

# Interview with Nicholas Reeves: An archaeologist 'on brink' of solving mystery of Queen Nefertiti's burial

Rana Gohar, Sunday 16 Aug 2015

Could the long lost burial place of Queen Nefertiti be located inside King Tutankhamun's tomb? Al-Ahram Daily Interviews British archaeologist Nicholas Reeves



Queen Nefertiti, whose name means, "the beauty has come," is one of ancient Egypt's most powerful women.

She was the mother of King Tutankhamun and the wife of the monotheistic King Akhenaten, who is considered one of the most important and controversial kings in ancient Egypt and one of the greatest thinkers of his era.

Akhenaten was the first king to abandon the traditional Egyptian polytheism, introducing worship centered on one god, Aten.

The location of Queen Nefertiti's final resting place has long perplexed scholars and has never been found. Within the last few days, however, British Egyptologist Nicholas Reeves revealed in an academic report that he may have found the long sought-after burial place hidden behind the walls of the burial chamber of King Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings.

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Reeves claims to have found a 'ghost' doorway hiding beneath the plaster on one of the walls of the burial chamber, while studying digital scans of the walls that were carried out by the Factum Arte (the Madrid-based company) who produced a replica of the Tutankhamun tomb.

Reeves says that the validity of his theory can easily and safely be checked using radar. Al-Ahram Daily

spoke to Reeves, who is located in London, to learn more about the steps that may have led him to find the resting place of the ancient queen.

You examined photos of laser scans of the walls of King Tutankhamun's tomb, without inspecting the tomb itself. Could you elaborate on how this was sufficient for you to determine that there were traces of a doorway, and behind that Queen Nefertiti's tomb?

Before answering any question, I would like to explain that my study is not about personal ego and speculation, but serious scholarship based on a carefully considered study of the evidences. It was first published not in the popular press but among the academic community. However, my finding proved an overwhelming interest that it did not take long for the press to take up the story.

I have visited the tomb of Tutankhamun many times, and have written many books and articles on the tomb, as you can see from my webpage on academia.edu

I have also studied closely the scenes on the walls and every other aspect of the tomb in close detail at first hand.

However, the detail conveyed by the surface scans made by Factum Arte (the Madrid-based company who produced this documentation for the Egyptian government) is unique. It provides information that we cannot see with our eyes when we stand in front of the original tomb walls.

In order to produce their replica of the Tutankhamun tomb next to Carter House, Factum Arte did two things: first, they photographed the wall decorations at a very high resolution and then they digitally scanned these same walls in order to capture the walls' precise surface detail.

Thanks to this latter process we are, for the very first time, able to focus on the physicality of the walls without the paintings, and see every constructional bump and line within the underlying plaster. This is information that we cannot see with our bare eyes in the tomb--it is quite unique.

What are the clues that guided you to infer that Nefertiti is buried within the tomb of King Tutankhamun?

When I studied the Factum Arte scans of the western wall, I noticed several vertical lines, which made me suspicious since they seemed to show the outline of a doorway in the plaster.

I measured carefully this putative "doorway", and I was astonished to find that the size of these traces was identical to the dimensions of the doorway into the Tutankhamun Annex. This cannot be mere coincidence. While trying to understand the strange ground plan of Tutankhamun's tomb we see that a chamber is missing at the precise point this putative doorway is located.

All of this is explained in detail in my paper, "The Burial of Nefertiti?"

Examining the scans of the northern wall, I found similar traces there, but of much wider openings that are blocked by an artificial wall.

At first I thought that it could be simply a trick of the light. But I realized that it is not as the left hand jamb of that opening lines up precisely with the western wall of the Antechamber.

This tells us that the Antechamber and the Burial Chamber of the tomb had originally been designed as a long corridor continuing beyond the northern wall.

A right-turning corridor is a type of tomb used by queens such as in the cliff tomb of Queen Hatshepsut. The tombs of kings are turned in the opposite direction, to the left.

I suggest that this corridor had clearly been widened in antiquity, in order to permit the introduction of a nest of shrines similar to that surrounding the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun. Tutankhamun's tomb (KV62) seemed, therefore, to be not merely the tomb of a queen; since normal queens seem not to have been supplied with nests of shrines, it begins to look like the tomb of a super-queen, or co-regent.

This conclusion seems to be confirmed when looked closely at the decorated on the northern wall, which we know from a Getty Conservation Institute 2012 publication, to be earlier than the southern, eastern and western painted walls.

Examining the details of this northern painted wall we found clear indications that it had been prepared for the burial of Queen Nefertiti.

In the famous scene of Ay opening the mouth of the mummy of Tutankhamun, which is located behind the sarcophagus, we could easily note the distinctive line at the corner of the mummy's mouth --a characteristic of Nefertiti-- and note the distinctive chin of the figure now labelled as Ay, a characteristic feature not of Ay's portraiture, but of the boy king Tutankhamun.

As the northern wall painting now exists, the inscriptions identify the scene's players as Ay officiating at the funeral of Tutankhamun; originally, however, I believe this scene represented Tutankhamun officiating at the burial of Nefertiti.

Renowned Egyptologist Zahi Hawass highly doubts that Queen Nefertiti would be buried in this tomb because in the 18th dynasty it was not common to have two burial chambers in the same tomb; Nefertiti cannot be buried in the Valley of the Kings because the priests of Amun wouldn't allow it and, finally, her name was not mentioned on any of the tomb's walls paintings. What is your opinion?

In fact there is quite a lot of evidence of double burials in the 18th dynasty. Evidence proved that King Amenhotep III prepared two of the orbital rooms surrounding the main burial chamber for his mother Queen Tiye and his wife Sitamun.

At Al-Amarna, in the great royal tomb, a second royal tomb branched off from the entrance corridor and was originally intended to run parallel to the principal axis, presumably for the co-regent, Nefertiti, though it was never finished and never used.

I disagree with the idea that Queen Nefertiti cannot be buried in the Valley of the Kings because the digging for royal burials at Thebes (opposite the Valley of the Kings) was the first plan, or Plan A. After King Akhenaten moved the country's capital to Al-Amarna, digging for burials there was plan B and later plan C. We know from the Pere graffito at Thebes that Akhenaten's successor, Ankhkheperure, had prepared a mortuary temple at Thebes. If there was a mortuary temple at Thebes, then there will have also been royal tombs. And, of course, I identify Ankhkheperure Smenkhkare as Nefertiti. See my book "Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet."

I believe that it was Nefertiti who began the reconciliation with the Amun priesthood, several years before Tutankhamun.

Regarding her name not being mentioned in the paintings on the walls, I believe that the name finally used by Queen Nefertiti was Smenkhkare and was originally written on the north wall scene. But when the original white background of this scene was painted yellow at the time of Tutankhamun's burial, these original inscriptions were painted over.

British Archaeologist Howard Carter, who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb spent almost 10 years doing research in the tomb, is it possible that he missed this?

Howard Carter never saw the wall surfaces, as we are able to see them now. Thanks to the Factum Arte scan, which provided us with a completely fresh view of the Burial Chamber walls without the distraction of the painted scenes.

Also, Carter noticed that the magical niches in the Burial Chamber were cut into solid bedrock, and so naturally assumed that the tomb ended at that point. What Carter did not consider was the odd positioning of these niches, which we now see was due to the fact that the ancient workers were trying to avoid placing them in the blockings.

What is your next move after making such a great discovery? Are you planning to come to Egypt anytime soon to complete further field research and excavations in the tomb?

Before publishing my paper, as a professional courtesy, I sent an advance copy to my colleagues in Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities Mamdouh Eldamaty, for the sake of security via the Egyptian Consulate in New York, with whom I also discussed my ideas.

The next move is to test my ideas, which I hope that I will be permitted to apply safely inside the tomb without causing any damage through using radar examination.

What if your hypothesis proves to be correct and you indeed discover the queen's burial chamber?

It would be a marvelous discovery if we find behind the burial chamber's western wall another intact storage chamber that belongs to Tutankhamun and filled with objects and information.

But if we find the burial of Queen Nefertiti hidden behind the northern wall that will be an extraordinary find and potentially a greater discovery than the one of King Tutankhamun.

But what is particularly marvelous is that we can inspect this hypothesis very easily and safely, causing no damage by means of radar.

If radar reveals a hollow beneath either the western wall or the northern wall, or both, then there is indeed something interesting. We may well be on the brink of something quite stupendous. Wouldn't that be nice for Egypt's tourist industry? A new twist to the Tutankhamun story is something everyone in the world will be interested in.

As recent and excited press coverage has amply demonstrated, this could be the good news story that everyone has been waiting for.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/137945.aspx>