



THE GOLD MASK OF ANKHKHEPERURE NEFERNEFERUATEN

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Several years ago, in an essay which has still to appear, I sought to demonstrate that the famous gold mask from KV 62 had been created not for Tutankhamun but for the use of a female predecessor, Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten—Akhenaten’s co-regent.² The evidence in favor of this conclusion was—and still is—compelling. Nevertheless, I was able to muster for it no inscriptional support: detailed scrutiny, both of the mask itself and of photographs, furnished not the slightest hint that the multi-columned hieroglyphic inscription with cartouche might pre-date Tutankhamun’s reign.

Happily, this reluctant presumption of the mask’s textual integrity may now be abandoned. A fresh examination of the re-positioned and newly re-lit mask in Cairo at the end of September 2015 yielded for the first time, beneath the hieroglyphs of Tutankhamun’s prenomen, lightly chased traces of an earlier, erased royal name. What is more, thanks to the kind cooperation of Mahmoud Al-Halwagy, then Director of the Cairo Museum, and the Museum’s talented and obliging photographer, Ahmed Amin, it proved possible to secure an exceptionally clear image of this palimpsest (Figure 1).

Given its significance, I was naturally keen to share this discovery with specialist colleagues, from whom I also sought input: for, although the opening signs of the underlying text were obvious enough, those traces close to the cartouche’s “tie” were proving difficult to disentangle. My request for aid evoked responses from both Ray Johnson and Marc Gabolde, and for their contributions to this note I am extremely grateful. Not only has our collaboration resulted in a reasonably definitive reconstruction of the name-form originally borne by the mask, but this name indeed confirms the conclusion I had reached previously on non-inscriptional grounds—namely, that Tutankhamun’s headpiece had been prepared originally for the co-regent Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten.

The changes to which the mask’s cartouche had been subjected are presented in a drawing by Gabolde (Figure 2). Above, in green, we see the present, Tutankhamun-era inscription, with visible portions of the earlier, underlying

text highlighted in red; below, in yellow, is the agreed reconstruction of this original name.

The easiest elements to recognize within the erased text are three floating legs of a *hpr*-hieroglyph. Positioned somewhat to the left of the superimposed *hpr* of Tutankhamun’s prenomen *nb-hprw-r^c* (Nebkheperure), space had originally been reserved on the right to accommodate a separate sign with rounded top and vertical base—evidently an *ḥnh*. In combination with the remains of three short verticals beneath the later plural strokes of the Tutankhamun *hprw* and a heavily re-emphasized *r^c*, what these traces plainly spell out, from right to left, is the prenomen *ḥnh-hprw-r^c*—“Ankhkheperure.”

There exist, of course, two versions of the Ankhkheperure prenomen: the first, incorporating an epithet associating the owner with Akhenaten, was a form employed exclusively by the female co-regent Neferneferuaten; use of the second, without epithet, appears to have been restricted to the pharaoh Smenkhkare. As the positioning of its opening traces suggests, the version originally carried by the gold mask had been that with epithet – an impression confirmed by the shadow-outline of a long, rectangular sign consistent with the hieroglyph *mr*, “beloved (of),” which physically underlies the *nb* of *nb-hprw-r^c*.

What had initially puzzled me about this earlier cartouche was the seemingly limited space left for the writing of this epithet: it was inadequate for any of the forms currently attested for Neferneferuaten. The explanation would be provided by Ray Johnson. He recognized that the cartouche employed by Tutankhamun was in fact an appreciably *shortened* version of the Neferneferuaten oval which had formerly occupied this position, with the area freed-up by that earlier cartouche’s reduction in size filled by the two vertical signs *m^{3c} hrw*, “true of voice.”

What, then, had been the precise form of the Ankhkheperure epithet in this earlier and longer cartouche? Shallow traces of a long and a short vertical to the left of the discerned *mr*, “beloved (of),” suggest an

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answer. While other identifications of these cuts could be argued (for example, as elements of a reed-leaf *i*, which would imply an employment of the rare epithet *mr itm*, “beloved of the Aten”), the most likely reconciliation of the

surviving traces is surely *nfr*. This would point towards the far more commonly encountered designation *mr nfr-hprw-rꜥ*, “beloved of Neferkheperure” (i.e. of Akhenaten). A likely arrangement of these signs is proposed in Figure 2.



Figure 1: Detail of the inscription on the gold mask showing cartouche containing Tutankhamun's prenomen (photograph by Ahmed Amin, Cairo Museum)

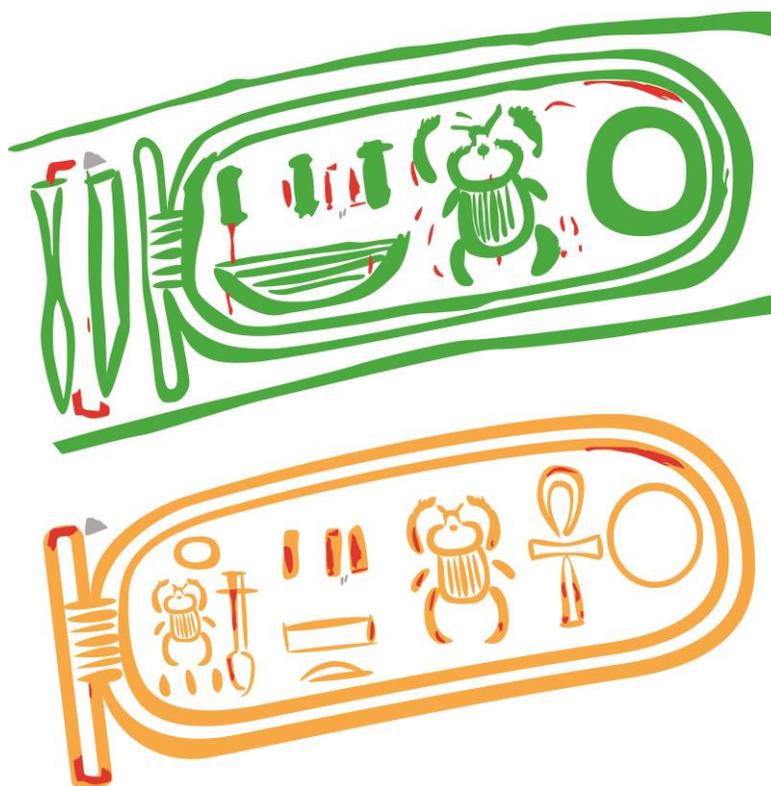


Figure 2: Drawing illustrating: (upper) the present, Tutankhamun-era inscription (green) with visible portions of the earlier, underlying text (red); (lower) the original name (yellow) as reconstructed on the basis of these still-visible traces (red) (drawing by Mark Gabolde)

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NOTES

- ¹ With the collaboration of Marc Gabolde and W. Raymond Johnson.
- ² Nicholas Reeves, "Tutankhamun's Mask Reconsidered," in Adela Oppenheim and Ogden Goelet (eds.), *The Art and Culture of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Dorothea Arnold. Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 19 (2014): 511–526 (in press). Earlier summaries of this article include Reeves, "Tutankhamun's Mask Reconsidered," in *Valley of the Kings Since Howard Carter, Symposium*, 4

November 2009: Book of Abstracts (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2009): 12; Reeves, "Tutankhamun's Mask," information panel provided in 2014 for the replica of Tutankhamun's tomb (see https://www.academia.edu/7516977/Tutankhamuns_Gold_Mask_2014); Reeves, "Everywhere the Glint of Gold: The Mystery of Tutankhamun's Mask," *Octavian Report* 1.3 (2015): 29.