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High-tech artistry reveals King Tut's face

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Using old data and high-tech tools, mummy experts and artists are revealing the face of the young King Tutankhamun in London's Science Museum.

The Egyptian pharaoh, who ruled more than 3,000 years ago, has been subjected to years of scientific probing. This time, scientists, special-effects artists, and a sculpting expert joined forces to recreate the face that could resemble Tutankhamun in his late teens.

Dr. Robin Richards, a facial reconstruction expert from University College London, created a digital skull using X-rays taken in 1968 by UK scientist Ronald Harrison. He also used volunteers who closely matched the pharaoh in age, size and ethnicity from which to gather physical information. Their features were then used to help Richards reconstruct King Tut's facial tissue layers and shape.

The basic face was then shipped to New Zealand for a team of special effects artists to flesh out. The skin tone, eyebrows and eye colour were digitally applied to create a more life-like rendition from which Alex Fort, a British sculptor specializing in human faces, would mould King Tut's head.

Fort used the digitally enhanced images to make the clay moulding, which he then cast in fibreglass and painted.

Who is King Tut?

King Tutankhamun was a young pharaoh who ruled in Egypt in 1333 B.C. The pharaoh ascended the throne between the ages of eight and nine and ruled until he died in his late teens. Though he reigned for less than a

decade, Tutankhamun has become one of the most fascinating subjects in the study of ancient Egypt.

The discovery of his tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in 1922 caused international sensation and has been considered one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time.

Howard Carter, the British archaeologist who discovered the tomb, also unearthed many ornate objects that revealed Tut's aristocracy. Household items, drenched in gold, were found in the tomb's antechamber -- things considered necessary for the pharaoh's life in the afterworld.

Leading Egyptologists have debated as to what caused Tutankhamun's death. Some experts say he was murdered but theories on how he was killed are still unclear.

Gathering clues

Tutankhamun's life has long been a puzzle to scientists but recent discoveries may reveal more clues about the pharaoh.

Dr. Richard Boyer from Utah suggests that Tutankhamun may have suffered from a condition called Klippel-Feil syndrome. Looking at spine and chest X-rays, Boyer found fused neck vertebrae and a curved spine. Some of the rare disorder's symptoms are a short neck and restricted movement of the upper spine.

Boyer's theory may not be far off, as over 100 walking sticks were discovered in the king's tomb. This discovery may also shed light on a possible death as Tutankhamun's condition could have left him very fragile and at risk from a deadly fall.

"His head is like it's on a broomstick or a poker," Boyer said. "So that if he fell backward or there was a blow to the back of his head, a serious spinal cord injury at that level could be fatal."

Tutankhamun's physical structure is just one among the many things scientists are exploring. His genetic makeup has also been under the scientific spotlight as experts try to determine whether he bears "true royal blood".

Japanese and Egyptian scientists collaborated in 2000 to conduct DNA tests on Tutankhamun and Amenhotep III, alleged father of Amenhotep IV, whom Tutankhamun succeeded.

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