

G. A Final Anchor Fact for Archaic Egypt

1. In 1922, British archeologist Howard Carter discovered the amazing tomb of “King Tut.”
2. Tut’s golden death mask became the most recognizable symbol of ancient Egypt, second only to the pyramids.
3. Because of the famous death mask and sarcophagus of King Tut, a new interest arose in the archaic culture of ancient Egypt.

H. King Tut and the Failed Egyptian Reformation

1. King Tut is connected to the most interesting story in the history of Egyptian religion.
2. His father, Amenhotep IV, decided to revive the idea of the pharaoh as the leader of Egyptian religion by commanding that Egyptians worship only the sun god, Aten.
4. To bring about this change, he changed his name from Amenhotep (which includes the god name “Amen”) to Akhenaten, which means “he who acts on behalf of the Aten”.
5. He also moved his family to a new capital city, Akhetaten, stopped supporting the priests of the traditional religion, made all religious festivals other than those involving the Aten illegal, and ordered the army to seek out temples throughout the country and scratch out all references to unauthorized gods.
6. Akhenaten's changes angered the priests and the people, and after he died, his religious changes were abandoned, which is shown by the fact that his son Tutankhaten is not known to us by that name. Instead we know his as Tutankhamen (which shows that Aten was replaced by Amen).
7. King Tut died at only nineteen years of age, leading to much speculation about his death, especially because of the strange conflict of religion involving his father.

II. Archaic Mesopotamia and Persia

Although far less famous than Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia (today Iraq) and neighboring Persia (today Iran) are two other important archaic cultures. They are interesting to compare to Egypt —and to later classical Greece. The greatest empire of the archaic world, the Persian Empire fought Greece in the most important war in human history: the Greco-Persian War!

A. Basic Orientation

1. The term “Mesopotamia” means “the land between two rivers”. The two rivers in question are the Tigris and Euphrates.
2. Before the rivers were dammed, they flowed more quickly and flooded regularly in the spring, much like the Nile.
3. The people of Mesopotamia did not create lasting stone monuments the way the Egyptians did. Mesopotamians made huge “ziggurats” from mud brick, which is far more fragile, so none of them have survived to this day.

B. A Lost World Brought Back to Life

1. The story of Ancient Mesopotamia, like that of Egypt, was once lost. The people who have lived in the region for over a thousand years (**since c.622 AD**) follow the religion of Islam, which teaches that ancient history is unimportant.
2. Since nothing even nearly as impressive as the pyramids survived in Mesopotamia and Persia, their history was buried until it was revived by European historians.

C. Rediscovery of the Region's Ancient Past

1. The written records of Mesopotamia were created using a form of writing called “cuneiform”, which means “wedge-shaped.” (A scribe pressed the wedge-shaped end of a reed into a wet tablet, making an imprint. Then the tablet was baked to harden it.)
2. A British army officer named Henry Rawlinson used his knowledge of cuneiform to decipher a carving on a mountainside in Persia called the “Behistun Inscription.”
3. It contained writing in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian. Rawlinson knew Persian, so he could learn the others. The Behistun Inscription became the Rosetta Stone of Mesopotamian history when he deciphered it in 1843.

D. Earliest Kingdoms: Sumer and Akkad

1. Ancient Mesopotamian history begins with the kingdoms of Sumer and Akkad.
2. They were unified by a ruler called Sargon of Akkad, who is the Menes-Narmer of Mesopotamian history c. 2250 BC.
3. However, Nomads called the Guti destroyed Sargon’s empire, delaying the start of Mesopotamian history until the rise of the Babylonian Empire 400 years later.