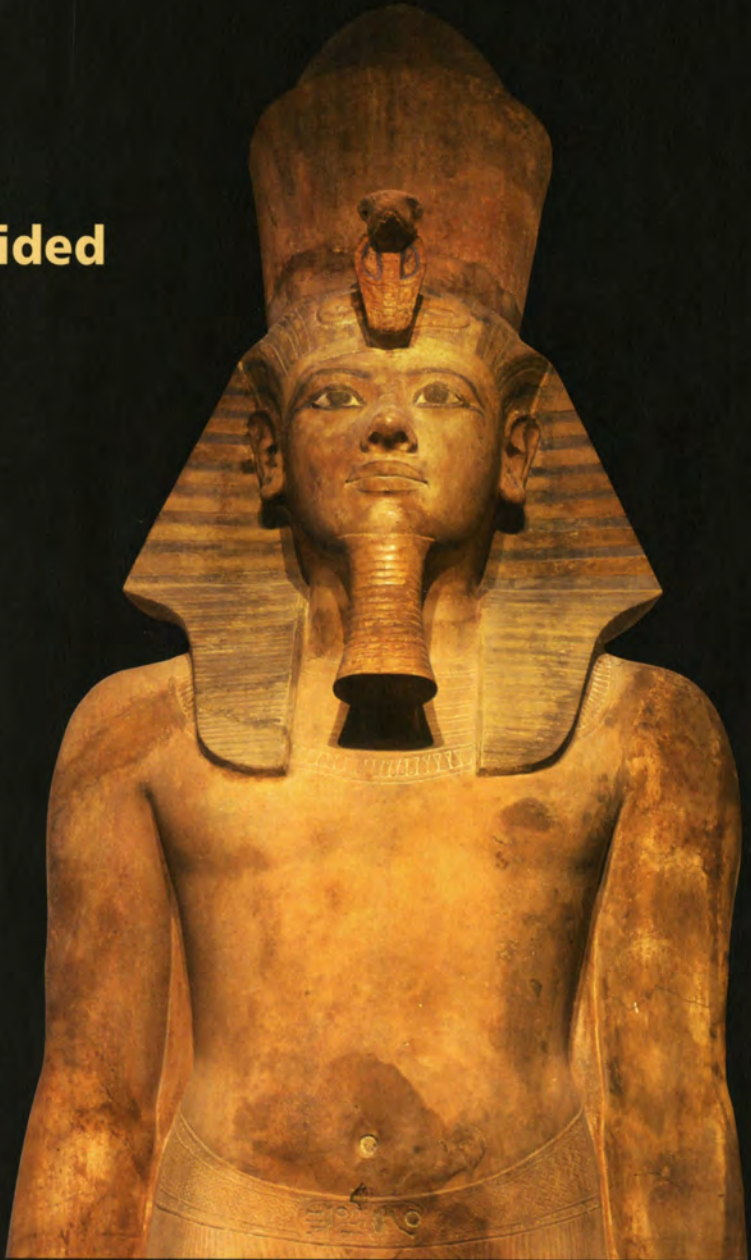


# The Ancient Near East in the Time of Tutankhamun

**A  
Self-Guided  
Tour**



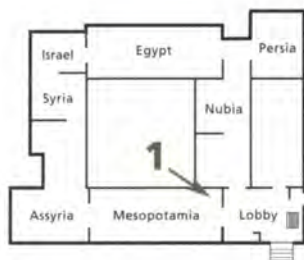
**The Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago**



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Welcome to the Oriental Institute Museum. This self-guided tour will introduce you to the ancient Near East during the time of Tutankhamun, who reigned from 1336 to 1327 BC. Use the maps in this brochure to locate the large yellow cartouches that correspond to the brochure text.



## 1. Map of the Ancient Near East

The Late Bronze Age, during which Tutankhamun ruled Egypt, was an age of internationalism and diplomatic relations between great kings. During the time of Tutankhamun, there were a number of great powers in the Near East.

- \* Egypt controlled the Nile Valley and the eastern and western deserts as well as much of the eastern Mediterranean coast. The empire's wealth was based on agriculture and the vast gold mines in the eastern desert.
- \* Central and southeastern Turkey was the home of the Hittite empire. By the time of Tutankhamun, a series of strong Hittite kings were engaging in diplomatic gift exchange with Egypt.
- \* Northern Iraq was the center of Assyria which was slowly growing in strength and would conquer the entire region, including Hittite lands and much of Egypt, over the next 700 years.
- \* Northern Syria was controlled by the kingdom of Mitanni. The Mitanni battled the Egyptians and the Hittites. Disputes about the succession to the throne of Mitanni weakened their kingdom, which, after the time of Tutankhamun, was divided by the Hittite and Assyrian empires.
- \* Central and southern Iraq, ancient Babylonia was ruled by the Kassites, a people who from the mountains to the east. Kassite Babylonia was not an expansive military power, but it generated wealth from intensive agriculture on the fertile Mesopotamian plain.

These lands were linked by trade and royal marriage. For example, the Egyptian pharaoh married women from most of the foreign courts. The era was also a period of sustained trade in luxury goods and exposure to the products of a wider world that included the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas.

During this tour, we will look at artifacts from each of the great powers during the time of Tutankhamun.

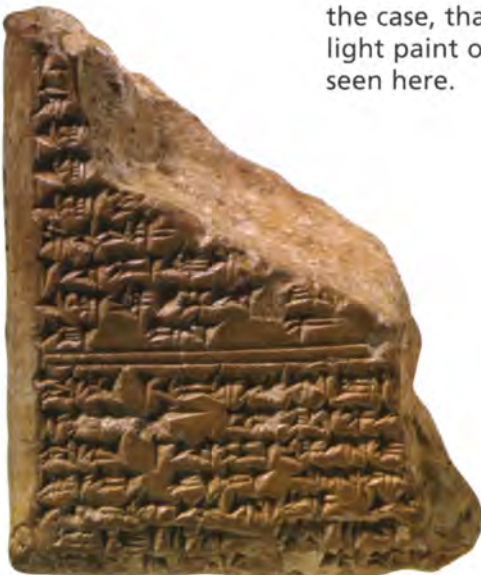
## 2. The Kingdom of Mitanni



The little-known kingdom of Mitanni was one of the major powers of the Late Bronze Age, ruling an area that ultimately extended from the Mediterranean coast eastward to northern Iraq.

Negotiations between the great kings of the Late Bronze Age are illustrated by a hoard of letters written in cuneiform script on clay tablets that were found at the Egyptian capital city of Tell el-Amarna. A fragment of one of these letters, displayed near the cartouche-shaped icon, was sent by Tushratta, the king of Mitanni, to Tiye, the mother of the Egyptian pharaoh. Tushratta states that in former days, the king of Egypt sent him solid gold statues because "gold is as common as dust" in Egypt. He complains that the new king, Tiye's son Amunhotep IV (also known as Akhenaten), sent cheaper wood statues covered with gold foil. Tushratta warns Tiye that relations between the two lands will suffer if appropriately lavish state gifts are not exchanged.

Vessels of the wealthy Mitannians included ceramics known as Nuzi ware, on the bottom of the case, that were painted in floral patterns with light paint on dark backgrounds, like the sherds seen here.

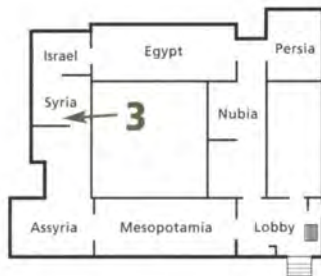


### 3. The Hittite Empire

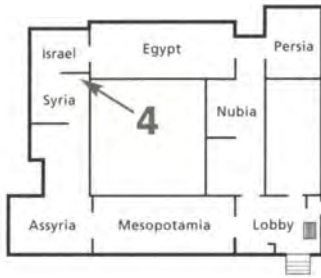
The Hittites recorded rituals in relief on ceramic vessels and on clay tablets. These Hittite vessel fragments may have depicted a wedding ritual, while the tablet fragment below describes death rituals from Hittite kings.

The Hittites expanded their empire from their homeland in central Turkey to northern Syria, where they came under the political domination of the Egyptians. In the time of Tutankhamun, a truce was in effect between the two powers. Relations were so close that a letter, probably written by Tutankhamun's widow, called upon the Hittite royal house to send a prince for her to marry because, as she says in the letter: "My husband has died and I have no son...You might give me one of your sons to become my husband. I would not wish to take one of my subjects as a husband." After inquiries, a Hittite prince was sent to Egypt, but he was murdered before he could arrive.

The years after the reign of Tutankhamun saw renewed warfare between Egypt and the Hittites—a conflict that was resolved by the military stalemate (which both sides claimed as a victory) at Kadesh in western Syria in about 1286 BC. This battle led to the earliest known written peace treaty.



## 4. The Amuq Valley and the Eastern Mediterranean Coast



Oriental Institute excavations in the Amuq Valley in the southeast corner of modern Turkey recovered evidence of a long historical sequence in a region that has always been a trade center and cultural crossroads.

At the time of Tutankhamun, the Amuq Valley was in political flux. In previous years, Egypt and Mitanni, once foes, were linked by alliances intended to keep the Hittites confined to Anatolia (today's Turkey). But at the time of Tutankhamun, the alliance broke down, allowing the Hittites to conquer the lands of Mitanni. The Hittites' move into the Amuq Valley put them in direct conflict with the Egyptians, leading to years of rivalry culminating in the battle of Kadesh.

The burnished red spindle bottle, which probably contained honey or wine, was a standard trade item in the eastern Mediterranean that was also traded down the Nile River as far as Nubia (present-day Sudan).

To the right of the spindle bottle is an example of fine painted pottery of the Mitanni kingdom known as Nuzi ware that we also saw in the Mesopotamian Gallery. The Nuzi ware of the Amuq Valley is a local variant that uses designs inspired by Minoan and Mycenaean Greek art, attesting to the exchange of artistic styles during this era.



Spindle bottle, 15th c. BC, OIM A26967

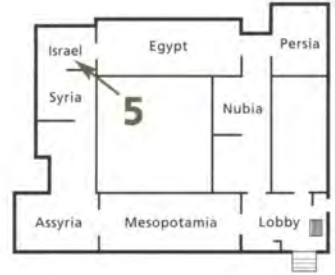
## 5. Ancient Israel—The City of Megiddo

During the reign of Tutankhamun, Israel was controlled by the Egyptian empire. At Megiddo, a regional center that is known in the Bible as Armageddon, excavations revealed the palace of an Egyptian governor that contained an abundance of carved ivory, a symbol of wealth in the Late Bronze Age.

The “Megiddo ivories” are one of the most widely known and important collections in the Oriental Institute. They are carved in at least four different styles (in order from right to left), that show how artistic styles of the entire ancient Near East were being used in ancient Israel:

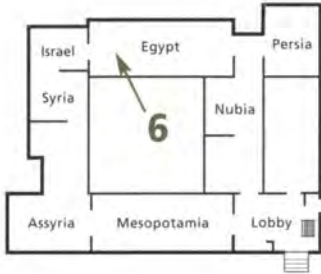
- \* A reclining sphinx, and lotus and palmette plaques in a style inspired by Egyptian art, as well as the use of Egyptian hieroglyphs.
- \* A rectangular plaque from Hittite Anatolia (in the lower right corner of the case), showing a procession of gods dressed in Hittite fashion.
- \* A griffin that shows influence of Mycenaean Greek art.
- \* The ivory bar (on the dark background to the left), carved in a local style known as “Canaanite” (referring to the region of Megiddo).

Many of these pieces were brought to Megiddo by trade, and some were locally carved in imitation of foreign styles. They show why the Late Bronze Age is called the “International Age.”



Griffin plaque, 1300–1200 BC,  
OIM A22212

## 6. Tutankhamun, King of Egypt



King Tutankhamun, who was probably the son of the “heretic” king Akhenaten, ruled the Egyptian empire for about nine years, during the 18th Dynasty, from about 1334 to 1325 BC.

This seventeen foot-tall statue of King Tutankhamun is the largest ancient Egyptian statue in the Western Hemisphere. It is one of a pair that flanked a temple doorway in Western Thebes across the Nile River from modern Luxor. Made of quartzite, one of the hardest stones used for statues, and fashioned with stone tools, the sculpture attests to the resources that the Egyptians lavished upon royal building projects. The statue was excavated by the Oriental Institute in 1930.

During Tutankhamun’s time, Egypt was one of the greatest powers of the Near East. Its wealth was fueled by the vast gold mines in the eastern deserts and by its monopoly on trade with the ivory and ebony of African regions to the south. The wealth of Egypt was poured into building enormous temples to commemorate the king and the gods, and also into the rich funerary goods left in the burials of pharaohs. Tutankhamun’s tomb is still the only royal Egyptian burial to have been found largely undisturbed.



Statue of Tutankhamun, ca. 1334 BC, OIM 14088



## 7. Life in Egypt

Although this relief is just a fragment of a much larger scene, the horses and chariot it depicts were of great importance to the Egyptian army and court.

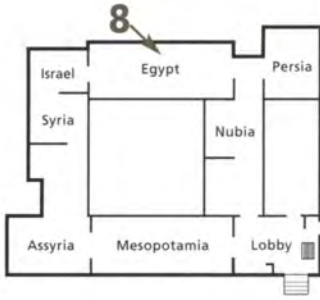
Egypt in the time of Tutankhamun was changing rapidly in response to foreign contact. Horses and chariots imported from western Asia—like those shown here—were still relatively new, as were techniques for manufacturing the glass vessels that held perfumes and cosmetics like those below the relief. The taste for painting pottery with the representation of a garland of flowers (as on the pot to the right) was also an innovation, although short-lived, of the time.

The time of Tutankhamun also saw the resolution of social and economic upheavals caused when one of his predecessors, Akhenaten, established a new capital city at Tell el-Amarna and suppressed the traditional pantheon in favor of the Aton, the incarnation of the life-giving rays of the sun. This change in religion was accompanied by changes in art seen on the piece of white limestone (to the right) with an image of Akhenaten showing his characteristic exaggerated features.



Relief with horses and chariot, ca. 1385 BC, OIM 24828

## 8. Vessels from the Funeral of Tutankhamun



The pottery vessels in this case are the remains of a banquet held during the funeral of Tutankhamun. The material was excavated in the Valley of the Kings in 1907. Hundreds of dishes, along with remains of a meal (bones from birds and cows and sheep or goats), were packed inside large whitewashed jars like the one in this case. Other material, such as dishes of resin, packets of natron, and lengths of linen, not exhibited here, had been used to mummify the king. Seal impressions with the name Tutankhamun indicate that the material was associated with that king.

When this group of material was discovered, the excavator mistakenly believed it to be the tomb of Tutankhamun that had been completely devastated by robbers. To other archaeologists, however, it was a clue that the tomb of Tutankhamun was in the Valley of the Kings, yet to be discovered. The tomb was finally found in November 1922.



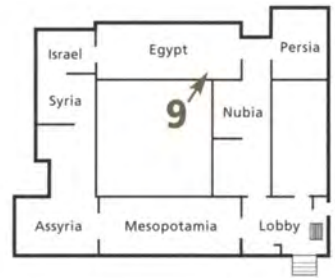
Vessels from the funeral of Tutankhamun, ca. 1325 BC

## 9. Egypt's Relations with Its Neighbors

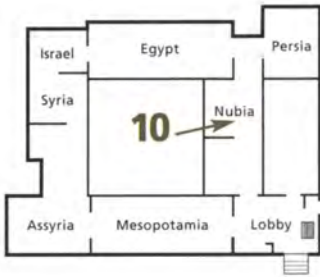
This section of a tomb wall shows people from Syria and Palestine adoring king Horemheb who claimed the Egyptian throne four years after Tutankhamun's death. The king (whose figure is not preserved on this relief), appeared above the group at a window decorated with floral hieroglyphs that proclaim "Upper and Lower Egypt are united."

The brightly decorated tile below the relief is from the wall of a palace. It shows an "Asiatic" with his arms bound and a plant that symbolizes Egypt wound around his neck, symbolizing Egypt's domination over western Asia.

Egypt had the luxury of generally having an offensive military program because it was naturally protected from attack by vast deserts to the east and west. Tutankhamun was born into a peaceful era of diplomacy made possible by the military campaigns of his predecessors. Nevertheless, the Egyptian kings, both before and after Tutankhamun, were often shown receiving homage from "conquered" peoples of other lands.



## 10. Nubia and Egypt



The copy of the painting from an Egyptian tomb at the bottom of the case shows a delegation of Nubians, some looking very much like Egyptians, others less so. Nubians like the princess in the ox cart and the four men to the right dressed themselves in Egyptian-style wigs and white gowns, yet their foreignness is expressed by coloring their hair yellow or red, a custom very exotic to the Egyptians. The two men in the middle of the scene, with non-Egyptian hairstyles topped with feathers, carry rings of gold as tribute for the Egyptian king.

The sandstone head of the Nubian is shown with tribal scars across his forehead and a large round earring. During the time of Tutankhamun, Egypt ruled Nubia, and this sculpture is typical of the manner in which Egyptians usually showed Nubians, stressing how different they were from Egyptians. From the Egyptian perspective, the Nubians were always “other” and foreign.

**This concludes our tour of the ancient Near East in the time of Tutankhamun. We hope that you will take time to explore the rest of our museum exhibits.**



Copy of tomb painting, ca. 1336–1327 BC

## Cartouche

