

CRASH TEST MUMMY?

A scientist thinks he's solved the riddle of King Tut's death

King Tut was only 9 years old when he became the ruler of Egypt 3,300 years ago. The boy pharaoh, whose full name was Tutankhamen (*TOO-tahn-KAH-men*), died only 10 years later.

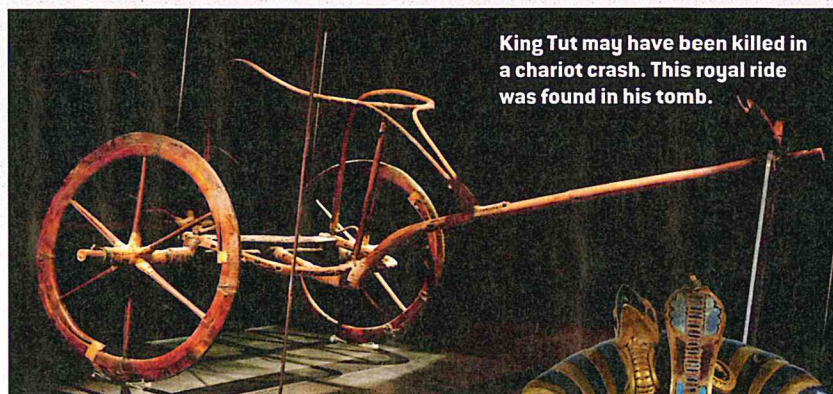
Scientists have learned a lot about Tut since British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered his tomb in 1922. But one thing has remained a mystery: How did Tut die?

Over the decades, experts have come up with many theories, including an infection or a blood disease. Now Chris Naunton, director of the Egypt Exploration Society, says he may finally have the answer: He thinks Tut was killed in a chariot accident.

Naunton began his investigation by looking back at Carter's notes. They indicated that Tut's body wasn't prepared like most other mummies. For one thing, his chest had been stuffed with linen and other materials. Then, studying X-rays of Tut's skeleton, Naunton also saw that his heart and some of his ribs were missing. Naunton thought maybe they had been so badly damaged that they were removed before the burial and his chest was stuffed with linen to keep it from collapsing.

The question was: What could have caused that much damage to Tut's ribs and heart?

In the past, some Egyptologists wondered if Tut died in a chariot



King Tut may have been killed in a chariot crash. This royal ride was found in his tomb.

crash. Naunton decided to put that theory to the test. He asked a group of car-crash investigators to use computer simulations of a number of chariot accidents. They determined that if a chariot had struck the young pharaoh in a certain way, it would have crushed his ribs and heart. Naunton believed he had his answer.

Some archaeologists don't agree with Naunton's theory. They believe Tut's ribs weren't removed from his body until thousands of years after his death: They think Carter's team removed the ribs to make it easier to carry the mummy out of the tomb. Other Egyptologists think Tut's ribs might have been damaged by another powerful force, like a kick from a horse.

Still, Naunton stands by his conclusion. "At this point, this is as good of a hypothesis that we have," he says. But, he adds, "I wouldn't want to think that this discussion is completely over."

—Joe Bubar

