



Tutankhamen's Tomb (near Luxor, Egypt)

The grave of Egypt's boy king, a site believed by many to be cursed



"The chamber gradually loomed before me, with its medley of extraordinary and beautiful objects."

Howard Carter's diary, November 26, 1922

-  Howard Carter and his assistants view the sarcophagus of Tutankhamen for the first time.
-  The solid gold mask of King Tutankhamen is inlaid with stone and glass, and weighs 22.5 pounds (11kg).

The Valley of the Kings in the desert to the west of Luxor was the burying place of the pharaohs of the New Kingdom period, from the sixteenth century B.C.E., who made Egypt the heart of an empire and the most powerful country in the ancient world. The graves were plundered by tomb robbers, but in 1922 the English archeologist Howard Carter discovered a tomb that was still almost intact and contained astonishing treasures of Egyptian art and craftsmanship. Carter and his financial backer, the Earl of Caernarvon, were the first for thousands of years to enter the grave of the young Pharaoh Tutankhamen (Living Image of Amun) and the world's media made much of the event with the notion that a fatal curse would destroy everyone involved.

The discovery made Tutankhamen the most famous of the pharaohs, even though he died after a reign of only a few years. His fame stems from the fact that his tomb was found intact with its magnificent tomb-treasure, rather than from the historical relevance of his reign. Tutankhamen became pharaoh at the age of nine and political decisions would have been largely taken by advisers such as the vizier, Ay, who became his successor. The treasures continue to draw huge and fascinated crowds every time they are put on show. They include the king's golden coffin and golden mask (with pierced ears), his carved throne, model ships, jewelry, lamps, jars, chariots, boomerangs, and bows and arrows. There were vivid painted scenes on the tomb walls and even long-wilted bunches of flowers left with his corpse.

For years it was suggested that Tutankhamen had been murdered, but a thorough reexamination of his mummy in 2005 did not support the idea; it suggested his leg was so badly broken that it caused a fatal infection. More than sixty other tombs in the Valley of the Kings have been excavated. **RC**

