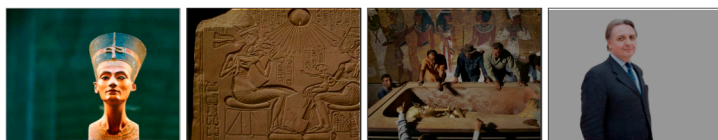
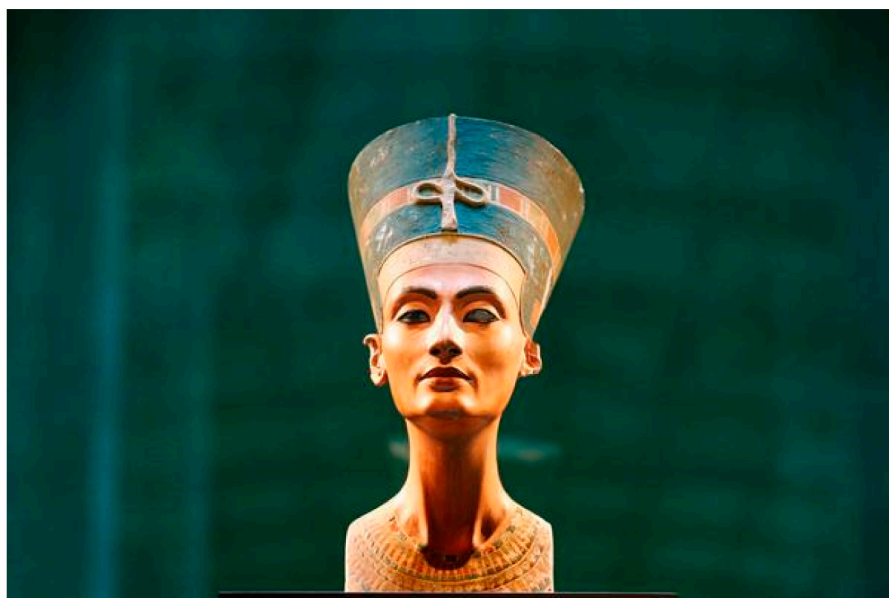


Looking for Queen Nefertiti

Does the ancient Egyptian Queen Nefertiti rest in the tomb of the Boy King Tutankhamun, as a British Egyptologist has claimed, asks **Nevine El-Aref**



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The beautiful Queen Nefertiti, wife of the monotheistic King Akhenaten and her son-in-law the golden Boy King Tutankhamun, has always perplexed archaeologists.

Nefertiti acquired unprecedented power during the first 12 years of the reign of her husband Akhenaten. She occupied the throne alongside her husband and appeared nearly twice as often in reliefs as Akhenaten during the first five years of his reign. She continued to appear in reliefs even when, in the twelfth year of Akhenaten's reign, she disappeared from the scene and her name vanished from the pages of history.

Some think she either died from plague or fell out of favour, but recent theories have denied this claim. Four images of Nefertiti adorn Akhenaten's sarcophagus, not the usual goddesses, indicating that her importance to the pharaoh continued up until his death and disproving the idea that she fell out of favour. It also shows her continuous role as a deity or semi-deity with Akhenaten.

Shortly after her disappearance, Akhenaten took a co-regent to the throne. The identity of this person has created speculation. One theory says it was Nefertiti herself in a new guise as a “female king,” like the female pharaohs Sobkneferu and Hatshepsut who ruled the country for several years.

Another theory introduces the idea of two co-regents, a male one called Smenkhkare and Nefertiti under the name of Neferneferuaten. Some scholars believe that Nefertiti became co-regent with her husband, and that her role as queen consort was taken over by her eldest daughter Meritaten.

Although her iconic bust, now on display at the Neues Museum in Berlin, was unearthed in an artist’s workshop at Tel Al-Amarna in 1912 by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt, neither her tomb nor mummy have yet been unearthed. As for the Boy King Tutankhamun, his mysterious death, lineage and health have seen many controversies and debates.

Over the years, scientists have used state-of-the-art technology to determine the causes of Tutankhamun’s mysterious death at an early age. After CT-scan examinations, they have concluded that the king could have died for one of two reasons: either he suffered a blow to the back of the head, either accidentally or deliberately, or he broke or fractured his leg, which then became infected and led to his death. The scans have revealed that Tutankhamun was 180 cm tall and slight in stature but was well nourished.

Tutankhamun’s name has also been associated with the “curse of Tutankhamun”, as strange events happened shortly after the discovery of his intact tomb and the removal of items from it in the early 1920s. The British Lord Carnarvon, who supported the work financially, died after a mosquito bite on his cheek seven weeks after the discovery of the tomb. After the lifting of the mask from the mummy of the boy king it was found that the pharaoh himself had had a lesion in the same place on his cheek. Back home in England, Lord Carnarvon’s dog Susie howled and dropped dead at the same time. A pet canary belonging to tomb discoverer Howard Carter was also eaten by a snake on the day of the opening of the tomb.

This week both royal figures were in the limelight again, as University of Arizona archaeologist Nicholas Reeves believes that he has discovered a secret passageway within King Tutankhamun’s tomb that leads to the resting place of Queen Nefertiti. He claims that he has reached this theory after the examination of digital scans of the wall paintings of Tutankhamun’s tomb carried out by the Madrid-based company Factum Arte, which produced a replica of Tutankhamun’s tomb near the rest house of Carter in the Valley of the Kings on Luxor’s west bank.

Lines in plaster: “When I studied the Factum Arte scans of the western wall, where there is a scene depicting 12 baboons that represent the 12 hours of the night, I noticed several vertical lines, which made me suspicious since they seemed to show the outline of a doorway in the plaster,” Reeves told Al-Ahram Weekly. He added that by measuring these lines he realised that they corresponded to the dimensions of an already existing doorway in a nearby wall.

“Probably someone had plastered over a hidden doorway in antiquity,” Reeves speculated, going on to say that this door gives access to another Tutankhamun-period orbital storeroom similar to the already excavated annex.

He also believes that the layout of Tutankhamun’s tomb suggests that there should be a chamber on this spot. In order to reach the burial chamber, a person would need to turn right from the main corridor. “Such a type of tomb was a configuration used only for ancient Egyptian queens, not kings, whose chambers were off to the left,” Reeves told the Weekly, suggesting that Tutankhamun’s tomb could originally have been carved in the cliff as tomb for a queen and then Tutankhamun was buried later in its outer part which was quickly enlarged to make it a proper royal burial that could house the nest of shrines dedicated to a pharaoh.

By studying the scans of the northern wall which is decorated with a scene showing king Ay proceeding with the open-mouth burial ritual on the mummy of Tutankhamun, Reeves found similar traces but of much wider openings blocked by an artificial wall. This second putative doorway, explains Reeves, could lead to Nefertiti’s resting place.

“At first I thought that it could be simply a trick of the light. But then I realised that it was not as the left-hand jamb of the opening lines up precisely with the western wall of the antechamber,” Reeves said. “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.”

“Tutankhamun’s tomb seems, 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,” Reeves told the Weekly, adding that this conclusion seems to have been confirmed. According to a publication of the US Getty Conservation Institute in 2012, the decoration of the northern wall seems to be earlier than those of the southern, eastern and western walls.

“It must originally have been erected as a ‘blind’ intended to fool the visitor into believing that the tomb stops at this point,” Reeves suggests and explains that several examples of such blinds are known from the Valley of the Kings, all opened in antiquity, such as that beyond the “well” in the tomb of Horemheb (KV57).

He also thinks that the scene on the northern wall indicates that it had been prepared for the burial of queen Nefertiti. He explains that in the scene of Ay opening the mouth of the mummy of Tutankhamun the distinctive line at the corner of the mummy's mouth can be easily noted — a characteristic of Nefertiti — as can the distinctive chin of the figure now labelled as Ay, a characteristic feature not of Ay, but of the Boy King Tutankhamun. "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," Reeves concludes.

"It is possible to trace a gradual and steady progression of Nefertiti's power through and beyond Akhenaten's reign," Reeves says, continuing that this is most clearly discernable in the evolution of the names of Nefertiti, those of Akhenaten's co-regent Neferneferuaten and those of Nefertiti's successor Smenkhkare. In each transition there is a carry-over of a single element of the name that went before.

"I believe this identifies all three as the names of a single individual," Reeves says, explaining that Queen Nefertiti early on expanded her name to queen Neferneferuaten — Nefertiti. Queen Neferneferuaten-Nefertiti then disappeared at the same time as a mysterious female co-regent Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten appears and at the same time as a sole ruler appears following Akhenaten's death with the cartouche names Ankhkheperure Smenkhkare-Djeserkheperu.

Scepticism: However, other Egyptologists are sceptical of Reeves's theory because the scratches on the wall are the sole indications of the queen's burial.

Egyptologist Zahi Hawass describes Reeves study as "a theory aiming at fame and publicity and not based on archaeological or scientific evidence." He told the Weekly that the idea was "speculation" not based on archaeological evidence. Reeves, Hawass said, had reached his conclusions after the examination of 3D photographs and had not based them on field work inside the tomb.

"These lines which Reeves sees in the photographs cannot be traces of doorways as he claims. They could simply be lines in the photographs," Hawass pointed out. He also explains that from the archaeological point of view, Nefertiti's tomb cannot be inside Tutankhamun's tomb. The architectural design of tombs during the 18th Dynasty, to which both belong, does not allow for one tomb inside another one or two burial chambers in one tomb. This phenomenon is only known from the 19th Dynasty, Hawass said.

He said that Queen Nefertiti could not be buried in the Valley of the Kings because the priests of Amun would not have allowed this as she had rebelled against the religion of Amun, choosing that of Aten, and anyway her name is not mentioned in any of the tomb's wall paintings. Hawass has called on the Ministry of Antiquities to assign a scientific and archaeological committee made up of Egyptian and foreign archaeologists, among them Reeves himself, to inspect the tomb in order to determine whether Reeves is right or wrong.

Minister of Antiquities Mamdouh Eldamaty said he would discuss the theory with Reeves and other scholars in order to clear up question marks hanging over it. However, Eldamaty told the Weekly that he did not believe that Nefertiti could be buried in the Valley of the Kings and that her tomb was likely to be somewhere in Al-Amarna. As for the scene of Ay opening the mouth of Tutankhamun, Eldamaty said that this showed Ay and Tutankhamun, and not Nefertiti and Tutankhamun, as Reeves suggests. Ay's name is written on the scene and could not be missed, he said.

"It's a very interesting observation that there are these traces; however, the jump to 'and Nefertiti's behind the wall' — the logic just doesn't follow at all," Aidan Dodson, an Egyptologist at the University of Bristol in the UK commented to the Website Live Science. "All we've actually got are a bunch of scratches on a wall," Dodson said.

There is no proof that there is a chamber behind the vertical lines, and even if there were, they could contain other items or people besides Nefertiti, he said. "Some Egyptologists believe that Nefertiti's mummy has already been found and is sitting in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo," Dodson told Live Science, adding that a prior DNA analysis found that this mummy could have been the mother of Tutankhamun.

"I think it is a very attractive idea, but the evidence for it is not very solid," professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo Salima Ikram said, wondering why Carter, who spent more than ten years excavating the tomb, had not realised that such a door existed although he was aware that false doors could lie behind painted walls. "It is not as if no one had looked for hidden rooms in the tomb before," Ikram added.

"I would be very surprised if this tomb was built to house the original, or first, burial of Nefertiti," countered Joyce Tyldesley, a senior lecturer in Egyptology at the University of Manchester, to the UK Times newspaper. "It seems to me that it is highly likely that she died during her husband's reign... but I would have expected her to be buried somewhere in the Western Valley, rather than in the centre of the Valley of the Kings."

Reeves's response: In response to these views, Reeves told the Weekly that there was a lot of evidence of double burials in one tomb in the 18th Dynasty.

For example, the evidence showed 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.

Reeves also disagreed with the idea that Nefertiti could not be buried in the Valley of the Kings because the digging of royal burials at Thebes was always the first plan of the workers, or Plan A. After Akhenaten moved the country's capital to Al-Amarna, the digging of burials there became Plan B, and later Akhenaten's successor Ankhkheperure prepared a mortuary temple at Thebes, as is known from a graffito at Thebes.

"If there was a mortuary temple at Thebes, then there will have also been royal tombs," Reeves asserted, adding that he identifies Ankhkheperure Smenkhkare as Nefertiti. "I believe that it was Nefertiti who began the reconciliation with the Amun priesthood several years before Tutankhamun," he said.

Regarding her name not being mentioned in the wall paintings of the tomb, Reeves believes that the last name used by Nefertiti was Smenkhkare and that this was originally written on the northern wall. But when the original white background of this scene was painted yellow at the time of Tutankhamun's burial, he said, these original inscriptions were painted over.

"I believe that Nefertiti as Smenkhkare certainly died before her successor Tutankhamun who buried her in a tomb she had earlier begun to prepare for herself at Thebes as a great royal wife of Amenhotep IV, which is now Tutankhamun's tomb (KV62)," Reeves said. He continued that the evidence of Nefertiti's subsequent pharaonic status is shown in the original white-ground northern wall scene.

Later, when Tutankhamun died and no funerary preparations had been set in train, Nefertiti's tomb was re-opened as far as chamber J and it was this outer section of the tomb that was adapted and expanded for the boy king's funerary use. "Hence KV62 became a tomb within a tomb," Reeves argues. He explains that room J had been the original tomb's notional "well", decorated with a single northern wall painting. This painting's white background carried three vignettes painted for the tomb's original owner Nefertiti, one with an image of the young Tutankhamun directing the funeral ceremonies.

He told the Weekly that when Tutankhamun came to be buried there the room's role changed to reflect its repurposing as "a house of gold" or burial chamber. Three additional paintings on a yellow ground were added to the southern, eastern and western walls, and the white background of the northern wall was simply painted over in yellow around the existing figures of the original owner, with inscriptions added to identify the deceased as Tutankhamun and the ministering priest as Ay.

"I believe that the burial compartments of Nefertiti were not hidden deliberately: it was only by chance because of the need to turn room J into a burial chamber for Tutankhamun," Reeves said. He added that Carter was not able to see the lines on the northern and western walls because technology at the time did not enable him to do so. The laser scan carried out by Factum Arte had provided a completely fresh view of the burial chamber walls without the distraction of the painted scenes, he said.

"I am not inventing theories. The lines I inspected on the laser scans are relevant traces of a door and not lines from the digital artefacts or scanning as some claim," Reeves asserted. "I have discussed this possibility with Factum Arte, and they confirmed that the relevant traces are indeed real ones," he said.

Carter noticed that the magic 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," Reeves told the Weekly.

Reeves said he urged for a non-invasive method such as radar to be used to check whether there was a chamber there or not. If the radar examination reveals a hollow beneath either the western wall or the northern wall, or both, then there is indeed something interesting and significant to be investigated, he said. Then there was a need to establish what these voids might be and who or what they might contain.

"I hope to come to Egypt soon to prove or disprove my theory, but everything is in the hands of the Egyptian government, and the minister of antiquities will decide upon the correct way forward," he said. "I hope that something good comes out from my study," he concluded.