# The Amarna Period in Egypt

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The Amarna period in Egypt was a turbulent time in which many changes occurred. The period saw the rise and fall of the sun god Aten, as well as the rise and fall of his most ardent follower, Akhenaten, who was in power from 1353 BCE to 1936 BCE. Over 3,000 years have passed since the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the death of the Akhenaten. Scholars continue to research and debate the legacy the Amarna period left on Egypt. Although some scholars have dismissed Akhenaten, calling him the heretic king, the importance of his primary wife Queen Nefertiti has never been questioned. It cannot be refuted that Nefertiti was one of the most important women in ancient Egypt. There is so much focus placed on this dynamic woman that the other women in Akhenaten's life, such as Queen Kiya, are most often overlooked.

There has been a minimal amount of research done on Kiya. However, the research that has been done has proven that her power and importance at Amarna has been underestimated for thousands of years. Even through this realization, Kiya is still not given the credit she deserves. The evidence presented in this paper will demonstrate that Kiya deserves to take her rightful place in the history books because like Akhenaten's primary wife, Nefertiti, she is an influential woman in ancient Egyptian history.

Queen Kiya was a secondary wife of Akhenaten and she was a much more important figure than most people think. Queen Kiya held the title of "great beloved wife," a title itself that tells of the importance of Kiya in Akhenaten's life. Archaeological sources depict Kiya performing key priestly duties, and evidence shows that she was most likely Tutankhamun's mother. Although the research on Kiya is minimal, the archaeological and written sources come together like pieces of a puzzle

to shine light on Kiya's life and her role at Amama.

Records recovered from Amarna begin to discuss Kiya around year nine of Akhenaten's reign. There are several theories about her origins. She is identified by some scholars, such as Subhash Kak, as Mitannian princess Tadukhepa, daughter of King Tushratta. Mitanni was an Indic kingdom which had bonds with Egypt through marriage across several generations, including the Eighteenth Dynasty.2 By sending his daughter to Egypt at the beginning of Akhenaten's reign, Tushratta cemented relations between the two countries.3 Tadukhepa would have then taken on a pet name, as did many of the ladies of the harem. The name Kiya could be considered a contraction of the foreign name Tadukhepa.4

Records of Tadukhepa also surface during the reign of Akhenaten's father, Amenhotep III. Barry Kemp writes in Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Cilivation that Tadukhepa was sent from Mitanni to be a bride of Amenhotep III.5 Egyptologist Erik Horning's ideas parallel Kemp's. In Akhenaten and the Religion of the Light, he

writes about Kiya, "Even if she was a Mitannian, she cannot have been identical to Tadukhepa, whom Akhenaten inherited from the harem of his father." Horning also states that it is possible Kiya was one of 317 ladies-in-waiting who arrived in Egypt with princess Gilukhepa, daughter of the Mitannian king Sutarna II, where she was to marry Amenhotep III. Although the two theories propose very different things about who Kiya was, they both suggest that she came to Egpyt from Mittani. Both theories are convincing, yet no information has been found to favor one over the other. Whether or not Kiya was princess Tadukhepa will probably never be known for sure. The theories argued by both sides are convincing and supported by evidence, and therefore should be considered when researching Kiya.

When considering Kiya's importance, it is critical to examine the plethora of archaeological sources, such as reliefs and inscriptions, which help reveal her place at Amarna. Kiya played a vital role at her Sunshade temple at Maru-Aten located in the southern precincts at Amarna. The temple consisted of two walled areas which enclosed a series of shrines and altars, or 'Sunshades' assigned to royal women. The images and inscriptions found at the temple prove that the temple was not built for Nefertiti as originally thought, but for Kiya.\* This was confirmed when examining the expunged inscriptions on the temple. Dorothea Arnold writes in her article, "Aspects of the Royal Female Image During the Amarna Period," that Kiya's role at Maru-Aten suggests that "this royal woman must have had singular beauty and a truly important position in Akhenaten's life and religion." Having a temple built for oneself at Amarna signified a position of power and importance, something Kiya unquestionably possessed.

Archaeological sources also help uncover Kiya's role in Akhenaten's religion.

She was a devout worshipper of the sun god, Aten. Although it is often thought that Nefertiti was the only female who participated in religious ceremonies, it can be noted that Kiya officiated religious ceremonies along with her husband on several occasions. 

Arnold suggests that perhaps it was not Nefertiti alone who was a powerful figure in the religion of the Aten, but that there were other females, like Kiya, who also played important roles in Akhenaten's religion. 

An image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art depicts Kiya performing important priestly functions by herself (fig. 1). The relief shows water being poured over Kiya and the ray hands of the Aten. Although it is a very small piece, the image is best understood as a part of an offering scene that portrays Kiya's involvement in religion at Amarna.

There are a number of artifactual sources that depict Kiya. Many of these pieces attest to Kiya's importance at Amarna. Some sources show Kiya parallel to Akhenaten which indicates her power and her concrete relationship with Akhenaten. Cyril Aldred writes in Akhenaten King of Egypt, "The twin iconography was not conformed to Nefertiti but was also used to depict the unity of Akhenaten and his other consort 'the wife and great beloved of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt...Kiya.'"

Another archaeological piece found at Hermopolis in 1939 depicts Kiya represented at virtually the same scale as Akhenaten. The relief shows two conjoined heads in profile; the head on the left is Akhenaten and the head on the right is Kiya. Kiya is identified by the particular wig she is wearing. Reeves writes in Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet that this piece is significant because "it testifies to Kiya's importance at court..." (fig. 2).

Although it is normally the powerful queen Nefertiti who is seen represented on the same scale as Akhenaten, she was not the only one who received this honor.

Other archaeological sources shed light on Kiya's physical characteristics. Three similar plaster studies found at the workshop of Thutmose at el-Amarna portray Kiya. The plaster studies a young member of the royal court. Scholars agree that the masks represent Kiya because of the large earrings attached to the woman's earlobes. These

large earrings were often depicted in reliefs of Kiya (fig. 3).14

Arnold presents interesting information about a beautiful fragment of a queen made from yellow jasper in her article "An Artistic Revolution: The Early Years of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten." The fragment is thought to depict either Kiya or Nefertiti. Arnold believes it is more likely to be Kiya because the reconstructions of the head with the various off-the-neck crowns worn by Nefertiti are extremely unlikely. It is more likely that the jasper figurine depicts Kiya because the Nubian wig worn frequently by her fits when reconstructed with the fragment (fig. 4). If, in fact, the fragment does represent Kiya, she must have had a place of importance to have such a beautiful sculpture created for her. Many reliefs which depicted Kiya were changed after her disappearance from the royal court, when Akhenaten's daughter Princess Meretaten took over as the king's Chief Wife. At this point in time many archaeological pieces which had originally shown Kiya were changed to depict Meretaten. However, Kiya was not totally eradicated from the images, as traces of her can still be seen on many pieces.

Although Nefertiti and Kiya were both married to Akhenaten during his reign, they were very different in many ways. It is very obvious that they led completely different lives. Their titles alone suggest this. Nefertiti's title was 'Chief Wife' while Kiya's full, formal title was 'Greatly beloved wife of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, living on truth, lord of the Two Lands, Neferkheprurewaenre, [who is] the goodly child of the living Aten and who lives forever and eternity, Kiya.' While Nefertiti did have her own title, she never possessed a title like 'Great Beloved Wife.' While Nefertiti's title suggests that she held substantial political power at Amama and was an important part of the government, it is Kiya's title which is more personal. Her relationship with Akhenaten must have been one of love and compassion if he

chose to give her such a unique title.

Unlike Nefertiti, Kiya was never shown wearing a royal crown, such as the Blue Crown or the royal uraeus. Instead, Kiya is frequently shown wearing the Nubian wig. The wig was the most frequently worn hairstyle at Amarna and was worn by men, women, royals, and commoners alike. Royal women such as Queen Tiye and Nefertiti wore the Nubian wig on occasion, but it is Kiya who was shown wearing the wig most often. Kiya's lack of a crown could be interpreted by some to mean that she never possessed the power that Nefertiti did. However, as said before, Nefertiti's power was different than Kiya's. Nefertiti held political power which would have needed to be validated by a crown; Kiya possessed a different type of power that, perhaps, did not require her to wear a crown.

There are also many physical differences between Nefertiti and Kiya. The Thutmose studio portraits give substantial evidence of Kiya's appearance which Reeves calls, "pretty and accessible, a complete contrast with the cool, haughty beauty of Nefertiti."

Most reliefs show Kiya's neck not straightened, but "thrust forward

obliquely, as was common in portrayals of many royal women. These images also show that Kiya had a prominent chin, a full mouth, and an elegant neck. In comparison to Nefertiti's long, thin face, Kiya's was rounder, wider, her nose fleshier, her mouth softer, and her smile more relaxed. By looking at the two woman's physical characteristics it is not difficult to see that they were both beautiful in their own way. However, it is Nefertiti's beauty which stands out in history, not Kiya's. The differences between the relationships each woman had with Akhenaten, the tasks they performed at Amarna, and their physical characteristics show that Kiya and Nefertiti were radically diverse, yet each brought something to Akhenaten's reign that the other could not have.

Although it is known that Akhenaten had many children from his various wives, there is a great deal of speculation about the children Kiya bore him. It is known that Nefertiti gave Akhenaten six daughters. Kiya did not give Akhenaten as many children; she had one daughter and possibly one son, Tutankhamun.<sup>27</sup> Although the name of Kiya and Akhenaten's daughter has been lost, she is often shown with Kiya in various reliefs. These reliefs attest to the fact that Kiya did in fact give birth to a daughter even though there is no record of her name. In a relief preserved only in fragments, Kiya appears, along with her daughter, behind Akhenaten.<sup>28</sup> Two of Akhenaten and Nefertiti's daughters are lying on the ground in proskynesis, which literally means "kissing towards," behind Kiya and her daughter, showing that they have been relegated to second in rank.<sup>29</sup>

Kiya giving birth to Akhenaten's seventh daughter was most likely of little concern to a king who was still hoping for a male heir. James Allen argues in "The Amarna Succession" that one of the prime goals of his marriage to Kiya was so that she could hopefully give him a son. This is why the mystery that surrounds Tutankhamun's parentage is so interesting. Scholars are still unsure of whether Kiya was Tutankhamun's mother. This is a topic which deserves much more research because if the mystery of his parentage was solved, many other mysteries would be solved along with it.

Although many scholars agree that Kiya was Tutankhamun's mother, firm evidence is lacking to establish this. There is much speculation about Tutankhamun's parentage; something that Reeves writes in *The Complete Tutankhamun* is fueled by the fact that Nefertiti bore Akhenaten no sons. Reeves also states that the chronology of Kiya's appearance at Amarna around year nine and her supposed disappearance around year eleven does line up with the time of Tutankhamun's birth, but that alone is not enough to determine if she was his mother. The complete Tutankhamun's birth, but that alone is not enough to determine if she was his mother.

Reliefs which have been used as evidence by advocates of the Tutankhamun-Kiya connection were found in a chamber in Akhenaten's tomb at Amarna.<sup>33</sup> These wall reliefs depict the death of a woman in childbirth and a baby being handed off to a nurse. Some scholars believe the woman to be Kiya and the baby to be Tutankhamun, but the evidence is not completely clear.<sup>34</sup> Aldred states that being Tutankhamun's mother "would have added immeasurably to her appeal in oriental eyes," giving Kiya access to privileges only few were allowed."<sup>35</sup> If Kiya was Tutankhamun's mother it would explain why she enjoyed such exceptional privileges at the court of Amarna.

Since the evidence on Tutankhamun's parentage is uncertain, several scholars believe that Kiya was not the mother of Tutankhamun. Marc Gabolde argues in his

The theories which surround Kiya's death are almost as controversial as the ones that deal with her relationship to Tutankhamun. There are two likely scenarios regarding Kiya's death. Scholars are undecided on which is true, so all evidence must be considered. One is that she died in 1352 BCE, year eleven of Akhenaten's reign, after giving birth to Tutankhamun.<sup>39</sup> The other is that she died in year fourteen, most likely of natural causes.<sup>40</sup> Reeves is a supporter of the first theory. In The Complete Tutankhamun, he concludes that Kiya disappeared in year eleven, around the time of Tutankhamun's birth.<sup>41</sup> He repeats the statement in his book Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet.<sup>42</sup>

Other scholars believe Kiya disappeared later in Akhenaten's reign. Amold relies on a convincing piece of art which shows all six of Akhenaten and Nefertiti's daughters together in order to prove this. The piece of artwork was dated in the second month of year twelve. Less than two years later, Princess Meketaten died, for the last mention of her is in year thirteen. Arnold states that the deaths of Queen Tiye and Kiya followed closely behind the death of the princess. This would put Kiya's time of death around year fourteen. Arnold hints that the deaths of Queen Tiye and Kiya shook up the city of Amama because the city "began to show signs of growing instability: erasure of the names of traditional gods became frantic; the positions of the female members of the royal family changed..." Aldred's ideas about the year of Kiya's death parallel Arnold's. He writes in his book, Akhenaten King of Egypt, "Early in Year 14, on the death of the Chief Queen Nefertiti... The death of Kiya, also about the same time, obliged him to bury her in the Royal Tomb, or in a tomb nearby" which indicates that he believes that Kiya died sometime in year fourteen.

Although many believe Kiya could have died during childbirth, or from natural causes, Reeves implicates Nefertiti. When discussing Kiya's death in The Complete Tutankhamun, he writes, "But it is equally possible that she fell from grace, victim of a court intrigue engineered by the jealous Nefertiti; indeed, it may be no coincidence the meteoric rise in the status of Nefertiti seems to have begun in earnest only after Kiya's demise."

He reiterates his theory in Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet explaining that Kiya's popularity with Akhenaten must have posed a clear threat to Nefertiti, one which she could not have ignored. Reeves' theory could be a bit far-fetched, but it is certainly something worth drawing attention to. If the theory about Nefertiti changing her name to Nefernefruaten and becoming Akhenaten's co-regent is true, Reeves states this co-regency would have begun around year twelve of Akhenaten's reign. With Akhenaten's 'Great Beloved Wife' out of the picture, it would have been much easier for Nefertiti, now Nefernefruaten, to reenter his life.

After Kiya's death, Akhenaten first elevated his eldest daughter Meritaten to royal wife. Later, in year 15 Akhenaten married another one of his daughters by Nefertiti, Akhesenpaaten. These two princesses gave Akhenaten at least two more daughters. Although these princesses provided Akhenaten with companionship

after Kiya died, neither was given the title of 'Great Beloved Wife.' This shows that although Akhenaten married again after Kiya disappeared, no one could take the

special place she had at Amarna.

Although researchers have made considerable discoveries regarding various royals of the Amarna period, they have yet to discover Kiya's mummy or her definite place of burial. There are many theories about the mystifying secondary queen's final resting place. The secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council for Antiquities, Zahi Hawass, believes the more recent discovery of KV63, the first tomb found in the Valley of the Kings since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb (KV62) in 1922, could be the tomb of Queen Kiya.52 He said,

I announce today my belief that KV63 is indeed the tomb of King Tutankhamun's mother, Queen Kiya. The identification of KV63 as the final resting place of Queen Kiya helps to solve the riddle of the location of King Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings. KV63 faces KV62, making it clear that the tomb was for someone near and dear to king Tutankhamun.55

There was not a mummy found in the tomb but artifacts like embalming supplies, pillows, and oil were found.54 A coffin was also uncovered during the final phase of the digging. This coffin contained gilded collars, sticks, linen pieces, and clay fragments.55 Hawass notes that there could be a few other women to whom the tomb belonged to, such as Tutankhamun's wife Ankhesenamun, or his step-mother Nefertiti, but both are unlikely.54 Ankheseamun outlived Tutankhamun and is usually ruled out on that account.57 The tomb is also probably not Nefertiti's because KV63 is unfinished

and Hawass states that Nefertiti had plenty of time to carve out a tomb.50

Scholars also link Kiya to tomb KV55. Although the male corpse found in the tomb could not belong to Kiya, the coffin and canopic jars may. On an alabaster canopic jar with glass and stone inlay show faint hieroglyphs which prove the jar was originally inscribed for 'Greatly beloved wife of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, living on truth, lord of the Two Lands, Neferkheprurewaenre, [who is] the goodly child of the living Aten and who lives for ever and eternity, Kiya.' (fig. 5)." It is thought that KV55 was not the original burial place for the body or any of the burial equipment found in the tomb. In fact, Tomb fifty-five was, according to Reeves, "a hasty reburial of mother and son, accompanied by a random selection of funerary items originally prepared for other and very different owners - most notably the coffin and canopic jars, which had once belonged to a secondary wife of Akhenaten named Kiya."60 Although it is not known for certain where Kiya is buried, her funerary equipment being found in another's tomb suggests her own tomb may have been ransacked after her death.

When discussing Kiya, it seems there are not many certain answers to the aspects of her life. All of the research that has been compiled about her provides historians with few answers to important questions regarding her time at Amarna. The evidence does, however, prove that Kiya played an influential part at Amarna, in Akhenaten's life, and in the religion of the Aten. It is necessary to continue to research this mysterious woman in order to further demonstrate her importance. If Egyptologists solved some pieces of the puzzle involving the life story of secondary queen Kiya, other unsolved mysteries of the Amarna period, such as the parentage of Tutankhamun, would slowly unravel.

#### **Figures**



Figure 1. Relief showing the purification of the minor queen Kiya, later changed into Princess

Meretaten. Limestone.

Reprinted from Dorothea Arnold, "Aspects of the Royal Female Image During the Amarna Period," in *The Royal Women of Amarna: Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt*, Dorothea Arnold (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 106.



Figure 2. Among the mass of dismantled temple reliefs brought to light at el-Ashmuein (Hermopolis) in 1939 was this fragment with two conjoined heads in Egyptian profile – that on the left evidently Akhenaten himself, the head on the right, by its particular wig, a variant representation of Kiya. The fact that the two are represented at virtually the same scales testifies to Kiya's importance at court – we may guess following the birth of a male heir, Tutankhamun.

Reprinted from Nicholas Reeves, Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 159.

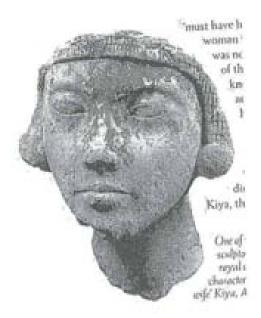


Figure 3. One of three closely similar plaster studies from the workshop of the sculptor
Thutmose at el-Amarna: a young, pretty member of royal court – to judge from the earrings
which seem to be a characteristic feature of her representations in relief, the 'greatly beloved wife'
Kiya, Akhenaten's mysterious 'other woman'.

Reprinted from Nicholas Reeves, Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 158.

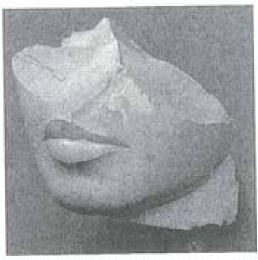


Figure 4. Fragment of a head of a queen. Yellow Jasper.

Reprinted from Dorothea Arnold, "An Artistic Revolution: The Early Years of King Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten," in *The Royal Women of Amama: Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt*, Dorothea Arnold (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 37.



Figure 5. New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, late reign of Alchenaten, ca. 1340–1336 B.C. Egyptian; From KV55, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes. Egyptian alabaster with glass and stone inlays; H. 20 1/2 in. (52.1 cm). Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915 (30.8.54).

Reprinted from Canopic Jar Lid [Egyptian; From KV55, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes] (30.8.54). Metropolitan Museum of Art. On-Line. Available from the Internet; http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/03/afe/hod\_30.8.54.htm. Accessed April 19 2007.

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