Egypt's Golden Empires

Episode 2: Pharaohs of the Sun

Keith David, Narrator: This plane has only one passenger. He is 3,500 years old. He was one of the most powerful kings of the ancient world. His dynasty ruled the greatest empire on earth. Today some see him as a genius: the first king in history to believe in a single god. For others, he was a madman and a heretic. He is the Pharaoh Akenhaten. This is the story of Akenhaten and his family. His father, Amenhotep, was the richest ruler in the world. His son Tutankhamen was buried with the greatest treasure ever discovered. Akenhaten himself had embarked on a revolution that brought the Egyptian Empire to the brink of disaster – and changed the world forever.

Narrator: 1550 BC. For over a hundred years, foreigners have overrun Egypt. Now a new dynasty of warrior pharaohs inspired Egyptians to rise up and reclaim their land.

Narrator: Egypt's armies surged beyond their traditional borders. On battlefields deep in foreign territories, they created the largest empire the world had ever seen. It was an empire controlled with an iron fist. There were clear, bloody warnings to anyone who dared to question the new might of Egypt.

Narrator: Egypt was now the most powerful and feared nation on earth. In 1390 BC, there was a new young pharaoh on the throne. His name was Amenhotep – meaning the god Amun is satisfied. His forefathers had led Egypt into battle and now this young pharaoh faced a completely different challenge. There were no more wars to fight. Egypt was rich, respected, and free. Amenhotep's challenge would be to protect this peace and prosperity – ruling Egypt's vast, sprawling empire, whose riches were the envy of the world.

Nicole Douek, London University: When he comes to the throne, it really marks the beginning of peace. It is a time when the wealth of all the empire pours into the coffers of the pharaoh. You could probably think of it as the golden age of empire and Egypt.

John Ray, Cambridge University: Amenhotep would have been the richest man in the world. He had the gold in Nubia. He had trade running along the Red Sea. There was hardly anything in the known world that Amenhotep couldn't put out his hand and touch.

Narrator: But the world was changing. For centuries, Egypt had been unchallenged. Now Babylonia, Assyria, and Mitani had emerged. These powerful civilizations could rival Egypt. United, they could destroy Amenhotep's empire. Amenhotep wanted to avoid war at all costs. He had to find a new way of dealing with the outside world. His solution was a master stroke, and we know about it because of a remarkable discovery.

Narrator: In 1887 a peasant woman was digging near the Egyptian town of Amarna. She was looking for old mud bricks to use as fertiliser. What she found was not the usual rough blocks, but rows of well-preserved clay tablets.

John Ray: The little bits of mud were covered with writing that looked rather like birds feet. It was as if the birds' footprints had set in the mud after the birds had gone. The lady didn't know what they were, but picked some of them up.

Narrator: These humble clay tablets were not bricks, but letters and they were the key to Amenhotep's success.

John Ray: The peasant lady had stumbled across the diplomatic record office of the capital of the ancient world. The Amenhotep letters throw a flood of light onto the politics of the Near East.

Narrator: These small tablets were the correspondence between Pharaoh Amenhotep and the other rulers of the Near East. The strange marks that cover them are a miniscule writing. They contain as much information as the inscriptions on all of Egypt's greatest monuments. They reveal Amenhotep was controlling his world, not with weapons, but with words. The pharaoh had become a diplomat.

Professor Antonio Loprieno, University of California, Los Angeles: I would describe it as the most important discovery of the ancient world, probably in terms of understanding of political life. It is not the most visible, not the most artistically appealing, but the politically most significant discovery of the ancient world.

Narrator: At a time when most people on earth could not read or write, Egypt was conducting a lively dialogue with her rivals. The king's messengers ran back and forth across the deserts of the Near East carrying letters that reveal Egypt's status as a super power.

Professor David O'Connor, New York University: International diplomacy in the days of the Amenhotep letters would be very familiar to diplomats today. It was really very much like diplomatic interaction between countries even in our own time.

Narrator: The letters show Amenhotep was as good at diplomacy as his ancestors had been at fighting. Ambassadors flocked to pharaoh's court, bringing gifts of friendship. Less powerful countries sent endless streams of tribute to show their loyalty.

John Ray: The principle in the ancient world was quite clear. If somebody was rich, you made them feel even richer. So when you visited them you would turn up with produce of your own country. It's partly to acknowledge that the power of the pharaoh extends even to countries where he has not set foot.

Narrator: Scenes painted in Egyptian tombs show how these dazzling displays of tribute must have looked. Priceless objects flooded in from all over the known world, from Minoan Crete, to Biblical Babylon.

Professor David O'Connor: The Nubians would bring giraffes and lions. The Syrians might bring bears, which were found in the mountains of Syria. People from other places would bring animals and birds characteristic of their countries. It was a very dramatic dynamic expression of what the empire meant for the Egyptians, what it was composed of, and above all, how central the Egyptian king was to this whole system.

John Ray: Amenhotep calls himself the King of Kings, and the King of Kings is what he must have seemed to the rulers who shared his world.

Narrator: Amenhotep knew he was the most powerful man in the world and he knew he had one great advantage. It was not military might, but gold. The letters that went back and forth from pharaoh's court show that even the greatest kings of the Near East were desperate for Egypt's gold. And they were prepared to beg for it.

Reconstruction voiceover: "If you send me the gold I wrote to you about I will give you my daughter. Send me as much as your father did."

Reconstruction voiceover: "In your country gold is like dust and you can just gather it up. If it is your intention that a sincere friendship exists, send much gold."

Reconstruction voiceover: "I have begun a new palace. Send me as much gold as is required for its…"

Narrator: Amenhotep responded shrewdly to their requests. He gave them gold but always left them wanting more. The strategy was a triumph. The kings of the Near East were exchanging gifts not blows. The most precious gift of all was a foreign princess as a wife, plus her dowry, and retinue. Amenhotep employed his personal ambassadors to find him the very best brides. It was about much more than pharaoh's sex life. Amenhotep's harem was full of the most beautiful daughters of the most powerful kings of the age.

Nicole Douek: It is about brotherhood between the great kings. They called themselves brothers. And if you married a daughter of another king, then you really were part of the family.

Narrator: But this was not a two-way process. In one letter, the king of Babylon complains bitterly that Amenhotep has refused to send him an Egyptian princess.

Reconstruction voiceover: "When I wrote to you about the possibility of my marrying your daughter, you wrote to me as follows: 'No daughter of a king of Egypt has ever been given to anyone.' Why not? You are a king, and can do what you like."

Narrator: It was a useless complaint. No Egyptian princess was allowed to marry into a foreign court for fear it would give a foreigner a claim to Egypt's throne. But the Babylonian king suggested a devious compromise.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Send me a beautiful woman as if she was your daughter. Who will be able to say that this is not the king's daughter?"

Narrator: The Babylonian king's second request was denied. Amenhotep saw himself as being able to pick princesses and give none in return.

Nicole Douek: Ranking him, he was a very intelligent man. He obviously used his position extremely carefully, so although there is great respect for the other kings of the time, he is always one cut above everybody else.

Narrator: Amenhotep was more wealthy and powerful than any previous Pharaoh. Soon everyone would know it. He would channel the vast resources of the empire into the largest building programme the world had ever seen.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: To embark on a building programme was one of the best ways for an Egyptian king to present himself as a hero, as an achiever, as a doer.

Narrator: It was work on an epic scale. The countless sandstone blocks hewn from the Egyptian quarries had left caverns that are themselves like temples carved out of the rock. It was a triumph of organisation. Soldiers, cooks, doctors and water bearers were all sent into the desert to support the quarries. Amenhotep's magnificent new temples did more than advertise his wealth. They also honoured the ultimate source of Egypt's glory – her many Gods. Amenhotep thanked one god in particular for his success. Amun Re, the King of the Gods. To guaranty the support of Amun Re, the pharaoh donated great portions of his wealth to the god's main temple. As the temple grew richer, the temple priests grew more powerful.

Nicole Douek: The priests who controlled these vast establishments have power. They have financial power and they have political power.

Narrator: The power of the priests of Amun Re was beginning to rival pharaoh himself.

But out in the empire Amenhotep made sure his subjects heard only of his triumphs, not his problems. And he had a surprising new way of communicating directly with his subjects. Stones, carved into the shape of scarabs had long been used in Egypt as amulets, now Amenhotep had these mass-produced. Portable scarabs inscribed with news of his latest achievements, were carried across the empire. These propaganda beetles were the first newspapers in history.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: He wanted to proclaim his power, his richness, and his achievements to the broadest possible strata of the Egyptian population. This new scarab was a way of sending information all over the place.

Narrator: It was by news scarab that the outside world first heard Amenhotep had chosen his queen. In addition to the minor wives in his harem, every pharaoh selected a chief queen. To strengthen the royal line, she was often a sister of close female relatives. Amenhotep chose to ignore this royal custom. He proudly announced that he was marrying a commoner, the daughter of a chariot officer – a woman called Tiy. The Chief Queen Tiy, her father's name was Yuya and her mother's name was Thuya – and she was the wife of a mighty king.

Nicole Douek: We get the sense of a very strong woman. The portraits are extraordinary, and they do

convey something of the person – because there is no blandness to Queen Tiy. You look at her and you think, "Oh, she really was something else, this one."

Dr. Zahi Hawass, Under Secretary of State Giza Pyramids: Queen Tiy was not an easy queen. She was so strong and you can see that from the statues of this queen. Hers were equal in size to the king.

Narrator: Queen Tiy was more than just a chief queen. She was Amenhotep's near equal. Far down the Nile in Nubia, Amenhotep made this stunningly clear by building a pair of temples: one for Queen Tiy and one nearby for himself, here at Saleb. These temples were not just built for the royal couple: they were actually dedicated to them. Deep in the southern part of his empire, Amenhotep and Tiy were worshipped as gods.

John Ray: The shadow of pharaoh extends in stone along the Nile to the African provinces of his empire. He is there in a physical presence, looking out over the empire that he controls.

Narrator: Amenhotep's message to his Nubian subjects was clear. At the base of the columns at Saleb are images of captive Nubians. These are a graphic representation of pharaoh's power for all to see. Here in Nubia it was especially important that Amenhotep be in control. Nubia's mines supplied most of Egypt's gold, and gold was what allowed Amenhotep to control his rivals.

Nicole Douek: The request from the foreign kings was for gold, gold, and more gold, because as says one of these kings: "In your land gold is as plentiful as dust." It's the Fort Knox of the ancient world.

Narrator: Amenhotep had secured the gold supply, but more and more of his gold was pouring into the temple of Amun Re. Amenhotep's priests in Thebes now controlled one-third of Egypt's wealth. They also interpreted Amun Re's will, which pharaoh had to obey.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: At this stage, the priests of Amun Re were probably more powerful than they had ever been in the history of Egypt. In fact, the High Priests of Amen at Karnak would probably have a power superior to that of the king.

Narrator: To shift the power away from Amun Re's priests, Amenhotep began to show interest in another minor god, Aten, the visible sun. It could hardly have seemed important. Yet it was about to change everything. In 1352 BC, Amenhotep III, the great King, the diplomatic genius died. Egypt was plunged into mourning.

Nicole Douek: The death of the king must have been a terrible event. This man had dominated politics, religion, the life of not only his subjects, but the life of the empire for such a long time.

Narrator: Even in the Near East, Amenhotep was mourned by his rivals. Foreign kings wrote to his widow, Queen Tiy, expressing their personal grief.

Reconstruction voiceover: "I cried. I sat. I did not eat or drink. I mourned, saying if only I were dead, or 10,000 were dead in my land, and that my brother whom I love and who loves me, were alive as long as heaven and earth."

John Ray: Amenhotep died in the course of his 39th year. Probably in his last days, he could look out over the empire that seemingly the sun would never set over. He could think of a world at peace, where diplomacy ruled, where the wealth of Egypt was undoubted. And he could leave it all to his son, Amenhotep IV.

Narrator: Amenhotep IV had grown up in the most powerful family on earth. Now he found himself pharaoh and ruler of Egypt's empire. In the first years of Amenhotep IV's reign, it must have seemed like nothing had changed. But at his court, the new pharaoh was encouraging ideas that would soon transform Egyptian society. A radically new style of art was flourishing. According to the artists, it was the pharaoh himself who had taught them. These artists rejected the conventions of traditional Egyptian art. Instead, they celebrated the vibrancy of the real world. Their work was sensual and filled with movement. But what shocked

Egyptians most were the new depictions of the royal family. To a modern eye, they seemed peculiar. To conservative Egyptians they must have been staggering.

Dr. Kate Spence, Cambridge University: Suddenly you'd get a sort of celebration of ugliness. The bodies become extraordinarily proportioned. You've got a thin torso, thin shoulders and massive hips on male figures as well as female figures. There are also big buttocks and pendulous thighs, which must be quite extraordinary for an Egyptian to see. Presumably, he was actually just trying to make a statement, "Hey! I'm different!" Doing something, which completely breaks with tradition, must have been very shocking. It's a very good way of getting yourself noticed as someone who is going to do something really quite radical.

Narrator: Amenhotep IV was embarking of a religious revolution. The seeds had been sown in the reign of his father. But nothing could have prepared Egypt for what was about to happen. In the second year of his reign, Amenhotep IV abandoned Egypt's traditional gods. Even Amun Re, the King of the gods, was discarded. His temples were closed and his priests were evicted.

Nicole Douek: If you want to make a break with the past, you close the temples. You remove the means for these people to use or abuse their power.

Narrator: For this pharaoh, there would be only one god – the Aten, the visible sun. Amenhotep would become the first monotheist in recorded history. He would also be the only priest of his new religion. The pharaoh stands alone, bathed in the rays of the Aten. At a stroke, all the certainties of life that had marked the golden age of his father were swept away. He discarded the name Amenhotep meaning Amen the Satisfied. He would take a new name, Akenhaten, meaning one who is beneficial to the Aten.

Dr. Kate Spence: Akenhaten does seem to have been a very driven person who must have had enormous energy to carry through all the changes he's making. They are much more substantial than just religion and art. At the end of the day, he must have restructured the whole way the country was working.

Narrator: Akenhaten had only just begun. Now he planned another astonishing act. To seal the break with the past, he ordered the construction of an entirely new capital city, far to the north of Thebes. It was a desolate site known as Amarna. He called it the Horizon of the Sun. On vast boundary stelas, cut into the cliffs, Akenhaten claimed the sun god had led him there. And he made it clear that his decision to move was irreversible.

Reconstruction voiceover: "It was my father, the Aten himself who pointed out the site. Before I came here, it didn't belong to any god or goddess or to any king or queen. I will never say I am leaving it, and I have no intention of breaking this oath."

Dr. Kate Spence: Amarna can't have been a very welcoming place for the first people that had to go there and try to create a city. It was desert really. It seems a rather strange place really to build a city.

Narrator: Abandoning Thebes, the new pharaoh could escape the influence of Egypt's high priests.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: We have a situation in which Thebes, the city that was traditionally celebrated in Egyptian hymns, had in fact become a threat to the king, to the most important inhabitant of this city.

Narrator: Everything in Thebes was packed up. Akenhaten and his entire government, officials, scribes, soldiers and artists would move to the new desert site. They were leaving behind their houses and their carefully prepared tombs. They were leaving behind the most cosmopolitan city in Egypt, built by Akenhaten's father.

Dr. Kate Spence: I don't think he would really have had any choice in the matter. If Akenhaten decides he wants to go there, everybody goes. The whole court would have to get up and go there. Everybody who would be part of court life would have had to get up and move to Amarna.

Narrator: Tens of thousands set out for Amarna. Ahead lay a 200-mile journey, up the Nile to a new life

in the new city. All followed Akenhaten's great experiment. The new capital city had been built on an unprecedented scale. It was eight miles long and three miles wide. Four huge palaces rose from the desert floor, surrounded by ornamental lakes and gardens. And dominating the city was the great temple of the Aten. The temple was open to the sun, surrounded by wide roads and open spaces.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: To a certain degree, Amarna was conceived very much like an American city. It was planned in a way that would account for openness and freedom.

Narrator: The whole city was one great stage on which pharaoh could demonstrate his devotion to the Aten. With him at the head of these processions, his subjects could see the woman who had helped him realise his wishes. She was one of the most remarkable women of the ancient world, but her face would not be seen again until the beginning of the 20th century. In the winter of 1912, a German archaeologist Ludvic Borchardt came to excavate at Amarna.

Reconstruction voiceover: "On December 6, just before the lunch break, I was called by an urgent note from Professor Borchardt, who was supervising the excavations. There at about knee height in front of us, a flesh coloured neck appeared."

Narrator: As his workers brushed the sand away, Borchardt began to see a stone face looking back at him. It was the most beautiful he had ever seen. It was the face of a queen, whose name meant, "a beautiful woman has come", Nefertiti. Stunned, that evening Borchardt wrote just one line in his diary.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Description is useless, see for yourself".

Narrator: In real life Nefertiti was as remarkable as her statue. Like her mother-in-law, Queen Tiy, Nefertiti played a prominent role in public life. She and Akenhaten stood together at the head of the new regime.

Nicole Douek: If you look at the role Nefertiti plays in the Amarna period, it is almost as important as that of Akenhaten. She is there, present all the time. She is even shown in some of the reliefs smiting the enemy – as a pharaoh is always shown. So Nefertiti is not just a beautiful woman, she is a very important element in this new and incredible experiment.

Narrator: Nefertiti is also the only Egyptian queen intimately described by her husband – in verses of love and devotion, which are over 3,000 years old.

Reconstruction voiceover: "She stands out in the palace, fair-faced and beautiful. At the sound of her voice, rejoicing breaks out. Her appearance fills the king with pleasure. She is the chief queen, the king's beloved. She is the mistress of two lands, Nefertiti."

Narrator: Nefertiti was not the only woman in Akenhaten's life. In the northern apartments of the palace, Nefertiti brought up their six daughters. In the few surviving reliefs, we see the princesses, six little girls growing up in the City of the Sun, well loved by their father and mother. No other royal family in the ancient world seems so human, so real. Stelas even show Akenhaten and his wife playing with their children – a brief moment in time captured 3,300 years ago.

Nicole Douek: The representations of this divine family are unique. Never before do you see the king and the queen with their children climbing all over them, or the king kissing his child. These are family situations, which we would recognise now as very human, and they appear at this time.

Narrator: Freed from the constraints of the old order, life in Amarna was good, at least for now. This success was celebrated in a new type of hymn, which the king himself claimed to have written. The greatest of these hymns was carved in a tomb above the city. It was a hymn so powerful that phrases from it found their way into the Bible. In it, Akenhaten praised the sun as the creator of the natural world – plants, animals, Egyptians, even foreigners.

Reconstruction voiceover: "When you cast your rays, the herds are happy in their pastures. Trees and

plants grow green. All the flocks gamble and all the birds come to life because you have risen for them. Even the fish in the rivers leap towards your face. You created the earth to please you – people, cattle and flocks, everything that walks on land or takes off and flies, using wings.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: The general message of the great hymn to the Aten in Amarna is that life comes from the Sun God, and life is distributed equally over the earth - equally among nations, equally among people, equally among animals.

Narrator: Egypt appeared to have accepted the new religion of the Aten. And in the twelfth year of his reign, Akenhaten organised a massive celebration to give thanks to his god with thousands of offerings. Even the elderly Queen Mother Tiy paid a royal visit. Ambassadors came from all over the world to deliver their tribute. At the head of it all was Akenhaten and sitting beside him Queen Nefertiti. There had never been a partnership like it. The incredible experiment appeared to be working. But that same year, in the midst of apparent triumph, Akenhaten's new world suddenly began to fall apart. At the height of her powers, Nefertiti simply vanishes from history. Egyptologists have failed to discover exactly what happened to her. Personal tragedy heaped upon the pharaoh. Nefertiti was gone. His mother, the great Queen Tiy, died soon afterwards. So too did one of his minor wives, and even one of his daughters. After 12 years of tolerance, Akenhaten began to turn his power to destructive ends. Once he had been content simply to replace Egypt's traditional gods, now he actively began to persecute them and Amun Re bore the brunt of his fury. The reformer had become a fanatic incapable of tolerating other gods.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: Akenhaten was certainly the first monotheist, but also certainly the first religious oppressor in the history of the world.

Narrator: Wherever they could be found, the name and image of Amun Re were destroyed. No reference to the god was too far away or too inaccessible.

Dr. Kate Spence: He sent out what must have been armies of men with chisels, along with people who could read the walls and find the names of the gods to be removed.

Narrator: Akenhaten even attacked the memory of his beloved father, Amenhotep, gouging out the part of his name that mentioned Amen.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: The name Amenhotep means "Amen is Satisfied". Akenhaten removed the Amen portion of the name, because obviously under his reign, Amen was certainly not satisfied. So he inflicted a punishment on his own father's name in order to comply with his own religious views, with his own religious fanaticism.

Narrator: Consumed by his religious fervour, Akenhaten had lost touch with the outside world. Letters poured in to warn pharaoh that his empire was under threat. Old allies, princes and vassals wrote begging him for help.

Reconstruction voiceover: "The King my Lord should be informed that the King of Hatti has seized all countries that were the vassals of…"

Reconstruction voiceover: "We have been writing to the King our Lord for 20 years, but we haven't heard a single word back."

Reconstruction voiceover: "In Canen some locals beat my merchants and stole their money. Canen is your country and its kings are your slaves.

Reconstruction voiceover: "I keep writing to the palace but you have never replied."

Dr. Zahi Hawass: Those princes and those people in the east were crying, "help us", but his ears did not hear anything.

Narrator: Akenhaten ignored the desperate pleas of his subjects. The empire his father had worked so hard to maintain was now in danger. As their world began to fall apart, Akenhaten's oldest officials must have remembered how things had been under his father.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: One could say that Akenhaten did all he could in his power to destroy his father's legacy. So at the end of his reign, what used to be a very cohesive power in the international arena is a country on the verge of crisis.

Narrator: Only the pharaoh's personal charisma held the dream together. Then, in 1336 BC, Akenhaten died. With Akenhaten dead, the keystone of Akenism was gone. In the hills above the deserted city, work was abandoned on the tombs of Akenhaten's courtiers.

Nicole Douek: The tombs at Amarna are all unfinished and unoccupied. The paintings are barely finished in some cases. It's almost as though somebody has just heard the king has died. "We're going away, drop your tools and go."

Narrator: Now with Akenhaten dead, traditional forces took hold of Egypt. Once-loyal courtiers, artisans, even priests of the Aten flocked back to Thebes. They were eager to wrest order from the chaos that threatened to engulf Egypt. After just 20 years, Amarna, the setting for pharaoh's great experiment, was abandoned. Emerging from the chaos came a new king, a 9-year-old boy. This child pharaoh had grown up in Akenhaten's palaces. His son by a minor wife, named Tutankhaten – meaning the living image of the Aten. Tutankhaten inherited a dynasty, a country, and an empire that was staring disaster in the face. But he was only a boy. Those who had lost out under Akenhaten seized their opportunity. They would use the young king to their own ends. First they would have to change his name. Tutankhaten became Tutankhamen – 'a living image of Amun'.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: Tutankhamen is, to a certain extent, a dual personality. He is a personality in between the Amarna and the post Amarna age. He certainly breathed Amarna air. He was imbued with this intellectual innovation. On the other hand, he was also the first pharaoh of the post Amarna era. He was the puppet of the new leaders in Egypt - the priesthood and military.

Narrator: In a carefully scripted decree, Tutankhamen blamed his own father Akenhaten for neglecting Egypt's traditional gods and plunging Egypt into chaos.

Reconstruction voiceover: "When his Majesty's reign began, the temples of the gods and goddesses were in ruins. Their shrines had crumbled into piles of rubble, choked with weeds. Their chapels were little more than footpaths and the land was in chaos because the gods had abandoned it."

Narrator: Tutankhamen's solution to these problems was simple.

Nicole Douek: It is a very important proclamation to the effect that order is being restored, and that things were going to go back to the way they were before. So this is the bringing back of Amun, of the ancient gods, of the old order.

Narrator: The old Gods, the temples, and above all the power of the priests of Amen-Re were restored. The Aten was relegated to a minor place in the Pantheon. No one went to its city, no one spoke of it. Akenhaten's heresy had simply never happened. By the time Tutankhamen was 19 and able to rule in his own right everything seemed to have returned to normal. But that same year Tutankhamen died suddenly and mysteriously.

Nicole Douek: An examination of his skull has recently produced yet another theory concerning the Aten family. It is this: Tutankhamen may have been murdered. By whom? It is a disaster for the royal family - there is no heir.

Narrator: Tutankhamen would only have been a footnote in Egyptian history if it had not been for the perseverance of a 20th century archaeologist named Howard Carter. In 1922, Carter discovered a tomb in the

Valley of the Kings, that few else believed existed. In a single breathtaking moment he would bring the age of Tutankhamen back to life.

Reconstruction voiceover: "The dust itself maintained eerie footprints of the last people to breathe that very air 3,500 years earlier. As you note the signs of recent life around you, a blackened lamp, the finger marks on a freshly painted surface, the farewell garland dropped upon the threshold, you feel it might have been put there yesterday. Time is annihilated by such intimate details as these, and you feel an intruder.

Narrator: Carter's find was unique. He had not just rediscovered Tutankhamen; he had unearthed the fabulous treasure ever found. Some 32,000 objects and vast quantities of the gold of Egypt's empire were buried with the boy king.

Nicole Douek: There were thousands of objects. Six chariots, four ceremonial beds, endless containers in the ante chamber alone. When Howard Carter describes opening the tomb and eventually removing these objects (and it took 10 years to clear the tomb), he actually tells us that they had to rig up platforms above the ground in order to avoid trampling on these objects and breaking them.

Narrator: In spite of its astonishing contents, Tutankhamen's tiny tomb was not complete. His treasures had not been carefully placed, but were randomly crammed in. This was no normal burial. On the back of the golden throne found in his tomb is a clue. Tutankhamen and his wife are shown sitting beneath the rays of the sun god Aten. Tutankhamen's officials had taken the opportunity to seal away this reminder of his father's reign, and the period they found so shameful. Tutankhamen was doomed to spend eternity with the very god he had renounced. Tutankhamen died without an heir. The backlash could now begin and it was savage. Every mention of the Aten that could be found was destroyed with ruthless efficiency. Every reference to Akenhaten, Nefertiti and their children was hacked out. The entire royal family was torn from the pages of history.

Nicole Douek: Everything is obliterated and Akenhaten, Nefertiti and this period become as though they had never happened. Akenhaten is a non-person. He is referred to, if ever he is mentioned, as 'that heretic'.

Narrator: Amarna, the once great and beautiful city that witnessed the birth of monotheism gradually crumbled back into the sand abandoned for all time.

Professor Antonio Loprieno: I would say that Egyptian society as a whole saw the Amarna experience as one of its most tragic moments. So much so that the Amarna experience left its trace for hundreds of years. The memory of this very dark period of Egyptian history remained in Egyptian conscience.

Narrator: A turbulent episode in the history of Egypt was over. The dynasty of the great pharaohs, who had founded the empire, came to an end. The stage was now set for a new beginning and a new family of pharaohs would struggle to recapture the glory of Egypt's Golden Empire.

ENDS

