hormheb guided King Tut in his royal decisions as a child. As King Tut grew older and became more independent he started making his own decisions without the aid of Horemheb. This new thinking might have upset him and he quickly saw his power fading away. This independence that King Tut was attaining might have upset him and could be the reason as to why he killed King Tut.

Though Horemheb did not get the throne after King Tut's death he did get it after Ay. Upon becoming the pharaoh he restored Egypt to its traditional tradition which was the worshiping of the many ancient gods. He moved his capital to Memphis and returned all the temples to their rightful priests. During his reign as pharaoh he removed any signs of Akhenaten's religion.

By his actions, many Egyptologists and historians strongly assume that Horemheb wanted to restore Egypt to its traditional ways. Although, in hindsight, it appears that King Tut was also leaning in the direction of restoring Egypt to the more habitual ways before his death—it might not have been fast enough for Horemheb though.

Mohamed El-Saghir, head of Upper Egyptian Antiquities, believes that Horemheb could not have committed the murder of the pharaoh. Mohamed believes that because King Tut was restoring Egypt to its traditional ways, Horemheb would not have had any reason to kill him. He does find it interesting that Horemheb removed King Tut's name from several items and replaced it with his. Even so, it's still not enough evidence and most pharaohs always tried to outdo the pharaohs before them.

Not only is Horemheb not the murder in his eyes, but Mohamid also believes that Ay should not be on the list as well. Mohamid sees Ay as someone who participated in personal and scared rituals with King Tut. He goes on to say, "There is insufficient evidence that he is guilty. He was the high priest and was, moreover, the one who wrote Tutankhamen's negative confession and performed his 'opening of the mouth' ceremony." If Ay and Horemheb are ruled out, then how else might have King Tut died?

Other Causes of Death

Other theories as well have come to light though scientific examination. Forensic experts from Egypt did an examination on King Tut and came up with a different explanation as to why King

Tut died. It was found that he may have died due to an infection. They are quick to point out that King Tut was not murdered and believe the crack in the skull was probably caused during the mummification process. Anything could have happened during this process such as his body being dropped or an instrument hitting his skull.

Just recently, new CT scans of King Tut have been performed and the results shed new light into King Tut's death. The scans revealed a broken leg that may have been responsible for the death of King Tut. Doctor Zahi Hawass says, "We found that he had a fracture on the left leg. And that fracture proved to have happened a few days before he died. It was before mummification, and therefore it could happen, we are not sure, it could (have) happened that he died because of this accident." So King Tut might have not been murdered after all.

Some have extended this theory a step further and have suggested he fell from his chariot while hunting. Though his leg could have broken from a variety of daily activities we'll never know how exactly he broke his leg.

If King Tut was murdered it would almost be impossible to solve due to the many years of tarnish. King Tut was the son of the "Heretic" Pharaoh and this alone creates so many dynamics that could have lead to his death. However King Tut died, people find his tragedy interesting and for this reason alone many more stories will forever surface.