

Chapter 11

Tutankhamun and the Discovery of His Tomb

Objective

To learn about Tutankhamun and the drama surrounding the discovery of his tomb by Howard Carter in the Valley of the Kings.

Mystery

Who was Tutankhamun and how did he die? Why has the discovery of his tomb been called the greatest archaeological find of all time? What is the mummy's curse all about?

Discussion and Research Projects

1. During the New Kingdom, where did the royals bury their dead?
2. How were the tombs constructed?
3. How were the walls of the tombs decorated?
4. What was placed in the tombs to assist the deceased in the afterlife?
5. Why were household items and food placed in the tombs?
6. Of all the tombs in the Valley of the Kings, which is the most famous? Explain why it is so famous.
7. How old was Tutankhamun when he became pharaoh? Do you think he ruled as a true pharaoh at such a young age?
8. What are some of the theories about Tutankhamun's death?
9. Who became pharaoh after Tutankhamun died? What happened to him?
10. What became of Tutankhamun's wife?
11. What was done to Tutankhamun's body after he died?



12. Can you explain the “opening of the mouth” ceremony that was performed on Tutankhamun’s mummy?
13. What do you know about the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb? Who found it, when was it found and what happened to it in the years immediately following its discovery?
14. What kinds of treasures were found in Tutankhamun’s tomb?
15. What do you know about the mummy’s curse?
16. Gather information about the different theories on Tutankhamun’s death. Discuss the pros and cons of each theory.

Creative Projects

1. Pretend you are a journalist at the press conference held to announce Howard Carter’s discovery of the tomb. Write a story to communicate the news to the world.
2. Interview Tutankhamun and his sister-wife, and ask them about their childhood. Find out about life at Tell el-Amarna, the city their father, Akhenaten, built when he moved away from Thebes.
3. Create a dialogue between yourself and Tutankhamun, who now lives in the afterworld. Ask him to describe his journey to the afterworld and to explain what it is like to live there. Ask him to tell you about the circumstances surrounding his premature death.
4. Use **Activity Sheet 26** to learn about Tutankhamun’s tomb.
5. Use **Activity Sheet 27** to learn about some of the treasures found in Tutankhamun’s tomb.
6. Use **Activity Sheet 28** to learn about Tutankhamun’s life from artwork found in his tomb.

FACT SHEET: Tutankhamun and His Tomb

Valley of the Kings

The Valley of the Kings is famous for its royal tombs. These beautifully painted tombs have been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. For over a thousand years, the kings, queens and nobles of the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.) were buried in the Theban necropolises, the world's most magnificent burial grounds.

The tombs were cut into the limestone rock in a remote wadi (a dry river valley) on the west side of the Nile, opposite the present-day city of Luxor. Their walls were painted and sculpted with magnificent murals depicting scenes of daily life and the Land of the Gods. The chambers were filled with treasures — everything from furniture to food, statues, boats and jewels, which a person needed to sustain life into eternity. The royals hoped to find refuge from robbers and their enemies, who caused such havoc in the pyramid tombs of their predecessors.

The Valley of the Kings is located across the Nile from Thebes, the capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom. The Theban Peak, shaped like a pyramid, can be seen high above the burial grounds. This is perhaps one of the reasons the pharaohs chose this remote location.

The valley contains 62 known tombs, 24 of which are royal burials. The most famous (KV No. 62) belongs to the boy king Tutankhamun. Its entrance was found 3.9 metres (13 feet) below that of the tomb of Ramses VI, which was built after Tutankhamun's. The rubble from the construction of Ramses' tomb had fallen over the entrance to Tutankhamun's, concealing it and protecting it from further intervention by robbers.

Who Was Tutankhamun?

Tutankhamun is the best-known pharaoh of ancient Egypt. He was probably the son of Akhenaten, the heretic king of the eighteenth dynasty. His mother was probably Queen Kiya, one of the king's secondary wives. Ankhesenamun,



Road leading to the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The Theban Peak can be seen in the background.

CMC ECD98-018 #5



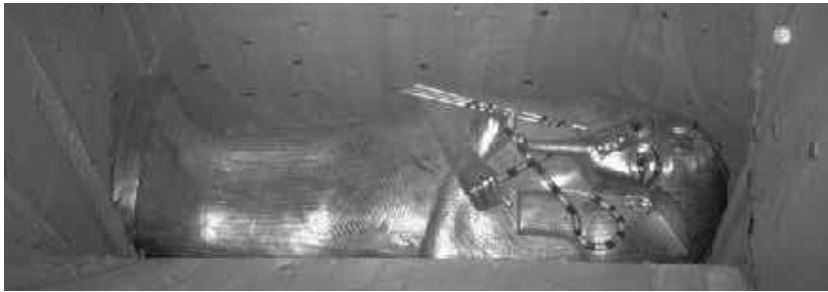
Entrance to Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings

CMC ECD98-034 #39



Inside the tomb of Ramses VII in the Valley of the Kings

CMC ECD98-007 #47



One of Tutankhamun's gold coffins, inside his sarcophagus
 Replica at the Pharaonic Village, Cairo
 CMC S97 9965



Statue of Akhenaten, who may have been Tutankhamun's father
 CMC S97 10043 (photo)

his older half sister, became his queen. Tutankhamun ascended the throne in 1333 B.C., at the age of nine, and reigned until his death at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Some speculate that he was murdered, and others think he may have been deliberately sent into battle to be killed. However, the exact cause of his death is unknown. Those who believe he was murdered point to the hole in his skull as evidence, but some experts believe the hole was made after his death. His mummified body was so badly preserved that we may never know the true fate of this minor pharaoh.

Not all scholars agree on the identity of Tutankhamun's parents. One theory suggests that he was the son of Amenophis III and his principal wife Tiy or his secondary wife Meritre. When the results of DNA testing on the pharaohs become available, we may get a clearer picture of the royal lineage.

Clues into Tutankhamun's Death

Researchers continue to investigate the cause of Tutankhamun's premature death. Bob Brier, a mummy specialist from Long Island University, has been tracking down clues that indicate Tutankhamun may have been killed by his elderly chief advisor and successor, Ay. An X-ray of his skull revealed a calcified blood clot at its base. This could have been caused by a blow from a blunt instrument, which eventually resulted in death.

The painting in Tutankhamun's burial chamber depicts his successor, Ay, at the "opening of the mouth" ceremony, giving life and breath to the young deceased pharaoh. Ay, a commoner, is wearing the leopard skin of a vizier and the crown of a pharaoh. Since Tutankhamun did not have a child to succeed him, some scholars speculate that Ay decided to seize the crown and declare himself king of Egypt.

There were at least two other deaths following that of Tutankhamun. His young wife, Ankhesenamun, pleaded with the king of the Hittites to send her one of his sons for a husband. She did not want to marry a servant, such as Ay. A son was sent, but he was murdered before he arrived.



Ay (right) performs the "opening of the mouth" ceremony on Tutankhamun's mummy. Scene from Tutankhamun's burial chamber.

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3522)

So who did Ankhesenamun marry? There is now evidence that she married Ay. A ring has been found with her cartouche inscribed next to his. Did Ay force her to marry him, thus legitimizing his claim to the throne? Within three years of Ay's death, Ankhesenamun disappeared. Could she also have been the victim of a serial killer?

What happened to Ay? He died within a few years of seizing the throne. His cartouches, which he had inscribed on temple walls, were eradicated, his tomb was robbed and vandalized, and his mummy disappeared. His name was also eliminated from the official list of pharaohs, as was that of Tutankhamun.

Another theory on Tutankhamun's death suggests that he was murdered by General Horemheb, a man of low birth who became one of Akhenaten's closest advisors. Under Tutankhamun, he was appointed commander-in-chief of the army and deputy of the king. Following the demise of Tutankhamun and Ay, Horemheb became pharaoh. During his reign, he had the names of Akhenaten, Tutankhamun and Ay removed from the royal list of pharaohs, which suggests that he had personal reasons for eradicating those rulers from the records.

Tutankhamun's Funeral

Since Tutankhamun died suddenly, his burial was arranged in haste. Following the mummification of his human remains, his body was placed in a gold coffin and transported across the Nile to the Valley of the Kings. In the funeral procession were Tutankhamun's wife and close relatives, priests and the highest officials of the land.

The tomb in which Tutankhamun was buried was probably intended for another person, but because of the young pharaoh's untimely death, it became his final resting place. Following the ritual "opening of the mouth" performed by his suc-



Bust of Tutankhamun found in his tomb

CMC ECD98-010 #79 (photo)



Priests lead the funeral procession taking Tutankhamun's coffin to his tomb. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.

CMC ECD98-010 #52

cessor, Ay, his body and coffins were placed in a red sarcophagus in the burial chamber. The foot of the outer coffin was sliced off and splashed with resin before the lid was set in place. The mismatched lid may have been dropped as it was being lowered into place because it was cracked. By the looks of it, the shrines around the sarcophagus were hastily erected, banged into place without due care as to the proper ritual orientation. A wall was constructed to seal the burial chamber from the antechamber. With all the worldly goods required for a happy existence in the afterworld in place, the entrance to the tomb was sealed, and Tutankhamun's cartouche was stamped on the wet plaster wall. The outer corridor was then closed off and the entrance to the tomb filled with rubble to prevent access to the burial chamber.



Howard Carter's water boy found the first step that led to Tutankhamun's tomb. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.

Photo: Adham Mostafa (CMC S97 10385)



Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon peer into Tutankhamun's tomb. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.

Photo: Adham Mostafa (CMC S97 10671)

Tutankhamun's Tomb

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb on November 4, 1922 by the English archaeologist Howard Carter is considered the most important archaeological find of the century. Here is a quote from Carter's diary describing his reaction as he first peered into the tomb's antechamber.

I inserted the candle and peered in, Lord Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn and Callender standing anxiously beside me to hear the verdict. At first I could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber causing the candle flame to flicker, but presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues and gold — everywhere the glint of gold . . . ¹⁵

When Lord Carnarvon, the English patron who financed Carter's work, could no longer stand the suspense, he asked, "Can you see anything?" Carter replied, "Yes, wonderful things." ¹⁶

This famous quote sums up the excitement of this incredible discovery that took the world by storm. The awe-inspiring beauty of Tutankhamun's treasures has generated enormous interest in ancient Egypt.



Tutankhamun's internal organs were placed in these canopic jars made of calcite (a translucent stone).

CMC ECD98-037 #90 (photo)

Tutankhamun's Treasures

Over 3,000 treasures were placed in Tutankhamun's tomb to help him in his afterlife, and the walls of the burial chamber were painted with scenes of his voyage to the afterworld. His mummy was found in the burial chamber. Four nested gilded wooden boxes (shrines) surrounded a red quartzite sarcophagus, inside which were three nested coffins. His body was wrapped in linen and over his face was placed an exquisite gold mask decorated with bands of glass paste imitating lapis lazuli and adorned with semi-precious stones and

glass. The mummy rested in the inner coffin, which is made of solid gold and weighs approximately 110.4 kilos (242.9 pounds).

Plan of Tutankhamun's Tomb

Tutankhamun's tomb is located in the Valley of the Kings between the tombs of Ramses II and Ramses IV. Although robbers probably entered the tomb at least twice in antiquity, its contents were virtually intact when it was discovered by Howard Carter.

The design of Tutankhamun's tomb is typical of that of the kings of the eighteenth dynasty. At the entrance to the tomb there is a flight of stairs leading to a short corridor. The first room is the antechamber, where many household items were found. Off this room is an annex, and at the far end is an opening that leads to the burial chamber. This chamber was guarded by two black sentry-statues that represent the royal ka (soul).



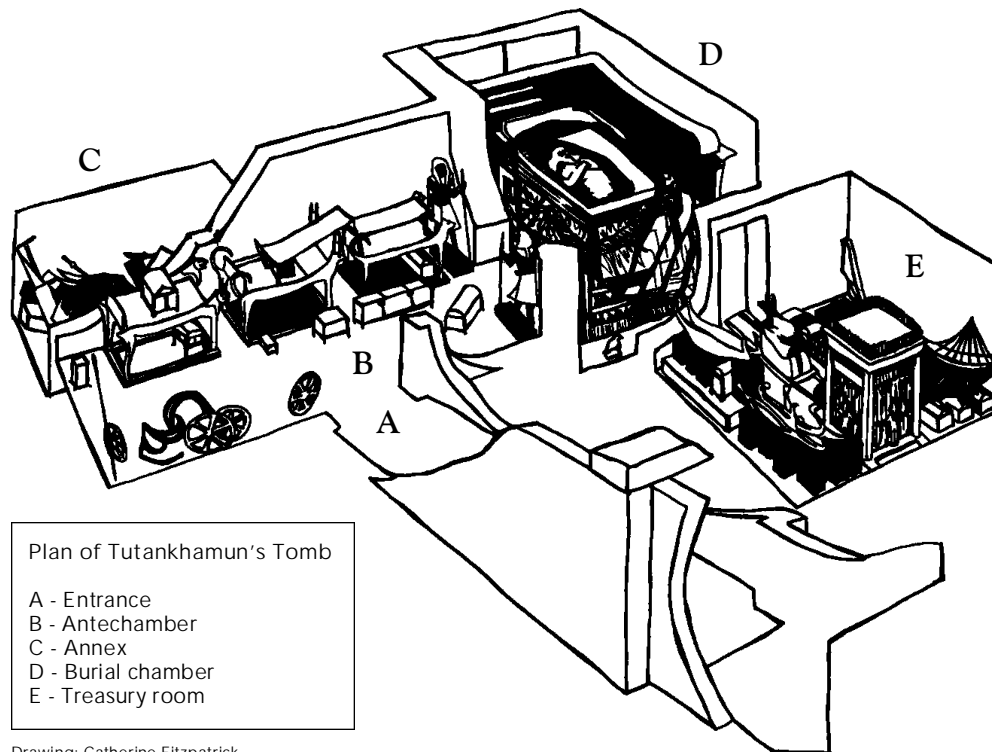
Tutankhamun's golden throne chair. The back of the chair bears an image of Tutankhamun and his wife.

CMC S97 10030 (photo)



Selkis, one of the four goddesses who protected the gold shrine that held Tutankhamun's canopic jars

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3498)



Plan of Tutankhamun's Tomb
 A - Entrance
 B - Antechamber
 C - Annex
 D - Burial chamber
 E - Treasury room

Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick



Inside the antechamber. One of two guardian figures that protected the entrance to Tutankhamun's burial chamber. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.

CMC ECD98-026 #43



Royal beds, chests and round boxes of food were found in the antechamber of Tutankhamun's tomb. Robbers had left the tomb in a state of disorder. To prevent further intervention, priests resealed the tomb immediately after the robbers were discovered, without cleaning up the mess. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.

CMC ECD98-027 #61

intestines and liver). Four goddesses protected the shrine — Neith to the north, Selkis to the south, Isis to the west and Nephthys to the east. Also found in this room were thirty-five model boats and a statue of Anubis, a god represented as having the head of a jackal. For conservation purposes, all these treasures have been removed to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The Mummy's Curse

The Egyptians were preoccupied with the cult of the dead. The mummified bodies of kings and commoners were placed in tombs filled with all the necessities of life. To protect the deceased in the afterlife and to prevent robbers or political enemies from desecrating the burials, the tombs were hidden in out-of-the-way places and a curse was invoked against violators.

The belief in the mummy's curse was rekindled when Lord Carnarvon, patron of Howard Carter's archaeological excavations, died of blood poisoning (following a mosquito bite that became infected) five months after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The public, however, preferred to explain his sudden death as the consequence of having disturbed Tutankhamun's tomb. For years, Carnarvon had been in poor health due to a car accident. To escape the damp winters in England, he went to Egypt and became interested in its ancient civilization. His unexpected death was undoubtedly the result of his weakened condition rather than the "curse", as many



Carter's golden canary in its cage at the archaeologist's residence. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.
CMC ECD98-026 #8

journalists suggested when reporting the story.

Prior to Carnarvon's death, Carter's yellow canary perished under strange circumstances. Carter had bought a canary in a gilded cage with the idea that its song would cheer up his lonely house. Upon seeing the bird, one of his servants exclaimed, "It's a bird of gold that will bring luck. This year we will find, inshallah (God willing), a tomb full of gold."¹⁷ Within a week of purchasing the canary, Carter discovered Tut's tomb. Not knowing whose tomb they had found, the workers nicknamed it "the tomb of the Golden Bird".¹⁸

The death of the canary at this most propitious moment was seen as a bad omen. Here is an account of what happened to the canary from the report of the inspector general in charge of antiquities.

During the recent excavations which led to the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, Mr. Howard Carter [the discoverer] had in his house a canary which daily regaled him with its happy song. On the day, however, on which the entrance to the tomb was laid bare, a cobra entered the house, pounced on the bird, and swallowed it. Now, cobras are rare in Egypt, and are seldom seen in winter; but in ancient times they were regarded as the symbol of royalty, and each Pharaoh wore the symbol upon his forehead, as though to signify his power to strike and sting his enemies.¹⁹



The cobra slithers over the floor and up a bench on its way to the canary's cage. Re-enactment scene from the film *Mysteries of Egypt*.
CMC ECD98-026 #10

Some people believe that the protective curses placed on Tutankhamun's tomb and those of his ancestors may have been responsible for these two deaths. There is plenty of evidence to the contrary. The water boy who first entered the antechamber and Howard Carter both lived to a ripe old age, as did many of the workers who excavated the tomb.