

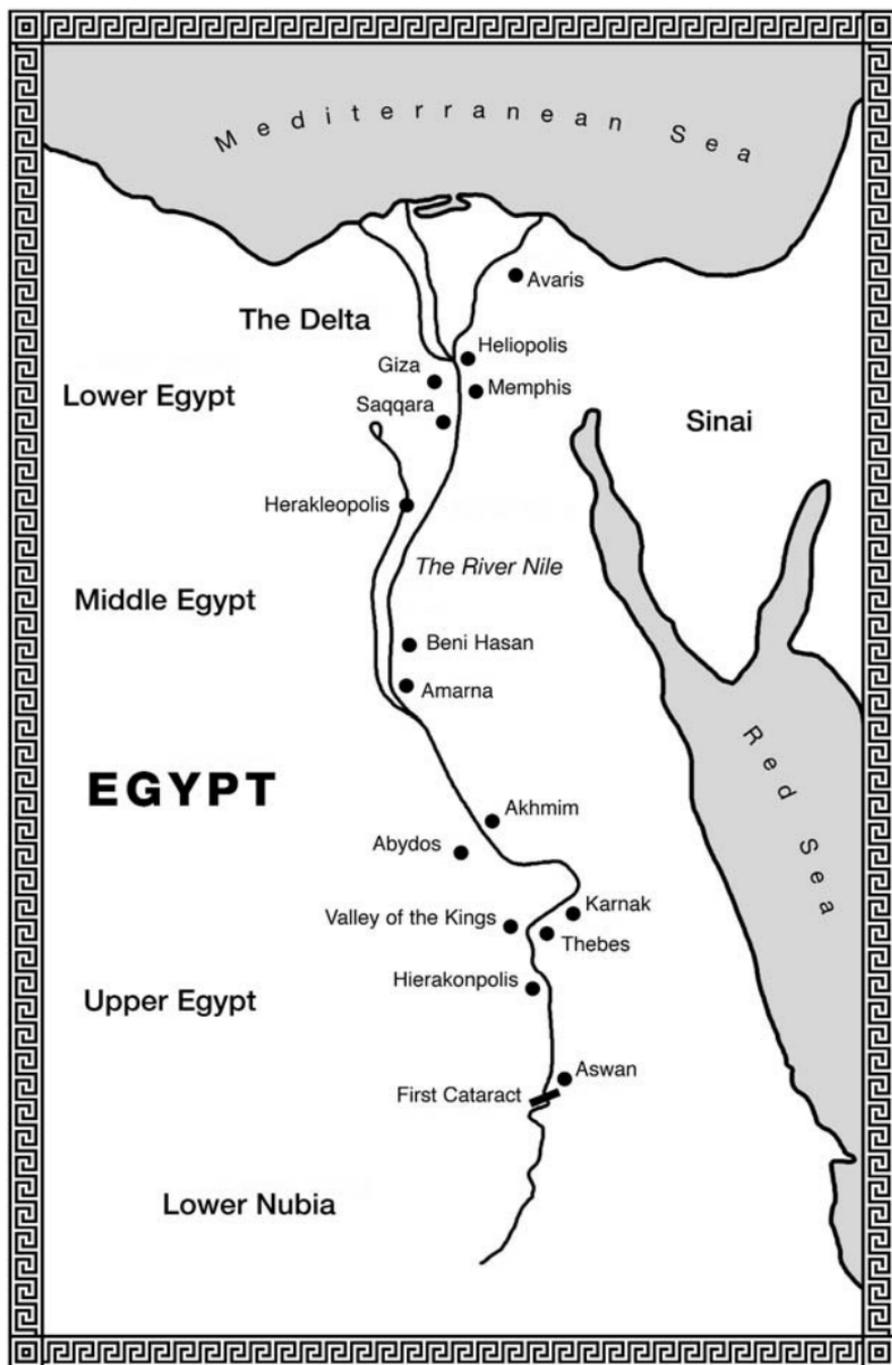
BILL PRICE

# TUTANKHAMUN

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EGYPT'S MOST FAMOUS PHARAOH





Tutankhamun  
Egypt's Most Famous Pharaoh

BILL PRICE

**POCKET ESSENTIALS**

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## A Note on Dates

There is not one universally accepted chronology of Ancient Egypt, but the majority of them broadly agree with each other. Dates given for the reigns of particular rulers and for specific events are, on the other hand, much more widely disputed. These dates have been arrived at through different methods, the results of which rarely agree with each other, and are not necessarily as accurate or reliable as is sometimes made out. So, when reading anything about Ancient Egypt, the dates should always be taken as being approximate. For the sake of consistency, the dates given throughout this book follow the chronology set out in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, edited by Ian Shaw.



## Introduction

Until the discovery of his tomb in 1922, Tutankhamun, the 12<sup>th</sup> Pharaoh of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, was one of the least known of all the pharaohs in the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt. His immediate successors to the throne intentionally attempted to remove his name from history and, for more than 3,000 years, they were almost entirely successful. Ironically their actions would be one of the main reasons why the tomb was eventually found almost completely intact, while the tombs of those later pharaohs were robbed in antiquity. Shortly after his death Tutankhamun appears to have been forgotten and his tomb hidden under debris from the construction of another tomb, preserving it and its contents until it was uncovered by Howard Carter.

News of the discovery created a media sensation around the world, unprecedented in its scale for an archaeological find, and Tutankhamun was propelled out of obscurity and onto the front pages of the newspapers. The nature of the wonderful artefacts found in the tomb, many made of gold and inlaid with semi-precious stones, was a clear demonstration of the extraordinary wealth of the pharaohs of this period. One object in particular, the solid gold funeral mask, soon became the most recognised artefact from the ancient world and it is still considered by many to be the most beautiful.

Successive generations have been able to see some of these artefacts in touring exhibitions, including the latest one, 'Tutankhamun and the Pharaohs of the Golden Age'. The focus of this exhibition has been broadened from that of the previous ones to include objects associated with other pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty as well as Tutankhamun. This may have been done through necessity, as many of the best-known objects from the tomb, including the funeral mask, are no longer allowed to leave Egypt but it has resulted in Tutankhamun being placed in a greater historical context than in previous exhibitions.

Trends in archaeology in general have been towards gaining a wider knowledge of the ancient world, rather than simply appreciating the objects, so the new exhibition can be seen as following these developments. This approach is also the one followed in this book, which is primarily about Tutankhamun, but also attempts to place him in the context of the world in which he lived.

The details of the life of a young man who lived more than 3,000 years ago can never be known with absolute certainty, but archaeology is all about interpreting the available data to give as complete a picture as possible and, again, this is the approach followed here. Recent research and discoveries have also been incorporated, some of which tend to confirm interpretations made in the past while other findings conflict with some of the wilder speculation.

The line between interpretation and speculation can be a blurry one, particularly when dealing with a subject where concrete facts are hard to come by. In the following pages I have tried to stay on the right side of the line. Where more than one theory exists to explain a particular piece of

## INTRODUCTION

evidence, I have presented the argument rather than chosen sides and, where conjecture has been employed, I have tried to make it plain that it is speculation and not fact.

Approaching Tutankhamun in this way, it becomes apparent that his reign coincided with one of the most fascinating and extraordinary periods in Egyptian history, the Amarna Period and its aftermath. It was also a time when Egypt was facing challenges from outside its borders, from the Hittites in the north and Nubia in the south, and from the vassal states within its own empire. By considering these events as well as the contents of the tomb, I hope that what emerges is a balanced account of the current state of our knowledge about Tutankhamun, together with an appreciation of those aspects of his life that are not yet fully understood.



## Egypt and the Pharaohs

### The Gift of the Nile

Herodotus famously described Egypt as being the gift of the Nile. The annual flood, beginning in July, deposited layers of silt over the inundated land along the banks of the river, building up a thick black alluvial soil. The Egyptians didn't need Herodotus to tell them about it. They called their country *Kennet*, 'the Black Land'. The Nile, rising as it does in the equatorial regions of Africa, flows all year round through the otherwise almost entirely arid region of Nubia and Egypt, on its 4,000-mile journey to the Mediterranean Sea. As well as laying down a rich and fertile soil, it was also a source of water for the irrigation of crops and the watering of animals and it provided a means of transport from one end of Egypt to the other. Boats could float down the Nile with the current and sail back up it on the prevailing southerly winds.

Agriculture was the foundation on which the wealth of Egypt developed. The first evidence of settled farming communities appears in the archaeological record much later than it does in the Fertile Crescent of what is now southern Turkey, Iraq, Syria and the Levant. In this area there is evidence of sedentism going back to the early Neolithic period, around 10,000 BC. During the same period, Egypt

was sparsely populated with hunter-gatherers and, although they leave little evidence behind them, it is thought that nomadic pastoralists would also have passed through the area. The climate of North Africa as a whole was much wetter at that time and the Nile Valley was mostly made up of marshland, which was unsuitable for a settled way of life. By about 7000 BC, the climate in the region had dried out. Desert encroached over an enormous area that had previously been savannah, giving rise to the vast Sahara Desert. The marshes of the Nile Valley also dried out, leaving behind the thick soil of Egypt, perfect conditions for farming.

The first evidence of agriculture in Egypt comes from about 5000 BC around the Fayum Oasis to the west of the Nile. In the absence of any definite evidence, it is generally assumed that farming techniques spread into Egypt from the Levant, although it is difficult to say whether this was due to the movement of people or to the adoption of new technologies by people already living in the region. This is borne out by the type of agricultural practices found; crops included barley, emmer wheat (an early variety of wheat first domesticated in the Fertile Crescent) and flax and there is evidence of the presence of sheep, goats, cattle and pigs. Farming began in Upper Egypt at a later date, where the archaeological evidence suggests it spread from the south, from what is now Sudan, and from the Western Desert, rather than north along the Nile Valley.

Egyptian farmers may have made a slow start but, in such ideal conditions and once they began to make use of the annual flood and the irrigation potential of the Nile, the civilisation developed quickly. Within a thousand years the society that would go on to create the dynasties of Egypt had

emerged. Small communities banded together to form kingdoms and, either by agreement or conquest, a single united kingdom emerged to dominate the whole of Egypt.

### The Dynasties of Egypt

In the third Century BC, about 200 years after Herodotus, the Greek-Egyptian priest Manetho wrote a history of Egypt going back to the beginning of the pharaonic period. Although his original work has not survived (in all likelihood, it was destroyed when the Library of Alexandria burnt down in 49 BC), it has been pieced together from extensive extracts quoted in works by later historians. In the *Aegyptiaca*, as it was called, he set out a chronology of Ancient Egypt based on dividing the pharaohs into dynasties. Manetho almost certainly based his chronology on surviving pharaonic king lists, which were inscribed in stone and painted on the walls of tombs or, in some cases, written on papyrus. These formed part of the cult of the royal ancestors practised by the pharaohs. They could also have been used to legitimise the rule of a pharaoh by showing his relationship to previous pharaohs, thereby demonstrating his divine right to reign.

Although modifications have been made to Manetho's chronology many times, it remains the basis of the dating of Ancient Egypt still in use today. Deficiencies in the system have long been recognised and, as more information has come to light, it has become apparent that Egypt has not always consisted of a single unified society, ruled by one king who has then been succeeded by another in an orderly fashion. Dividing the dynasties into three kingdoms, the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms respectively, has partially overcome this

problem. During the dynasties designated as belonging to one of these kingdoms, Egypt can be viewed as a single country comprising the Two Lands of Upper Egypt (the Nile Valley) and Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta). Between the kingdoms come the intermediate periods, during which the central power of a single king no longer existed and the region fractured into a number of smaller chiefdoms, each governed by its own local ruler. In a pattern repeated a number of times, one of these smaller powers grew in strength and overcame the others, reuniting Egypt and creating a single kingdom again.

Advances in archaeological dating techniques have allowed the chronologies to be refined further. Stratification, in which the descending layers of an archaeological dig are identified and the finds from the different layers compared with those from sites of known age, has been used for more than 100 years to give approximate datings. More recently techniques such as carbon dating, thermoluminescence and dendrochronology have further refined the chronology. As is the way of such things, the dates obtained by different methods don't always agree, leading to a certain amount of disagreement between dates in different accounts.

### From Farmers to Pharaohs

Manetho gave the name of the first pharaoh as King Menes. No reference to this name has yet been found in the archaeological record and it has been suggested that Menes could be a mythological figure. Alternatively the name has been linked with Narmer, a predynastic ruler from about 3100 BC, or with Aha, the first pharaoh of the Early Dynasty Period, who

ruled c3000 BC. What becomes apparent from the record is that the transition from an agricultural society based on individual settlements to a unified state governed by a single king was not a clear cut process and this means it is all but impossible to pinpoint the exact moment the pharaonic period in Egypt emerged.

The great Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) considered that the complex society of Ancient Egypt could not have arisen from the indigenous peoples of the area and the society they inhabited prior to 3000 BC. Based on the evidence available at the beginning of the twentieth century, which suggested Egyptian society arose very rapidly, this was not an unreasonable conclusion to reach. Petrie thought complex society was introduced by the conquest of the lands of Egypt by a force from the south or, possibly, from the Levant and that the invasion resulted in the rise of a single ruler of all Egypt. More recent archaeological excavations have unquestionably shown that this was not the case and that the dynastic pharaohs were an indigenous phenomenon.

During the Naqata period, from 4000 BC to 3200 BC, the farming culture along the length of the Egyptian Nile began to become much more regular. Towards the end of this period the style of artefacts, such as pottery, found in archaeological excavations of sites throughout Egypt are much the same, suggesting the emergence of a single uniform culture at this time. This process began in Upper Egypt, where towns first began to develop out of scattered agricultural settlements and specialist trades began to be practised, and then spread down the Nile into Lower Egypt. The reason this occurred first in Upper Egypt is thought to have been that the greater availability of resources in this region allowed individual commu-

nities the opportunity to specialise in a particular trade or craft. The increasing wealth of particular towns, gained through trade links along the length of the Nile and south into Nubia, gave rise to a ruling elite. With increasing wealth came greater power and, as one local ruler became more powerful than his neighbouring rulers, the region began to become unified. There are two possible processes by which this can happen; it could have been a development of increasing trade links, with traders being followed by colonists, or it could have been accomplished by warfare and conquest. The most likely scenario is that Egypt was gradually united by a combination of both these processes, with those regions not submitting to the most powerful ruler voluntarily being overcome by force.

One of the main reasons why rulers from Upper Egypt wanted to extend their territory into Lower Egypt was so that they could gain complete control of the lucrative trade routes along the entire length of the Nile and further on across the Mediterranean into the Levant and Syria. One example, that of the timber trade between Egypt and what is now the Lebanon, serves to illustrate why this was the case. At that time the best wood to build large river-going boats and ships to sail the Mediterranean came from the cedars of Lebanon, tall straight-grained trees which do not grow in Egypt. The ruler of Upper Egypt had the natural resources and craft centres in towns to supply the wealth so that he could trade with the city states of the Lebanon, but he could only do so through the ports on the lower Nile and the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. There was an obvious advantage to be gained by developing direct links with the states in the Lebanon rather than having to go through any number of middle men

in Lower Egypt or having to pay tariffs to local rulers for passage through their territory. Once one king became dominant in Upper Egypt, the prospect of his expanding his rule further, into Lower Egypt, must have been an attractive one.

Comparisons of the pottery of the period from various sites along the Nile reveal the replacement of the typical styles found in Lower Egypt with those deriving from the south. The obvious conclusion to draw from this is that the spreading culture of Upper Egypt came to dominate the whole region. It would make sense that not only pottery styles were becoming the same but the entire culture was becoming uniform under a single ruler.

Support for such a theory comes from excavations carried out at cemetery complexes in Abydos and Hierakonpolis, which both contain graves dating back to the early Naqata period. There is a gradual increase in both the quantity and quality of grave goods, indicating the rise of a complex hierarchical society. For example, the tomb designated as U-j in the Umm el-Qa'ab necropolis at Abydos, which dates to about 3150 BC, shows a clear line of development from earlier tombs in the same area, but it is much larger, extending to 12 rooms in all. Although it was robbed of much of its contents before it was excavated, numerous examples of pottery were found, including something like 400 wine jars from Palestine and 150 seals from other containers, which were inscribed with the earliest known examples of hieroglyphs. These, together with the presence of a wooden shrine and an ivory sceptre, point towards it being the tomb of a ruler, probably one of a number of pre-dynastic kings who share the name King Scorpion. There is not enough evidence to say for certain that this king definitely ruled both Upper

and Lower Egypt, but the architectural style of the tomb is part of a progression which includes later kings who definitely did rule both lands. This shows that these later kings came originally from Upper Egypt.

As is the case with much of the archaeology of Egypt, the evidence is not specific enough to prove exactly when the unified state of Egypt arose but, by about 3000 BC, the structure of the state was in place. A state administration, using hieroglyphic writing to keep accounts, was based in Memphis, at the head of the Nile Delta, while the spiritual centre of Egypt remained in Upper Egypt, as it would throughout the entire course of the pharaonic history of the country. The prosperity of the country was based on agriculture and expanded its wealth through its natural resources and the high level of specialisation in particular crafts, such as metal working, and through trade and colonisation. It was held together by a strong state administration and by religious uniformity across the whole country, both under the direct control of a single ruler, who was held to be semi-divine by his subjects. This was the only country during this period in which a state of such size was ruled as a single entity by one king.

### The Rise of the New Kingdom

The Old Kingdom lasted for about 800 years (see Appendix 1) and, during this period, many of the cultural, religious and political developments which would form the basis of future kingdoms first became established. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, rival factions developed within the ruling elite, resulting in the First Intermediate Period, when Egypt