

King Tut biography

SYNOPSIS

Born circa 1341 B.C.E., King Tut was the 12th king of the 18th Egyptian dynasty, in power from 1361 B.C.E. to 1352 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

Probably one of the best known pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Tutankhamen 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. 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

Tutankhamen was born circa 1341 B.C.E. and given the name Tutankhaton, meaning "the living image of Aten." At this time, Ancient Egypt was going through great social and political upheaval. Tutankhaton's father had forbidden the worship of many gods in favor of worshiping one, Aton, the sun disc. 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 Aton 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 Aton, the religious conversion threw ancient Egyptian society into chaos. The capital of Thebes was moved to the new capital of Akhetaton. 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, Tutankhamen, took over around 1332 B.C.E.

BOY KING IN POWER

The same year that Tutankhamen took power, he married Ankhesenamun, his half sister. It is known that the young couple had two daughters, both stillborn. Due to Tutankhamen'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 Aton, in favor of the traditional polytheistic beliefs. Tutankhaton 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 Tutankhamen sought to restore better relations with ancient Egypt's neighbors.

While there is some evidence to suggest that Tutankhamen's diplomacy was successful, during his reign, battles took place between Egypt and the Nubians and Asiatics over territory and control of trade routes. Tutankhamen 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, Tutankhamen 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 Karnack. He also oversaw the completion of the red granite lions at Soleb.

DEATH AND BURIAL

Because Tutankhamen 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, Evidence shows that Ankhesenamun later married Ay, before disappearing from history.

Tutankhamen 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, Tutankhamen's body was laid to rest and the tomb was sealed. There are no known records of Tutankhamen 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 Tutankhamen, 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 Tutankhamen'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 Tutankhamen'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.