

Zahi Hawass: Where is the tomb of Nefertiti?

Zahi Hawass, Sunday 23 Aug 2015

The recent theory regarding the tomb of the ancient Egyptian Queen Nefertiti should be welcomed by the scientific community. But it requires very careful evaluation, Egyptian renowned archaeologist Zahi Hawass says



Recently Nicholas Reeves published an article titled “The Burial of Nefertiti?” in which he postulates that the tomb of Nefertiti is hidden behind the walls of the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings.

Regardless of whether or not he is correct, I am happy to see how much attention this theory is getting in the international press and on social media because the article is bringing great publicity for Egyptology, and we need this today to bring tourists back to Egypt.

Reeves bases his theory on his analysis of 3D scans of the tomb of Tutankhamun that were published online by Factum Arte, the company that created the full-scale replica of the tomb.

In images of the north and west walls of the tomb, Reeves focuses on lines and shadows that suggest to him plastered-over doorways leading to hidden rooms. He proposes that these chambers belong to the tomb of Queen Nefertiti, whom many believe changed her name to Smenkhkare and ruled Egypt as a king after the death of her husband, Akhenaten.

Before I examine this theory, let us have a review of the 3D scanning of the tomb of Tutankhamun.

North of Howard Carter’s house, we planned to have a replica valley constructed, because we thought that we needed to save the most beautiful tombs on the west bank, those of Tutankhamun and Seti I in the Valley of the Kings, and also the tomb of Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens.

The replica tombs, which would be as identical as possible to the originals, would be available for viewing by the public, thus preserving the original tombs, which would be closed.

We had a cooperative project with The Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt in Switzerland to create the replica of Tutankhamun’s tomb.

They hired an expert, Adam Lowe, to do the 3D laser scanning of the tomb of Tutankhamun. In 2012 the replica was installed near Carter's rest house, and it can be visited now. Images from the 3D scanning project were published online, and Reeves was able to look at the evidence that led him to suggest the presence of two doorways that were blocked and plastered to conceal their existence.

I believe that all of the Egyptian queens, Nefertiti is the most famous one. She disappeared during the last years of her husband's reign, with just a single inscription, dated to year 16, known after year 12. Most of us do believe that she changed her name and ruled after Akhenaten, but her tomb has never been found. Its location is one of ancient Egypt's greatest mysteries.

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In 2003, British Egyptologist Joanne Fletcher claimed that she had found proof that the mummy of the Younger Lady found in a side chamber of the tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35) was the mummy of Nefertiti. At that time, I rejected the theory because she presented no convincing evidence.

She was working within an English expedition to examine the mummies found in KV 35, which had been used as a cache for royal mummies after the end of the New Kingdom, and based on antiquities law, she was required to present her idea to the Supreme Council of Antiquities before going public with it. She went instead through the Discovery Channel and made a worldwide announcement.

Our Egyptian Mummy Project, using CT-scans and DNA analysis, determined that the mummy of the Younger Lady in KV 35 is very likely the mother of Tutankhamun, but we do not know her name.

She was also discovered to be the daughter of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye, and we know that Nefertiti was not their daughter.

We then began to look at other unidentified mummies to find the best candidate for the mummy of Nefertiti. When we did DNA analysis of the two mummies from KV 21, we found that one could be Ankhsenamun, one of the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti and Tutankhamun's queen.

We think that the other mummy, which is missing its head, could be Nefertiti. We need to locate the bones of Queen Mutnodjmet, who is thought to be Nefertiti's sister, and do DNA analysis to find more evidence for or against the theory that this headless mummy is Nefertiti.

If we look at the scenes on the walls of Tutankhamun's burial chamber, behind which, according to Reeves, lies Nefertiti's tomb, we can see that most of the original scenes in the burial chamber survive today. One wall, the south, fell victim to Howard Carter's excavation team, which damaged part of the decoration when it breached the wall from the Antechamber.

Later, when time came to remove the shrine that surrounded the boy king's sarcophagus, the south wall had to be completely removed, but steps were taken to save the remaining paintings and move them to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The ancient workmen had covered the walls in a thick layer of mortar to receive the paint in this room, the only one in the tomb to be decorated.

The painters who decorated the chamber drew most of the figures based on a grid of 20 squares. This was a convention held over from Amarna period art (before and after this time, Egyptian artists used an 18-square grid).

This resulted in figures that were short-legged, and they were also noticeably soft looking—another lingering Amarna influence — on a background painted yellow to resemble not only old papyrus but also gold, the color of divine flesh.

Howard Carter worked in the tomb for ten years. I am sure he was looking everywhere to see if these walls were solid or if there was something behind them.

We always do that when we discover a tomb. Otto Schaden, when he found KV 63, examined every place in the tomb to see if there were more rooms.

This is why I believe that Carter did the same, and he was not able to see anything that was hidden. I also think that he removed the plaster from the five niches that held the magical bricks.

That would have indicated if there was anything behind the walls, because the plaster had been removed. Harry Burton took photographs, which anyone can examine now, and they were examined by Carter.

What did Reeves see in the shadows, lines, and cracks of the wall that led him to his theory? First, unusual shapes can be seen by any individual who looks at a 3D scan of a decorated wall. In the temple scenes of Seti I at Abydos, for example, someone imagined they could see an airplane.

Also, the existence of a tomb inside a tomb is known to us from Dynasty 19, but we do not have any examples of tombs like this in Dynasty 18. Also, in Dynasty 19, the tomb was made inside a tomb for the king himself, perhaps because they were trying to hide his actual burial, or perhaps for ritual reasons.

Why would Tutankhamun be buried inside Nefertiti's tomb? She was not even his mother. I do not believe that Reeves has present enough evidence to convince me that there are hidden chambers beyond the tomb of Tutankhamun.

The west wall, behind which Reeves thinks is one chamber of the tomb of Nefertiti, contains a scene from the "Amduat," the book of what is in the Netherworld.

There is a scene of Khepri, the sun in the form of a scarab beetle, on a boat flanked by figures of Osiris and twelve baboons.

The damaged remains on the south wall show Tutankhamun receiving life from Hathor, while Anubis places his hand on the king's shoulder.

Behind Anubis, we see that Isis makes the *thy-nyge* gesture (a ritual gesture characteristic of this goddess), and behind her squat three more gods of the Netherworld. These were drawn closer to the traditional, non-Amarna 18-square grid.

Now we come to the scene on the north wall of the tomb, also a part of Reeves's theory.

The sequence of the scenes proceeds from right to left. In the first of these, Ay, formerly Tutankhamun's vizier and now his successor, wears the blue crown and the leopard skin of the high priest.

He performs the very ancient ritual known as the "opening of the mouth" on the dead king's mummy, here represented as Tutankhamun in the form of the god Osiris.

Ay holds a carpenter's adze, one of several implements touched to parts of the mummy, coffin, or statue in order to allow the deceased to eat, speak, see, hear, breathe, and otherwise function in the afterlife.

Reeves suggested that this scene originally showed Tutankhamun performing this ritual for Nefertiti. If this is the case, then what can we say about the inscriptions over the heads of Ay and Tutankhamun, and why don't we see any traces of the name of Nefertiti?

Additionally, this scene should not be in the tomb of Tutankhamun, but inside the tomb of Nefertiti, if Reeves is right. Finally, what do we do about Ay, who ruled and came to the throne after Tutankhamun; why can we not find him in the tomb?

I do not believe that Nefertiti was buried in the Valley of the Kings, because she completely supported Akhenaten, and the priests of Amun would never have allowed her burial in the Valley.

Nefertiti was active in Akhenaten's reign, accompanying her husband when he offered to Aten, serving in effect as the high priestess of the Aten. The Aten's high priestess could not be buried in the precinct of Amun. Though Akhenaten's body was moved to KV 55 in the Valley of the Kings later, his original tomb was the royal tomb at Amarna.

I found it odd that Reeves would use a quotation from Omm Seti, saying that Nefertiti was buried in the Valley of the Kings, but I do like what he said in one of his newspaper interviews: "If I am wrong, I am wrong, but if I

am right, this is potentially the biggest archaeological discovery ever made.” I think he is right, this would be an extraordinary discovery, but now we have a question: What can we do now?

In my opinion Reeves is one of the leading experts on the Valley of the Kings, with many publications on the subject to prove it. Thus, if he says anything about the Valley, we all as Egyptologists have to respect him, and I do respect him as a person, and I also respect his scholarship.

However, I once rejected a theory of Reeves and proved that he was not right.

He published the results of ground-penetrating radar in the Valley of the Kings, and based on the radar readings, he located a tomb which he called KV 63 in front of the tomb of Tutankhamun (this was published before the discovery of KV 63 by Otto Schaden).

After this, I initiated the first-ever Egyptian excavations in the Valley – it was not right that only foreign colleagues excavated in the Valley and that not one single Egyptian scholar did any work there.

I began my excavation and thought that I should examine Reeves’s theory, as well as Lyla Pinch Brock’s idea that KV “C” existed beneath the old rest house built for tourists.

Reeves announced his GPR survey on August 3, 2006 and stated that the analysis of the data had revealed the presence of an anomaly on the eastern side of the central area.

This announcement received a lot of publicity. Our team undertook to explore this area through excavation, and over the course of the work recorded 5 m of flood deposits above the bedrock of the Valley.

The team also encountered six workmen’s huts that Carter had hastily recorded. But we found that Reeves’s interpretation of the radar data was not correct; it turned out that his anomalies were natural fissures in the bedrock. After we dismantled the rest house, we also found no evidence for the existence of KV “C”

For this new theory, I think that the Ministry of Antiquities should announce that we do respect Reeves’s theory and we thank him for his ideas.

Then, five scholars should be appointed to go to the Valley of the Kings with Reeves and the data from the 3D scans and examine the theory in situ, inside the tomb.

If, and only if, the scholars determine that the theory has merit, then the next step would be to use sophisticated radar to see what is behind the two walls. If the radar shows an anomaly, it could be a room, but it also could be nothing, and I do not think that the Permanent Committee would approve any drilling to look for these rooms.

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