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TUTANKHAMEN'S CURSE

THE DEVELOPING HISTORY OF AN EGYPTIAN KING



JOYCE TYLDESLEY

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PROFILE BOOKS

This paperback edition published in 2013

First published in Great Britain in 2012 by

PROFILE BOOKS LTD

3A Exmouth House

Pine Street

London EC1R 0JH

www.profilebooks.com

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Designed by Sue Lamble

Typeset in Adobe Garamond by MacGuru Ltd

info@macguru.org.uk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon CR0 4YX

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 86197 166 1

eISBN 978 1 84765 797 8



Mixed Sources

Product group from well-managed
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A NOTE ON NAMES



The Egyptians omitted vowels from their hieroglyphic texts: like modern emailers and texters (txtrs), they saw no need to waste time, energy and space writing sounds – and sometimes even words – that would have been obvious to everyone. Lol.

Unfortunately, ancient Egyptian is now a long-dead language, and the missing sounds are far from obvious to modern readers. Egyptologists therefore have to guess which vowel goes where. Generally, we insert ‘e’ as the vowel of choice, but this may not be the vowel that the Egyptians used, and we might not insert it in the correct place. As a result, all but the shortest Egyptian words have several variant English spellings, all equally acceptable. Throughout this book I use the spelling Tutankhamen, and I refer to Tutankhamen’s god as Amen. In so doing, I follow the precedent set by Howard Carter. I have taken the liberty of extending this preferred spelling to all quotes within the text. Others prefer the spelling Tutankhamun (and Amun) or Tutankhamon (Amon); more exotic variants – Touatânkhamanou, Tut.ankh.Amen, Tutenchamun, etc. – will be found in the older literature. All refer to the same man.

The king that we know as Tutankhamen (living image of [the god] Amen) was born Tutankhaten (living image of [the god] Aten) but changed his name during the first few years of his reign. His consort,

Ankhesenpaaten, became Ankhesenamun at the same time. Others had already changed their names. The king that we today know as Akhenaten was originally Amenhotep IV; Akhenaten's consort, Nefertiti at the time of her marriage, expanded her name early in her husband's reign to become Neferneferuaten Nefertiti. To avoid unnecessary complications I will refer to these individuals as Tutankhamen, Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Ankhesenamun throughout the text, unless it is inappropriate so do.

At his coronation Tutankhamen assumed a series of five names that served as a formal statement of intent or propaganda for his reign. His last two names, known today as the prenomen and the nomen, are the names that are given in cartouches (distinctive oval loops) on his monuments and inscriptions. His prenomen (Nebkheperure) is the name by which his people knew him:

Horus Name: Image of births

Two Ladies Name: Beautiful of laws who quells the Two Lands/
who makes content all the gods

Golden Horus Name: Elevated of appearances for the god/his
father Re

Prenomen: Nebkheperure: Lord of manifestations of [the god]
Re

Nomen: Tutankhamen: Living image of [the god] Amen

A NOTE ON DATES



Egypt's dynastic age started with the unification of the country by the southern warrior Narmer in approximately 3100 BC, and ended just over 3,000 years later with the suicide of Cleopatra VII in 30 BC. Following the scheme devised by the Ptolemaic historian Manetho, Egyptologists divide this dynastic age into 'dynasties': lines of kings who are in some way linked together. They may be, but are not always, blood relations. It is important to remember that these dynasties are artificial, modern divisions; the ancients did not divide up their history in this way.

The dynasties are grouped into times of strong, centralised rule (the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms and the Late Period) separated by periods of decentralised or foreign control (the First, Second and Third Intermediate Periods). Tutankhamen ruled during the late 18th Dynasty, the first dynasty of the New Kingdom (Dynasties 18–20, *c.* 1550–1069 BC).

The Egyptians dated events by reference to the current king's reign: Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, etc. When the old king died and a new king took his place, the dating system began again with a new Year 1. Although this is by no means a perfect system, it is the most accurate means that we have of dating Egypt's past, and it is the system that will be used throughout this book.

It is notoriously difficult to tie the Egyptian regnal dates into our modern calendar. As there is no universally accepted chronology the following, based on the dates suggested by Ian Shaw in the *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (2000: 481), is used:

Kings of the 18th Dynasty (c. 1550–1295 BC)

Ahmose c.1550–1525 BC

Amenhotep I c.1525–1504 BC

Tuthmosis I c.1504–1492 BC

Tuthmosis II c.1492–1479 BC

Tuthmosis III c.1479–1425 BC

Hatshepsut c.1473–1458 BC

Amenhotep II c.1427–1400 BC

Tuthmosis IV c.1400–1390 BC

Amenhotep III c.1390–1352 BC

Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten c.1352–1336 BC

Smenkhkare c.1338–1336 BC

Tutankhamen c.1336–1327 BC

Ay c.1327–1323 BC

Horemheb c.1323–1295 BC

A NOTE ON TOMBS AND TOMB NUMBERS



The Theban west bank is honeycombed with tombs of all ages, some royal and some private. Starting in the 18th Dynasty, the New Kingdom pharaohs chose to be buried alongside some of their more important courtiers in rock-cut tombs cut into the remote Valley of the Kings. During the 19th Dynasty the nearby Valley of the Queens was developed as a cemetery for some of the more important royal wives and their children.

In AD 1827 John Gardner Wilkinson surveyed the twenty-one known tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Each tomb was given a number, allocated as he came to it. Today it is possible, by following his number sequence, to see that he walked first from the Valley entrance southwards, then turned towards the east. His system has continued into modern times, with the tombs now being numbered in the chronological order of their discovery, so that in 1922 Tutankhamen's tomb was designated KV (or King's Valley) 62. When, in 2005/6, the next 'tomb' was discovered by a team led by Dr Otto Schaden, it became KV 63. KV 64 is a suspected tomb, discovered by radar, while KV 65 is a suspected tomb entrance. The next tomb to be discovered will become KV 66, and so on. Just twenty-five of the KV tombs are royal tombs. The others were built for