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Bold, Black and Beautiful! There's a New Face on Ancient Egypt

By Alex P. Kellogg, BET.com Staff Writer

Posted August 13, 2003 -- Nefertiti, is that you?



Well, a team of British scientists thinks this may be what ancient Egypt's most powerful queen looked like.

Damian Schofield of Nottingham University and Martin Evison of Sheffield University, both in the United Kingdom, reconstructed the face of this bronze-skinned beauty from a 3,400-year-old unidentified skull discovered in 1898 and forgotten for nearly 100 years. They applied their forensic expertise in examining digital X-rays of skulls, the same science used to identify unknown murder victims.

Neither scientist was given any indication of whose face they were reconstructing before they started.

Schofield and Evison generated this image by first making a 3-D computer grid of the woman's skull. They then placed a series of markers on that grid to indicate where tissue should be added. The next stage involved adding facial muscles. In the final step, a graphic designer added skin texture, eyes, lips, head, a crown and jewelry like that Nefertiti has been shown wearing.

When they finished, they were astonished at how closely their computer creation -- a Black woman with striking, angular features -- resembled that of surviving busts of Nefertiti.

Despite the resemblance, however, both scientists acknowledge that it's not enough to prove that the skull is that of Nefertiti. But British

Egyptologist Joann Fletcher, of the University of York, who led investigation into the neglected skull, said the resemblance is remarkable.

"I was bowled over by it, to be honest," Fletcher told *USA Today* .
"The face is that of a very strong individual, indeed. She has such a beautiful profile. She is stunning."

Nefertiti married Akhenaten when he was a pharaoh-in-waiting. He later gained fame -- and infamy -- for being Egypt's first ruler to believe in one god. While he pushed his subjects to worship Ra, the Sun God, as the only true divinity, he ruled over an empire that for centuries had believed in dozens of divinities.

He ruled from 1353 to 1336 B.C. with his wife as his near equal, an unprecedented move at the time. He died under suspicious circumstances and is widely speculated to have been the victim of foul play. Nefertiti died three years later. Her body has never been positively identified but there is speculation that she may have ruled for some time after Akhenaten's death.

One of the most powerful women of the ancient world, her name means, "The beautiful [or perfect] woman has come." British scientists first announced in June that the long forgotten skull may be hers.

Are you surprised that scientists are conceding that one of history's most beautiful women was a Black woman? Tell us what you think by clicking "Discuss Now."

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