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Path to Tutankhamun

The discovery – the life and the mystery

A guide to the important literature and iconic pictures.

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2nd, updated edition

Introduction

The 100th anniversary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun is approaching. Since the discovery, countless books have been published about Tutankhamun and his time, which can fill an entire library. Some of the books are essential for research, others are less important. Herrmann A. Schlögl published a similar book in German, which is available in several editions from the 1990s [1] until the last edition in 2013 [2].

The present collection of material and literature focuses on Tutankhamun and his immediate predecessors and successors. Numerous new publications in 2021 and spring 2022 as well as announcements of forthcoming publications in the anniversary year recommended an updated new edition for this introductory book.

The Essential Publications

If you lack the time to study Tutankhamun in-depth and still need the most important knowledge, the following monographs are recommended. They are up to date and available in book stores.

Nicholas Reeves' monograph is still a monument of overwhelming importance today, although the 1990ies book is no longer relevant to Reeves' new theories after 2015 [3]. As hoped, an expanded and updated edition of Nicholas Reeves' classic will be released on 18 October 2022 [4].

Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum, gives an entertaining and exciting account of the discovery and exploration. This book is very worth reading. The book is available in English [5] and German [6].

The richly illustrated book by I. E. S. Edwards from the late 1970s is still splendidly informative. The book is available in a new edition [7].

The most important biography of Howard Carter is by T. G. H. James and describes the life of the discoverer in great depth [8].

Very up-to-date and comprehensive is my monograph with the state of research, the updated 3rd edition was published in 2021 [9].

Prof. Richard Parkinson (University of Oxford) presents a new book, describing 50 key-objects in detail. Also included are letters, drawings, excavation notes and diaries of the excavators: Tutankhamun: Excavating the Archive [10]. Also available as German translation: Howard Carter und

das Grab des Tutanchamun: Geschichte einer Entdeckung [11].

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The Reign of Amenhotep III

The reign of Amenhotep III was dealt with in numerous publications, which have the New Kingdom as their subject [13]. There are also specialised monographs [14]

The exhibition catalogue from 1992 on the epoch and art of Amenhotep III is so important that it can also be considered a quasi-monograph on the king [15]. The encyclopaedia entry on Amenhotep III in Thomas Schneider's handbook, which is a must-have book for Egyptologists, also offers a good introduction [16].

For the first time, Amenhotep III is tangible as crown prince in the Theban tomb TT 64 of Heqaerneheh. He seems to have ascended the throne of Egypt as a child. Exactly how old he was remains uncertain, mostly an age of 10-12 years is assumed.

For some researchers, Amenhotep III represents a morbid decadence, an epoch in which Egypt sank into inactivity and luxury. The king's self-glorification and craving for pleasure are undeniable [15].

On the positive side, he was a master diplomat who was able to keep a fragile Middle Eastern power play of kingdoms in balance. The Amarna letters found in 1887 are part of this diplomatic correspondence of the time of Amenhotep III and IV. The letters begin around the 31st year of the reign of Amenhotep III and continue until the first years of Tutankhamun's reign.

An enormous building activity distinguished Amenhotep III, which was only surpassed by Ramses II in the 19th dynasty. More than 1000 monumental statues of Amenhotep III still exist today, 45 of which are over 3 metres high [16].

His main queen was Tyje, who comes from a non-royal family. She was the daughter of Yuya, a priest of Min and leader of the chariot troop and his wife Thuya. They came

from Akhmim and were privileged to be buried in the Valley of the Kings (KV 46). Parts of their burial furnishings and their excellently preserved mummies were discovered by Theodore Davis in 1907 [17].

In his 36th year of reign, the king seems to have fallen ill, as he asks Tushrata, King of Mitanni, in one of the diplomatic letters to send him a statue of the goddess Ishtar of Nineveh. At the same time, hundreds of statues of the goddess Sekhmet are created. The goddess had the reputation to bring diseases, but also to take them away. At the time of Amenhotep III, it was assumed that a bubonic plague may have occurred, but it cannot be identified medically [18,19].

In the last years of his reign, Amenhotep III also married his two eldest daughters Satamun and Isis during the Sed-Jubilee-celebrations.

The Ptolemaic chronicler Manetho assigns Amenhotep III a reign of 38 years and 7 months (Josephus variant of Manetho). This is consistent with the highest surviving contemporary sources, vase inscriptions in the palace in Malqata, which also attest to the year 38.

Amenhotep III was buried in King's tomb WV 22 in the Western Valley of the Kings. His mummy, it is assumed, may have been covered with gold like a statue of the gods [20]. Unfortunately, however, his mummy (Cairo CG 65074) is in very poor condition [21-24].

Literature:

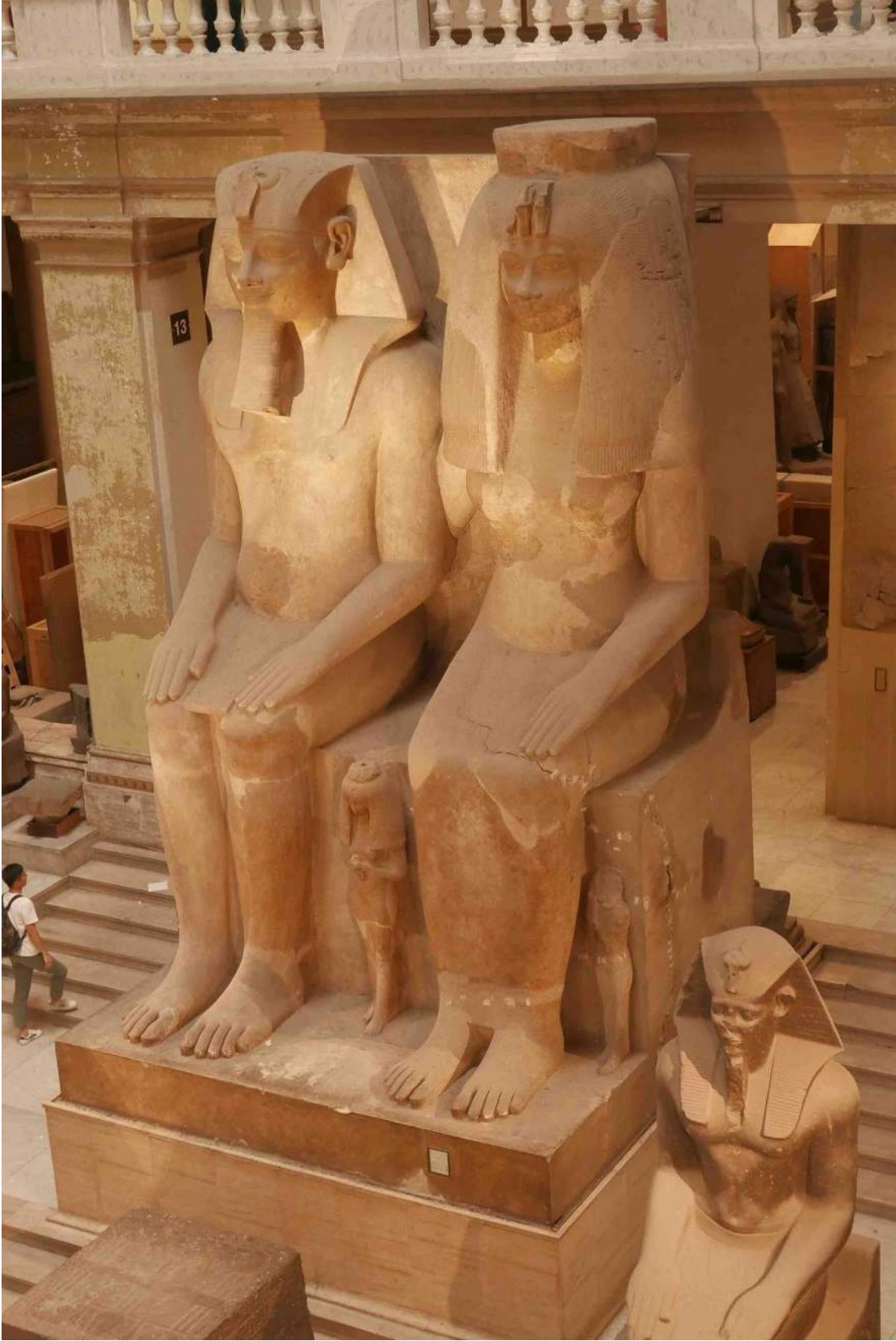
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Monumental group of Amenhotep III and his Queen Tyje in
the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Tahir square).
M. Habicht 2019.

The Reign of Amenhotep IV Akhenaton

Amenhotep IV, the later Akhenaton, was not intended to succeed to the throne as his second son. Since his older brother Thutmosis died as a teenager before his father, Amenhotep succeeded him.

There is little known evidence of his time as a prince, so we know very little about his youth. His sisters, in contrast, are much better documented, especially Satamun and Isis, Amenhotep III's two eldest daughters. There is no evidence of a third brother called Smenkhkare, whom certain experts postulated. He probably never existed (see chapter Enigma Smenkhkare).

The reign of Amenhotep IV begins quite conventionally at first. He was already married to Nefertiti before he acceded to the throne. If the Younger Lady from KV 35 is indeed Nefertiti, he seems to have been married to one of his sisters. Sibling incest in the Egyptian royal house was widespread [25,26]. Perhaps one of the daughters of Amenhotep III and Tyje changed her name to Nefertiti for theological reasons. The theological change had already taken place under Amenhotep III. Satamun and Isis seem to be the most likely candidates for equation with Nefertiti (see also genetics).

The new solar theology is implemented from the 4th year of rule as an increasingly radical revolution from above and completed in years 6 to 9. Already from the 3rd year, a temple for Aton was erected in Thebes. In the 4th year the high priest of Amun was eliminated and the god Aton was placed at the head of the gods (a henotheism). At first, the other gods were only moved into the background.

In the 5th year, the king moved the residence to a desert plateau opposite Hermopolis and named his city Akhet-Aton (horizon of Aton). He also changed his name from Amenhotep to Akhenaton. The new religion of the sun becomes more and more an endowed and state decreed religion and Akhenaton is its prophet. Only to him Aton is directly accessible. Religion now has an increasingly monotheistic character, plunging polytheistic Egypt into a deep spiritual crisis. Science is far from unanimous about the new theology and character of this very special Pharaoh: The descriptions ranged from statements such as "One of the spiritual heads of antiquity", "the first idealist, a bold spirit who spread thoughts that went infinitely beyond the understanding of his time", to more negative evaluations such as "a great mystic who was alien to his people through his fanaticism" or "a pitiful character with a tendency to bragging".

Indeed, the Amarna period has produced some of the most outstanding works of art and a sun hymn that suggests a new way of thinking. The downside was a neglected foreign policy and the fact that Egypt was increasingly sinking into a religious conflict.

The last years of Akhenaton's reign are increasingly poorly documented, which poses major problems for research [27]. In the 12th year there is an uprising in Nubia, which is militarily suppressed. In the same year Nefertiti seems to have ascended the throne as co-regent. From the 12/13th year several daughters of Akhenaton and Nefertiti died in quick succession, possibly of an epidemic, as many inhabitants of Akhet-Aton also died.

The last known mention of Nefertiti dates from the 16th year of Akhenaton's reign [28]. The inscription was only found a few years ago and refutes earlier speculation that Nefertiti, who otherwise disappeared from the 13/14th year, died.

Akhenaton died in his 17th year of reign and was buried in the king's tomb TA 26 of Akhet-Aton. The circumstances of his death are unknown. For a short time, he seems to have married his eldest daughter as queen. What exactly happened after his death is one of the greatest mysteries of Egyptology. In the final phase of his reign, the mysterious figure Smenkhkare appeared on the scene, often accompanied by Queen Meritaton.