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ANCIENT EGYPT: THE PATH TO ETERNITY

RECONSTRUCTION AND INTERPRETATION
OF THE PAINTING PROGRAM OF NEFERTARI'S TOMB
AN ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN FUNERARY ART

A digital reconstruction project for a UNESCO World Heritage Site,
this architectural, cultural, and artistic monument of Ancient Egypt.

The Second Edition (Work in progress)

!_IMPORTANT_! The translation of a book fragment was done
by artificial intelligence.

_NOTE:: Expanded illustrations for the book and additional information
are available on the project's website.

www.nefertaritomb.com

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Chapter IV

Cultural heritage of world significance



In the 1930s, Nefertari's tomb was closed to tourists and Egyptologists due to the threat of plaster crumbling. Access to the tomb was restricted to specialized scientists monitoring its condition. Professional photographers also occasionally documented the paintings for Egyptologists and researchers to prevent them from visiting the monument itself.

In 1976, the National Gallery of the Grand Palais in Paris held the first major exhibition dedicated to the era of Ramesses the Great, which featured a life-size model of Nefertari's tomb¹. Then, in 1978, the same exhibition was shown at the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid. Then, from 1984 to 1985, it was shown in Munich, Berlin, and Hildesheim as part of the program "Nefertari, the Beauty of Ancient Egypt." Completing the exhibition cycle, in 1986, the tomb model was shown as part of the program "Ramesses the Great and His Time" in Montreal (Palais de la Civilization), Brussels (Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire), Barcelona (Caja de Pensiones), and Geneva (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire)².

On November 12, 1992, the Getty Museum (Los Angeles) opened the exhibition "In the tomb of Nefertari: conservation of the wall paintings" to mark the completion of the tomb's conservation work by the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI)³. A separate section in the book will be devoted to this grandiose and important project.

The exhibition "Nefertari: Light of Egypt" (Nefertari: Luce d'Egitto) was held in Rome at the Palazzo Ruspoli from October 6, 1994 to February 19, 1995. A large catalogue⁴ was prepared for it, describing the objects on display, as well as a detailed report by the GCI on the work carried out on the burial.

In the summer of 2016, the tomb was reopened for tourist visits with expensive tickets with a visit limit of up to 15 minutes in small groups of up to 10 people, but on March 2, 2024, it was closed again⁵.

4.2 Getty Conservation Institute Project

As early as 1934⁶, the Ministry of Antiquities (MAA) recognized the risk of keeping the tomb open to visitors, so the government decided to close it. An early report, published in the MAA's 1940 yearbook, noted that the condition of the painted plaster in Nefertari's tomb had noticeably deteriorated compared to 1904⁷. Since the early 1970s, several organizations, including UNESCO, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, Cairo University, and Canadian and Italian teams have conducted a series of studies into the condition of several important tombs, including Nefertari's⁸. In September 1985, the EAO and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) signed an agreement to conduct a joint conservation project to preserve the endangered paintings of Nefertari's tomb, approximately 20% of which had already been irretrievably lost. Previously, since the tomb's discovery, there had been numerous ad hoc conservation attempts. From 1934 to 1977, numerous restoration experiments were conducted, with varying degrees of scale, effectiveness, and success⁹. Everything changed on September 8, 1986, almost a year after its

¹ <http://passion-egypte.fr/site/index.php/albums-photos/le-mans-musee-de-tesse/tombe-de-nefertari/category/3> (date of access 2025-11-04).

² Corzo M. A., Afshar M. Art and Eternity. Los Angeles, 1993. P. 101.

³ Getty Conservation Institute.

⁴ Corzo M. A. Nefertari: Luce d'Egitto. Roma, 1994.

⁵ The information is valid for 2016–2026.

⁶ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 18.

⁷ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 20.

⁸ Rivista Le Scienze, N. 384 Agosto 2000, P. 74.

⁹ Corzo M. A. Wall paintings of the tomb of Nefertari: scientific studies for their conservation. Cairo, 1987. P. 35.

founding, when GCI and the EAO began a six-year conservation project to preserve the tomb's murals¹⁰. An international group of specialists from seven countries on four continents was formed¹¹, Experts in the conservation and preservation of wall paintings were brought in from various fields of science—geology, chemistry, and microbiology. To prevent further deterioration of the plaster and repair existing damage, GCI and EAO carried out three phases of work. The tomb conservation team was led by Italian restorers Paolo and Laura Mora; Spanish restorer Eduardo Porta served as the project's field coordinator. The entire process included a condition assessment, scientific analysis, conservation of the wall paintings, and training of restorers from Egypt and other countries. Work on the tomb was officially completed in the spring of 1992; approximately six million German marks were spent over seven years of research and conservation work¹².



>> Figure_4.2.01. The conservation process of the tomb of Nefertari GCI and EAO
Photo // Guillermo Aldana

Saving such a unique architectural monument as the tomb of Nefertari requires highly professional specialists and modern technical equipment (Figure 4.2.01¹³ shows the GCI and EAO conservation process).

_NOTE:: To better understand the geographical features of the Valley of the Queens, photographs taken by spacecraft were studied: Gemini XII in 1966, Landsat satellites since 1972 and the Large Format Camera (LFC) of the space shuttle in 1984¹⁴.

The first stage of the work (June 1986 – November 1987) was an assessment of the condition of the wall paintings and the development of a general conservation strategy for the tomb. In November and December 1986, a survey and graphic recording of the actual state of preservation of the painted plaster was conducted to provide a visual representation of the tomb's condition. Once in Rome, graphic sketches were

¹⁰ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 21.

¹¹ Corzo M. A. Nefertari: Luce d'Egitto. Roma, 1994. P. 39.

¹² Schmidt H. C., Willeitner J. Nefertari. Mainz, 1994. P. 102. The dollar to the German mark exchange rate in 1992 was approximately 1.5; adjusted for inflation and adjusted for today (August 2025), the CGI and EAO work would cost approximately US\$9,275,000.

¹³ <https://www.getty.edu/news/processing-the-material-record-of-the-tomb-of-nefertari-project/> (date of access 2025-11-04).

¹⁴ Corzo M. A. Wall paintings of the tomb of Nefertari: scientific studies for their conservation. Cairo, 1987. P. 46.

made from scale photographs, which served as the basis for further work, which consisted of recording the various degrees of loss or threat of loss of the painted plaster. On transparent sheets of 50 × 70 cm format, the corresponding data with legends were recorded over the graphic sketches, creating graphic tables with a database of the degradation of the tomb of Nefertari (Fig. 4.2.02¹⁵). In total, about two hundred such tables with topographic indications were made, giving a complete picture of the condition of the painted plaster in the burial of the queen in 1986¹⁶.

But most importantly, emergency work was carried out to strengthen particularly vulnerable areas of the tomb, which was carried out from April 5 to June 30, 1987¹⁷. Analysis and assessment of the walls' condition revealed that the primary cause of the paintings' deterioration was the presence of sodium chloride, or salt, in the limestone and plaster. When exposed to moisture, it dissolved and gradually migrated to nearby surfaces, specifically the painted plaster. When the water evaporated, the salt crystallized. Consequently, in some parts of the tomb, the resulting crystals began to corrode the paint, turning it to dust. But the main problem lay in the areas where the largest and hardest crystals had formed between the limestone and the plaster, pushing the plaster away from the stone and destroying its integrity. During their study and analysis of the tomb, scientists discovered several sources of moisture: 1) water that initially seeped from the damp plaster during the tomb's construction; 2) rainwater seeping through cracks in the rock from the surface, as well as through the entrance to the tomb; 3) water vapor from the atmosphere and moisture exhaled by visitors to the tomb¹⁸.



>> Figure_4.2.02. Inspection of the condition of the side chamber [G] of the wall [G2].

The assessment of the tomb's condition involved a four-stage analysis focusing on: the condition of the foundation (1, top left); changes in the painted plaster layer (2, top right); the typology and localisation of foreign matter, mainly salt (3, bottom left); and the physical results of previous interventions, some dating back to the tomb's discovery in 1904 and others from a later date (4, bottom right).

Another cause of the plaster's degradation is the presence of bacteria in the tomb, as determined by Hideo Arai, an expert in the biodegradation of cultural heritage sites. He was the first member of the conservation team to enter, taking air samples inside the queen's tomb and establishing a baseline level of

¹⁵ Corzo M. A. *Afshar M.* Art and Eternity. Los Angeles. 1993. P. 69.

¹⁶ Corzo M. A. Wall paintings of the tomb of Nefertari: scientific studies for their conservation. Cairo, 1987. P. 114.

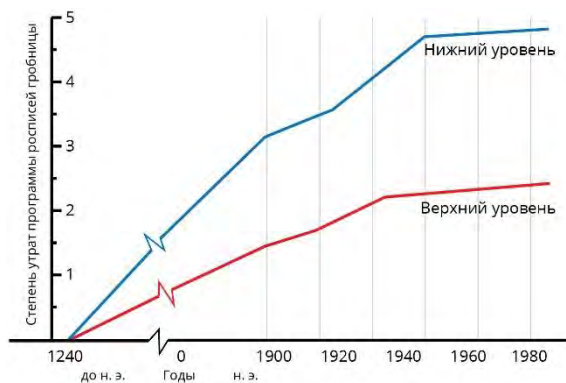
¹⁷ Corzo M. A., *Afshar M.* Art and Eternity. Los Angeles, 1993. P. 71.

¹⁸ Monitoring the Environment in the Ancient Tomb of Nefertari. *Vaisala News*, 151, 1999. P. 13–14.

bacterial activity. A second sample was taken three days later, after only six people had entered the tomb. The results showed a 300% increase in bacteria count. Arai's data, along with additional evidence collected later, demonstrated that relative humidity above 70% can promote bacterial growth and biological activity in the tomb, which ultimately played a significant role in the debate over restricting public access to Nefertari's tomb. In addition to the effects of bacteria and the presence of salts in the rock, concerns are raised by the composition of the plaster itself, which was made from gypsum mixed with sand, clay, and crushed straw. It could have completely dehydrated over centuries, causing it to shrink and detach from the stone base¹⁹. Thus, it is possible to make an assumption about the reasons for such extensive collapses of plaster on the walls [K3] and [K7] in the northern part of the burial chamber [K], as well as in the Northern chamber [Q].



>> Figure_4.2.03. Crystallization of salt deposits in rock, fragment of the ceiling of the northern chamber [Q]
Photo // Dmitry Petrenko



>> Figure_4.2.04. A timeline of the degradation process of Nefertari's tomb
Scheme // K. M. Wilson-Yang, George Burns

Figure 4.2.04²⁰ shows the degradation dynamics of the painted plaster in Nefertari's tomb throughout the 20th century. The diagram shows the degree of loss along the ordinate axis, where: 0 - no change; 1 - losses noticeable upon close inspection; 2 - noticeable minor losses; 3 - significant losses of important parts of the painting program; 4 - massive losses of entire blocks; 5 - complete loss of the entire painting program. The difference in the volume of losses on the upper and lower levels of the tomb can also be seen.

Table 1. Phases of GCI work in the tomb

Phase	Period	Days
I	February 1 – April 1, 1988	71
II	October 14 – December 13, 1988	61
III	October 7 – December 17, 1989	72
IV	February 2 – April 6, 1990	63
V	October 11 – December 15, 1990	66
VI	October 7 – December 17, 1991	72
VII	February 3 – April 7, 1992	64
Total		469

Following the initial assessment and emergency measures, all major works to save the monument were divided into seven phases²¹. In 1987, while a group of scientists analyzed the tomb's condition and mapped all problem areas, a team of specialists studied conservation methods in the laboratory. The second phase (November 1987 – December 1988) focused on the full-scale conservation of the wall paintings, beginning

¹⁹ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 22-24.

²⁰ The graph is based on the study in Figure 9. Wilson-Yang K. M., Burns G. The stability of the tomb of Nefertari 1904-1987, Studies in Conservation 34, London, 1989. P. 153-170, fig. 9.

²¹ Corzo M. A., Afshar M. Art and Eternity. Los Angeles, 1993. P. 72.



>> Figure_4.2.06. Restorer Lorenza D'Alessandro at work in the tomb of Nefertari, 1988
Photo // Guillermo Aldana

The conservation process of any monument is extremely complex and requires meticulous work, which must be approached with the utmost responsibility and involves the use of specialized equipment and technologies. The first step was to fix the crumbling plaster, first cleaning the surface of salt and treating dusty areas with compressed air. The most contaminated fragments required specialized chemicals. Where possible, a layer of special insulating solution was applied between the wall and the painted plaster²⁴, which would minimally interact with moisture and change its volume upon drying to prevent re-penetration of water and sodium chloride. For the simplest areas, where small fragments of plaster had not yet crumbled but were just beginning to peel, special strips of Japanese paper (2 x 7 cm) made from mulberry bark were used to secure them²⁵, which were then coated with acrylic resin. In more difficult areas, where large sections of plaster were peeling off, they were protected from crumbling in the same way, replacing the paper with cotton gauze napkins (especially on the ceiling)²⁶. In total, about ten thousand protective “bandages” were applied to the walls and ceiling.²⁷ During the conservation work, many photographs were taken not only of the wall paintings, but also of the process itself (Fig. 4.2.06²⁸ and 4.2.07²⁹).

²⁴ The mortar consisted of washed, desalted local sand and gypsum in a 3:1 ratio. Water was added as needed to make the mortar flowable. In some cases, the amount of water was reduced to produce a quick-drying mixture. In other cases, three to five drops of acrylic resin solution were added to the mortar to slow drying and prevent moisture absorption by the sensitive painted plaster. Particularly large voids were filled with stone chips, which were then added to the mortar mixture. Where large quantities of mortar were required, a drier mixture was used to avoid the risk of moisture seeping into the plaster. *McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S.* In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 30–31.

²⁵ In literature it is also found as mulberry bark, which has the advantage of extremely strong and light fibers.

²⁶ *Schmidt H. C., Willeitner J.* Nefertari. Mainz, 1994. P. 102.

²⁷ *McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S.* In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 28.

²⁸ *Rivista Le Scienze*, N. 384 Agosto 2000, P. 72.

²⁹ *Schmidt H. C., Willeitner J.* Nefertari. Mainz, 1994. P. 102–103.

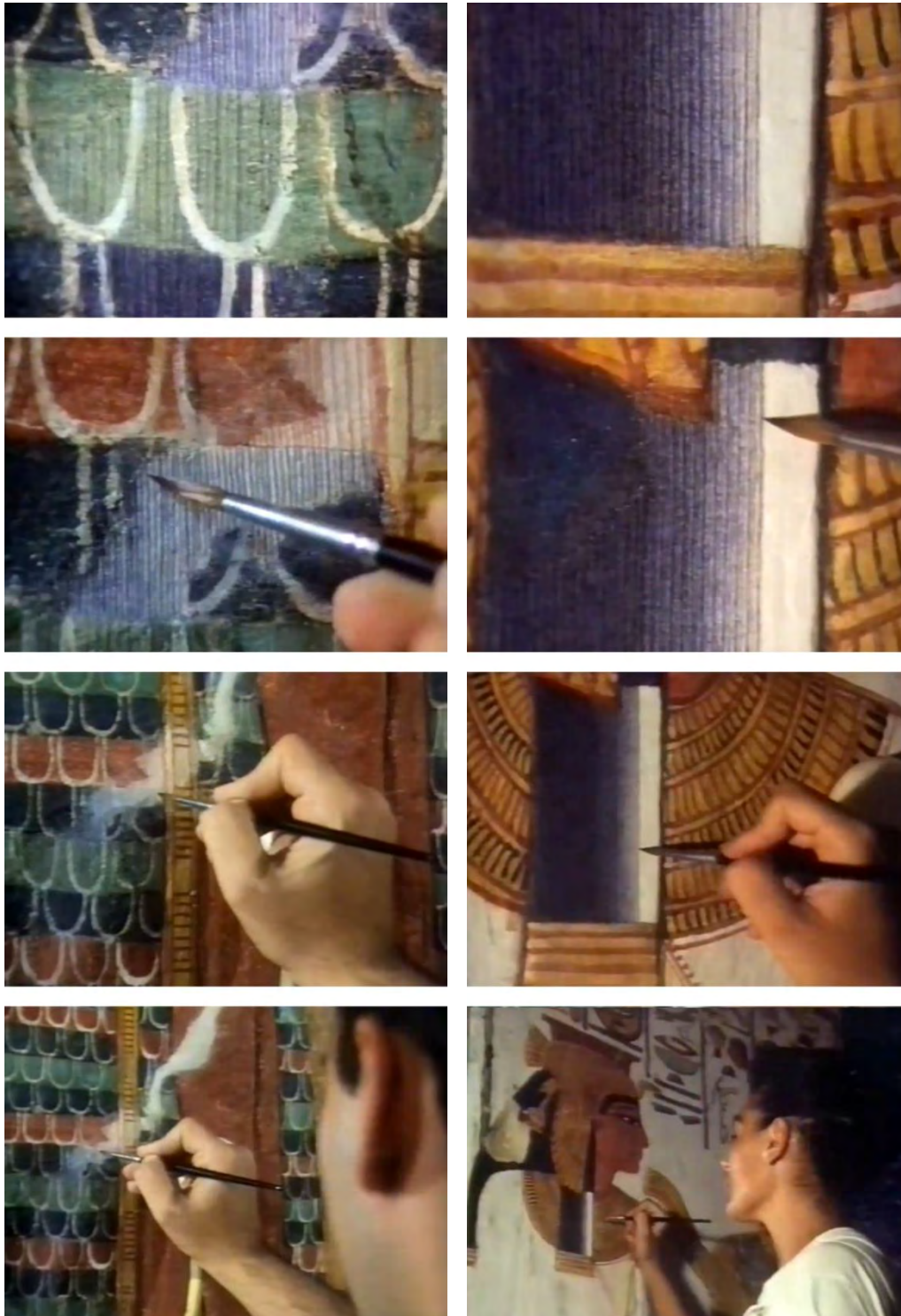


>> Figure_4.2.07. The conservation process of the tomb of Nefertari GCI and EAO
Photo // Alberto Siliotti

!_IMPORTANT_! Chemical analysis of the pigment in Nefertari's tomb revealed that over time, the binders (primarily gum arabic) had been lost in some areas of the painted plaster. This loss rendered the pigment so fragile that it could be rubbed off with a simple flick of the finger. In these particularly challenging areas, the conservation team restored the pigment using acrylic glue³⁰.

³⁰ Corzo M. A. Nefertari: Luce d'Egitto. Roma, 1994. P. 42.

At one stage of the work, attempts were made to reconstruct obviously missing fragments of painted plaster, as seen in Denis Moriarty's documentary mentioned earlier. In Figure 4.2.08, I have compiled several still frames capturing the reconstruction process. This was painstaking and difficult work, but it was abandoned to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous scholars, bringing the skill of modern artists to the original ancient monument.



>> Figure_4.2.08. GCI reconstruction process of painted plaster fragments in the tomb of Nefertari

Photo collage // Denis Moriarty

Figure 4.2.09 shows that fragments of the painted plaster on Atum's throne, loincloth, and right arm have been lost over time. The central image³¹ shows an attempt to reconstruct these areas in the 1950s, but GCI specialists removed the modern paint layer and sealed the crumbled areas with a special solution to prevent further loss of the plaster.



>> Figure_4.2.09. The state of the tomb, as illustrated by the image of Atum: at the time of its discovery (left); before conservation work (center); and after (right)

Photos // on the left: Archivio Museo Egizio C01680; in the center: Ekkehard Ritter; on the right: Andrey Plaksin

Conservation of the wall paintings was completed and documented³² during the third phase (November 1989 – April 1992). Conservation and preservation work on the tomb itself began with the lower level in February 1988 and was completed in April 1992 on the upper level. According to the team, no additional restoration work was carried out during this period; only the original paintings were preserved: "We conserve and stabilize, but we do not add or reconstruct. For example, in the case of Nefertari's tomb, gaps and areas that had lost paint—either extensively or sparingly—were covered with mud plaster, specially prepared from local materials, in a textured manner aesthetically compatible with the tomb's environment"³³.

_NOTE:: During excavation of the tomb in February 1988³⁴, GCI workers found a fragment of gold jewelry (Fig. 4.2.10³⁵), likely a bracelet³⁶, apparently unnoticed by either ancient robbers or tourists for over 3,200 years. Resin adhering to the fragment indicates that it was originally worn by a mummy. It resembles a segment of a New Kingdom bracelet or necklace and measures 38 mm long and 25 mm wide. The find was assigned to the eastern chamber [O]³⁷.

³¹ Goedicke H., *Thausing G. Nofretari*. Graz, 1971. pl. 39.

³² The Nefertari Tomb Project Archive is a report on the work carried out by GCI in collaboration with the EAO. Here, the authors provide information on the organization of the archival records for this work, the process of creation, and the archive's contents. <http://archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/IA30008/IA30008.xml> (date of access 2025-11-04).

³³ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In *The Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings*. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 10.

³⁴ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In *The Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings*. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 31.

³⁵ Schmidt H. C., Willeitner J. *Nefertari*. Mainz, 1994. P. 87.

³⁶ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-04-18-me-991-story.html> (date of access 2025-11-04).

³⁷ https://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/field_projects/nefertari/nefertari10.html (date of access 2025-11-04).



>> Figure_4.2.10. Fragment of a gold bracelet
Photo // Alberto Siliotti

In addition to conservation, cleaning work was performed on the wall paintings: layers of dirt and dust were removed, revealing the true colors of the relief images. After completing any process, the conservation and restoration team leaves a small area, called a control square, untouched. There are two such squares in Nefertari's tomb, one on the upper level and one on the lower (Fig. 4.2.11, left and center). Similar sections are made before any work begins to assess the quality of the pigment and its response to cleaning reagents and preparations (Fig. 4.2.11, right).



>> Figure_4.2.11. Control squares after completion of all works in the tomb of Nefertari, wall [C7] (left), wall [K1] (center); control square before the start of cleaning and conservation in the tomb of Seti I, KV17 (right)
Photo // Andrey Plaksin

The damage caused by time, nature, and man has been halted, and the surviving images have regained their original elegance. Now, the future of Nefertari's tomb must remain a priority, for no matter how successful the GCI and EAO's conservation efforts, the tomb will have to be rebuilt if the environment is not strictly controlled. It was this consideration that prompted the GCI and EAO project's technical committee to meet in Luxor in May 1989³⁸.

³⁸ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 32.



>> Figure 4.2.12. Restorers Paolo and Laura Mora and their team of conservation specialists
Valley of the Queens Necropolis, April 1992

Tomb condition monitoring system

To preserve Nefertari's tomb, a unique architectural monument, for future generations, its microclimate must be carefully monitored and controlled, maintaining relative humidity at 45% or lower. The tomb is partially self-ventilated early in the morning and around sunset, when the temperature inside exceeds the outside temperature. Hot air rising from the tomb mixes with cooler air flowing down the ramp. Unfortunately, preliminary tests indicate that the tomb's microenvironment, as measured by relative humidity and carbon dioxide levels, is rapidly degrading due to the large number of visitors, while its ability to recover is much lower and may even be limited³⁹.

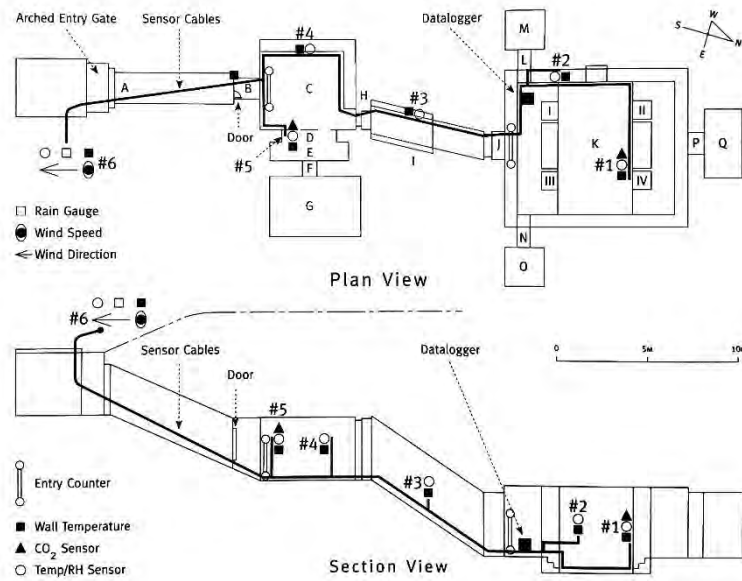
A team of specialists led by Paolo and Laura Mora (Fig. 4.2.12⁴⁰) conducted numerous tests in the tomb between August 1991 and April 1992 to determine the dynamics of microenvironmental changes for the long-term preservation of the painted plaster. During the tests, conditions inside and outside the tomb were documented and analyzed, enabling the formulation of appropriate recommendations. For the safety and comfort of tourists, and most importantly, the preservation of the paintings, it was proposed to strictly limit visits to the tomb during the summer months, when the baseline relative humidity is high and natural ventilation is minimal.

In addition to temperature and humidity monitoring, carbon dioxide levels were also recorded. Since the tomb's natural ventilation is not very effective, this gas has difficulty escaping and can even pose a danger to visitors. Carbon dioxide also reacts with atmospheric water vapor, forming carbonic acid, which can cause patina formation on the paintings. It was also noted that normal carbon dioxide levels, around 340 ppm (parts per million), can rise to 2,500 ppm when a group of tourists enters the tomb. For safety reasons, the concentration of this gas should not exceed 1,000 ppm⁴¹.

³⁹ McDonald J. K., Bianchi R. S. In the Tomb of Nefertari: Conservation of the Wall Paintings. Santa Monica, 1992. P. 32.

⁴⁰ Corzo M. A. Nefertari: Luce d'Egitto. Roma, 1994. P. 32.

⁴¹ Rivista Le Scienze, N. 384 Agosto 2000. P. 77.



>> Figure_4.2.13. Tomb microclimate monitoring scheme
Scheme // Getty Conservation Institute

_NOTE:: The tomb's temperature and relative humidity monitoring system (Fig. 4.2.13⁴²) used six Vaisala sensors—one outside and five inside—which monitored the tomb until May 1997. Measurements were taken every minute. Some of the monitoring equipment remains in operation today (Fig. 4.2.14).



>> Figure_4.2.14. Equipment for the tomb's microclimate monitoring system
Photo // François Olivier, Tatiana Nikolaychuk

Due to the interest of the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities in opening the tomb to the public, a fourth phase (April 1992 – Spring 1997) was added to the project, extending the campaign to 11 years to continue

⁴² Corzo M. A., Afshar M. Art and Eternity. Los Angeles, 1993. P. 106.

monitoring and analyzing the tomb's microenvironment and periodically checking the condition of the wall paintings.

The EAO agreed to restrict visits to the tomb for at least three years. From May 1992 to November 1995, environmental conditions in the Valley of the Queens and the tomb's microclimate were recorded. All tourist visits to Nefertari's tomb were also recorded, subject to the aforementioned recommendations. However, in early 1995, the EAO decided to open the tomb to the public and set a maximum number of visitors per day of 150⁴³. A mechanical ventilation system and lighting were installed in the tomb to cope with the impact of increased tourist numbers. Monitoring of the microenvironment and the condition of the paintings continued for another 16 months after the tomb was finally opened to visitors in November 1995. Monitoring documents showed that the tomb's microenvironment was maintained at a safe and stable level⁴⁴. However, after some time, Nefertari's tomb had to be closed to all visitors again.

!_BAJHO_! Long-term monitoring and controlled experiments on the relative humidity and CO² levels in the tomb indicate that for the safety of visitors, as well as to preserve the integrity of the painted plaster, it is necessary to strictly limit visits to Nefertari's burial during the summer months, when the baseline humidity is high and natural ventilation is minimized; in the winter months, a limited number of visitors are allowed, subject to careful control of the microenvironment⁴⁵.

GCI published the results of the project in two monographs: *Wall paintings of the tomb of Nefertari: scientific studies for their conservation*⁴⁶ in 1987 and *Art and Eternity: The Nefertari Wall Paintings Conservation Project, 1986–1992*⁴⁷, in 1993.

The GCI archives⁴⁸ also contain an extensive library of materials, including 24 boxes, 19 videotapes, and 36 document folders. These documents span the period from 1984 to 1996, as well as 2005 (plus undated ones), and are grouped into three series (see table below⁴⁹). Some materials are available for research upon request, but some contain confidential information with expiration dates ranging from 2031 to 2046.

Table 2. Documentation of the conservation project for the tomb of Nefertari

Series I	Field research	1985–1996, undated
I.A	Phase I	1985–1988, undated
I.B	Phase II	1987–1989
I.C	Intermediate phases II and III	1987, 1989 undated
I.D	Phase III	1988–1992
I.E	Phase IV	1992–1996
I.F	Graphic documentation	1986–1994 undated
Series II	Dissemination of information about the project	1984–1996
II.A	Exhibitions	1988–1996
II.B	Public relations	1984–1996
II.C	Publications	1987–1996 undated
II.D	Television and film production	1986–1995
Series III	Project evaluation	2005

Nefertari's tomb was reopened to researchers and tourists only in 2016, but the entrance fee was quite high at 1,000 Egyptian pounds. Since 2018, the price has been raised to 1,400 Egyptian pounds. At the same time, a single ticket for all attractions in the Luxor area (the Luxor Pass) became available, including the tombs of Nefertari and Seti I. This ticket cost \$200.

⁴³ Since the end of 1995, a maximum of 150 visitors per day have been permitted, in groups of 10–15 people, for no more than 15 minutes. A ticket cost \$30, generating approximately \$1.5 million in annual revenue for the Egyptian government. *Rivista Le Scienze*, N. 384 Agosto 2000, P. 77.

⁴⁴ *Monitoring the Environment in the Ancient Tomb of Nefertari*. *Vaisala News*, 151, 1999. P. 13–14.

⁴⁵ *Corzo M. A., Afshar M.* *Art and Eternity*. Los Angeles. 1993. P. 120.

⁴⁶ *Corzo M. A.* *Wall paintings of the tomb of Nefertari: scientific studies for their conservation*. Cairo, 1987.

⁴⁷ *Corzo M. A., Afshar M.* *Art and Eternity*. Los Angeles, 1993.

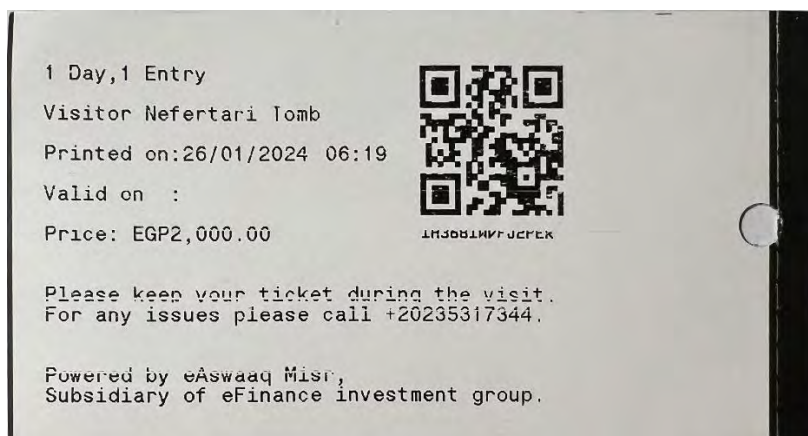
⁴⁸ GCI's conservation project for Nefertari's tomb has received an identification number IA30008.

⁴⁹ <http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifaia30008> (date of access 2026-01-23).

Much to the regret of those who love colorful and bright tickets, in 2022 they were replaced by regular receipts, and from 2023 — coupons with a QR code of the number, date and time of purchase (essentially the same receipt, only on thick paper, Fig. 4.2.16).



>> Figure_4.2.15. Illustrations of tickets for visiting the tomb of Nefertari, 2016–2018



>> Figure_4.2.16. Nefertari Tomb Ticket, 2024
Photo // Andrey Plaksin

* * *

Almost 35 years after the conservation work on Nefertari's House of Eternity was completed, GCI and EAO have taken up the task again... The reason for this was the repeated collapse of the tomb, which became evident during my expedition in January 2024.

For many years, I had been unable to reconstruct a single inscription in the eastern chamber [O] on wall [O2]. I lacked any clues to cling to. Every time I visited the tomb, I carefully photographed this wall and the fragment of the inscription. And although after the November 2022 expedition I managed to reconstruct the text of the sought-after fragment of the painting, on January 26, 2024, out of habit, I once again went to photograph it (from year to year, the lamps in the tomb are changed, and the light always falls on the walls differently). After returning from the expedition and sorting through the photographs to refine the reconstruction, I noticed one discrepancy on this very wall [O2]. At first, I thought I was mistaken, but after collecting several photographs taken at different times and by different photographers (especially good is that in this place there were only cracks, you can see in the photograph by George Nader from 2017)⁵⁰. I was convinced of my doubts and discovered obvious and clearly expressed dynamics of how this wall began to rapidly crumble (Fig. 4.2.17).

⁵⁰ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mana4u/33280628334/in/album-72157680132968381/>



>> Figure_4.2.17. East chamber [O], wall [O2]; Collapse dynamics of the selected fragment: March 2017 (left), November 2022 (center), January 2024 (right)
Photo // Andrey Plaksin, Jorg U Manna Nader (kairoinfo4u)

I began raising the alarm on social media, detailing the problem with the photographs, which drew responses from professional Egyptologists around the world. Nefertari's tomb was closed on March 2, 2024, for further conservation work, and at the time of publication, it was still closed to tourists.

Despite careful monitoring, the potential damage caused by tourists must be considered and periodically assessed. While there is no absolute ban on admiring the magnificent painted reliefs and immersing oneself in the mystery and enchantment of this gateway to the distant past, a balance must be struck: this is a complex task, affecting not only Nefertari's tomb but also countless other endangered archaeological sites. Since the damage is irreversible and cumulative—and it is all too easy to destroy in a few decades what has been preserved for millennia—it may not be practical to allow everyone to visit the site. Ultimately, this is precisely what Ramesses II wanted for his late wife: a quiet, secluded life⁵¹.

⁵¹ Rivista Le Scienze, N. 384 Agosto 2000, P. 77.

Abbreviations and Bibliography

List of abbreviations:

ÄA / Ägyptologische Abhandlungen. Wiesbaden.
ARos / Aegyptiaca Rossica. Москва.
CG / Catalogue général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire.
BIFAO / Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale. Le Caire.
IFAO / Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire.
JARCE / Journal of American Research Central Egypt. New York.
JEA / Journal of Egyptian Archeology. London.
SAK / Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur. Hamburg.
Urk / Urkunden des Agyptischen Altertums.
ZÄS / Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde. Leipzig, Berlin

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⁵² <https://www.nefertaritomb.com/book> (date of access 2026-05-07).