

Discovering Tut: the Saga Continues

-by A.R. Williams

The mummy of King Tut

As the mummy of King Tut was glided for performing a CT scan, angry winds stirred and dark clouds covered the stars. His scan was being done to unearth the mysteries that had surrounded his death.

Tourists had lined to pay their respects to the ‘mummy’ of the famous Egyptian king Tutankhamun and made speculations about his untimely death.

“Funerary treasures”

The mummy was in a very bad state, according to Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. King Tut’s tomb was first discovered in 1922 by Howard Carter, a British archaeologist. Tut was found buried with numerous “funerary treasures” in a coffin made of pure gold. The treasures found included precious collars, inlaid necklaces and bracelets, rings, amulets, a ceremonial apron, sandals and sheaths for his fingers and toes. These treasures are till date the richest royal collections ever found. Some everyday items considered to be needed in the afterlife, like board games, bronze razor, linen undergarments, cases of food and wine were also found. This revealed that the ancient Egyptians believed in the idea of resurrection and hoped to take their riches with them.

Carter’s investigations and the problems faced

Carter investigated the three nested coffins. In the first, a shroud adorned with garlands of willow and olive leaves, wild celery, lotus petals and cornflowers were found. This gave vague evidence that the death might have taken place in the month of March or April.

Carter faced difficulty in extracting the mummy of the king out of the coffin. The ritual resins had hardened resulting in cementing of Tut to the bottom of the solid gold coffin. Though Carter unsuccessfully tried to use sun to loosen the resins,

there was no other way left to separate the mummy from the adornments than to chisel it away. Its head had to be removed and the major joints had to be detached.

The only ground for Carter to defend himself for chiselling Tut was that thieves would have ripped the body apart to rob the gold, if he had not chiselled it.

Another revelation

As the archaeology changed with the advent of time, it focused more on details of life and mysteries of death than on treasures. Some 40 years after Carter's discovery, in 1968 a startling fact was revealed, in the discovery of an anatomy professor who had X-rayed the mummy. He claimed that the breast-bone and the front ribs of the mummy were missing.

Tut's family history

Amenhotep III (Tut's father or grandfather) ruled for almost four decades during the 18th dynasty golden age. He was succeeded by his son Amenhotep IV who pioneered one of the odd periods in the history of ancient Egypt. He made some drastic and unpleasant changes. He promoted the worship of the Aten, the Sun disk, and changed his name to Akhenaten. He moved the religious capital to the new city of Akhetaten. He made some drastic unpleasant changes. He destroyed the images and temples of Amun, a major god. After his demise, a ruler named Smenkhkare reigned for a brief time. Finally, Tutankhaten (the name was later changed to Tutankhamun) took the throne and restored the old order destroyed by his predecessors. He reigned for about nine years.

The death of King Tut

Tutankhamun or King Tut as he's widely known today, died as a teenage pharaoh (ancient Egyptian king) and buried laden with gold. He was the last heir of the family of rulers who had ruled Egypt for centuries. His unexpected demise was a big event and the reasons for his death remained unclear. Two of the biggest questions are still unanswered about him – "how did he die, and how old was he at the time of his death?"

The CT scan

In the year 2005, (more than 3,300 years after his death), King Tut's mummy

became one of the first mummies to undergo a CT scan-“in death, as in life, moving regally ahead of his countrymen.” The CT scan was led by Zahi Hawass and done with a portable CT machine. The scan came up with new clues about his life and death. It provided precise data for an accurate forensic reconstruction of King Tut. Due to sand in the cooler fan of the CT machine, they had to use two plastic fans to complete the scanning process.

Tut’s body was examined over a computer screen with the help of the CT scan. It showed a grey head, neck vertebrae, a hand, several images of the rib cage and a transection of the skull. After collecting the data for scan, the Pharaoh is sent back to the place he belonged, i.e. his coffin. It was a relief for Zahi Hawass as “nothing had gone seriously wrong” with the mummy.

After their observations, when they left, the wind had stopped and the surrounding came to a deathly silence. In the sky, just above the entrance to Tut's tomb stood Orion, the constellation, also called by the Egyptians as the soul of Osiris, the God of afterlife, watching over the boy king.