



The Life & Legacy of King Tutankhamun

A supplementary lesson to Historic Huguenot Street's online exhibit "*Delicacy, Grace, and a Degree of Virtuosity*," Ruth Lynda Deyo



Do Now

Examine the following images of the items found in King Tut's tomb and answer the following questions:

- What do you notice about these objects?
- What might they tell us about ancient Egyptian culture and the life of King Tut?







Tutankhamun's Parents

- Tutankhamun was the son of King Akhenaten, who was previously named Amenhotep IV.
- Though the true identity of Tutankhamun's mother is unknown, she is believed to have been one of Akhenaten's sisters.
- Tracing the lineage of King Tut and other ancient Egyptian pharaohs has been made possible by genetic analysis of human remains. Genetic analysis of King Tut's remains show that there is a 99.99% chance that he is the son of Akhenaten, and that the chances are just as high that King Tut's mother was a full sister of Akhenaten.
- Though the remains of Tutankhamun's mother have been found, her exact identity still remains unknown.



Statue of Akhenaten. Source: Britannica.org

Akhenaten & Monotheism

- Tutankhamun's father, Akhenaten, was an Atenist, meaning he worshipped the deity Aten above all other gods. In fact, Tutankhamun's birth name was originally Tutankhaten to reflect his father's beliefs.
- Akhenaten's position as an Atenist was a unique and controversial one, as the ancient Egyptians were a polytheistic people, meaning they worshipped multiple gods. Akhenaten's shift to monotheism, or the worship of one god, was not widely accepted by the Egyptian people.
- Despite mass disapproval, Akhenaten remained steadfast in his sole worship of Aten and even built a new capital city, Akhetaten (also known as Amarna) to honor him.





Death of Akhenaten & Aftermath

- Even in death, Akhenaten broke with ancient Egyptian tradition. He had his burial tomb built in Akhetaten and was laid to rest there, rather than in the Valley of Kings, which was the traditional location for pharaohs' burials for approximately five hundred years between the 16th and 11th centuries B.C.E.
- Following his death, all statues and monuments built for Akhenaten were hidden, dismantled, and even destroyed, and later pharaohs would go on to remove Akhenaten from official registers of Egyptian rulers. These actions virtually wiped Akhenaten's existence from ancient Egyptian history for centuries.
- Due to this large scale erasure of Akhenaten's reign, scholars and archaeologists did not know of his existence until the 19th century when the city of Amarna, or Akhetaten, was uncovered.

Ruins of the Northern Palace at Amarna/Akhetaten



Image Source: worldhistory.org

Akhenaten, Ruth Lynda Deyo, & *The Diadem of Stars*

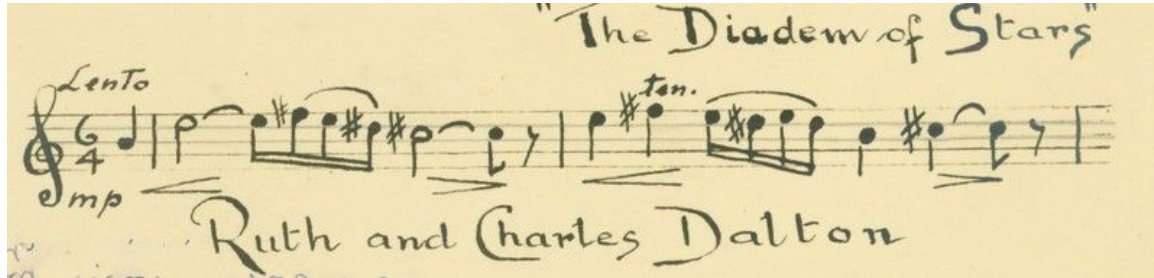


Image Source: Historic Huguenot Street via omeka.hvrh.org

- Ruth Lynda Deyo was deeply fascinated with the history and culture of Egypt. She and her husband would eventually move there together, and Ruth would go on to write an opera, *The Diadem of Stars*, which featured characters based on ancient Egyptian historical figures.
- Akhenaten was a central character in this opera due to the chaos he created during his reign. Akhenaten's radical shift to monotheism and the sole worship of Aten took center stage as the conflict in Ruth's opera.
- Tutankhamun is also featured as a character. Though Tutankhamun becomes pharaoh and restores peace to Egypt in *The Diadem of Stars*, it is not depicted in the most accurate manner.
- In the play, Tutankhamun marries Akhenaten's daughter, which allows him to become pharaoh.
- As we have learned, archaeological excavation and examination of both Akhenaten and Tutankhamun's remains prove that they were father and son.
- It is likely that this connection was unknown when Ruth wrote her opera and that this genetic analysis had not yet been conducted.



Pause & Reflect

What seems to be the main method by which the information you have learned today about Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, and ancient Egypt as a whole was uncovered?

King Tut & The Restoration of Polytheism

- As the son of Akhenaten, Tutankhaten succeeded his father as pharaoh following his passing. Soon after taking power, Akhenaten took a distinct step away from his father's religious views when he changed his name to Tutankhamun.
- Beyond changing his name to reject the strict Atenist views of his father, Tutankhamun also publicly decried his monotheistic beliefs and called for a restoration of polytheism and the equal worship of all Egyptian gods in the pantheon.
- Tutankhamun officially moved the capital city from Akhetaten back to Thebes, and even had his father's remains removed from the tomb in Akhetaten and relocated to the Valley of Kings. This move gained Tutankhamun a great deal of respect from the Egyptian people.



Location of the Valley of Kings. Image source: Wikipedia.org

King Tut's Reign

- Though the initial moves Tutankhamun took to restore polytheism in Egypt seem like those of an experienced governor, he was only between eight and nine years old when he ascended the throne and became pharaoh.
- Due to his age, it is believed that Tutankhamun would have had advisors to help him rule effectively.
- Tutankhamun spent much of his reign repairing the damage his father's reign did to Egypt's economy and foreign relations.
- Archaeological evidence of gifts from the Mitanni people to Tutankhamun and Egypt as a whole demonstrate that he was successful in repairing relations between the two peoples.
- Despite his success rebuilding relations with the Mitanni, King Tut's burial tomb showcases artwork depicting battles the Egyptians fought with the Nubians and Asiatics.
- Armor and weapons found in Tutankhamun's tomb further back that Tutankhamun went to war with rivaling civilizations during his reign.



A piece of King Tut's armor. Image source: [Egypttoday.com](https://www.egypttoday.com)



Tutankhamun's Death & Discovery of His Tomb

- Tutankhamun's reign was cut short by his untimely death at the age of eighteen. Ultimately, his reign lasted for nine years.
- Scans and analysis of Tutankhamun's remains show that he had many physical ailments during his lifetime which may have contributed to his early death. Analysis has also shown that he contracted a strain of malaria, which was likely the main cause of his death.
- King Tut's tomb was uncovered by British archaeologist Howard Carter in 1922. Carter had been in Egypt searching for Tut's tomb in the Valley of Kings since 1891.
- Ruth Lynda Deyo was exploring Egypt at the same time that Howard Carter was searching for the tomb of King Tut, and the two developed a close personal friendship. Ruth herself was able to tour Tut's tomb, and she is believed to have been the first woman ever to do so.
- At the time that Carter discovered Tut's tomb and remains, Tutankhamun had been dead for three thousand years.
- The ancient Egyptians viewed their pharaohs as gods and took great care to preserve their bodies after death. The careful preservation process of Egyptian mummies has allowed archaeologists, historians, and scientists to study them extensively today.



Restoration work on the walls of Tut's tomb.
Image source: History.com



The Legacy of King Tut

- Though King Tut did not live a long life or achieve anything particularly remarkable compared to other ancient Egyptian pharaohs, he is one of the most well known Egyptian pharaohs, and one of the most important.
- Tutankhamun's tomb is to thank for the level of fame and attention he has received in the past century. The tomb is the most well preserved one found to date in the modern era, and it has provided countless opportunities for archaeologists, historians, and scholars to learn not only about Tutankhamun's life and reign, but about life and culture in ancient Egypt as a whole.
- By excavating and examining the tomb of Tutankhamun, modern archaeologists and historians have been able to learn about the culture, customs, burial practices, dynasties, international relations, and religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptian people.
- Without the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, it is likely that we would know very little about life in ancient Egypt today.



Review & Reflection Questions

- Why was Akhenaten such a controversial pharaoh?
- What led to Akhenaten's centuries-long erasure from Egyptian history?
- How did Tutankhamun correct the errors of his father once he became pharaoh?
- Why is King Tut significant today?
- How did the history and archaeological significance of ancient Egypt inspire Ruth Lynda Deyo?
- What do you think we would know about ancient Egypt today if the tombs of pharaohs like Tutankhamun were never explored and excavated?