

## The Mysterious and sudden death of Tutankhamun



Tutankhamun, The Boy King, is one of the most interesting and famous Pharaoh's of ancient Egypt. The discovery of his intact tomb was arguably the greatest archaeological discovery to date. We associate this pharaoh with his renowned blue and gold death mask and the immense treasure retrieved from his tomb, but who was this mysterious king and why did he die so suddenly at such a young age?

Tutankhamun ruled from 1333-1323 BCE at a time when Egypt was at the very height of its power. His father was the controversial Pharaoh Akhenaten (also known as Amenophis IV) who reigned for 17 years during the Amarna period which culminated in him building of a new city devoted to the Sun God 'Aten' and turning away from the established Egyptian Gods. After Akhenaten's death in 1335 BCE a pharaoh called 'Smenkhare' ruled for a brief period of two years, this pharaoh was believed to have been Tut's stepmother 'Nefertiti'. After 'Smenkhare' died Tutankhamun took the throne. He was extremely young (around eight year's old) and was heavily influenced by his father's advisor 'Ay' who was a prominent and powerful figure in Egypt at the time. During his short reign of 10 years Tutankhamun accomplished very little and suddenly died at the age of 19, the circumstances around his death are enigmatic and mysterious.

There are various theories as to the cause of Tut's demise; some suggest a chariot accident, Malaria, a severe and painful bone disease, or assassination by Tutankhamun's closest advisor Ay.



Thanks to Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 and the advances in modern day science and technology, Egyptologists have been able to analyse the mummy further and have a clearer understanding of the cause of death. They discovered that Tutankhamun suffered from a missing toe bone and had a club foot. This would have left him in severe pain and unable to walk properly without the aid of a walking stick, this is corroborated by the 130 walking sticks found scattered throughout his tomb. This chronic disease was most likely a result of a gene mutation because the

closeness of his relatives. Akhenaten had two wives Nefertiti and Kiya, the latter of the two was the mother of Tutankhamun. Kiya and Akhenaten were siblings which meant Tut's mother was also his Aunt. (this was not uncommon at the time and most pharaohs married their close relatives). But, was this disease the cause of Tutankhamun's death?

Recent new evidence highlights another possibility. King Tut's mummified remains revealed an horrific open fracture on his left knee. Egyptologists suggest an injury this severe could have been the result of a chariot accident – perhaps leading his army into battle? With the bone condition Tutankhamun had he would have found driving a chariot at great speed difficult – is this when the accident occurred? The severity of the open fracture which might well have become infected and the lack of medical knowledge meant that Tut is likely to have died within a week from his injury.

As already mentioned Ay was a key member of Tutankhamun's 'inner circle' and was considered to have been the key power behind the throne during Tut's reign. Ay was also father of Nefertiti and thus step-grandfather to Tutankhamun this meant Ay did have a weak claim to the throne. During Tut's younger years, Ay had more control and influence over the young Pharaoh, but as Tut grew older and was able to make his own decisions it's possible Ay's influence wasn't as prominent as it once was. A popular new theory is that Ay murdered Tutankhamun in a bid to take the throne. Tutankhamun's mummy did show that he had suffered a blow to the back of his head (by someone who was able to get very close to him), but Egyptologists believe this was not enough to kill him. More recent evidence has come to light which suggests the damage to his skull could have been caused during the mummification process.

A painting on the wall of Tutankhamun's burial chamber depicts Ay at the "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony, giving life and breath to the young deceased pharaoh. This ceremony is usually carried out by the heir to the throne. Tutankhamun did not have a child to succeed him. This wall painting could indicate that Ay had already decided to declare himself as the heir and Pharaoh of Egypt. Ay did reign for four years and married Tutankhamun's widow Ankhesenamun – strengthening his direct link to the throne and maintaining continuity.



Tutankhamun's Tomb was sealed quickly - the paint on the walls was still wet evidenced by mould which had formed on wall paintings in the tomb. The tomb was significantly smaller and far less extravagant than others in the Valley of the Kings. It is highly likely that he was not actually buried in his own tomb due to the suddenness of his death and his own tomb being incomplete.

Ay was in charge of Tut's burial and modern medical evidence suggested his mummification process was rushed and botched. Is this because Ay saw Tut's unexpected death as an opportunity to good to miss and swiftly carried out his burial so he could claim the throne? Or was his burial rushed to conceal the possible foul play which had taken place to remove Tut from the Throne?

No one will ever know the true cause of Tutankhamun's death; the complexity of his knee fracture leads most Egyptologists to believe this was the cause of death. But was Tut's death a freak accident he endured leading his army into battle? Did somebody tamper with his chariot knowing his 'club foot' condition made it difficult for him to drive a chariot? Was Ay losing his influence and power over Tutankhamun and his death provided an opportunity for him to restore his domination over Egypt?

*Written by Sarah (year 12)*