

# World Leaders: King Tutankhamun

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The golden funerary mask of King Tutankhamun in the Egyptian Museum. Wikimedia Commons

**Synopsis:** King Tut was born around 1341 B.C. and was the 12th king of the 18th Egyptian dynasty. He was in power from about 1332 to 1323 B.C. During his reign, the traditional Egyptian religion was brought back. After Tut's death at age 19, he disappeared from history, until the discovery of his tomb in 1922. Since then, his tomb and remains have revealed much information about his life and times.

## Background

Probably one of the best known pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Tutankhamun was not very important in ancient Egyptian history. The boy king was the son of the powerful Akhenaten, also known as Amenhotep IV. His short reign lasted eight to nine years and did not accomplish much. However, the discovery of his tomb in 1922 led many to attempt to uncover the mysteries of his life and death.

## Early Life

Tutankhamun was born about 1341 B.C. He was given the name Tutankhaten, which means "the living image of Aten." Tutankhaten's father had forbidden the worship of many gods in favor of one, Aten, the sun. Some historians believe Akhenaten wanted everyone to worship one god, while others say he only wanted to make Aten the most important. It does seem, however, that Akhenaten wanted to reduce the power of the priests and increase the power of local government officials and military commanders.

As Egyptians were forced to honor Aten, society was thrown into chaos. Akhenaten moved the capital from Thebes to Amarna. He put all of his efforts into the new religion, neglecting the rest of the country. After ruling for 17 years, he was gone. He was most likely forced to leave, and he died soon after. His 9-year-old son, Tutankhaten, took over around 1332 B.C.

### **Boy King In Power**

The same year that Tutankhaten took power, he married a princess, Ankhesenamun. The young couple had two daughters, both of whom likely died before birth. Because Tutankhaten was so young, the country was probably controlled by two men, Ay and Horemheb. Both men proclaimed that Egyptians would go back to worshipping the traditional gods instead of Aten. Tutankhaten changed his name to Tutankhamun, which means "the living image of Amun," and had the royal court moved back to Thebes.

Tutankhamun hoped the old gods would once again help Egypt. He ordered the repair of the holy sites and continued building a large temple.

### **Death And Burial**

Tutankhamun died at 19, around 1323 B.C. After his death, Ankhesenamun contacted the king of the Hittites, asking for one of his sons as a husband. The Hittite king sent a son, but he died during the journey, most likely killed by Ay and Horemheb.

Tutankhamun was buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings. It is believed that he died so young that his tomb was not finished, requiring him to be buried in a smaller tomb built for a lesser noble. The body was mummified. 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 he remained nearly unknown until the 1920s. Even the location of his tomb was lost. Its entrance had been covered by the rubble from another tomb built later.

### **King Tut's Tomb Discovered**

Tutankhamun is better known today as King Tut. Much of what is known about him comes from the discovery of his tomb. On November 26, 1922, British archaeologists Howard Carter and George Herbert entered the inside of the tomb. To their amazement, they found that most of its contents were untouched. Inside one of the chambers, murals were painted on the walls. The murals 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 a large carved stone container holding three coffins. One coffin was inside the other, and the last coffin was made of gold. When the lid of the third coffin was raised, King Tut's mummy was revealed, preserved for more than 3,000 years. As

archaeologists examined it, they also found bracelets, rings and jeweled collars. Over the next 17 years, Carter's team carefully excavated the tomb, uncovering an amazing collection of priceless objects.

## Quiz

- 1 What is the MOST likely reason why the author included information about King Tut's father in the section "Early Life"?
- (A) to explain why Tut became a king at such a young age
  - (B) to explain why Tut's father wanted him to become a king
  - (C) to show that King Tut had the same beliefs as his father
  - (D) to show that King Tut received a lot of help from his father

- 2 Fill in the blank.

The author MAINLY explains the importance of the discovery of King Tut's tomb by .....

- (A) describing the many places archaeologists had looked for it
- (B) stating that he accomplished a lot and was an important king
- (C) explaining that a lot was learned about him from the objects inside
- (D) suggesting that the tomb explained how he died

- 3 Read the sentences below from the section "Boy King In Power."

*Because Tutankhaten was so young, the country was probably controlled by two men, Ay and Horemheb. Both men proclaimed that Egyptians would go back to worshipping the traditional gods instead of Aten.*

Which of the following words, if it replaced the word "proclaimed" in the sentence above, would CHANGE the meaning of the sentence?

- (A) announced
- (B) hoped
- (C) stated
- (D) declared

- 4 Read the sentence below from the section "King Tut's Tomb Discovered."

*Over the next 17 years, Carter's team carefully excavated the tomb, uncovering an amazing collection of priceless objects.*

Which word from the sentence helps you understand the meaning of "excavated"?

- (A) years
- (B) tomb
- (C) uncovering
- (D) priceless