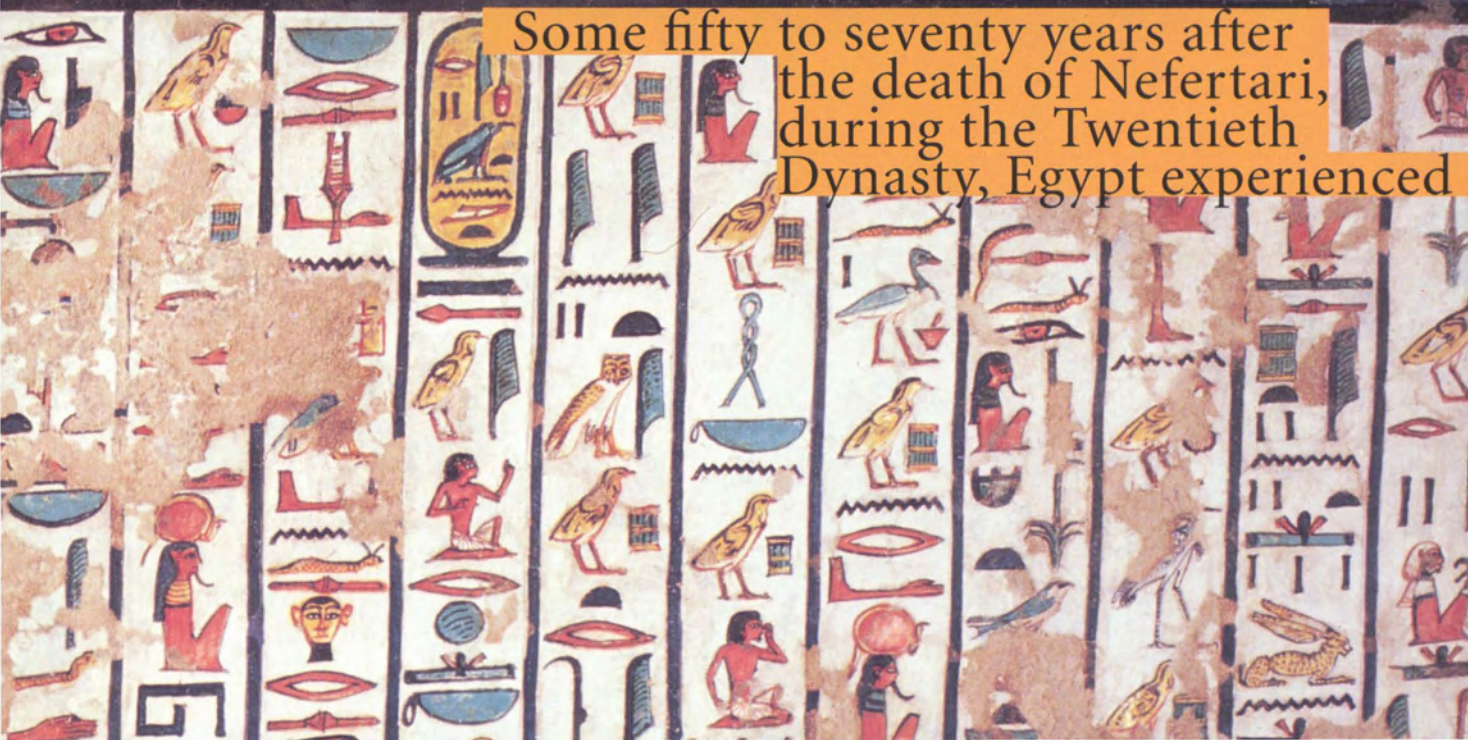






Some fifty to seventy years after the death of Nefertari, during the Twentieth Dynasty, Egypt experienced





*A piece of embossed gold foil bearing Nefertari's name and an epithet "true of voice" discovered in 1988 by one of the tomb's conservators.*

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The upper west wall of Chamber C. Nefertari, masked and mummified lies on a bier with the goddesses Nephthys and Isis in their kite form at her head and feet. Next to Nephthys is the benu bird, associated with resurrection. Beside Isis is a water god symbolizing abundance of years.*

several severe economic depressions, brought on in part by the loss of gold mines

and deteriorating relations with allies in the Near East. For an economy based on precious metal, the loss of the mines amounted to a financial catastrophe.

Sit-down strikes by the necropolis workers in Thebes occurred in the twenty-ninth year of Rameses III (about 1165 B.C.E.). Workmen laid down their tools and marched to the Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Rameses the Great, seeking back wages. The disputed payments consisted mostly of grain and oil, which the workmen had ample reason to believe were sequestered in huge, mud-brick storehouses that today still stand behind the temple. Despite assurances from government officials, the back wages did not materialize until the workmen called a second strike, one involving their wives and children.

Not surprisingly under such circumstances, a cottage industry in tomb robbery arose. Apart from its spiritual function, the necropolis was a vast treasure trove of liquid wealth just waiting to be pillaged. All one had to do was muster the courage to break into a tomb and strip the mummies of their gold and jewels.

The situation became acute during the reign of Rameses IX (1125–1107 B.C.E.). In the sixteenth year of his reign, there was a rash of tomb robberies. Court proceedings preserve the testimony of people who knew about or had participated in the looting. Charges were hurled against local officials and even the mayor of western Thebes who were accused of conniving with workmen to rob tombs.

A generation later, the situation had grown even worse. The Theban priests of the Twenty-first Dynasty (1070–945 B.C.E.) were so alarmed that they gathered whatever royal mummies they could locate and secured them in places of safety. Two such caches have been discovered, one in the tomb of Amenhotep II in the Valley of the Kings, and a second in an Eleventh-Dynasty tomb belonging to a minor queen named In-hapy.

Neither sign nor mention of Nefertari's mummy has been found apart from some telltale fragments of her remains, discovered by Schiaparelli in 1904. Considering the extreme vulnerability of the tombs in the Valley of the Queens, it seems likely that Nefertari's tomb was robbed as long ago as 1109 B.C.E.; yet no one can know what took place inside the tomb for some three thousand years.

In addition to the mummy fragments, Schiaparelli discovered that the tomb still held pieces of the queen's rose granite

sarcophagus, thirty-four servant figurines (*ushabtis*, believed to be essential for the deceased to become an Osiris), several large glazed earthenware vases, and an enamel knob bearing the name of King Ay.

In 1904, some items of the queen's personal jewelry appeared on the antiquities market in Luxor and were purchased by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. These included a large plaque of gilded silver, a small plaque made of embossed sheet gold, a gilded bronze pendant in the shape of a lily, and four servant figurines. Although the exact origin of this jewelry is unknown, there is every reason to suppose it was part of the queen's burial equipment.

Astonishingly, in 1988, while trying to reattach a section of wall plaster, one of the tomb's conservators discovered a piece of embossed gold foil. The ornament bore Nefertari's name and the epithet "true of voice." The title is a customary designation for a deceased person and a strong indicator that the bracelet was made expressly for the great queen's burial.

*Nefertari's sandals were among the few objects that escaped looting. Photo: J. Hyde.*

