

The Mystery of King Tut

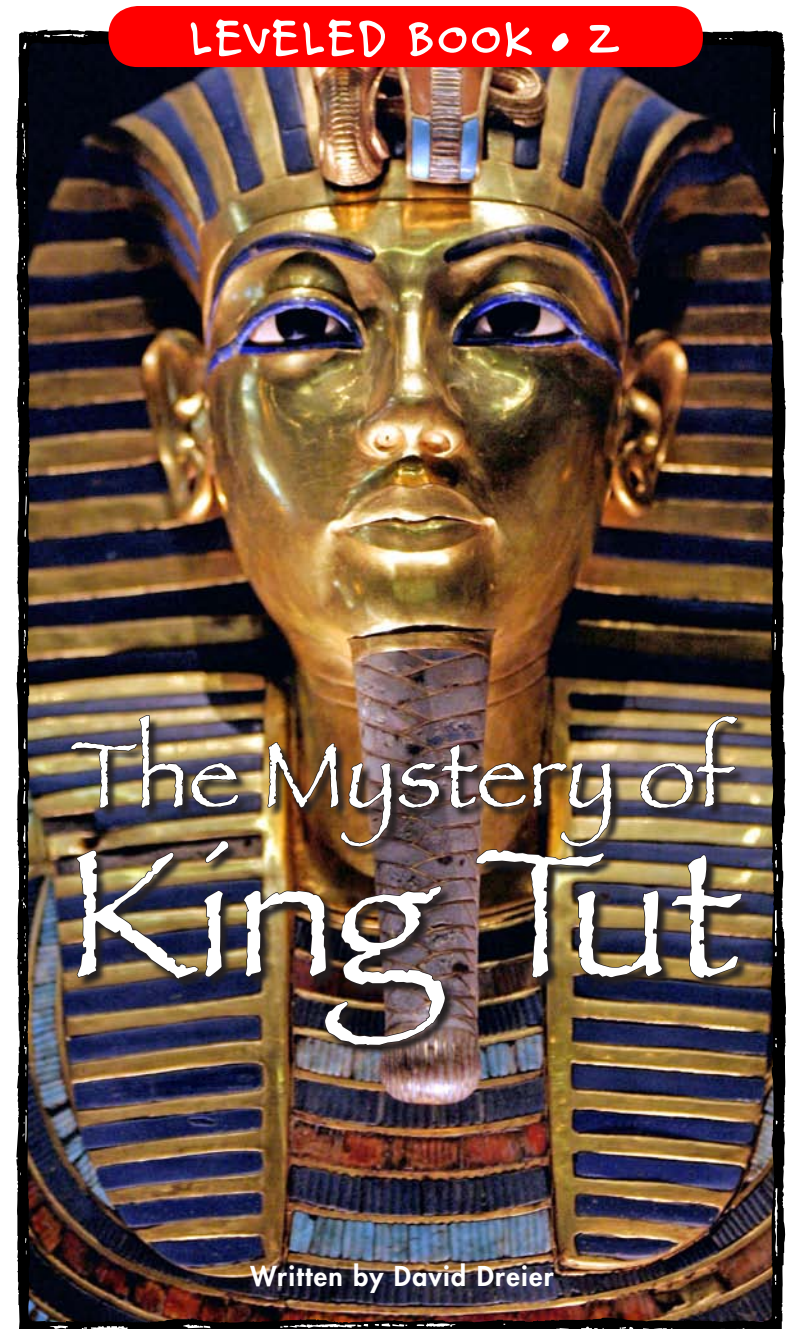
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The Mystery of King Tut



King Tut's sarcophagus

Written by David Dreier

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Front and back cover: The front and back of King Tutankhamun's funeral mask, one of the treasures found in his tomb

Table of Contents: British archaeologist Howard Carter, who discovered the tomb of King Tut, examines the golden sarcophagus during the excavation.

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Correlation

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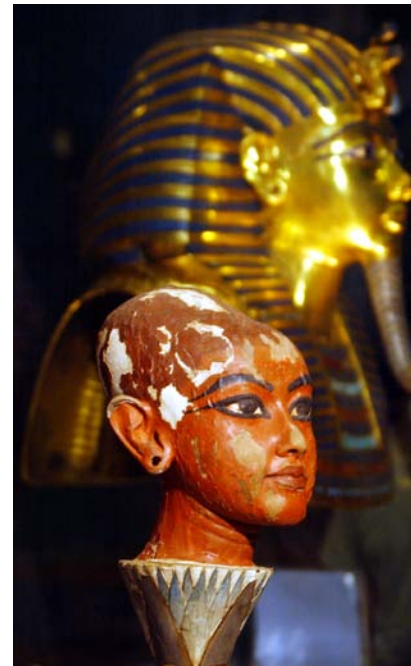


Finding Tut

In 1922, a British **archaeologist** (AR-kee-OLL-oh-jist) made a fantastic discovery in the country of Egypt. He found the tomb of Tutankhamun (toot-an-KAH-muhn), better known as King Tut. Tut ruled ancient Egypt more than 3,300 years ago, becoming **pharaoh** (FARE-oh) at the age of nine. He ruled less than a decade before dying suddenly at about age 19. Over all the years since the opening of Tut's coffin, many have wondered how and why the young king died.

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What Tut might have looked like, with his funeral mask in background

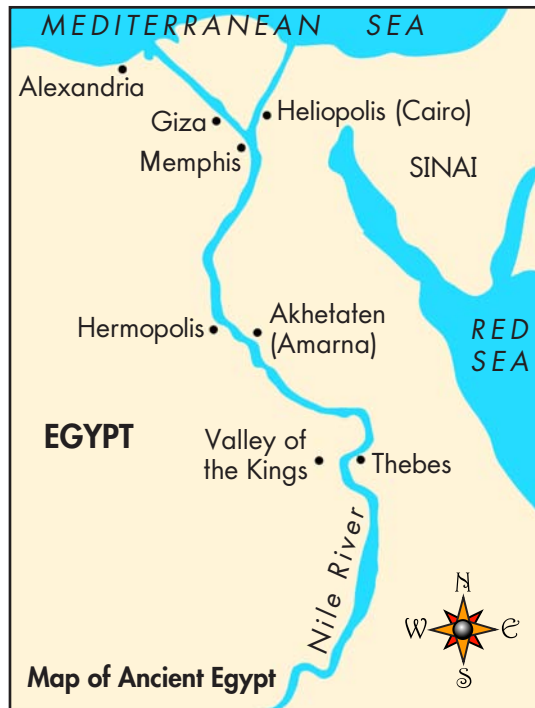
Just like detectives, archaeologists try to solve mysteries by looking at the evidence and by asking questions. Where did Tut live? What was his health like? Who were his family and friends? Did he have enemies? Answering questions like these may help solve the ultimate question: Why did King Tut die at such a young age?

King Tut's Homeland

Ancient Egypt was ruled for about 3,000 years by a series of thirty **dynasties** (ruling families). Historians group the first twenty dynasties into historical periods called the Early Dynastic Period, the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom.

King Tutankhamun was a member of the 18th Dynasty, the first ruling family of the New Kingdom, which began around 1540 BC, almost two hundred years before Tut was even born.

In ancient Egypt, religious belief was an important part of life. Egyptians at that time worshipped many different **deities**—gods and goddesses. To fully understand King Tut's life and perhaps his death, one must learn the history behind this religious belief.



At the beginning of the New Kingdom era, two of Egypt's most important gods were Ra (RAH) and Amun (AH-muhn). Ra was believed to live within the Sun. In images, he was often depicted as a falcon. Amun was usually depicted as a man with a tall crown.

During the New Kingdom period, however, some Egyptians gradually began worshipping the Sun in a different way. Instead of seeing the Sun as Ra's home, they saw the Sun as a god itself. They called this new god Aten (AH-tuhn) and depicted him as a golden disk with rays of light reaching toward Earth.



Amenhotep IV

As Aten's power as a god grew, other gods such as Ra and Amun were worshipped less and less. Religion was an established part of life in Egypt, but there was some flexibility. To most people, this newcomer, Aten, was just another god among many. He did not pose a threat to their religious beliefs until a young man named Amenhotep (Ah-muhn-HO-tep) IV—Tut's father—became pharaoh.

Gods on the Job

Out of hundreds of deities, people usually chose to devote themselves to a small group of major and minor gods and goddesses. One reason Egyptians worshipped particular deities was to get help with their careers.

Thoth, god of writing and knowledge, was worshipped by many scribes in ancient Egypt.

Seshat, goddess of writing and measurement, would have been a better choice than Thoth for ancient astronomers, architects, and mathematicians.

Ptah, god of craftspeople, was worshipped by artisans of all kinds, such as those who painted tomb walls or those who made statues.

Anubis, god of embalmers, was believed to be a powerful friend of those who made their living by preparing the dead for the afterlife.

King Tut's Family

Amenhotep IV began his rule in 1353 BC. He has been shown in Egyptian artwork as an odd-looking man with a long face, large lips, and a protruding belly. Amenhotep had been raised in the new Aten religion and was a true believer in the Sun god. He saw Aten as a *universal* god—a god of all the people in the world, not just Egyptians.

The pharaoh believed Aten, the universal Sun god, created the world at the beginning of time,

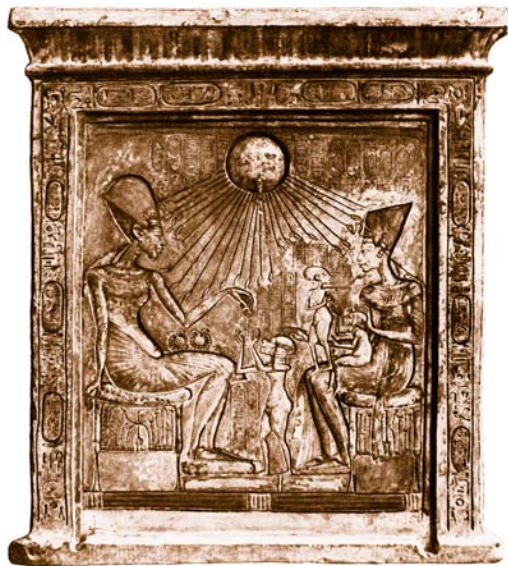
ruled over it alone, and continued to give life to the world through his bright rays of light. Thus, Amenhotep IV has been called the world's first **monotheist**, someone who believes in a single, all-powerful god.

After about five years, the new pharaoh took a drastic step. He began a religious **revolution**, a sudden and complete change in the official religion of Egypt. He declared that Egyptians could only worship Aten. He changed his name to Akhenaten (ahk-NAH-tuhn), which means "He Who Serves Aten."

Akhenaten closed and tried to destroy temples where people worshipped the other gods. Akhenaten's severe actions upset people who were used to worshipping many gods and angered the priests of the old gods. In various parts of Egypt, people tried to stop the destruction of their temples, but the pharaoh's military was able to control them.

In addition to destroying temples, Akhenaten also ordered a new capital city built. He moved the capital away from Thebes and called the new city Akhetaten (ahk-TAH-tun), which means "Horizon of Aten." Today this area is called Amarna, and Akhenaten's revolution is called the Amarna Revolution.

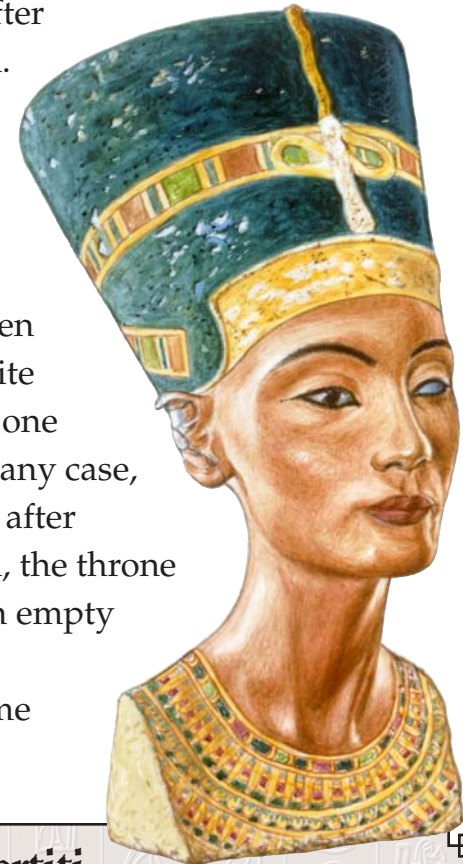
It was in this new capital of Egypt that King Tut was born in about 1342 BC. He was named Tutankhaten, meaning “the Living Image of Aten.” Only recently, researchers positively identified mummies that were Tut’s parents and grandparents, using **genetic** tests. Using DNA samples taken from bones, the tests established the mummy most likely to be Akhenaten as Tut’s father and provided a five-generation family tree for the boy king. Tut’s mother is known to be one of Akhenaten’s sisters, but which sister is uncertain. Marriages between close relatives were common in Egyptian royal families so the family could keep their lands and the power that came with them.



Akhenaten and Nefertiti, possibly Tut’s stepmother, with their three children in a carving from a temple at Amarna

Akhenaten died in 1336 BC after seventeen years of rule. What happened next is as puzzling as the other mysteries surrounding Tut’s life and death. There were apparently two rulers who had very brief reigns after Akhenaten’s death.

One of them may have been a brother of Tutankhaten. The other may have been Akhenaten’s favorite wife, Nefertiti. No one knows for sure. In any case, three or four years after Akhenaten’s death, the throne of Egypt was again empty so nine-year-old Tutankhaten became pharaoh.



Queen Nefertiti

Except for Cleopatra, no other queen of Egypt is as well known as Nefertiti (neh-fer-TEE-tee). She was the favorite wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten. Nefertiti was likely stepmother to young Prince Tutankhaten (later Tutankhamun) after his mother died. Nefertiti died in her early 30s.

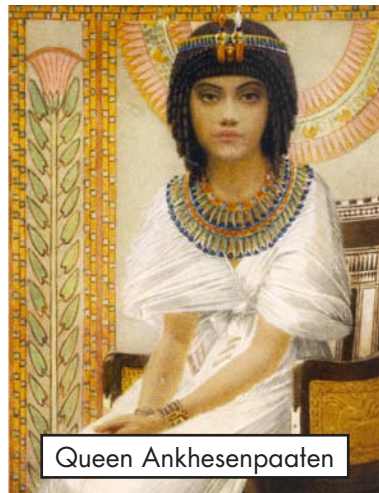
The Boy Pharaoh

Before and during his reign, Tut lived the life of the wealthy. He wore jewelry, linen clothes, perfumed oils, and makeup. Archaeologists found all these items in his tomb. As pharaoh, he would have been expected to hunt with members of his royal court, usually with a bow and from a chariot. Chariots, nearly fifty bows, and *senet* (a board game) were placed in his tomb for his use in the afterlife.

During his reign, Tutankhaten married his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten (AHNK-eh-suhn-PAH-tuhn), a daughter of Nefertiti. Ankhesenpaaten's name means "She Lives Through Aten." Tut fathered at least two daughters but neither lived.



King Tutankhaten



Queen Ankhesenpaaten

King Tut had several servants in the court. One personal attendant, Tutu, had served Tut's family for years, since his grandfather had been king. Other servants, some even younger than King Tut, would help him with even the smallest tasks. For example, he had a cup bearer, whose job was to make sure everyone's drinking cups stayed full, especially the young king's.

Because the pharaoh was so young, the military and political work of the royal court was mostly carried out by others—two men in particular. One of them was an aging military officer and adviser named Ay. The other was a great army general named Horemheb (HOR-ehm-heb). Although they had both served Akhenaten, they strongly disliked his religious reforms. The two men hoped King Tut would bring back the old ways of worshipping.



Wall painting of Horemheb, an army general and adviser to King Tut

Horemheb and Ay used their influence to persuade Tut to end the worship of Aten. They especially wanted Tut to return Amun to his former glory as chief god. The young king did so, and changed his name from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun, “the Living Image of Amun.” The queen also took a new name, Ankhesenamun (AHNK-eh-suhn-AH-muhn). Historians are certain that Ay and Horemheb were the main forces behind the changes that took place during King Tut’s reign. Because he was so young, they believe the pharaoh did as he was told.

As part of a return to the old ways, the royal court moved back to the city of Thebes. The once-thriving city of Amarna, devoted to the god Aten, was left to decay in the Egyptian sun.

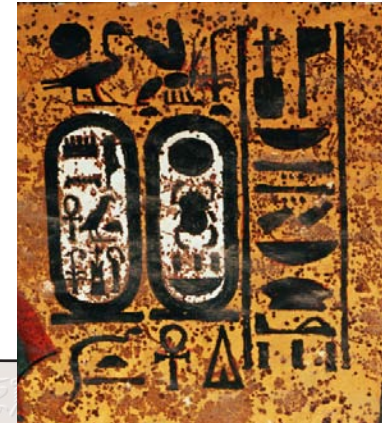


Remains of Akhenaten’s city of Akhetaten built around 1348 BC

End of a Dynasty

In 1323 BC, when he was about nineteen years old, King Tutankhamun died. How he died was not officially recorded and so a mystery was created. The young pharaoh was **mummified** and buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, a large royal cemetery near Thebes.

Because Tut had no living children, the throne of Egypt was open to someone who was not a member of the royal family. Ay, because of his long experience in the court, became the new pharaoh and married Tut’s widow. After ruling for just four years, Ay died in 1319 BC. Horemheb then became pharaoh.



Do You Know?

Just like a person today might have a first, middle, and last name, pharaohs had more than one name. They had one name at birth, and when they became pharaohs, they were given other names. Often these names appeared inside an oval known as a cartouche (car-TOOSH). Ancient Egyptians believed names were very powerful. They thought that by writing a person’s name on something, and then breaking it, they could hurt or even kill that person.



Archaeologists digging in Egypt's Valley of the Kings always hope to find a ruler's untouched tomb.

To show his devotion to Amun, Horemheb ordered the destruction of everything connected with the Aten religion and Akhenaten. In Amarna, his men demolished the abandoned temples of Aten. They also smashed statues of Akhenaten and his family—including those of King Tut—and gouged their names and faces from wall art. Later, workers removed the blocks of stone with the wall art from the buildings in the city and used them for construction projects in Hermopolis, a city on the other side of the Nile River near Amarna.

Horemheb ruled for twenty-seven years, dying in 1292 BC. With his death, the 18th Dynasty ended. Later, Ramses II, a great pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty who had served with Horemheb in the Egyptian army, completed the destruction of Amarna. The shattered remnants of Akhenaten's once-splendid capital were covered by drifting sand and forgotten.

King Tut's Tomb

In the 1800s, many archaeologists went to Egypt to study Egyptian picture writing, called **hieroglyphics** (hy-ur-uh-GLIF-iks), that is found on many walls and monuments. From the writing, archaeologists learned a lot about the customs of Egypt and about its pharaohs. They learned that the tombs of pharaohs would be filled with all the things a person might need in the afterlife. Expecting to find riches, they excavated many pharaohs' tombs, but were always disappointed. Tomb thieves had robbed every tomb of its valuable treasures long ago.

The Rosetta Stone

Scholars and scientists had long puzzled over the ancient Egyptian picture language, hieroglyphics. No one could decipher the meaning of its symbols and drawings. When Napoleon brought his army to conquer Egypt in 1798, he was there for military glory. But one of his French soldiers found something more enduring: a flat black rock about the size of a coffee table, with writing in three languages carved into its surface. Two of the languages on the stone were unreadable forms of ancient Egyptian, but the third was Greek. Over the next 25 years, using the Greek text as a key, scholars translated the other two languages—one of which was hieroglyphics. Finding the Rosetta Stone remains one of the most critical archaeological discoveries of all time.



By the early 1900s, archaeologists believed they had discovered the tomb of every known pharaoh except one: Tutankhamun. A determined British archaeologist named Howard Carter searched for Tut for more than five years without success. In 1922, he persuaded the man paying for the search, Lord Carnarvon, to pay him for one more season.

Luckily for the world, his persistence paid off. Later that year, Carter found Tut's tomb in almost undisturbed condition. It contained a wealth of **artifacts**, including thrones, jewelry, weapons, and statues. The mummy of Tutankhamun, covered with a large gold mask, lay within three nested coffins. The innermost coffin was made of about 242 pounds (110 kilograms) of pure gold. Carter's discovery created a sensation, and Tut became the most famous pharaoh in history.

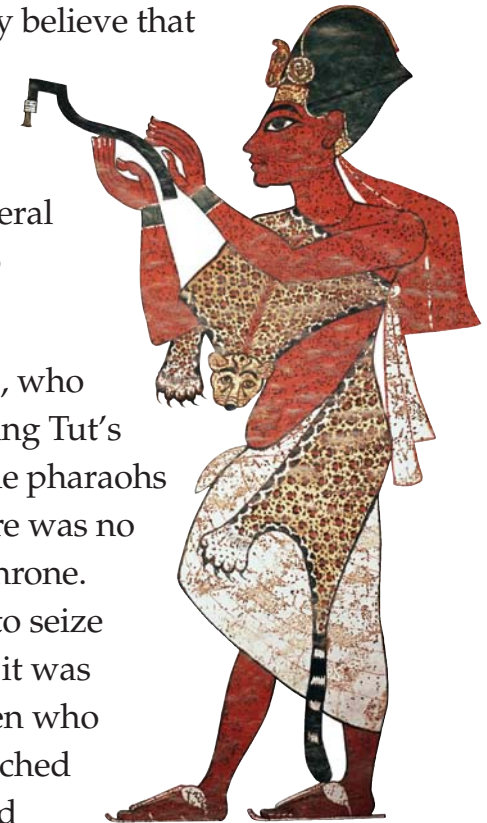
The Mummy's Curse

In November 1922 Lord Carnarvon attended the opening of Tut's tomb. A few months later, he died from an infected mosquito bite. Soon after that, two other people who had entered the tomb died prematurely. Newspaper stories of these deaths gave rise to the legend of "The Mummy's Curse." The legend said that anyone who dared to disturb Tut's resting place was doomed. However, Howard Carter, the man who should have been the most cursed of all, lived until the age of 66.

The Suspects

Early death was nothing unusual in ancient times. The average life span in ancient Egypt was about thirty years, and many people didn't live that long. Still, there were many reasons for some historians to originally believe that the physically weak, teenage King Tut may have been the victim of murder. Several people had reasons to kill him.

Ay and Horemheb, who controlled many of King Tut's decisions, both became pharaohs after Tut's death. There was no natural **heir** to Tut's throne. Thus, if they wanted to seize power, the time to do it was before Tut had children who lived, or before he reached adulthood and pushed the two men aside. Some ancient Egyptians must have suspected Horemheb was involved in Tut's death because an inscription on a statue in his tomb claims he is innocent of foul play.



A wall painting of Ay found in Tut's tomb

Ay and Horemheb were the most likely suspects, but they were not the only ones. Some researchers identified two of Tut's servants as possible murderers: the cupbearer and Tut's personal attendant, Tutu. They were among the few people permitted to enter the king's bedroom. Either man could have murdered the pharaoh, perhaps by striking his head with a heavy object while he slept or by pushing him down stairs.

The Body

For many years, people had theorized that Tut was killed by a blow to the head. They based that theory on **X-ray** studies of the pharaoh's mummy made in 1968 and in 1978. The X-rays showed damage to the back of Tut's skull. Experts said the damage was strong evidence that Tut had been hit on the back of the head with a heavy object.



In a detail from his Golden Shrine, King Tut is shown hunting birds with a bow.



Dr. Zahi Hawass with Tut before the mummy enters the CT scanner

In 2005, researchers in Cairo, Egypt, decided to find out if that was true. The group was led by a top Egyptian archaeologist, Zahi Hawass. The researchers studied King Tut's mummy with an advanced X-ray technique called **CT (CAT) scanning**. A CT scanner takes numerous X-rays of an object from different angles. The X-ray information is fed to a computer, which uses the information to produce images. CT images are much more detailed than ones made with regular X-ray machines.

Hawass announced that King Tutankhamun definitely did not die from a blow to the head. He said the skull damage happened after Tut was already dead and that it probably occurred during the mummification process when King Tut was **embalmed**.

The CAT scans also revealed several physical problems that young King Tut endured. He had a cleft palate, and a club foot which required him to walk with a cane. Many canes had been found in his tomb. The researchers also found other evidence of what might have killed Tut. The scans showed that he had suffered a broken leg shortly before his death, and it had not healed properly. Hawass said the king may have developed an infection from the injury and died a few days later. From 2007 to 2010 researchers, including Hawass, studied Tut's remains further using genetic tests.

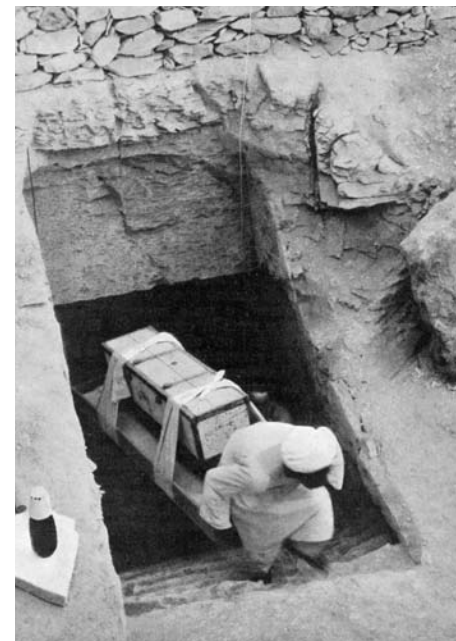
The new genetic tests showed the researchers two important conditions they hadn't seen before. They found evidence that King Tut had multiple attacks of severe malaria, which was common in Egypt. The disease alone probably wouldn't have killed Tut, but it may have left him very weak. They also found evidence of sickle cell disease (SCD), a serious inherited blood disorder often found in regions prone to malaria. As his parents were siblings, he may have inherited the condition from both of them, compounding its debilitating effects.

Scientists reveal the face of King Tut's mummy.



Mystery Solved?

So, is that the end of the mystery? Did young King Tut die from a combination of physical problems, an accident, a disease, and/or an infection from a broken leg? Maybe or maybe not. After reading the CT scans some members of Hawass's group said the broken leg might have also happened when Tut was being embalmed. Others felt certain that Howard Carter's team caused the break when they removed Tut's body from its inner coffin years ago. It's still possible that Tut was poisoned or that the broken leg happened during a failed attempt on his life. But if either of those theories is true, we may never find definite proof of



it, or who did it. With new scientific research and DNA evidence, theories of how the young king lived and died become more provable. But different experts might interpret them differently. What's your interpretation?

Carter's team removes Tut from his tomb.

Glossary

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| archaeologist (<i>n.</i>) | someone who studies objects from ancient times (p. 4) |
| artifacts (<i>n.</i>) | objects created by people of a particular period (p. 17) |
| CT scanning (<i>n.</i>) | the use of computerized tomography machines to create three-dimensional images of human bone and soft tissue (p. 20) |
| deities (<i>n.</i>) | gods and goddesses (p. 5) |
| dynasties (<i>n.</i>) | families whose members rule a country for generations (p. 5) |
| embalmed (<i>adj.</i>) | filled with chemicals to prevent decay (p. 20) |
| genetic (<i>adj.</i>) | having to do with heredity (p. 9) |
| heir (<i>n.</i>) | someone who will inherit the property and wealth of another, usually a family member (p. 18) |
| hieroglyphics (<i>n.</i>) | the ancient Egyptian system of writing using pictures (p. 16) |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| monotheist (<i>n.</i>) | person who believes in one god (p. 8) |
| mummified (<i>adj.</i>) | embalmed and wrapped in burial cloth (p. 14) |
| pharaoh (<i>n.</i>) | a king in ancient Egypt (p. 4) |
| revolution (<i>n.</i>) | a sudden, major change in the way things are, often brought about with violence, such as overthrowing a government (p. 8) |
| X-ray (<i>n.</i>) | an energy beam capable of creating an image of many substances, especially bone (p. 19) |



Examples of Egyptian hieroglyphics from the Temple of Amun