



B E Y O N D  
**KING TUT**  
T H E I M M E R S I V E E X P E R I E N C E

AN EDUCATIONAL COMPANION

THE STORY OF KING TUTANKHAMUN IS NOT JUST ANCIENT HISTORY. IT IS AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF THE STORY OF TODAY'S EGYPT. **DISCOVER HOW.**

# WELCOME TO THE TOMB OF KING TUTANKHAMUN!

One hundred years ago, the unearthing of Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings heralded an important moment for the study of one of the largest and oldest civilizations in human history. More than 5,000 years ago—surrounded by deserts and sustained by the gifts of the Nile River—Egypt began developing a unique culture and distinct art style that is still recognized throughout the world.

The story of the boy king and the study of the nearly 5,400 artifacts found in his virtually intact tomb gives us rare insight into the life of one of the rulers from this ancient time. A life uniquely human and yet so different, perhaps, from our own.

At National Geographic, we believe in the power of science, exploration, education, and storytelling to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world. In this exhibition, we are using powerful visual storytelling tools to tell this story in a new way. And in this educational companion, we provide a deeper context for ancient Egyptian life and culture and ask how our scholarship of King Tutankhamun and his possessions informs our understanding today.

Every great exhibition is an opportunity to be immersed in a narrative and transported through time and space. We hope that you will discover something new about Egypt's past and be inspired to learn more about Egyptian culture in today's world.



Enjoy!

**KATHRYN KEANE**

VICE PRESIDENT  
OF PUBLIC PROGRAMMING  
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# THE RHYTHM OF THE NILE

## **TUTANKHAMUN'S STORY BEGINS IN ANCIENT EGYPT,**

a land shaped by the seasonal changes to the Nile River. All life in Egypt depended on the river—the Nile provided food and natural resources, land for crops, a “road” for travel, and a means to transport materials and merchandise.

## **SEASONAL SURGE**

The flooding of the Nile has been an important natural cycle in Egypt since ancient times. Heavy rains from the Ethiopian highlands would cause the waters to begin rising in June, flooding the Nile Valley and depositing nutrient-rich soil. This surge transformed the desert into productive farmland. The river's predictability allowed the Egyptians to build an empire based on agricultural wealth. They grew staple food crops—such as wheat and barley—and industrial crops—such as flax and papyrus. Farmers developed a complex irrigation system, digging channels to direct floodwaters and saturating soil to make it ready for planting. Riverbank mud was baked into bricks for building structures.

## **THE RIVER AS A ROAD**

The Nile provided a natural highway for transporting goods and people. Most of the major cities in ancient Egypt were located along the riverbank. Ships ferried merchants, messengers, and armies throughout the kingdom. Building supplies and other goods could quickly be transported. The trip from Memphis to Thebes typically took up to two months during the dry season. During the flood season, that same trip was reduced to about two weeks.

Crocodiles were a common sight along the river. The crocodile-headed god Sobek was worshiped for protection and to insure the fertility of the people and their crops.

Photos: (river) Jacqueline Abromeit/Shutterstock; (relief) Blue Ice/Shutterstock; (crocodile) warat42/Shutterstock



## AS A MEANS OF IDENTITY

The Nile's annual renewal of the land influenced ancient Egyptian people's view of life, death, and the afterlife. Much of their cultural identity was linked to what they observed in the natural world around them. The rising and setting of the sun; the movements of the stars across the sky; the annual flooding of the Nile; the planting, growing, and harvesting of crops all served as evidence of daily life regularly renewed by natural forces. The Egyptians saw their own lives as a cycle: They were born; they grew from childhood to adulthood to old age; they died; and they were reborn.

**EGYPT TODAY:** THE NILE RIVER IS STILL THE CENTER OF EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION AND ITS GREAT CITIES STILL FLOURISH. TODAY, 95 PERCENT OF EGYPTIANS LIVE WITHIN A FEW KILOMETERS OF THE NILE. DAMS, SUCH AS THE ASWÂN HIGH DAM, HAVE BEEN BUILT TO PROVIDE A SOURCE OF HYDROELECTRIC POWER. THE NILE CONTINUES TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURE AND FISHING AND REMAINS A KEY ROUTE FOR TRANSPORTATION.

*“Egypt is the gift of the Nile.”*

*Herodotus, 5<sup>th</sup> century Greek historian*

# MEDITERRANEAN SEA

To the north, the Nile fans out into thinner branches, forming a delta. Its shape resembles a lotus flower, often depicted in Egyptian art.

Nile Delta

Giza  
Saqqara

**Memphis:** the city where Tut lived after leaving Amarna

## LOWER EGYPT

**Amarna:** the capital city under Akhenaten, thought to be the king's father

EASTERN  
DESERT

RED  
SEA

WESTERN  
DESERT

Nile River  
Abydos

**Valley of the Kings:** burial place of kings; where the king's tomb is located

**Karnak Temple:** an important religious center in the ancient city of Thebes

**Thebes:** reestablished as a capital city after the king's father died

## UPPER EGYPT

**Aswan:** city where building resources were quarried

The Nile River flows from south to north across 4,160 miles (6,695 km).

- City
- ⊕ Capital city
- ▲ Temple or site
- Fertile land



Map: Robert Pratt

## THE TWO LANDS

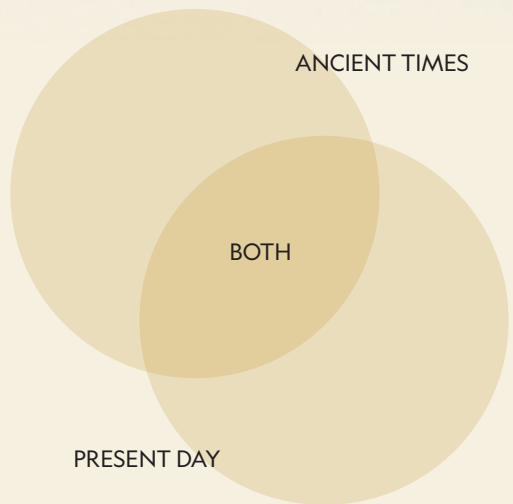
The Nile river flows from south to north, and the ancient Egyptians divided their country into the “Two Lands.” Lower Egypt was in the north and ended in the Nile Delta. Upper Egypt was in the south. To the ancients, *Kemet* or “black land,” denoted the rich, fertile land of the Nile Valley, while *Deshret* or “red land,” referred to the hot, dry desert. The Western Desert (Sahara) was roughly twice the size of the Eastern Desert (Arabian). These deserts were inhospitable and created buffer zones between Egypt and its neighbors. This physical isolation allowed Egypt to build and defend a distinct and unique civilization.

*The king’s role was to unify the “Two Lands.” When Akhenaten died, the task to keep Upper and Lower Egypt united fell upon his son, the young Tutankhamun.*

### Ask Yourself:

- ▶ If the Nile River did not flood every year, how might life have been different in ancient times?
- ▶ How did being physically isolated by deserts help Egypt build a distinct and unique civilization?
- ▶ Name all the ways in which the Nile River was used by ancient Egyptians. Now think of all the ways the Nile is used today. How do these uses overlap?

### HOW PEOPLE USE THE NILE RIVER

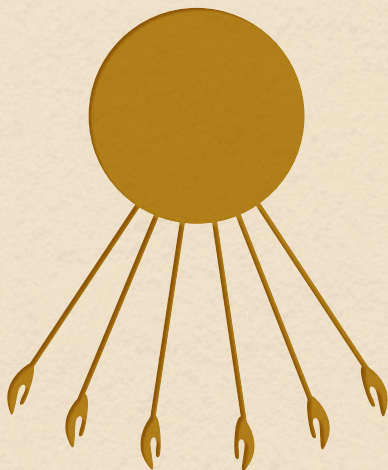


# KING TUTANKHAMUN

THE LAST PHARAOH OF THE 18TH EGYPTIAN DYNASTY, IN POWER FROM APPROXIMATELY 1332 TO 1323 B.C.E.

## WHO WAS THE BOY KING?

To understand the boy king, it helps to understand his predecessor and probable father, Akhenaten. At the time of Tutankhamun's birth, Egypt was going through social and political upheaval. For hundreds of years, Egyptians had worshiped many gods and goddesses. Then Akhenaten decided there would be only one god: the Aten, the god of the sun. The only way people could reach the Aten was through him. In acts that angered many of his people, Akhenaten ordered the names and images of other Egyptian deities to be destroyed or defaced throughout Egypt.



*The Aten did not appear in human form. It looked like sun disk with hands for rays.*

*Image: National Geographic Staff*

The Head of Nefertem (left) is one of the first objects found in the king's tomb. Nefertem was the incarnation of the sun god at dawn, born from a blooming lotus. Carved from wood and painted, it is a portrait of Tutankhamun as a young boy.

This painted wooden statue (center) was found in the antechamber of the king's tomb. It is a life-size representation of him.

The funerary mask (right) is considered one of the masterpieces of Egyptian art. It rested on the king's shoulders inside the innermost gold coffin. The mask weighs 22.5 pounds (10.2 kg).

*Photos: (left) Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images; (center) Timothy A. Clary/AFP/Getty Images; (right) Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection.*





## AS A PRINCE

The young prince was born Tutankhaten—“living image of the Aten”—and raised with the new beliefs. Akhenaten moved the capital city from Thebes to a place in the desert called Amarna. It was here that the young prince spent his childhood.

The life of Tutankhaten was privileged. His home was a spacious palace. While average Egyptians survived on bread, the prince also ate meat, vegetables, and fruit. He wore finely woven clothing, and when he slept, servants fanned him with ostrich plumes so he would not be disturbed by the heat. When he swam, guards watched over him to protect him from Nile crocodiles. As the prince got older, he became skilled with a bow and arrow and may have driven his own chariot.

Tutankhaten’s life was not easy, though. Modern science has revealed that he most likely suffered from genetic disorders that were inherited. CT scanning of his remains shows that he had a cleft palate, a curved spine, and a clubbed foot. A degenerative disease was destroying some of the bones in his feet, which meant he probably needed to use many of the 130 walking canes that were in his tomb.





*Egyptians used archery in battle and hunting. The boy king is depicted in his chariot with a bow and arrow, hunting ostriches, on this golden fan found in his tomb.*

*Photo: Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection*

## AS AN IMMORTAL KING

When Tut became king around age nine, he had unprecedented power. Since Tut was still a child, his royal and military advisers ran the kingdom for him. Under *their* rule, everything that the boy had known changed dramatically.

First, Akhenaten's decree to worship Aten in favor of multiple gods and goddesses was reversed. Amun was restored as the "king of the gods," and the boy's name was promptly changed to Tutankhamun—the "living image of Amun." The royal court was moved back to Thebes, and Tut's boyhood home, Amarna, was abandoned. Holy sites that had been defaced were repaired, such as at Thebes (known today as Luxor), and construction of a mighty temple at Karnak dedicated to Amun was given top priority. All the old ways were restored. A king needed an heir, so a marriage for Tut was quickly arranged.

Death for Tutankhamun came unexpectedly. From CT scans of his mummy, we can tell that at the time of death, he had a badly broken leg, which may have become infected. He had malaria and other underlying health issues. At 19, he had only ruled for 10 years. He left no heir when he died, and his reign was passed on to his chief advisor, Ay. To his people, Tutankhamun was a minor pharaoh. Like other kings before him, they believed that he journeyed to the underworld and became immortal. His tomb was then forgotten. Had it not been for locating his tomb in 1922, Tut's life may have been lost to history.



A king's name rests inside a cartouche—an oval with a line. It can be read in any direction—the key is to look at the animals. Their faces always face the beginning of the phrase or sentence. This cartouche was found on a chest in the king's tomb.

Photo: Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection

- 1: tut
- 2: ankh (life)
- 3: a / mun (Amun, the sun god)
- 4: haq / awnw / usu (ruler of Egypt)

## Ask Yourself:

When we put ourselves in another's place, we are seeking to understand that person's perspective. ➤ *How do you think Tutankhamun might have felt when at nine years old, he become the leader of one of the most powerful societies of the time?*

Everything changed for the boy king after his father died—his home, his religion, even his name. ➤ *How might these changes have affected him?*

Depictions of ancient rulers in Egyptian art were very stylized and idealized. Archaeologists studying his remains have concluded that Tutankhamun had significant health issues. ➤ *Why would it be important for scholars to try to piece together a fuller picture of his life based on his remains, his artifacts, and the records of his time?*

*The afterlife was not guaranteed to anyone. Even a king had to make the difficult journey through the underworld before becoming immortal.*

# JOURNEY TO THE AFTERLIFE

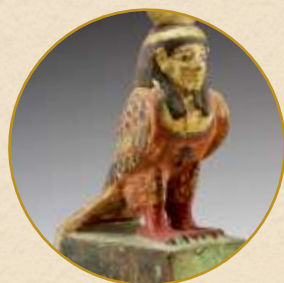
The ancient Egyptians believed that every living person was made up of three essential elements: body, *ba*, and *ka*. They knew that the body would fail one day and die, but they believed the other parts of a person could live on. The *ba* was essentially a person's personality—all the things that made that person unique. The *ka* was the person's life force—it made life possible for the body and the *ba*. Death occurred when the *ka* separated from the body. To achieve a successful afterlife, the *ba* had to be reunited with its *ka*. Once that happened, the person could live forever in the spiritual form known as the *akh*, or "effective being."

*To make the powerful transition to the afterlife, the deceased had to navigate a dangerous journey. The trip was guided by Anubis, the jackal-headed god of the dead. This statue of Anubis stood guard over the burial chamber in the king's tomb. Positioned between its front feet was a small brick of unfired clay, known as a "magic brick." Its inscription read:*

**I am the one who snares the sand at the wall of the hidden chamber/the active combatant who repels him to the flame of the desert/I have set alight the desert, I have deflected the ways/I am the protector of the Osiris**

*Some think this message may have been the origin of the "curse of the pharaohs"—the idea that disturbing the sealed tombs of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs would result in an untimely death.*

Photo:  
Mountainpix/  
Shutterstock



*The **ba** was often shown as a bird with a human head and wings.*

Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / Rogers Fund, 1944



*The **ka** was often a picture of two raised arms.*

Photo: Hemro/Shutterstock

## PRAYERS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Typically, the deceased would be buried with a manual—a series of papyrus scrolls. Scholars called these scrolls the *Book of the Dead*. These prayers and instructions helped the deceased pass the trials of the underworld. While there was not a *Book of the Dead* found in King Tutankhamun's tomb, many prayers and images were depicted on amulets and inscriptions in the tomb.

Traveling by boat with Anubis, the deceased moved through a world filled with terrible beasts to reach the realm of the Duat (Land of the Gods). There were seven gates, each requiring the accurate recitation of a magic spell. If successful, the deceased arrived at the Hall of Osiris. Here, they would undergo a final test. Their heart was weighed against a feather from Ma'at, the goddess of truth and justice. Those who passed became one with Osiris and achieved immortality. Those who failed were eaten by a waiting beast, called Ammit.

The ancient Egyptians wore amulets, which are pieces of jewelry believed to protect against evil. Some amulets were tucked into the layers of a mummy's wrappings to safeguard each part of the body. There were 143 small amulets found in King Tutankhamun's wrappings. Other amulets were placed throughout his tomb.



*This scarab pendant was found in a chest in the king's tomb. The scarab symbolized the sun god Kepri, the god of creation and rebirth. This amulet serves as a magical guarantee of rebirth and resurrection.*

*Photo: S. Vannini/De Agostini/Getty Images*

## THE ‘OPENING OF THE MOUTH’

The ancient Egyptians believed that in order for a person’s soul to survive in the afterlife, it would need to have food and water. The “opening of the mouth” ritual was thus performed so that the person who died could eat and drink again. This ceremony was believed to be essential to reanimate a person’s *ka* (or life force). It was usually carried out by the dead king’s son or heir, in this case, Ay, who succeeded Tutankhamun. For this ceremony, the mummified king was placed upright, and Ay touched his mouth, eyes, and nose with various implements.

The opening of the mouth ceremony is depicted on the north wall of the burial chamber of Tutankhamun’s tomb. The king is depicted here as Osiris, but his name is written above his head in hieroglyphs.

In this depiction, Ay is dressed in a special priest’s outfit that included a leopard skin. He is holding a tool called an adze. The table holds more tools, the leg of an animal, and five drinks—possibly some of the food the king would be able to enjoy once the ceremony was completed. Scholars think there was a funerary meal, eaten by the king’s family and friends, after this ceremony. Remains of what might have been this special meal were found buried in a pit near his tomb.





## *Ask Yourself:*

The ancient Egyptians saw their lives as a cycle that always included rebirth. ▶ *What examples did they see in the natural world that reinforced these beliefs?*

▶ *Describe what you think was the significance of the “opening of the mouth” ceremony?*

▶ *How are the beliefs of the afterlife held by the ancient Egyptians different from your own beliefs? How are they the same?*



*This ancient adze is similar to the one depicted on the “opening of the mouth” scene in Tut’s tomb. Photos: (top) Kenneth Garrett/ National Geographic Image Collection; (bottom) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / Rogers Fund, 1925*

*The ancient Egyptians believed that King Tutankhamun successfully passed through this journey.*

# TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB

Archaeological excavations require careful planning, organization, and a team of skilled laborers. In the 1920s, the work of digging fell to Egyptians from local communities, though it was common for these excavations to be led by foreigners from Europe. The search for Tut's tomb relied on the hard work of scores of Egyptians and was led by British archaeologist Howard Carter. King Tutankhamun's tomb was located on November 4, 1922, when a carved step was found by one of the teams. In the Valley, there is a story that this step was found by a twelve-year-old water boy.

## A DIFFERENT STORY

Workers who toiled under the Egyptian sun during an excavation needed plenty of water. Every excavation, even today, has someone who brings water to the site in earthenware jars with rounded bottoms. According to one version of events, 12-year-old Hussein Abdel Rasoul arrived at the dig site with jugs of water on the morning of November 4. He began to make a hole to bury the bases to keep them upright. While digging, his stick struck stone. Brushing aside the sand, the story goes, Hussein discovered the top of a flight of steps.

*Photos: (L-R) Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo; Historica Graphica Collection/Heritage Images/Getty Images; David Cole/Alamy Stock Photo*





## Ask Yourself:

In Howard Carter's official account of finding the tomb, he makes no mention of Hussein Abdel Rasoul. Carter writes that the step was found under the ancient workmen's hut that a team of Egyptian workmen had cleared the previous day. Hussein's story first surfaced in an unpublished memoir by Lee Keedick, the New York-based agent who organized Carter's lecture tour of North America in the summer of 1924. Keedick claimed Carter said—in private and later in print—that the step had indeed been discovered by the water boy. ▶ *The story of Hussein is well known among Egyptians living in the Valley. Why is this oral history from the Egyptians in the Valley about Hussein's role in finding King Tutankhamun's tomb important?*

*Egyptian workers gently carry artifacts from the tomb (left); Lord Carnarvon, his daughter, Evelyn, and Howard Carter (middle); part of the Egyptian team, including a young boy, assist Carter inside the tomb (right).*



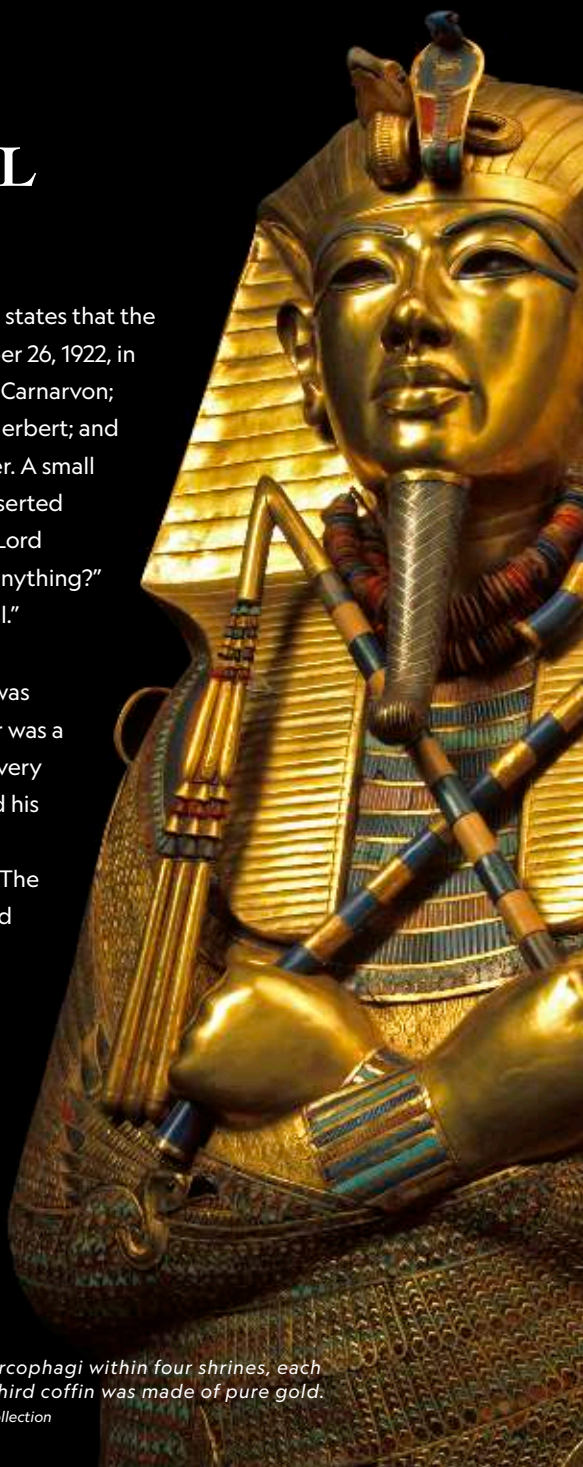
# WONDERFUL THINGS

In his official account, Howard Carter states that the tomb was not opened until November 26, 1922, in the presence of his benefactor, Lord Carnarvon; Carnarvon's daughter, Lady Evelyn Herbert; and an assistant, Arthur "Pecky" Callender. A small hole was made in the door. Carter inserted a candle and peered into the tomb. Lord Carnarvon asked him: "Can you see anything?" Carter answered, "Yes, it is wonderful."

Even though the tomb was small, it was packed with artifacts. Howard Carter was a meticulous archaeologist who had every single item recorded. It took him and his team nearly 10 years to describe and catalogue the nearly 5,400 artifacts. The study of funerary artifacts, tombs and the remains of the past is at the core of the scientific field of archaeology. Not much of Tutankhamun's life was written down in ancient texts. To know him, we must read the past through his possessions. The study of funerary artifacts, tombs, and remains from the past is at the core of the scientific field of archaeology.

*The king's body was nestled in three sarcophagi within four shrines, each more magnificent than the other. The third coffin was made of pure gold.*

*Photo: Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection*





## IMMORTAL

Having successfully journeyed through the underworld, the immortal king would have needed help. To the ancient Egyptians, the afterlife was a mirror image of one's life on Earth. Just as in mortal life, there was work to be done. To assist him in his labors were hundreds of carved figures called shawabtis. Summoned to life by a spell, these "replacement" Tuts did the king's work for him.

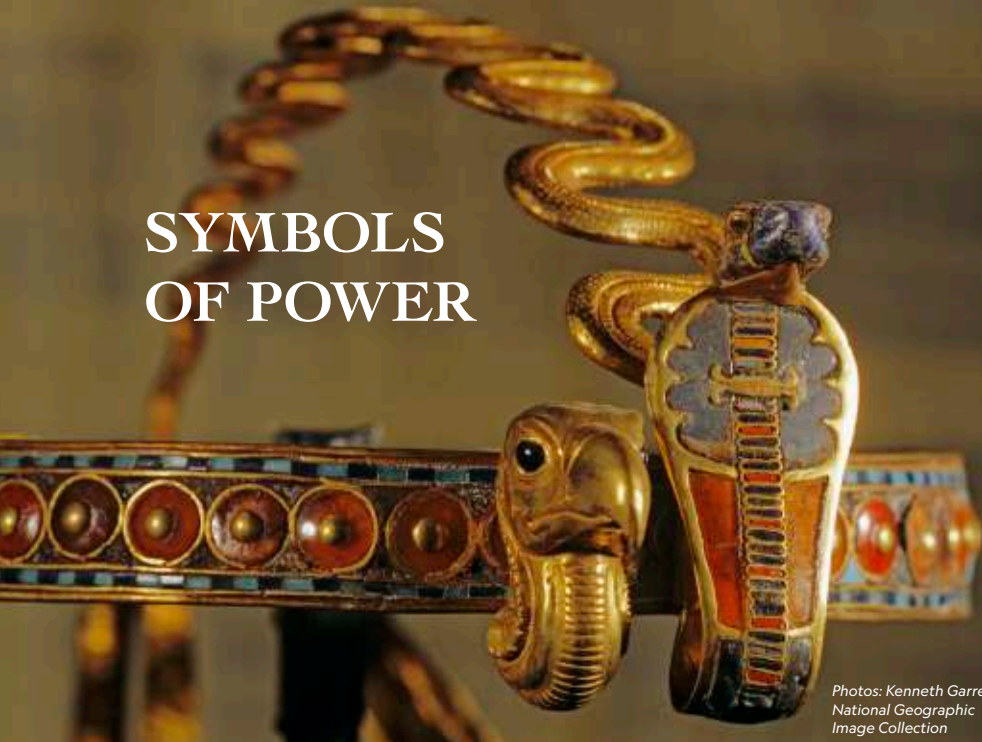
## HIGH PRIEST

The king's tomb was robbed twice during antiquity. It is believed that thieves stole more than half of the royal jewelry. Many of the remaining pieces reenforce Tut's role as high priest. This necklace depicts the god Horus in the form of a falcon with the sun disk on its head. It holds the ankh (symbol of life) and the shen ring (representing eternal protection) in each talon.



*Photos: (top) Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection; (bottom) Realy Easy Star/Alamy Stock Photo*

# SYMBOLS OF POWER



Photos: Kenneth Garrett/  
National Geographic  
Image Collection

## KINGLY CROWN

Many artifacts in the king's tomb illustrate his power as king and military leader. His crown bore the royal insignia, a vulture and a serpent. The vulture was Nekhbet, the goddess of Upper Egypt. The cobra represented the goddess Wadjet of Lower Egypt. Together, they symbolized the protectors of the united Two Lands over which the king reigned.

## ROYAL SYMBOLS

In his hands, the king would have carried the crook and the flail. The crook represented the pharaoh's role as a shepherd in caring for his people. The flail might have represented the pharaoh's responsibility to establish the order that was essential to sustaining society. It might also have signified the pharaoh's role in providing for his people and protecting land that could grow food for the people.



## ART OF POWER

In ancient Egypt, art was also used to visually express divinity and sovereignty. The royal art tended to be highly stylized, often not differentiating between male or female or even individuals, except in inscriptions. During Akhenaten's reign, he changed the standards of art. In Tutankhamun's reign, he changed the standards back to the old stylistic formula. Many objects in Tut's tomb may have originally been made for other people or other rulers.

Three of the 29 chairs found in the tomb were likely thrones. This throne stood out for its magnificence. Made of wood and covered with gold leafing, silver, glass, and semi-precious gemstones, its legs are shaped like a lion's claws.

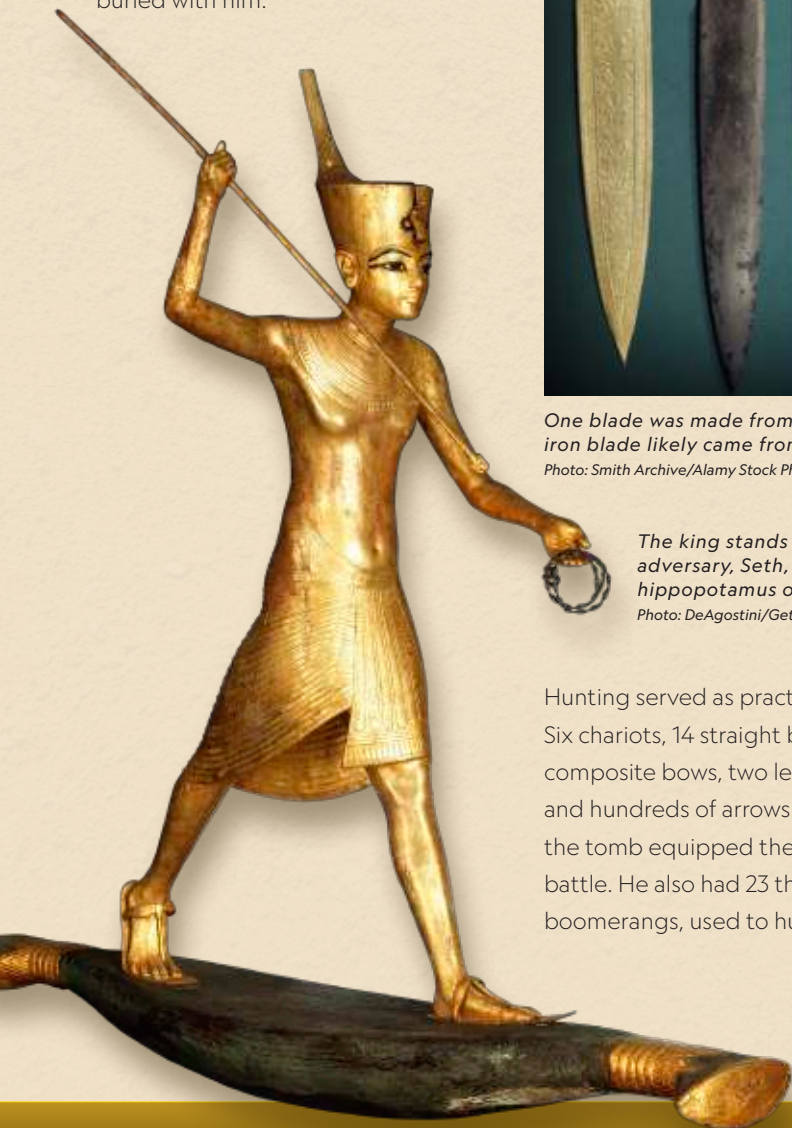


*The back of the throne depicts the king basking under the rays of the Aten. Queen Ankhsenamun lightly touches the king's shoulder. The king and queen wear a pair of sandals shared between them. While a throne is intended to demonstrate kingly power, scholars have marveled at the tenderness of this scene. Photos: Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection*



## MILITARY MIGHT

As chief of the army, Tutankhamun would have need of many weapons. His tomb housed a full suit of leather armor and eight shields. Two daggers were buried with him.



*One blade was made from gold. The second's iron blade likely came from a fallen meteorite.*

*Photo: Smith Archive/Alamy Stock Photo*

*The king stands poised to hunt his adversary, Seth, often portrayed as a hippopotamus or crocodile.*

*Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images*

Hunting served as practice for war. Six chariots, 14 straight bows, five composite bows, two leather quivers, and hundreds of arrows found in the tomb equipped the king for battle. He also had 23 throw sticks, or boomerangs, used to hunt birds.

## FOOD AND COMFORT

The king would not go hungry. Meat was stored in egg-shaped wooden boxes. More than 100 boxes held grain and fruits—wheat, barley, honey, dates, figs, and almonds. Jars for wine and beer were carefully labeled with the year they were made and their region of origin. Some jars even included the name of the vine grower.

The king's wardrobe was extensive—shirts, long tunics, kilts, sashes, and riding gloves. Some were simple and plain, for daily use; others were ornate and ceremonial. There were 93 individual sandals. Why the odd number? Who is to say? His four socks may have been gifts that he never wore under his sandals. The king had plenty of underwear, though—145 loincloths.

*The soles of some of Tut's sandals, as shown in these replicas, were decorated with images of captives, allowing him to "walk" over his enemies.*

*Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP/Getty Images*



### *Ask Yourself:*

The artifacts buried in King Tutankhamun's tomb tell scholars a lot about Egyptian culture during his time.

► *If someone visited your home or your room, what would your possessions tell them about you? What might they learn about your culture?*

Take a moment to reflect on the stories and information you have been told about King Tutankhamun's life. ► *Do you think you have a full picture of his life? What is missing for you? What more do you want to know?*

**KING TUTANKHAMUN** was a little-known king in Egyptian history compared to pharaohs like Ramses the Great, Thutmose III, Hatshepsut, or Cleopatra. The reason we remember him is that his tomb is the only one to be discovered nearly intact—or untouched. Most tombs were looted and robbed in antiquity. Tutankhamun's tomb remained hidden for more than 3,000 years. This 1922 find—made 100 years ago—has provided us with a wealth of information about the boy king and the world he lived in. His story is known around the world, and we continue to learn from him.