

THE CURSE OF THE MUMMY

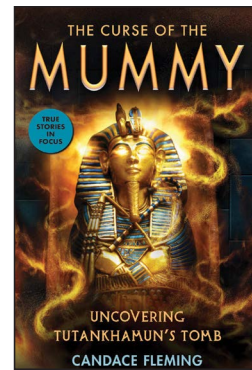
FACT SHEET

KING TUT: POP ICON

In life, the teenaged King Tut was a minor pharaoh; in death, he became a pop icon. The opening of his tomb in 1922 not only captured the world's fascination, but it also ignited what came to be called "Tutmania"—an interest in all things Egyptian. Practically overnight, the boy-king became a cultural phenomenon, inspiring everything from architecture to fashion. Take a look!

KING TUT GOES COMMERCIAL: Cashing in on Tut's hold on the public's imagination, manufacturers have used his name and image to sell "King Tut Lemons," "King Tut Sardines," and even "King Tut Breath Mints." In the 1920's, Palmolive soap advertised its new Egyptian line of skin care products as "the re-incarnation of beauty" and showed a modern woman standing before a wizened mummy, while Orange Crush soda proclaimed itself "a treat for Tut." In more modern times, manufacturers have cranked out everything from T-shirts to coffee mugs bearing Tut's image. There are Tutankhamun jigsaw puzzles, bed sheets, bobble-heads, candy molds, cross-stitch pattern books, lunchboxes, and key rings. There's a King Tut version of the board game Monopoly, a paint-it-yourself coffin kit, and a toilet paper dispenser in the shape of Tutankhamun's iconic golden funeral mask. (The paper is pulled out through the nose.) There is even a custom-made King Tut car with his image painted on the hood. You name it; chances are Tut has been used to sell it.

KING TUT GOES HOLLYWOOD: The boy-king hit the silver screen just months after his tomb was opened in a silent film called *Tut-Tut and his Terrible Tomb*. Since then, mummies, buried treasures, and whispers of a curse have inspired dozens of films and television programs, including *The Mummy* (1932), written by John Balderston, the first journalist to ever see Tutankhamun's face. Is it any wonder the movie's sets looked remarkably like Tut's tomb? A smash hit, the movie gave rise to a brand-new genre: "horror films." Since then, scores of "mummy" films have been made. It wasn't until the 1960's, however, that the boy-king made his television debut on the series, *Batman*. In a two-part episode titled, "*The Curse of Tut/The Pharaoh's In a Rut*," an over-the-top villain named "King Tut" tries to foil "The Caped Crusader" to no avail. This evil character obviously had staying power. Fifty years later, he appeared in *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017). In addition, Tutankhamun appeared in the 2014 film *Mr. Peabody and Sherman*. He even inspired an animated television series, *Tutenstein*, in which his mummy is accidentally brought back to life after being struck by lightning. And what about the tablet of Akmenrah featured in *The Night at the Museum* movies? Credit it to Tutmania. But perhaps the greatest Tut-inspired hit came in 1978 when comedian Steve Martin performed an elaborate sketch on *Saturday Night Live* that made fun of America's obsession with the boy-king. The sketch was so popular, that Martin went on to release it as a record. "King Tut" reached #17 on the *Billboard Hot 100 Chart*, and sold more than a million copies. The song was cleverly credited to "Steve Martin and his Toot Uncommons."



KING TUT GOES HIGH FASHION: Bobbed haircuts and shift dresses. This was the popular style of women in the 1920's. It was also the style of the ancient Egyptian women depicted on Tut's tomb artifacts. Is it any wonder that Egyptian motifs—snakes, birds, lotus flowers—began appearing on both exclusive clothing labels and mass-produced consumer goods? Women donned snake-shaped bracelets and gold cuffs. They wore jeweled collars and gold dresses. Sandals became de rigueur, as did eyes rimmed with black kohl eyeliner. Later generations have also seized on Egyptian-inspired clothing. Tunic style dresses with belting at the waist, pleating and draping, halter tops, embroidered necklines and high waists are all fashion trends based on ancient Egyptian styles. What Tut-inspired clothing is hanging in your closet?

KING TUT GOES MOD: Believe it or not, Tutmania inspired New York City's Empire State Building, as well as its Chrysler Building and Rockefeller Center. All three are examples of Art Deco architecture. Art Deco, an art movement that emerged around 1920, used bold colors and geometric shapes. Art Deco designers and architects expressed their fascination with ancient Egypt by mimicking the imagery found in Tut's tomb. Floral motifs adorned metalwork around doors, lotuses decorated elevator doors and winged sun disks were painted on walls and ceilings. Other buildings took on the Egyptian form, too. In Hollywood, Sid Grauman built his Egyptian Theater. A riot of pseudo-hieroglyphs, papyrus columns, winged goddesses, and giant sphinx head, it ignited a national craze for Egyptian-themed movie theaters. By the end of the 1920's, four dozen such theaters sprawled across the country. In later years, Tutmania even inspired a Las Vegas hotel and casino, the Luxor. This pyramid-shaped building boasts a huge sphinx and oasis-themed pool area. It also once housed an elaborate recreation of Tut's tomb, but has since donated it to the Las Vegas Natural History Museum. A boon for the museum, the tomb draws in thousands of visitors a year, proof that the boy-king still fascinates.

KING TUT GOES ON EXHIBIT: What do disco, *Star Wars*, and King Tut have in common? They were all a late-1970's craze. In 1976, fifty-five glittering artifacts from Tut's tomb—including his gold mask—began a three-year, six-city tour across the United States. The exhibit, "Treasures of Tutankhamun" drew huge crowds, breaking museum attendance records. People waited all day—and sometimes overnight—in lines that snaked for city blocks. They entered the exhibit hushed and awed, and emerged from the museum gift shop with scarves, tote bags, books, and prints emblazoned with the boy-king's image. "Seeing Tut is the status symbol right now," declared an official at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Everyone, it seemed, was clamoring for a ticket. And plenty of Americans got one. By the time the exhibit closed in 1979, eight million people had seen it—one million more than Tut had ruled in his lifetime.