

# Tutankhamun: A Divine Ruler [C1]

Sono passati 100 anni dalla scoperta, nella Valle dei Re di Luxor, della tomba di questo faraone egiziano del XIV secolo a.C., un monarca morto giovane ma circondato da un ricco tesoro. Parliamo con un esperto egittologo che ci spiega la storia di una delle più grandi scoperte archeologiche di tutti i tempi e analizza le chiavi del fascino che la vita e la morte di Re Tut esercitano ancora su di noi.



Tutankhamun is something of an ancient Egyptian celebrity today, but one hundred years ago most egyptologists had never heard of him. His unconventional predecessor, Akhenaten, promoted the cult of one particular god, the Aten, or sun disc, to the exclusion of most — if not all — others. In contrast, Tutankhamun was quite a [low-profile](#) king, credited only with reintroducing polytheism, the traditional religious practice in ancient Egypt. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Dr. Campbell Price, an egyptologist and [curator](#) of Egypt and Sudan at the Manchester Museum in the UK, and the [chair](#) of the [board of trustees](#) for the Egypt Exploration Society, Britain's [foremost](#) charity supporting Egyptian cultural [heritage](#). We began by asking him how much is known about Tutankhamun. **Dr. Campbell Price (Scottish accent):** We know he ruled for nine years. We have [attested](#) historical dates

that go up to year nine — he might have made it slightly into a year ten —, and we know how old he was when he died because we've got his body. And of course, [plus or minus](#), a little bit of [leeway](#), he was about eighteen when he died. So by extrapolation, he was eight or nine when he came to the throne. We know the name of his wife, Ankhesenpaaten, [who] changed her name to Ankhesenamun. And we know that she is definitely a daughter of Akhenaten. So it depends how you read the paternity of Tutankhamun himself, either, yes, he's married to his half-sister, [most likely](#), or his [aunt](#), we're not quite sure. But there is no definitive evidence about his physical abilities, simply because mummification, the ritual of mummification, the process of mummification, so entirely changed the chemistry of Tutankhamun's remains that it is almost impossible to say anything definitively. And I absolutely hate facial reconstructions — but that's my own personal [hobbyhorse](#). So, we can say a lot less about Tutankhamun than a lot of people would like.

## EXTRA SPECIAL

It was not unusual that the king was so young when he took the throne, says Dr. Price. **Dr. Campbell Price:** It's not exceptional that Tutankhamun was young coming to the throne, and it was perfectly acceptable for a nine-year-old to occupy that position. Remember, he was believed to be at least partly divine, he was the son of a god, the sun god Ra. And in Tutankhamun's case, he probably was the last surviving [male heir](#) of the family line, so he would have been really extra special. People would have thought, "Wow, this kid is really the divine ruler, and so we just have [to enable](#) his [kingship](#) as best we can."

## AN INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY

Price talks more about the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. **Dr. Campbell Price:** It's [arguably](#) the great archaeological discovery. I think the significance of it comes from the fact that because of Akhenaten's [heresy](#) and his [shutting down](#) temples and exclusive [worship](#) of the Aten, the sun disc, this meant that later history wants to forget this period. So he already

disappeared in terms of official [accounts](#) a few generations after his death. So, I think this in some ways contributed to the fact that people didn't know where his tomb was. Also the location of the tomb it's in the bottom of the Valley [of the Kings], and it was easily covered by cement-like stones and [rubble](#) and [mud](#) that come through the valley in occasional flash floods.

## ENTER HOWARD CARTER

As has been the case with many archaeological finds, the tomb was discovered through a combination of persistence and pure luck. **Dr. Campbell Price:** In 1922, after intensive interest in the rest of the Valley of the Kings, someone called Howard Carter [comes along](#), [an] English archaeologist sent out to Egypt by the Egypt Exploration Fund, what is today the Egypt Exploration Society. So Carter systematically [works his way](#) through the Valley of the Kings in a more systematic way than previous archaeologists. And on the 4th of November 1922, an Egyptian [water boy](#) uncovers a step, a limestone step, and that the rest, as they say, is history. The tomb was [cleared](#) over the next ten years and revealed absolutely [eye-popping](#) material.

## A CELEBRITY MUMMY

As Dr. Price, Tutankhamun [shot to fame](#) at a [timely](#) moment in history. **Dr. Campbell Price:** One of the reasons that makes Tutankhamun such a good story is it happened at exactly the right time. So it's the 1920s, [Roaring Twenties](#). There was a fashion for this kind of art deco look. The stuff from the tomb absolutely caught the moment. Remember, of course, so many young men in Europe had died in the First World War, the Great War. So discovering the tomb of a young man who died at eighteen really captured people's imagination ... The tomb was disappointing in a way because there weren't many extensive texts. Carter and other Egyptologists were hoping for more [in the way of](#) texts. But Carter says when he first saw the tomb, it was like the [prop room](#) of some forgotten opera, because it's so [over-the-top](#). So many things covered in gold and [inlaid](#) with glass and ceramic, and just [eye-poppingly](#) colourful. There's something about the

style, this what we call 'post Amarna style', which has a certain androgyny to it, it has a certain elegance you don't find from other periods of Egyptian art history. So, I think all of that combines to make Tutankhamun the great archaeological find.

## **GOLD AND MYSTERY**

So, why are we all so [mesmerised](#) by ancient Egypt? **Dr. Campbell Price:** No Egyptologist for sure knows how the pyramids were built. There's that mystery. And then there's the glamour — it's wealthy people, it's kings, queens. There's lots of gold. The country is beautiful and sunny and exotic and it's all of these things. But there's also a sadness, a [pathos](#) to Tutankhamun. And that mask! I mean it's one of these works of human [ingenuity](#). It just captivates us because, yes, it's technically advanced, but we also think of it as in a way a strange investment of material goods. Because all of that gold went into the ground and no one would see it again after the door was closed. We can't [fathom](#) that.

## **THE MUMMY'S CURSE**

There is a popular belief that a [curse](#) will be placed on anyone who disturbs an ancient Egyptian tomb, especially that of a pharaoh! Is there any evidence of behind it? **Dr. Campbell Price:** The [curse](#) of Tutankhamun does really seem to be a of a tabloid newspaper invention. There is no evidence of a written [curse](#), as some claimed. But I think the [root](#) of the [curse](#) narrative is well known before Tutankhamun, already in Victorian times. This kind of gothic literature: Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, are writing about Egypt, Egyptian antiquities, mummies ... All of this is [rooted](#) in, frankly, colonial [guilt](#) because Egypt was ruled directly from 1882 by the British. Egypt was [mercilessly](#) exploited. And so the mummy becomes a kind of [foil](#) for that, a kind of [cipher](#), a symbol for revenge for colonial exploitation. Especially with Tutankhamun, because in 1922 Egypt had gained partial independence from the British Empire. And so the [curse](#) narrative absolutely [fits](#) into that colonial [angst](#).

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# Glossary

- **angst** = angoscia
- **heritage** = eredità
- **most likely** = più probabilmente
- **shutting down** = clausurare
- **worship** = adorazione
- **pathos** = compassione
- **curse** = maledizione
- **mercilessly** = senza pietà
- **inlaid** = inserito
- **low-profile** = basso profilo
- **leeway** = margine
- **aunt** = zia
- **arguably** = si può dire
- **heresy** = eresia
- **eye-popping** = affascinante
- **shot to fame** = diventare famoso
- **fits** = andare bene
- **root** = radice, origine
- **plus or minus** = più o meno
- **rubble** = detriti
- **mud** = fango
- **comes along** = arrivare, venire
- **water boy** = lavoratore dell'acqua
- **over-the-top** = smisurato
- **fathom** = immaginare
- **cipher** = messaggio cifrato
- **foremost** = più importante
- **attested** = testimoniare
- **accounts** = acconti
- **works his way** = lavorare attraverso
- **cleared** = pulire
- **mesmerised** = ipnotizzati
- **foil** = rappresentazione

- **in the way of** = riguardo a
- **ingenuity** = ingenio
- **guilt** = colpa
- **to enable** = abilitare
- **kingship** = essere re
- **prop room** = sala di attrezzi
- **board of trustees** = consiglio di amministrazione
- **male heir** = erede maschio
- **timely** = oportuno
- **curator** = conservatore
- **chair** = presidente
- **hobbyhorse** = cavallo di battaglia
- **Roaring Twenties** = i pazzi anni venti