

Who Killed King Tut?

Two modern gumshoes think they've solved the ancient mystery of the boy King's untimely death

BY JEFFREY KLUGER AND ANDREA DORFMAN

The tomb of the boy King Tutankhamen created a sensation from the moment it was uncovered in 1922. One of the few royal burial chambers that survived the centuries relatively intact, it was by far the richest — filled with gold, ivory and carved wooden treasures, including what may be the world's most famous funerary mask. But there was also something troubling about the way King Tut was buried — hints and omissions that suggested foul play.

Tut was barely 18 when he died — young for Pharaohs, who always enjoyed the best nutrition and medical care in what was one of the ancient world's most civilized kingdoms. What's more, he is thought to have been the son of a controversial — in some quarters, hated — leader, which would have made Tut controversial too. But more than anything it was the state of the boy's tomb — its diminutive size, its unfinished condition — that suggested he had died unexpectedly. All of this raised suspicions that his demise may have been an unnatural, even violent one. And now a new case is being made that supports those who have long surmised that he was, in fact, murdered.

More than 3,300 years after Tutankhamen was entombed, Greg Cooper, a former FBI profiler and chief of police in Provo, Utah, and Mike King, director of the Ogden, Utah, police department's crime-analysis unit, have tackled the case at the request of British film producer Anthony Geffen. Working with Geffen's London-based company, Atlantic Productions, the two investigators have used a wealth of sources — including books, scholarly papers, photographs of Tut's tomb, X rays of the mummy itself and interviews with contemporary experts — to apply modern forensic science to the ancient case. So well did the techniques work that the two sleuths believe they have proof of a murder as well as a pretty good idea who did it. The Discovery Channel will air a two-hour documentary on their investigation Oct. 6.

Prominent Egyptologists, however, say the conclusions are nonsense. Cooper and King's work, they argue, is merely warmed-over theories with a dash of forensic science thrown in. This field has been plowed before, they note, and has yielded nothing conclusive.

"People love to speculate," says Marianne Eaton-Krauss, a Tutankhamen expert at the

Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. "But there isn't any evidence."

Whoever is right, it's clear that when British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb 80 years ago, he found a grave like no other. As Pharaonic burial sites go, Tut's was slapdash. Not only did its modest size suggest it had been intended for a nonroyal, but it was also hastily decorated, with wall paintings marred by splashes of paint nobody ever cleaned up. Some of the elaborate artifacts that so captivated the world appear to have been obtained from a funerary warehouse, since close examination reveals that other people's names were erased from them and Tut's name was applied. And the embalming was marred by buckets of unguents dumped over the mummy at the end. Was that part of the ritual or a crude attempt at a cover-up?

To try to solve the mystery, Carter commissioned an anatomical study of the corpse in 1925 that turned out to be less autopsy than butchery. The unguents that saturated the mummy's bandages glued them in place, which meant the body was damaged as it was removed from the sarcophagus. Studying the corpse literally limb by limb, the first anatomist found nothing suspicious. More than 40 years later, however, in 1968, a University of Liverpool researcher received permission to X-ray the mummy and discovered some intriguing clues: there was a sliver of bone floating in the brain cavity and a dense area at the base of the skull that may have been a blood clot, suggesting a severe — perhaps deliberately lethal — blow to the back of the head.

To shed sharper light on the problem, Cooper and King obtained the original X rays and took them to a medical examiner, a radiologist and a neurologist. The experts quickly spotted more clues. Abnormalities in the thin bones above Tut's eye sockets may be the kind of fractures that can occur when the head strikes the ground during a backward fall and the brain snaps forward. What's more, the vertebrae in Tut's neck were fused — a sign of a musculoskeletal malformation called Klippel-Feil syndrome. People with Klippel-Feil cannot turn their heads without moving the entire torso, an infirmity that's impossible to hide and makes the sufferer highly vulnerable to injury from a fall — or a push. "It was like having a bowling ball on top of a pool cue," says King.

To take advantage of Tut's apparent frailty, an ancient criminal, like a contemporary one, would need means, opportunity and motive. Using these criteria, "we initially looked at the entire Egyptian empire," Cooper says. "But we quickly narrowed the focus to Tut's

inner circle." Eventually, they winnowed the field to just four suspects: Maya, Tut's chief treasurer; Horemheb, his military commander; Ankhesenamen, his wife; and Ay, his Prime Minister. (Warning: plot spoiler ahead.)

Maya was soon ruled out. Although his work probably brought him into close contact with Tut, giving him means and opportunity, he lacked motive. A gift in Tut's tomb bears Maya's name, which could be a sign that he genuinely grieved for the youth. Additionally, when Tut's tomb was robbed shortly after his death, Maya saw to it that it was restored and resealed. Finally, Maya had the least to gain from murder, since he was not likely to move up in the next government. "In fact," says King, "he risked being demoted."

Horemheb was a harder nut to crack. Cooper and King speculate that the military commander spent much time with Tut, teaching him hunting and chariot driving — activities that offered plenty of opportunity for a contrived accident. If Tut did die while on the road, the body would have begun decomposing before Horemheb could take it home, which might explain the extra unguents on the mummy. Horemheb's likeliest motivation for regicide would have been to assume the throne himself, something that would have been easy with the army behind him. When Tut died, however, Horemheb stayed where he was. "If Horemheb wanted the Pharaohship, he could have taken it," Cooper says.

Ankhesenamen too was ruled out. It was not impossible for the Pharaoh's wife to ascend the throne after her husband's death, and she may have been motivated by a mere power grab. A likelier scenario was that she was thinking more about her heirs. Two mummified fetuses were found in Tut's tomb. Both are thought to have been the royal couple's premature or stillborn daughters. If Tut was unable to sire healthy children, Ankhesenamen may have wanted him out of the way so she could marry someone who could.

But Cooper and King are convinced that Ankhesenamen and Tut were a close couple. They were half-siblings and had known each other from childhood. The paintings in Tut's tomb portray them as a loving pair, and the fact that their unborn children were mummified is unusual. Says King: "These are signs of a close family unit."

This leaves Ay. The Prime Minister, who served in the same role under Tut's father, had been de facto King while advising the young Tut and had won the boy's trust. (Tut became Pharaoh when he was 9.) Ay may have coveted the throne himself — a position

he in fact assumed after Tut's death. Wall paintings in Tut's tomb show Ay performing the Opening of the Mouth ceremony at Tut's funeral, which is reserved for the heir apparent.

Tut's widow may also provide evidence against Ay. A cuneiform document reports that a letter was sent from an unnamed widowed Egyptian Queen to the Hittite King in what is now Turkey, pleading that one of his sons be sent south to marry her. The writer's fear was that she would otherwise be forced to wed one of her "servants." Ankhesenamen, as onetime Queen, would surely have seen Ay as a servant. Some people, including Cooper and King, believe that an ancient ring bearing her and Ay's names indicates that the two were in fact married, a move that would have legitimized Ay's Pharaohship.

Other scholars are not persuaded. Relying on tomb paintings to determine the nature of relationships, for example, is naive, they say. "Tomb paintings were always happy," says Rita Freed, of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. "They were idealized depictions."

Additionally, it has never been proved that Ankhesenamen wrote the letter to the Hittite King; some scholars believe the author was not Tut's widow but his father's. Similarly, the ring bearing Ay's and Ankhesenamen's names may indicate little, since in ancient Egypt there were no such things as wedding rings. "The ring merely shows an affiliation," says Eaton-Krauss.

However firm or flawed the case is against Ay, it's unlikely to put the speculation to rest. Other 21st century tools — which can search for diseases or provide images more detailed than X rays — might shed more light, and King and Cooper would have liked the chance to use them too. "Criminal behavior is criminal behavior," Cooper says. "It doesn't matter if it's today or 3,500 years ago." The statute of limitations on some crimes, it appears, will never run out.

Who killed king tut? Follow. 13 answers 13. If Tutankhamun was murdered, the prime suspect is the vizier Ay who succeeded him. Whether Ay actually did the deed himself or simply arranged for it to happen remains in question, as does whether Tutankhamun was actually murdered. Regardless of the political situation at the time, Egyptian kings were considered the earthly incarnation of the divine Horus - they were divine (the issue of divinity is far more nuanced and complicated, but this is not the place to go into it). This did not always prevent murder or conspiracy to commit murder at various periods of Egyptian history, but it is worth Who killed King Tut? Although there is some speculation that he was assassinated, the general consensus is that his death was accidental. CT scan taken in 2005 shows that he had badly broken his leg before his death, and that leg had become infected. DNA analysis, conducted in 2010 showed the presence of malaria in his system. It is believed that these two conditions, combined, led to his death. Who killed King Tut and why? No one killed King Tut. He might of died from fracturing his ankle which caused something to make him die. What was King Tutankhamun's Feelings? king tut killed lots o King Tut died of a combination of malaria and a bone disorder, new DNA analysis reveals. A new analysis of mummy DNA sought to find signs of any diseases " genetic or not " that could have contributed to King Tut's death. The DNA tests have also revealed or confirmed the likely identities and relationships of several previously unidentified mummies, including Tut's mother and father . Play Video.