



The Queens of the Exhibition

The mothers of pharaohs, Great Royal Wives, secondary wives, concubines, and the sisters or daughters of pharaohs who became their wives — all of these queens of Egypt had considerable influence and played important military, political, diplomatic or religious roles. Some even became pharaohs themselves.

The seven queens featured in this exhibition lived during the period known as the New Kingdom (1539–1076 BC). Over three successive dynasties, Egyptian civilization reached the height of its power and refinement. It was also a period in which queens gained in status and influence.

Queen **AHMOSE-NEFERTARI**, Great Royal Wife, Regent and Goddess

Great Royal Wife of Pharaoh Ahmose I, whose reign inaugurated the New Kingdom, Ahmose-Nefertari was the first queen on whom the title “God’s Wife of [Amun]” was bestowed. It was an important religious role.

After Egypt went through troubled times, Ahmose-Nefertari contributed with determination to the kingdom’s political, economic and cultural awakening. She had several children and was even regent, ruling until her son was old enough to do so, as Amenhotep I.

When she died, around the age of 70, this universally respected queen was deified — and worshipped for nearly five centuries.

HATSHEPSUT: From Queen to Pharaoh

When Thutmose II died, his Great Royal Wife and half-sister Hatshepsut served as co-regent for her nephew until he was old enough to rule. On the strength of her “divine birth” — the walls of her temple in Deir el-Bahari tell that the Sun god coupled with her mother so their daughter would one day take the throne — she replaced depictions of herself as a female queen with those of a pharaoh. She also had a new tomb dug into

the Valley of the Kings. She ruled for some 22 years under the name Maatkare (Maat, soul of Ra).

After her death at about 50 years of age, all traces of her were erased for reasons that remain unclear.

Queen **TIYE**, Great Royal Wife and Skilled Diplomat, Deified in Her Lifetime

The child of an important figure, Tiye was a young girl when a regency council decreed that the future Amenhotep III would marry her. Later, the pharaoh would dig a lake for his beloved in the middle of the desert.

This shrewd queen advised her husband on foreign affairs. She kept up her diplomatic correspondence even in widowhood.

Mother of Amenhotep IV, Tiye supported her son when he eliminated the worship of the Sun god Amun and other deities in favour of the worship of the Sun god Aten — and changed his own name to Akhenaten. A new era had begun, one that would see the beautiful Nefertiti appear on the scene.

Queen **NEFERTITI**, Great Royal Wife of Akhenaten

The origins of this queen of legendary beauty, who gave six daughters to her royal husband, remain a mystery.

In marrying Amenhotep IV, Nefertiti joined her husband's religious revolution. He later ruled under the name of Akhenaten. Never before had a royal couple been represented so often and with such intimacy: the pharaoh and his queen kiss, tenderly intertwined on a chariot, hold their children on their knee, or eat roast duck together as a family.

With the fluid "Amarna art" style born in Akhenaten's new capital, love and affection were expressed unreservedly for the first time in Ancient Egypt's iconography.

Queen **TUYA**, Great Royal Wife of Seti I and Mother of Ramses II

Tuya, also called Mut-Tuya to emphasize her role as a grandmother, came from a military family. After becoming the Great Royal Wife of one of the most important pharaohs, Seti I, she remained more or less in the background during the 13 years of his reign. The mother of four children, including the future Ramses II, Queen Tuya focused on her role as queen mother. She was both discreet and active, maintaining the tradition of stateswomen associated with Egypt's greatness.

It was as the pharaoh's mother, during the reign of Ramses II, that Tuya became famous, influential and revered. Ramses II contributed to that. To affirm his divine nature and consolidate his power, he invoked a legend that made him the son of Tuya and the god Amun-Ra.

Tuya died in the 22nd year of her son's reign, at more than 60 years of age. She was buried in the Valley of the Queens.

Queen **NEFERTARI**, Favourite Great Royal Wife of Ramses II

Nefertari, represented many times with her royal husband, including at the foot of the colossi of the great temple of Abu Simbel, remains a mystery. Who were her parents? The first to give Ramses II a presumptive heir, she is associated with the pharaoh's activities very early on. In year 1 of his reign, she accompanied him on an official voyage, gaining an understanding of a complex political machinery. She bore eight of Ramses' children. He had over 100 children.

For his beloved Nefertari, Ramses II built the most beautiful tomb discovered to date for an Egyptian queen in the Valley of the Queens — and a temple across from his own in the mountain of Abu Simbel.

Queen **ISETNOFRET**: Great Royal Wife of Ramses II and Nefertari's Rival?

Little is known about “the beautiful Isis.” Was she a Syrian commoner? Based on the rare depictions of Isetnofret, it is presumed she had more influence in Lower than in Upper Egypt — perhaps to avoid direct competition with the other Great Royal Wife, and Ramses II's favourite, Nefertari. It was nevertheless Isetnofret who bore Ramses II's eventual heir: Merenptah.