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### Akhenaten's appeal from Akhetaten "Horizon of the Sun Disk"

**Abstract:** The Egyptians For thousands of years worshipped "a variety of gods" but, within a few years of Akhenaten ascending the throne, he abolished the ancient Egyptian religions, and imposed his own monotheistic vision on the all. Akhenaten believed in "one god" named Aten, and changed his name from Amenhotep to Akhenaten- One Who is Effective for the Aten- and redirected revenue from Egypt's temples into the Aten cult, and sidelined the temples of other gods. Also, decided that the worship of the Aten required a location uncontaminated by the cults of traditional gods and to this end chose a site in Middle Egypt for a new capital city which he called Akhetaten 'Horizon of the Sun Disk' and he left a series of monumental inscriptions in which he outlined his reasons for the move and his architectural intentions for the city in the form of lists of buildings. And began construction the massive temples to the Aten, and building tombs for the royal family.

**Keywords:** Akhenaten; Amarna; Aten; Monotheism; Atenism

### Akhenaten's Reign

Akhenaton is an Egyptian pharaoh who ruled during the eighteenth dynasty of the new kingdom period of Ancient Egypt. Born in Egypt, and he was the second son of Amenhotep III and his consort Tiye<sup>1</sup> he was originally named Amunhotep and may have been born between c.1385 and 1375 BCE. He became pharaoh after his father died, he came to the throne around 1349 BCE, and ruled for seventeen years until his death. While there is no record of his death nor have any material remains from his burial

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<sup>1</sup> Amenhotep III chose Tiye, a woman of middle-class origins, to be his Great Royal Wife. Amenhotep III had two sons and four daughters, the crown prince Thutmose died in the 30th year of his father's reign.

\* Frederike Kampp-Seyfried, (ed), *In the Light of Amarna: 100 Years of the Nefertiti Discovery*, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2012.

as yet come to light, the cause of his death is not known<sup>2</sup>. But After his death Akhenaten would be buried in his tomb in the royal Wadi in Amarna. Yet, the tomb was severely damaged and his body missing. The male buried in KV 55 is often identified as Akhenaten, but this discussion remains open<sup>3</sup> The Amarna period was followed by a quick succession of reigns, the details of which remain hazy.



**Fig. 1:** Portrait of king of Akhenaten (Luxor museum), and to the left: Some of Akhenaten's names are written in the cartouches

He spent his early years as king engaged in fairly traditional building projects, including at the great Karnak Temple, home of Amun, and in the gold-rich land of Kush (Nubia) to Egypt's south. Late in his third year of rule, however, he took the extraordinary step of celebrating a Jubilee Festival, a ritual renewal of kingship usually held after 30 years on the throne. At Karnak, Akhenaten constructed a series of Jubilee buildings with *talatat*, small stone blocks that became a signature of his reign. But the Karnak Jubilee buildings featured the Aten alone and represented in a new form: as the disc of the sun, its rays ending in hands reaching out to the royal family, another of the Karnak buildings showed the Aten not with Akhenaten but with his queen, Nefertiti, and the royal daughters, Akhenaten's promotion of the Aten cult soon intensified<sup>4</sup>.

The fifth year of Pharaoh Akhenaten's reign was to prove a watershed moment in ancient Egyptian history. In a bid to break free from

<sup>2</sup> David P. Silverman, et al, *Akhenaten and Tutankhamun: revolution and restoration*, UPenn Museum of Archaeology, 2006, pp. 11-13.

<sup>3</sup> Kampp-Seyfried: op. cit, p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> Dominic Montserrat, *Akhenaten: history, fantasy and ancient Egypt*, Psychology Press, 2000, p. 15.

the shackles of the influential Amun-Re priesthood, he changed his name from Amenhotep IV (meaning 'Amun is content') to Akhenaton – One Who is Effective for the Aten – The new name represented his faith in the sun god Aten – mean "The Living Spirit of Aten", and redirected revenue from Egypt's temples into the Aten cult. Akhenaten also announced plans to create a new cult arena entirely for the Aten. He chose a place halfway between Memphis (Cairo) and Thebes (Luxor) it was a virgin territory both from a political and religious point of view, equidistant from the two previous capitals, perhaps because of two hills between which the sun could be seen rising, and named it Akhet-Aten (Horizon of the Aten), to honor of the solar deity, the Aten. Whether driven by religious fervor or a political desire to distance himself from the priesthood of Amun, but it must surely have been an affront to other Egypt's religious institutions.

Akhetaten grew quickly into a large, sprawling city on the east bank of the Nile River. Vast temples were dedicated to the Aten, left unroofed to be filled with light- thus eliminating the need for cult statues of the god. Akhenaten's palaces and temples were decorated with scenes from the natural world, including birds, frolicking calves and river plants, celebrating the life-giving aspects of the Aten.



**Fig. 2:** The rays of the sun that represent the god Aten and some of the offering tables that celebrate the life-giving aspects of the Aten

## **Monotheism: the ideology of Amarna cult**

Atenism, also known as the Aten religion, which refers to the religious changes that occurred during the 18th Dynasty, in the reign of Akhenaten. The Atenism was Egypt's state religion for around 20 years in the 14th century BC. Akhenaten met the worship of other gods with persecution; he

closed many traditional temples, and suppressed other traditional cult, while he was interested in building Atenist temples, in honor to the god Aten<sup>5</sup>.

Aten - the God of Atenism, first appears as a god in texts dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty in the Story of Sinuhe, during the Middle Kingdom, Aten as the “sun disk” was merely one aspect of the sun god Ra. it was a relatively obscure sun god, without the Atenist period, especially in the reign of Amenhotep IV who introduced the Atenist revolution in a series of steps culminating in the official installment of the Aten as Egypt’s sole god.

Akhenaten embraced the Atenism religion, calling for monotheism and fighting all the ancient religions, he deposed its religious hierarchy, headed by the powerful priesthood of Amun at Thebes, and closed all the temples of Amun, whose vertical feature was the veneration of images and statues of deities, that were worshipped in temples, then he turned to a new color in worship, which is a symbol of the sun disk only without any photography Or another expression of the idol<sup>6</sup>. And was declared Aten not merely the supreme god but the only god, who often show a rayed solar disc, the rays commonly depicted as ending in hands, appear to represent the unseen spirit of Aten, and he was the only intermediary between the Aten and his people. Akhenaten’s religion is probably not strictly speaking monotheistic, although only the Aten is actually worshipped and provided with temples. But the priests of Amun rejected this, and he entered into a conflict with the priests, and forced to leave Thebes and went to Tel el-Amarna, which he called Akhetaton, and changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning the savior of Aton, and perhaps his wife, Queen Nefertiti, supported him at the beginning of the invitation. And that migrated with him to the new city, which he took as the capital of the country and the seat of government and religion. Some of the sincere clerics who believed in his call and some of his aides migrated with him the collapse of Atenism began during Akhenaten’s late reign when a major plague spread across the ancient Near East. He constructed new temples for the worshipped of Aten, and show the functionally equivalent representations of him and his family venerating the Aten and receiving the ankh (breath of life) from him<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Word *Aten*, meaning “circle,” “disc,” and later “sun disc,” is first found in the 24th century BC. In Abusir Papyri, discovered in the mortuary temple of the Fifth Dynasty pharaoh Neferirkare Kakai.

Donald B. Redford, *The sun-disc in Akhenaten’s Program: its worship and antecedents, II*, “Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt” 17 (1980), 21-38.

<sup>6</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, translated: Tagreid Abu-Hassabo. “Akhenaten: dweller in truth” (No Title) 2000, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism*, Oxford University, 2015, pp. 62-82.

By the end of Akhenaten's rule, the Atenism worship ended, and although he succeeded in limiting the influence of the priests of Amun and reducing the popularity of Amun, this ended with the end of his rule.



Fig. 3: King Akhenaten and his family making offerings to the god Aten, Tomb of Meryre, Tall - El Amarna – Minya, Egypt

### Tell El-Amarna - Akhetaten (Akhenaten's capital)

Amarna is the modern Arabic name for the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten (Horizon of the Sun-disk), capital of the country under the reign of Akhenaten, and so-named for the Beni Amran tribe who were living in the area when it was discovered. Amarna is a city in Upper Egypt, extends across several square kilometers of desert on the edge of the Nile River about 200 miles south of Memphis/Cairo and 250 miles north of Thebes/Luxor.



Fig. 4: The plan of the area of El-Amarna (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/amarna.htm>)

Akhenaten built the city about 1348 BCE as the new capital of his kingdom when he abandoned the worship of Amon and devoted himself to worship of the Aton. And he made a Boundary stelaes were erected at intervals around its perimeter which told the story of its founding. The area of the city and its surrounding property was fixed by copies of decrees carved on fourteen tablets embedded in the cliffs on either side of the river.

These stelae give a vivid account of the king's selection and dedication of the site for his capital, following instructions from his father Aten when he illuminated a certain spot on the desert at sunrise. Much of the western side of the area, including houses, harbors and the main palace of the king, was obscured under the modern cultivation<sup>8</sup>.



**Fig. 5: One of the boundary stelaes A, to demarcating the territory on which Akhenaten build his entire new capital city, Akhetaten**

Amarna city was made up of temples, government establishments, utilitarian facilities such as grain silos and bakeries, palaces and common mud-brick homes, several necropolises, as well as a number of zoos, gardens and other public buildings. Abandoned only some twenty years later.

The area is divided into suburbs, the North Suburb, the South Suburb, and the worker's village. With the so-called "central city" that ran south to the vicinity of the modern village of El-Hagg Qandil, includes housing the Royal Palace and The Great Temple (The PA-Aten) and the Small Temple of Aten, besides the king's house, as well as various official buildings. This was the bureaucratic center of the city where the administrators worked and lived, like; the vizier Nakht, the high priest Panehsy, the priest Pa-wah, General Ramose, the architect Manekhtawitf, and the sculptor Thutmose, who discovered in his workshop the famous bust of Nefertiti.

<sup>8</sup> David P. Silverman, et al, op. cit., pp. 43-46.



Fig. 6: The plan of the area of El-Amarna<sup>9</sup>

There are also the ruins of grain silos. The Southern Suburbs was the residential district for the wealthy elite and featured large estates and monuments<sup>10</sup>.

There is also in the north district of the city, The Northern Palace of Queen Kiya-Aten, the wife of Akhenaten. It was mistakenly known as the Nefertiti Palace. But after Kiya death the palace became the residence of the eldest royal daughter Meritaten. On the bank of the Nile River, it is characterized by a unique architectural design and planning in terms of dividing rooms, halls, buildings for servants, employees, and food stores. Some stairs can also be seen, and the rest are decorations for some birds, plants, and animals. Which was painted on the plaster that covered the walls, which were made of mud bricks<sup>11</sup>.



Fig. 7: The Northern Palace of Queen Kiya-Aten, Tall El-Amarna, Minya, Egypt

<sup>9</sup> Jimmy Dunn, *The Ancient City of Akhetaten at El-Amarna*, <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/amarna.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Barry Kemp, *The city of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. Amarna and its people*, Thames & Hudson, Cairo, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Amarna Project | Amarna the Place; Amarna The Place - Amarna Project

As for the nobles' villas at Akhetaten had only one floor; the roof of the central living room, however, was usually higher than the rest of the house, thus permitting clerestory lighting and ventilation. But the workers lived in simple row houses.

## The Necropolises - The Temples

Tombs of the Nobles at Amarna are the burial places of some of the powerful courtiers and persons of the city of Akhetaten. These tombs are built to be highly complicated to ensure that they are protected from thieves. Most of them start with an open court that leads to three chambers. Within these chambers there are papyrus columns that meet in the rear end. There a statue of the dead would have been placed looking toward the entrance.

The tombs are divided in two groups, cut into the cliffs and bluffs in the east of the dry bay of Akhetaten. There are 25 major tombs, many of them decorated and with their owners name, some are small and unfinished, others modest and unassuming. Each seems to reflect the personality and patronage of the tomb's original owner. These tombs are located in two groups in the cliffs overlooking the city of Akhetaten, to the north and south of the city. Are near one of the Boundary Stela (Stela V).

The North Tombs situated on the north-east side of the desert plain, where the cliff reaches a height of about 85 meters.



**Fig. 8:** Tomb in the northern group, is for “Panehsy”, chief servant of Aten at Akht-Aton City, Dynasty XVIII, circa 1350 B.C.

While nineteen more tombs are located in the south and known as the South Tombs, are located in a series of low bluffs south and east of the main city. And these tombs contain a little or no decoration, but



produced several decorated wooden coffins that shed light on funerary belief under Akhenaten, in spite some of these tombs were used for later burials.



**Fig. 9:** Tomb in the southern group, had the images reflecting the importance of Ay and his wife Tiye who was Nefertiti's nurse. Scenes include the couple worshipping the sun and receiving rewards from the royal family

## The Royal Tomb

Akhenaten's tomb (No 26) is located six kilometers up the Royal Wadi. The entrance leads to a stairway of 20 steps with a central slide in width, then to a long undecorated sliding corridor, but covered by a layer of plaster. Halfway in the right side of the corridor there opens a doorway that leads to 6 unfinished corridors and chambers. At the end of the corridor there is a second sliding staircase and a central slide in width, at the top of this staircase to the right a doorway opens and leads to three rooms known as alpha beta and gamma that were decorated, at the foot of the staircase lies a doorway that leads to the well shaft, which directly leads to the door of the burial chamber of the King, is a squared in shape. In the middle of the floor area lies the base of the sarcophagus of the king.

This chamber is considered the largest in the tomb was the best decorated by colorful scenes. Among these scenes is a scene depicting the king, queen and her daughters, all under the rays of the Aton, mourning the death of a female figure to the right represented under a canopied shrine decorated by a frieze of cobras.



**Fig. 10:** The royal family grieve over the death of Meketaten. Scene in room gamma of tomb 26B

## Destruction of the City

Akhet-aten was one of the ancient Egyptian cities which flourished until Akhenaten's death; and his reforms did not survive for long in his absence. Afterwards, the throne passed to co-regent Smenkhkare, about whom we know virtually nothing, appears not to have remained in power for long. After him, Tutankhamun assumed power, who abandoned the city of Akhetaten and the worship of the Aten and returned to Egypt's traditional gods and religious centres. He moved the capital back to Memphis and then to Thebes, and reopened the temples, and the businesses which depended upon them were renewed. He died before he could finish these reforms, and they were carried on by his successor, the former vizier Ay, and then by Horemheb, who sought to erase Akhenaten's name and accomplishments from history; he does not appear him in any of Egypt's later historical records. And He ordered the city razed and its remains dumped as fill for his own projects. the city of Akhetaten gradually crumbled back into the desert. Also, Ramses II is known to have reused many stone blocks from the Aton temples for his work at nearby Hermopolis.

## Political Legacy of Amarna

Once Akhenaten moved his capital to Akhetaten, he focused his attention on the adoration of Aten and he inherited a strong state from his father, Amenhotep III, so he relied on the stability of the country's internal and external movements, and he was not devoted to any other expansions.



Fig. 11: A group of Asian ambassadors who came to meet King Akhenaten

The diplomatic relations between Egypt and neighboring countries are evident through “Amarna letters”, includes more than 300 diplomatic letters; and the remainder comprise miscellaneous literary and educational materials and probably used in the training of the scribes). These letters have been important in establishing both the history and the chronology of the period. also, several letters dating back to the rule of Akhenaten's

father, Amenhotep III, were among those found at Amarna, meaning that they were brought to the new royal city from an older archive, the Amarna Letters testify to the use of the Mesopotamian script and the Akkadian language across the eastern Mediterranean during this period<sup>12</sup>.

Letters comprise the majority of the Amarna tablets, and two types of letters can be distinguished. The first (more common) type comprises letters written from rulers of cities and small kingdoms in the Levant—an area controlled by Egypt in the New Kingdom period—that were vassals of the Egyptian king. These rulers write deferentially to the king. While the second (less common) type comprises letters from rulers who were powerful kings in their own right and controlled large territories such as Babylonia, Assyria, Mitanni, and Hatti. In both tone and content, these letters differ considerably from those of the Levantine rulers. In the end, Amarna letters are tangible traces of important political connections forged across long distances.



Fig. 12: Five Amarna letters at the British Museum<sup>13</sup>

## Amarna Art

The most beautiful and unique artifacts in ancient Egypt came from the Amarna period. During Akhenaton's era there was no single change regarding religion, but there are also changes in art. Before Akhenaton,

<sup>12</sup> David P Silverman, et al, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

<sup>13</sup> See: [ArmstrongInstitute.org](http://ArmstrongInstitute.org) | Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology

people were offered “ideal faces and perfect bodies” in art. But during Akhenaton’s reign, artists depicted “what people really looked like”. This was a dramatic change at the time, called “Realism Art” which highlights the defects of people, especially the physical defects of the king.



Fig. 13: Statue of Princess Ank-es-in-ba-aton. Daughter of King Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti, Mallawi Museum, Minya, Egypt



Fig. 14: Statue of King Akhenaten, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt.

It represents the art of Amarna, which was known for ideal realism

So, The Amarna art was characterized by realism in photography and engraving, which is a trend contrary to the usual idealistic art in ancient Egypt, where the Egyptian artist succeeded in depicting the social life that brings together the king, his wife, and his daughters, and also shows the extent of intimate and friendly relations between family members, regardless of the technical analysis recorded by researchers and scholars of the school's

defects. But, I am inclined to the opinion that finds from this art a new color that aims to depict all patterns of worldly life from the worship of the god Aten and family life, to show aspects of intimacy, affection. And political relations between Egypt and other countries.



**Fig. 15: Akhenaten and Nefertiti seated, holding three of their six daughters, under the rays of the sun god Aten, Neues Museum, Berlin**

Likewise the Amarna period brought about an extraordinary and unusual artistic architectural revolution, as the huge blocks of stone previously used to erect temples and royal edifices were replaced by standard-sized stone bricks "Talatats" which had the advantage of being quicker to build with. About The "talatat" term derived from the Arabic word for 'three', referring to the width of the blocks (three palms or handbreadths, which is one half of a cubit, the basic unit of measurement in ancient Egypt).



**Fig. 16: Showcasing the talatat stones - Luxor Museum - Egypt**

Although Amarna was destroyed. talatat construction was abandoned, hundreds of thousands of talatat blocks were re-used in other constructions as filler material for foundations and pylons for subsequent large buildings

at Karnak and elsewhere. However these stons, enabled scientists to reconstructed hundreds of partial scenes that once decorated the walls of temples.

## Akhenaten Museum in Al-Minja

The Akhenaten Museum is about 65 km north of the city of Tell el-Amarna. It is the largest museum in Upper Egypt. Located south of Cairo, it is the only museum in Egypt that stretches 600 meters along the Nile River, which is still under construction. It is a large main building surrounded by a number of service buildings, but the design as a whole highlights the refraction of sunlight, which is the symbolism of the Atonian period, which represented the Aten in the form of a sun disk, with its rays that end with human hands.



**Fig. 17: The exterior design of the Akhenaten Museum in Minya, Egypt**

The German government designed the museum as a gift to the Egyptian government in 1998 after signing a partnership agreement between Minya Governorate and the city of Hildesheim in 1979. This building designed by German designer, engineer Arne Eggebrecht (former Director of the Pelizaius Museum in Hildesheim, Germany) and the Egyptian architect Gamal Bakri modified the building, which is located on an area of 5000 square meters. It is 54 meters high and contains 14 museum exhibition halls and a museum library, in addition to a theater with a capacity of 800 people.

This museum built to recount the historical and cultural importance of King Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti. And show the idea of the Atonian religion and the construction of the city of “Akhet Aten”. It also highlights the great value of this historical period, despite its short duration, and many archaeological and artistic antiquities. Which produced and filled many local and international museums. Although the museum is still under construction, it has succeeded in linking the museum with the archaeological site of Amarna. And plays an important role in developing and educating the local community, through the establishment of museum activities and events, making many field visits

to the archaeological site. And linking the story of the museum and the site to what is taught in the school curriculum.



**Fig. 18:** Some educational and cultural activities Akhenaten Museum with the local community of Minya Governorate – Egypt

As well as its role in communicating with all segments of society, such as special needs, elderly, as well as the most marginalized societal groups. In addition to his works in the selecting the objects that will be displayed in museum, and the project of recording and documenting the Talatat stones to form and display them also in the museum.



**Fig. 19:** Some of the museum's work to communicate with marginalized groups. In right: our work in the project Talatat (ATP)