

Tutankhamun, King of Egypt (1336-1327 BC)
The British Museum

Tutankhamun was born 'Tutankhaten' during the Amarna period, probably at the capital, Akhetaten (Tell el-Amarna). The identity of his parents is disputed but they were perhaps Akhenaten and his lesser wife Kiya; the boy was a royal prince and ascended the throne at the age of about eight years. Tutankhamun married Ankhesenpaaten, daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti.

Tutankhamun ruled from Memphis with the advice of officials such as the vizier Ay and the general Horemheb, both of whom succeeded him as king. Analysis of Tutankhamun's mummy suggests that he was around seventeen years old when he died, but the cause of his death is a mystery. When the young king died unexpectedly he was buried in the Valley of the Kings in what was probably intended as a non-royal tomb. This tiny tomb was discovered almost intact by Howard Carter in 1922.

The British Museum has a number of items related to Tutankhamun but the most impressive piece is a red granite lion, one of a pair, both attributable to Amenhotep III, who installed them as images of himself in front of his temple at Soleb in Nubia. While one bears an original inscription naming Amenhotep 'lion great of strength', the other appears to have been left unfinished, to be later inscribed by Tutankhamun. They were subsequently transported south to Gebel Barkal in the third century BC by the Meroitic ruler Amanislo, who had his names carved on the lion's chests. The statue of Horemheb (portrayed as Hapy) also clearly bears the features of Tutankhamun.