

NEFERTITI'S LAST DOCUMENTED REFERENCE (FOR NOW)

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Thanks to the kind and willing cooperation of the Dayr al-Barsha-Project, led by Prof. Dr. Harco Willems, and against the backdrop of a never-ending flood of speculative writings concerning the last years of the queen, one can provide new and strong material that will, on the one side, put an end to old discussions, and on the other, lead to new ones.

We thank and congratulate our colleagues involved with the Dayr al-Barsha-Project.

Friederike Seyfried

No queen has been such a great mystery as Nefertiti, *the beautiful one has come*. Although the Amarna Period is now one of the most studied periods in Egyptian history, a lot of questions remain unanswered. One of the most obscure points of the period was situated near the end of Akhenaten's reign. It is generally agreed that he died in his seventeenth regnal year. His last dated inscription is a wine jar label from "year seventeen, second month of the inundation season."¹ After his death Akhenaten would be buried in his tomb in the Royal Wadi in Amarna. Yet, the tomb was severely damaged and his body missing.² The male buried in KV 55 is often identified as Akhenaten, but this discussion remains open.³

And what about his queen? Not much is known about the final years of Nefertiti. As far as can be deduced from published evidence, she disappears around the thirteenth or fourteenth year of Akhenaten. The last time she was depicted was at the funeral of her second daughter Meketaten in the Royal Tomb of Amarna.⁴



FIG. 1 View of the stone bridge of Deir Abu Hinnis. The inscription was discovered in the first quarry from the left

Several historical interpretations have been proposed, but the most common interpretations boil down to four hypotheses. The first suggests that the queen died some time after the twelfth regnal year of Akhenaten.⁵

A second hypothesis claims that the queen fell into disgrace and was banished from the central city of Amarna. She did not leave the town, but moved to a residence in the northern part of Amarna. A variant of this explanation is that the queen left Egypt and moved back to her hometown of either Crete or Syria. These theories are no longer current and have been replaced by the following two.

An influential “newer” theory claims that Nefertiti was made co-regent of Akhenaten around his 12th regnal year and that she changed her name to Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten. This means that following his death Nefertiti would be her husband’s direct successor. Akhenaten, however, was not replaced by his wife but by a young male king with the name of Semenkhkare. Semenkhkare adopted part of the name of Nefertiti to confirm his kingly status. Finally, it is also argued that it was Nefertiti who eventually changed her name to Semenkhkare, based on the fact that there is no evidence that Semenkhkare was male.⁶

Although various arguments can and have been mustered in support of each of these hypotheses, the evidence is highly fragmentary and tenuous. The discovery of a hieratic text in a quarry in Dayr Abu Hinnis reveals new information about the final years of the royal couple of Amarna.

The village of Dayr Abū Hinnis lies about ten kilometres north of Amarna on the eastern Nile bank and halfway between two other known archaeological sites: Antinoopolis in the north and Dayr al-Barshā in the south. An extensive archaeological area can be found east of the village. The steep limestone hills of the Eastern Desert are intersected by a number of wadis, which contain more than two hundred limestone quarries. Their main exploitation phase was the Amarna Period. The site is mostly known for its rock church (ca. 6th century AD), constructed in one of the quarries.

The text was discovered in a quarry in the largest wadi of Dayr Abū Hinnis, called the Wadi Dayr Abū Hinnis. It was written on a pillar in the back of the quarry, at a height of 8 m. The inscription



FIG. 2 Pillars in the quarry gallery with a historic inscription in red paint (note: chisel marks visible on all pillars and wall surfaces, that have also damaged the inscription, stem from a later phase of the quarries’ usage.)

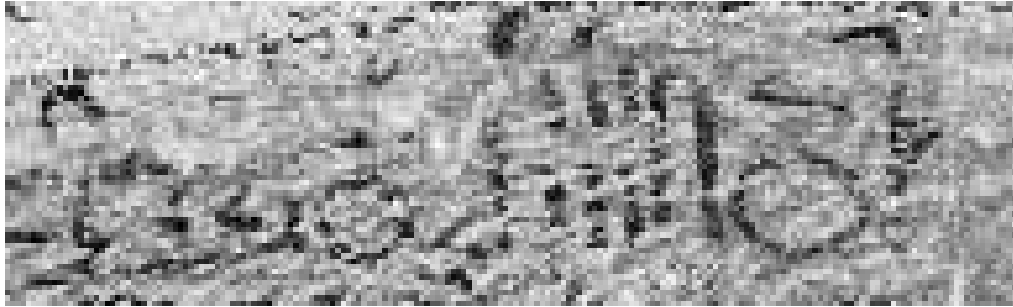


FIG. 3 Detail of the inscription “year 16”

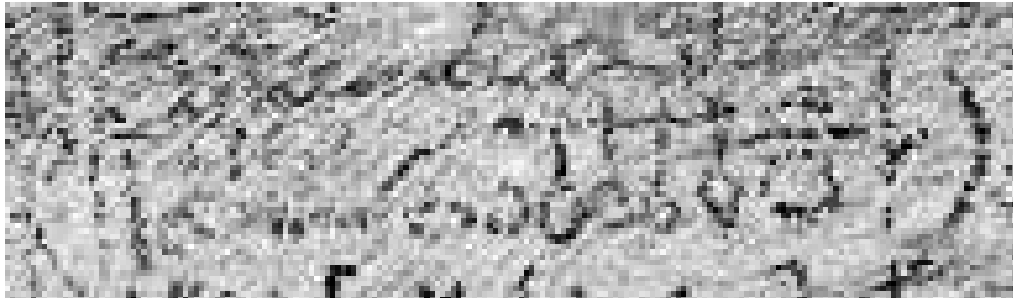


FIG. 4 Detail of the inscription with the cartouche and Nefertiti's name.

is 5 lines long and covers the whole width of the pillar. Written in red ochre, the original inscription is hard to decipher due to the patina of the limestone. Once photographic documentation was processed, however, the text revealed most of its secrets. The inscription provides some details regarding a construction project of which the details will be discussed elsewhere. Here we concentrate only on the beginning of the text, which provides a date and the names and titles of the king, his wife and the Aten. The text was written on the fifteenth day of the third month of the inundation season of the sixteenth year of Akhenaten. The third line starts with the words “Great King’s Wife, his beloved, mistress of the two lands, Neferneferuaten Nefertiti.” This undermines most of the theories about both the banishment or death of Nefertiti in Akhenaten’s fourteenth year. It also confirms that she was still the main queen in year sixteen, and that neither her daughter nor Kiya replaced her as the most important woman of the reign. A lot of questions remain unanswered, like the co-regency with Semenkhkare and the identity of king Ankh(t)kheperure Neferneferuaten. However, the text does not contain any evidence to suggest that there was a coregent in the 16th regnal year of Akhenaten. If either Semenkhkare or Ankhkheperure shared the position of coregent with Akhenaten, it was only possible in his last year. The inscription is therefore greatly consequential for historical interpretations of the era.

- 1 Hornung, E., R. Krauss and D. A. Warburton. 2006 *Ancient Egyptian Chronology, Handbook of Oriental Studies* 83. Brill, Leiden, p. 206.
- 2 Martin, G. T. 1974 *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna. Part VII: The Royal Tomb at El-Amarna. 1. The Objects, Archaeological Survey of Egypt* 35. Egypt Exploration Society, London, pp. 104–106.
- 3 Allen, J. P. 2009 “The Amarna Succession.” In *Causing His Name to Live. Studies in Egyptian Epigraphy and History in Memory of William J. Murnane, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*. Brand, P. and L. Cooper (eds.). Brill, Leiden, p. 13.
- 4 Freed, R. E., Y. J. Markowitz and S. H. D’Auria 2000 *Farao’s van de Zon. Achnaton, Nefertiti, Toetanchamon*. Exh. cat.

- Leiden; Martin, G. T. 1989 *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna. Part VII. The Royal Tomb of El-Amarna. 2. The Reliefs, Inscriptions, and Architecture, Archaeological Survey of Egypt* 39. Oxford University Press, London.
- 5 Schlögl, H. 1989 *Echnaton – Tutanchamun. Fakten und Texte*. Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, p. 42.
- 6 Harris, J. R. 1973 “Nefernefruaten.” In *GM* 4, p. 16; Samson, J. 1976 “Royal Names in Amarna History.” In *CdE* 51, p. 34; Samson, J. 1985 *Nefertiti and Cleopatra. Queen-Monarchs of Ancient Egypt*. Rubicon Press, London, pp. 95–97; Freed, R. E., Y. J. Markowitz and S. H. D’Auria 2000 *Farao’s van de Zon. Achnaton, Nefertiti, Toetanchamon*. Exh. cat. Leiden, p. 89–91.