**The Death of Tutankhamun**

**Introduction: Background Information**

Tutankhamun was one of the most famous pharaohs in Ancient Egyptian history. Before this, his father Ahkenaten ruled. Ahkenaten was not a popular pharaoh. He wanted everyone to believe in one god, Aten, from whom he took his name from. However, when Tutankhamun succeeded the throne, he reversed his father’s decision. He allowed all Egyptian people to believe in many gods once again.

It is well known that Tutankhamun had a short life. He became pharaoh at nine or ten years old and died unexpectedly just ten years after this at the age of nineteen or twenty. He was sealed in his tomb within the Valley of the Kings and for thousands of years, his tomb laid undiscovered. Later, in 1922, Howard Carter who was an archaeologist, made one the of the most interesting discoveries of all time. He, together with an aristocrat called Lord Carnarvon, had managed to secure the concession to dig in the exclusive location. Inside, Carter and Carnarvon found over 5000 artefacts but most importantly, the sarcophagus containing Tutankhamun’s body. The cause of his death remained a mystery but there were indeed many theories surrounding the subject.

**Suspects and Motives**

For a long time, archaeologists and historians thought that Tutankhamun might have been murdered as it seemed very suspicious that he died at such a young age. There were certainly two people who might have wanted him dead. The first was Ay, Tutankhamun’s great uncle and advisor, and the other was Horemheb who was a general in the Egyptian army. Both of them were ambitious men who wanted power and in fact, they both went on to become pharaohs after Tutankhamun died.

Both these men had a lot to gain if Tutankhamun was out of the way. The position of pharaoh was a very powerful one and they each had several other motives. Ay was probably very jealous of Tutankhamun and wanted to steal his crown, although he was a family member. He had been an advisor for a long time but once Tutankhamun was an adult, there was a possibility that he might lose his job. As a member of the royal family, he might have thought that he deserved the throne instead of a little boy. After Tutankhamun died, Ankhesenamun was left without a husband so she wrote to the king of the Hittites to ask for a prince to marry. However, when the prince was on his way, he was ambushed and murdered. Ay did later marry Ankhesenamun, and so he may have intercepted the letter and been responsible for another murder to achieve this. Interestingly, once Tutankhamun died, Ay was in charge of his burial. This was done very quickly so that Ay could seize the crown before Horemheb or any other contenders could do so.

Horemheb was a general and also an important man. He was actually out of the country at the time of Tutankhamun’s death, however he could have instructed someone to do the job for him. It is also possible that he too had aspirations of marrying Ankhesenamun, in order to get himself into the royal family of Egypt. Suspiciously, when Horemheb later became pharaoh, he tried to destroy all evidence that Tutankhamun ever existed, for example pictures and historical writing about the pharaoh. This might have been to cover up any evidence that might point towards him, or perhaps it just shows that he really hated the boy pharaoh.

**Important Evidence**

As a result of Howard Carter’s excavations, archaeologists were able to find many important clues that tell us a lot about Tutankhamun’s life. Usually, when a pharaoh began his reign, they would start to build them an elaborate tomb in preparation for an expensive royal burial. However, Tutankhamun’s tomb was a lot smaller and many items seem to have been planned for someone else. For example, there were an incredible 413 shabtis in his tomb, which are models of servants who would help them in the afterlife. This was very strange, as not only would pharaohs usually be buried with just one or two, but many of them did not have Tutankhamun’s name on. This suggests that he was buried in a hurry and his burial was not carefully planned. Howard Carter also discovered that the lid of the sarcophagus had been broken and then quickly and clumsily repaired, which again did not match the careful way in which pharaohs were usually buried. Furthermore, there was a lot of thick, black liquid in one of the coffins which looked like it had been poured in by mistake during mummification. This could be another sign that mummification had been rushed.

There were also many wall paintings in the tombs which are very important evidence. In the burial chamber, one painting showed the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ceremony. The Ancient Egyptians believed it was very important to open the body’s mouth so that they would be able to eat and drink in the afterlife. In the painting, it is Ay who was performing the ritual, but strangely he is already wearing the crown of the pharaoh. Traditionally, the pharaoh would not be crowned until the burial had been completed and the previous pharaoh is sealed in his tomb, out of respect. This makes it look like Ay was extremely eager to seize power as soon as possible.

Another interesting clue was that Tutankhamun was always shown sitting down or walking with a walking stick in the paintings. In fact, 130 walking sticks were also found in the tomb which suggested that Tutankhamun had been weak or ill at the time of death. All of this evidence made archaeologists think his death was very suspicious for many years.

**Scientific Evidence**

Science and technology was not very advanced back in 1922. Later on though, scientists were able to develop ways of predicting what had happened to Tutankhamun. Scientists were able to use x-rays to investigate the cause of his death further. X-rays to his head revealed that there were small fragments of bone inside his skull that were the result of damage to his head. Originally, archaeologists thought that this must mean that he had been killed by a vicious blow to the back of the head, but later studies and CT scans showed that it was just from mummification.

They also x-rayed his feet which revealed that the left foot was a lot weaker than the right. It was also possible to see a break in his leg which appeared to be infected and had not healed properly. All of this evidence suggested that Tutankhamun had had a painful bone disease which would have made him very weak and vulnerable to other illnesses.

The most recent research shows that in fact, Tutankhamun had malaria at the time he died and this is the most likely cause of his death. Although there were several people who probably wanted him dead, in the end it seems that his illnesses left him weak enough to be killed by the disease.