

# Akhetaten: A Portrait in Art of an Ancient Egyptian Capital

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THE ART ASSOCIATED with the city of Akhetaten (modern al-Amarna), Egypt's capital for about a decade in the mid fourteenth century BCE, consists essentially of works created at royal command during a politically revolutionary era, works systematically attacked and severely damaged or destroyed during the subsequent period of reaction. What survived includes fragmentary statuary, stelae, wall reliefs and paintings, desecrated tombs, the plans of destroyed temples, and fragmentary architectural elements out of their original context.

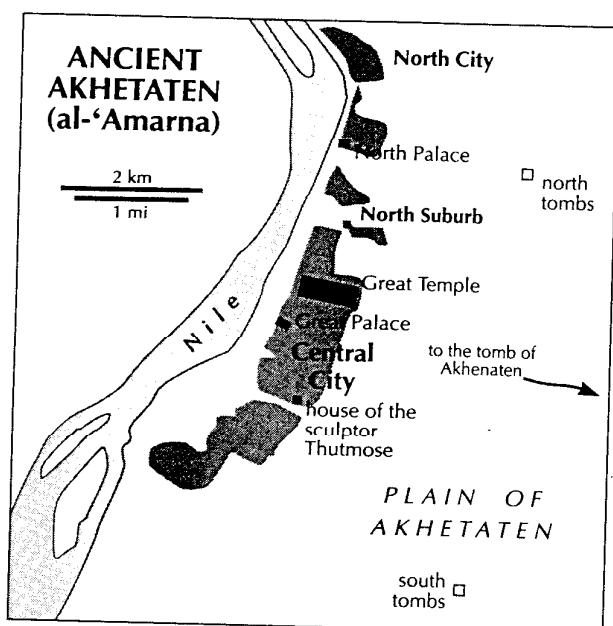
Research on these remains since the mid nineteenth century has established the basic outline of the course of the artistic revolution inspired by King Akhenaten as the corollary to his political and religious reforms. A very brief initial phase continuing the style of the previous reign came to an abrupt end with the introduction of a revolutionary "mannerist" depiction of the human form. A moderated style evolved at Akhetaten after the court moved to the city. The two new styles seem to have existed side by side, at least until the king who had inspired them died and political events took another course.

The initiator of the political and artistic revolution that produced the art of the city was King Akhenaten or, as he was known at the beginning

of his reign, Amenhotep (Amenophis) IV. At his side stood Queen Nefertiti, who was accorded an exalted status unparalleled for a King's Great Wife during the history of dynastic Egypt. Their seventeen-year reign witnessed a revolution emanating from above that had as its political goal the concentration of absolute, unrestricted power in the crown.

Akhenaten focused the religious life of the state on the sun-god, who had been worshiped in Egypt since earliest times as the creator and ruler of the universe and whose son and representative on earth was the king. In pursuit of his policy, Akhenaten attacked the younger cult of the god Amun, which had become the state religion in the New Kingdom. Amun's main temple, and the religious center of the land at Akhenaten's accession, was at Karnak in Thebes. The early evidence for the art of the reign derives principally from Karnak; here, at the beginning of his reign, Akhenaten constructed a huge temple for the sun-god as embodied in the sun-disk, the Aten (Aton).

A significant step in the king's campaign against Amun was the decision taken in his fifth regnal year to move the capital away from Thebes to a site in Middle Egypt. The new capital, named Akhetaten (Horizon of the Aten) by



the king, was dedicated to the cult of the Aten. In honor of the disk, the king changed his personal name from Amenhotep (Amun is content), with its reference to the despised god, to Akhenaten (He who is effective for Aten). Furthermore, he initiated a campaign against Amun and his cult. Thus, Akhenaten's domestic policy assumed the character of a general "cultural revolution." The king's desire to foster change was not restricted to the political and religious spheres: his influence made itself felt in every aspect of cultural life. An achievement of particular significance was the revolutionizing of artistic creation.

## AMARNA ART

### *Early Archaeological Activity at al-Amarna*

The art of Akhetaten—or Amarna art, as it is now termed—first became known through reliefs in tombs at al-Amarna and from the boundary stelae of the city set up at Akhenaten's command. For a half century, the sixth large folio volume of Carl Richard Lepsius's seminal *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien (Monuments from Egypt and Ethiopia)* (1858) was the most important reference work for Amarna art. The

plates documented the range of typical scenes: the ubiquitous offering scene with the royal couple, usually accompanied by one or more princesses, beneath the rays of the sun-god; king and queen bestowing honors from the Window of Appearances on the loyal courtier acclaimed by a jubilating crowd; and the royal family and their entourage riding in chariots to and from the temple. Early Egyptologists were quick to note the conspicuous role played by royal women in these reliefs. In all the scenes recorded by Lepsius's expedition, the queen was shown at the king's side, usually accompanied by one or more of their daughters. The conclusion seemed justified that the art of the period—indeed, the entire reign—might be seen as feminine, if not effeminate.

Lepsius's plates proved fundamental for iconographical studies of Amarna art. His publication familiarized scholars with the icon of the omnipresent sun-disk with its armlike rays terminating in human hands holding the hieroglyphic signs for life and prosperity. The reliefs depicted palaces and temples complete with architectural sculpture. What is missing not only from Lepsius's publication but also from subsequently published drawings for Amarna relief is any indication of the characteristic sculptural technique employed: the scenes were cut in well-modeled sunk relief and brightly painted.

The nature of the copies made by Lepsius's expedition prevented Egyptologists from making stylistic comparisons of Amarna art with what preceded and followed. It was recognized, however, that two-dimensional compositions at Akhetaten were freed from the traditional principle of strict axiality, especially as it had applied to royal figures. The deeply bowing posture of servants and soldiers was new, too. The earlier simple overlapping of several similar or identical figures to represent a group gave way to attempts to depict interaction of the figures among themselves. In general, the relief art at Akhenaten's capital showed much more indication of movement.

Even the best copies published by Lepsius did not accurately reproduce the anomalous form of the king's physiognomy and anatomy. The pioneering Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, to name only one authority of the time, felt uncomfortable in the presence of the tomb reliefs

at al-Amarna itself. To explain the king's unusual appearance, Mariette resorted to a concocted anecdote: on a military campaign in the south, Akhenaten had been captured by Nubian tribesmen and emasculated, his "effeminate" physical form thus being the consequence of castration!

A very modest initial, theoretical approach to Amarna art was made by Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez in the volume on Egypt in their *Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité* (1883). They believed that the reliefs depicted the actual physical appearance of the king realistically and that the art of Akhetaten embodied "a desire for truth at any price."

### *Flinders Petrie at al-Amarna*

No valid, modern evaluation of Amarna art was possible until the excavations of W. M. Flinders Petrie at al-Amarna in 1891–1892. He uncovered the ruins of mud-brick structures whose stone accoutrements—relief-decorated wall facings, columns, and architectural sculpture—had been carried off for reuse or broken up on the spot soon after the city was abandoned. Petrie's excavations concentrated on the palace and temple quarters. At the site of the Great Palace, he traced the plan of an enormous courtyard, once surrounded by colossal statues of Akhenaten, as well as a complex of pillared halls and smaller courts with 540 brick piers and walls encrusted with glazed tiles. In the environs, he uncovered floor paintings on plaster and fragments of comparable wall paintings.

Petrie established the plan of the Great Temple of the Aten with its succession of pylons giving access to enclosed courts open to the sky. Within these courts stood hundreds of altars for offerings to the sun-god. The cult focus was a huge altar approached by a ramp at the rear of the temple.

A peculiarity of temple architecture at Amarna identified in Petrie's work was the "broken lintel," in which the lintel did not span the space between two jambs completely. The breach it left open to the sky allowed the rays of the sun-god to fall uninterrupted upon any procession moving through the temple.

Petrie noted the frequent employment of stone inlays, from hieroglyphs in inscriptions to parts of composite figures, inserted into scenes

in relief. Both the lotiform (shaped like a lotus petal) and palmiform columns he excavated were encrusted with glass-paste inlays, and the capitals retained traces of gilding. Here, as elsewhere in Amarna art, the intention was to produce a brilliant polychrome effect. In a similar spirit, the sculptors of the Amarna period invented the composite statue, a technique that did not long survive Akhenaten's reign. Petrie excavated feet, hands, arms, and heads in quartzite, granite, and jasper; these had been made to be attached to torsos of white limestone to simulate bodies wearing white linen garments.

Petrie considered Amarna's achievement in the decorative arts particularly significant: "The glazes and glass were the two principal manufactures . . . a variety and a brilliancy was attained which was never reached in earlier or later times." The glazing of molded elements of all kinds was popular and widespread; Petrie's excavations uncovered glazed finger rings, attachments for furniture, pendants and beads in many shapes for costume jewelry, miniature flowers and fruits for sewing onto clothing, and even decorative inlays for walls and ceilings.

An important find is a fragment from one of the first known examples of the "family stelae" (Louvre E.11624). It belonged to a scene depicting Akhenaten seated on a chair and apparently dandling the queen and two of their daughters on his knee. The king's right foot, whose toes bear the weight of the figures on his lap, is accurately rendered. Right and left feet had been occasionally differentiated in relief and painting before Akhenaten's accession, but in his reign they were distinguished consistently in depictions of royal figures.

A small-scaled headless statuette found by Petrie is the only preserved freestanding (as opposed to rock-cut) sculpture in the round depicting the royal couple accompanied by a princess (University College, London, 004). The spindly, scarcely modeled limbs of the royal couple with their fleshy upper bodies, protruding abdomens, and spreading buttocks rendered as they might occur in nature without "mannerist" exaggeration suggest that the group was made in Akhenaten's later years, after the introduction of the moderated style.

A century ago the lively rendering of birds and animals in nature, such as those depicted in

the colorful floor paintings uncovered by Petrie in the Great Palace, caused a sensation. The central element of the composition was a pool teeming with fish swimming among water plants and surrounded by a papyrus thicket with cavorting calves and flying ducks. Egyptologists have often seen possible Minoan influence in these paintings, but there has been no carefully argued study of this supposed relationship. A newly identified scene of a battle apparently involving Aegean soldiers, on a fragmentary papyrus from al-Amarna, may be relevant here.

From a sculptor's atelier, Petrie excavated a plaster cast of the head of a statue produced in a previously undocumented technique (Cairo CC 753); he mistakenly identified this as a cast of Akhenaten's death mask, which resulted in the piece's instant notoriety. But its popularity waned when numerous objects of the same type but of higher quality were found by German excavators in another sculptor's atelier at al-Amarna.

Petrie accepted the estimation of Perrot and Chipiez that the art of Akhetaten was an expression of the king's relationship to "truth": "'Living in truth' was his motto in art, as well as religion. The new style of sculpture and painting is marked by the fullest naturalism." Petrie's judgment, influenced by his own personal enthusiasm for the art—and the person of Akhenaten, who inspired it—was adopted wholeheartedly by the American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted, who declared Akhetaten "the first individual in history"—an idealist, monotheist, pacifist, and monogamist. Breasted identified the forces underlying the art of Akhetaten as emotion and realism. Petrie and Breasted based their understanding of Amarna art on an incorrect interpretation of the Egyptian word *ma'at* to mean "truth" in an objective sense; a half century later, Rudolf Anthes and H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort demonstrated that for Akhenaten *ma'at* was a sociopolitical concept with no relevance for the art of Akhetaten.

The first official investigation of Akhenaten's tomb in a wadi east of al-Amarna occurred in 1891, simultaneously with Petrie's excavations in the city. Akhenaten and Nefertiti are shown in the reliefs mourning the death of one of their daughters, a theme previously unknown in royal iconography. A scene in the king's burial cham-

ber shows the rising sun and the simultaneous awakening of the animal world, illustrating the great *Hymn to the Aten*, whose text is known from private tombs at the site (see "The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God" in Part 8, Vol. III). Many fragmentary funerary figures (so-called *ushabtis*) of high quality belonging to Akhenaten were found in and near the royal tomb. Some of them have eyes in "sfumato," that is, eyes that give the impression of a veiled glance because there is no plastic indication of the lower lids. Even though this rendering of the eye occurred sporadically as early as the Middle Kingdom, its ubiquity in Amarna sculpture has resulted in its being considered a salient stylistic element of the period.

Between 1903 and 1908, Norman de Garis Davis published six volumes devoted to the reliefs in nonroyal tombs at Akhetaten and to the city's boundary stelae. His facsimiles, which improved considerably on Lepsius's copies, continue to provide the scholarly basis for the study of the themes and iconography of Amarna art.

### *Early-Twentieth-Century Excavations*

The high regard now enjoyed by Amarna art can be traced principally to the finds made at Akhetaten between 1911 and 1914 by an expedition of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society) under the direction of Ludwig Borchardt. From an art-historical point of view, the German excavators' most significant discoveries were made during the clearance of sculptors' ateliers. Among the first of these exciting finds was a painted limestone bust (Berlin 20496) with a highly unusual form: the shoulders have been squared up to form a pedestal-like base. The head lacks any covering, although the fittings across the forehead and at the temples indicate that the sculptor intended to add a separately worked crown. The excavators initially identified the subject as Akhenaten, and plaster casts of the bust were sold in record numbers.

In December 1912 the German archaeologists uncovered the ruins of a large compound. Within an enclosure wall they excavated the spacious dwelling of a sculptor, a smaller subsidiary house, and, significantly, a series of simple ateliers. A horse blinker found in the grounds is inscribed with the name of the sculptor Thut-

mose. This object implies that Thutmose owned horses and a chariot, attesting a much higher social status than is usually associated with ancient Egyptian sculptors.

The most famous piece of sculpture from Thutmose's workshop is the painted bust of Queen Nefertiti (Berlin 21300), which was first exhibited publicly in Berlin in 1924, more than a decade after its discovery and against the wishes of the excavator. In addition to a fragmentary bust of the king (Berlin 21360), several heads for composite statues of the queen came to light, among them one in quartzite (Berlin 21220) whose "girlish youthfulness" led some authorities to ascribe it to one of Nefertiti's daughters. But the fittings for the separately made headgear across the brow and temples are best suited to the special crown closely associated with Nefertiti, the one that she wears in the famous bust. The proportions of the face differ from those of the bust, and the style is softer, but there is no compelling reason to consider the painted bust the prototypical portrait of the queen. Stylistic variation among her statuary can be expected, as is attested by two other heads for composite statues depicting Nefertiti from Thutmose's atelier—a magnificent black granite head with sfumato eyes (Berlin 21358) and another likeness in limestone (Berlin 21352), modeled on the painted bust but with a larger mouth and lowered chin.

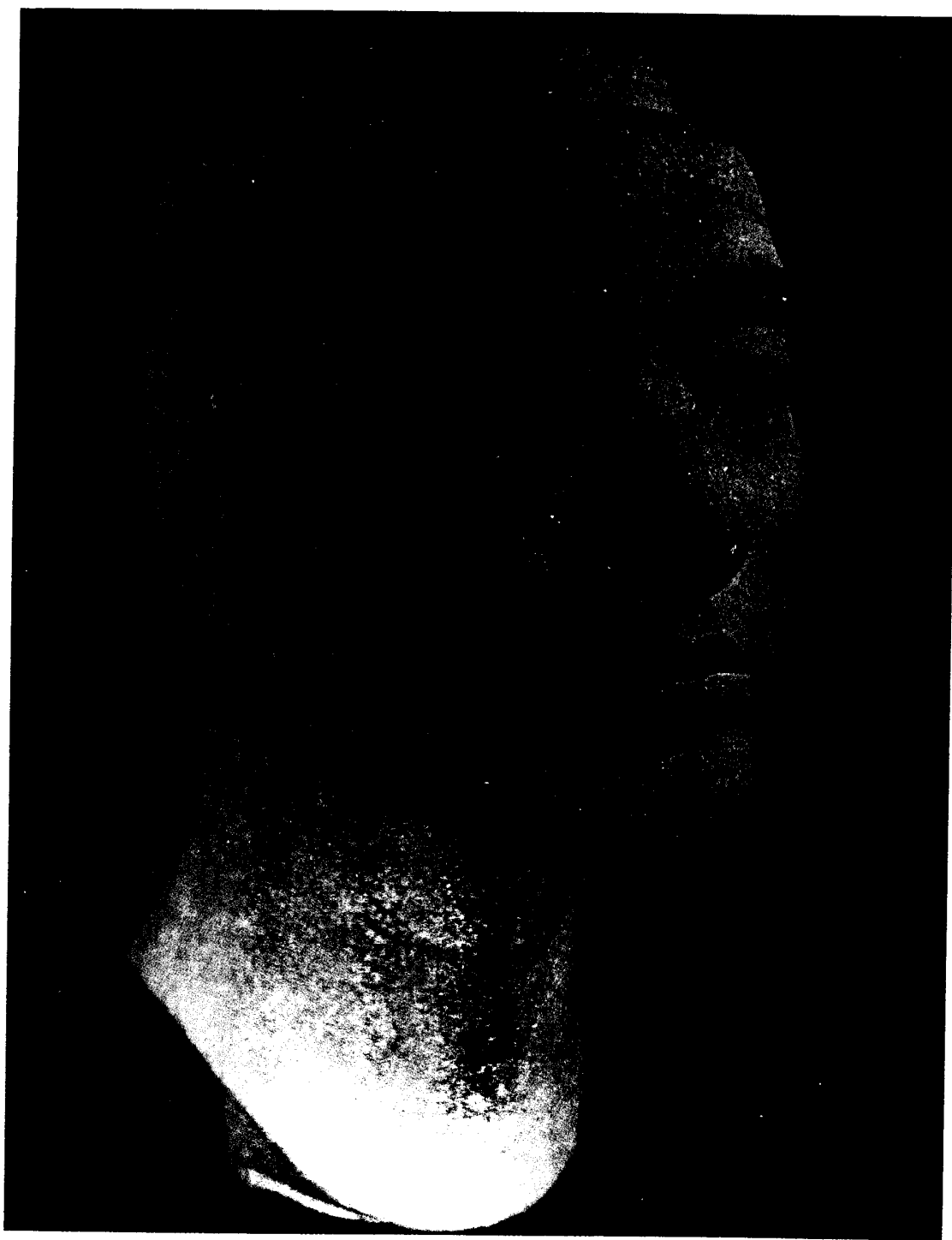
Another much-discussed find was a somewhat under-life-sized limestone statue of a queen wearing a caplike crown with uraeus (cobra on the front of the crown) that became known in English-language publications as "the tired Nefertiti" (Berlin 21263). The queen's dress is treated almost like a second skin, except for its sleeves, which flare outward above the elbows. The upper torso is narrow with small pointed and slightly sagging breasts; the abdomen, too, is pendulous, while the full thighs and buttocks are naturally proportioned, in contrast to the emphatic, swelling forms of these elements in depictions of the queen in the "mannerist" style, as on a fragmentary quartzite torso (Louvre E.25409). In the Berlin statue, the navel is round, not half-moon-shaped as is typical for Amarna figures. The sensitive modeling of the face, in particular the fleshy pockets at either side of the mouth, with its downturned corners—an ex-

tremely unusual feature in depictions of the queen—creates a melancholy impression, bordering on the depiction of actual physical suffering. Egyptologists have considered the statue to be a realistic representation: the aging queen seen through the eyes of the royal family's physician. This interpretation, influenced by modern psychology, tells us nothing about what the sculptor intended to depict in the work.

In addition to these pieces in stone, two dozen heads made of plaster were excavated in Thutmose's compound. For many years they were the focal point of Egyptological interest,



Painted limestone bust of Nefertiti (ht. 50 cm. [20 in.]) shown with her crown and uraeus, Eighteenth Dynasty. The bust was excavated from Thutmose's workshop at Amarna by German archaeologists during the 1912–1913 archaeological season; it is now in the State Museum, Berlin. BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN



Brown quartzite head of Nefertiti (ht. 35.5 cm. [14.2 in.]). This unfinished piece was excavated from a sculptor's workshop in Amarna and is considered by some scholars to be one of the most beautiful depictions of the queen. EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, CAIRO

but they have in fact contributed little to our understanding of Amarna art. The plaster heads divide naturally into two groups, according to the traces of headgear they preserve: those depicting persons wearing crowns (that is, the king and queen) and others wearing wigs, presumed to depict nonroyal individuals. Borchardt identified some of them as casts from the heads of statuary and others as casts taken from living people. His attribution of a particular piece to one or the other of these categories was often arbitrary and unsystematic. This is also true to a large extent for the hypothesis put forward by Günther Roeder, who, just prior to the outbreak of World War II and the division of the Berlin collection, was the last person to study the originals as a group. Roeder considered them all to be casts made from freely formed sculptor's models in clay, an explanation that cannot be correct, since it is at odds with what we know about the working methods of Egyptian sculptors. The plaster heads were probably made from casts of finished statues.

Borchardt's preliminary publication of the finds from Thutmose's workshop led to a polemical conflict with the Egyptological art historian Heinrich Schäfer. Like his renowned French colleague Gaston Maspero, Borchardt viewed the art of the Amarna period not as something radically new but rather as the logical continuation and elaboration of innovations already found during the reign of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father. Behind this denial of the revolutionary character of Amarna art may have lain a desire to deny Akhenaten any independent achievement.

### *Egypt Exploration Society*

Excavations were resumed at al-Amarna in 1921 by the Egypt Exploration Society of London, which continued to work at the site through 1936. The English were quick to point up what they considered to be the shortcomings of their German predecessors. But whatever may have been the failings of the German archaeologists in the field, the documentation of their work was exemplary for its time, as is demonstrated by the fact that their notes were used to produce an important volume describing the architectural remains more than sixty-five years after they had left the site.



Limestone statuette of the "tired" Nefertiti (ht. 41 cm. [16.4 in.]), which was so named for the supposedly aging queen's melancholy expression. The statuette was excavated from Thutmose's workshop at Amarna and is now in the State Museum, Berlin. BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN

The discoveries of the Egypt Exploration Society broadened the material basis for a study of Amarna art. But the publication of the finds and, in particular, their illustration were less than satisfactory.

Several spectacular items were excavated, such as a head from a composite statue depicting Nefertiti (Cairo JE 59256). The English archaeologists also found a complete statuette depicting a nonroyal man seated on a chair and holding a lotus against his chest (Cairo JE 53249) and the head from a second nonroyal statuette (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 31.114.1). Private statuary is rare in Amarna art, so much so that some scholars have incorrectly concluded that it was prohibited by the king. But this thesis ignores the private tombs at Akhetaten, which regularly included rock-cut statuary depicting

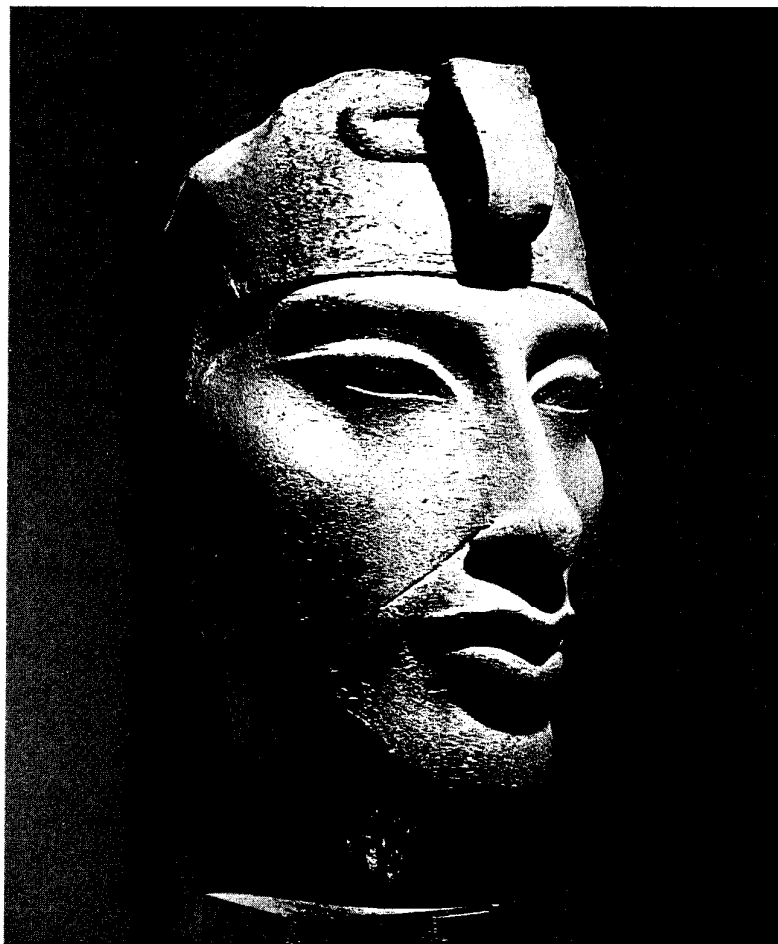
the tomb owner. Unprovenanced examples of freestanding private statuary of the period are an anonymous triad depicting two men and a boy (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 11.150.21) and the group of the sculptor Bak and his wife carved in one with a *naos* (Berlin 1/63).

In 1929, Henri Frankfort, one of the field directors of the Egypt Exploration Society's excavations, published a study of Amarna art. Of major importance was his recognition of early and late styles; this distinction has been retained in modified form in studies of Amarna art down to the present. Frankfort described the compositional principles underlying two-dimensional art

rather vaguely as "psychological unity" created by the gestures of the figures and the emotions to which they gave expression. Only in the 1950s did Herbert Senk elaborate on and define the formal artistic means that Frankfort had signaled, one of them being the "contact figure," a figure whose head is turned to face in the opposite direction from the body to unite two other figures or groups of figures that flank it.

#### *Theban Material and Modern Studies*

Until the mid 1920s information about the art of Akhenaten's reign derived almost exclusively from al-Amarna, but important discoveries were



Face from colossal sandstone statue of Akhenaten (ht. 64 cm. [25.6 in.]), Eighteenth Dynasty, excavated at Karnak. The statue is now in the Luxor Museum. JÜRGEN LIEPE, BERLIN





Relief decorated limestone block (51.5 × 24 cm. [20.6 × 9.6 in.]) depicting Kiya, a secondary wife of Akhenaten, found at Hermopolis. NY CARLSBERG GLYPTOTHEK, COPENHAGEN

soon after made at Thebes, where the earliest works of “Amarna” art had been created. It had long been known that Akhenaten had built a temple at Thebes. Isolated relief blocks from its walls were published as early as the 1840s. The first systematic excavations at the site of the temple on the east side of Karnak unearthed colossal statues of the king that had served as architectural sculpture. These colossi shocked Egyptologists, and they continue to do so: in 1984, Donald B. Redford, an authority in the field of Amarna studies, labeled the king’s likeness as depicted in the colossi as “hideous” and “effeminate.” In collaboration with a medical doctor, Cyril Aldred, another expert on Akhenaten, developed—but later retracted—the theory that a glandular disorder was responsible for Akhenaten’s appearance in the colossi.

There have also been attempts to explain the colossi in terms of ancient Egyptian religious symbolism. The statue that has most often been the subject of such speculation depicts a figure that seems to be nude and lacks male genitals (Cairo JE 55938): the lower abdomen and hip

region are indistinguishable from contemporaneous statues of women. One theory put forward to account for this colossus’s form is that the king had himself depicted in it as an androgynous creator deity, a “male mother goddess.” A more plausible alternative is that the statue represents not Akhenaten but Queen Nefertiti.

Following the discovery of the colossi, first hundreds and then thousands of small relief blocks (*talatat*) measuring about fifty-two by twenty-six by twenty-four centimeters (21 by 10 by 9 inches) came to light, mostly from the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak but also from other Theban sites. These blocks, decorated in painted sunk relief, have been studied by both North American and Franco-Egyptian missions. The subjects depicted include the ubiquitous offering scene and representations of a jubilee celebration. A noteworthy vignette that depicts king and queen beside a bed may be an innovative representation of the traditional “sacred marriage” theme.

Since the 1970s, research on Amarna art has focused on the *talatat*—the iconography of the

scenes, the interpolated texts, and the interpretation of both in relation to the cult policy of the reign. Stylistic analysis of the reliefs, which seem to have been laid out by at least six masters and carved by many sculptors of widely varying competence, has been largely neglected.

In 1939 an expedition by the Roemer-Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim, Germany, discovered 1,200 limestone relief blocks from al-Amarna inside a temple pylon of Ramesses (Ramses) II at Hermopolis (modern al-Ashmunin) across the Nile from Akhetaten. Ramesses II was, however, not responsible for the first attempt to level Akhenaten's capital, since subsequent British Museum excavations at Hermopolis demonstrated that Horemheb also built a pylon there reusing material from buildings at Akhetaten. The decorated blocks derive from various structures, such as chapels associated with royal ladies. In the mid 1970s the scholars J. J. Perepelkin and Rainer Hanke independently identified Kiya, a secondary wife of Akhenaten, among the women depicted on the Hermopolis blocks. Like Nefertiti, Kiya is shown with Akhenaten, but her iconography is distinctive. She wears a wig, never a crown, and there is no cobra at her forehead.

An exhibition organized by Bernard V. Bothmer at the Brooklyn Museum in 1973 represented a milestone in the study of Amarna art: for the first time, an overview of the art of the period was possible, and Aldred's exhibition catalog provided the first monographic treatment of the subject. Building on Frankfort's analysis of the evolution of Amarna art, Aldred described three successive styles: early, middle (or transitional), and late. The first, epitomized by the Karnak colossi, was the most revolutionary, and the last was significantly moderated, with a transitional phase between them. Aldred proposed that the early phase was attributable to the influence of the sculptor Bak, and the late to Thutmose, both under the direct tutelage of the king. There is, however, no specific evidence in support of historical roles for these two sculptors, whose names have been preserved by chance, and the assumption that the king played a decisive role in the formulation of the principles of Amarna art derives from a misinterpretation of textual sources. Furthermore, the interrelationship of the three styles, which Aldred believed

to be consecutive, seems more complex; possibly there was no replacement of the early by the late style, but after the introduction of the latter, artists may have worked side by side in both. Accordingly, reliefs and statuary that display elements of both styles are not necessarily attributable to a transitional period, but may rather be the result of interaction between artists working in the two styles at any time after the introduction of moderated elements.

In the early 1980s Gay Robins made a significant contribution to the study of Amarna art. Analyzing the traces of grid lines on reliefs of the Amarna period, Robins showed that a significant change in the canon of proportion was introduced after Akhenaten's accession. The traditional eighteen-square grid for the human figure was altered to a twenty-square grid. The two grid squares added to the chest and neck regions elongated the human figure in relief, painting, and sculpture in the round; they are likely to be a symptom of the artist's mannerism rather than its cause. In either case, the reign of Akhenaten's successor witnessed a return to the older convention, although some artists continued to use the twenty-grid figure sporadically into the early Nineteenth Dynasty.

## SOME MASTERPIECES OF AMARNA ART

### *Relief*

A highly regarded relief in the early style is a fragmentary calcite balustrade (Cairo Temp. reg. 30/10/26/12) from a ramp in the broad hall of the Great Palace at Akhetaten. King and queen elevate spouted vessels while a princess shakes a sistrum. The sun-god spreads armlike rays over offering stands and presents the sign of life to the noses of the royal couple. The relief probably depicts a ritual in which the king and queen stood side by side. During the Amarna period, compositions of this type continued to be bound by traditional conventions of Egyptian relief art and show no hint of perspective.

The cutting of the relief is very deep, with the figures and especially the sun-disk bulging within the sunken contours. The vertical axis of the king's figure is displaced by the forward



Amarna-period fragment (102 cm. [40.8 in.]) from a calcite balustrade in the Broad Hall of Akhetaten's Great Palace, Karnak, showing the royal couple and a princess. EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, CAIRO

thrust of the head on the elongated neck, and this effect is emphasized by the arms elevated in offering. Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Princess Merytaten share the same facial type, but the male anatomy of the king is carefully distinguished from the female anatomy of the queen: his buttocks sit higher than hers, and they are sharply set off from his thighs. The new proportional system has by this time resulted in the elongation of the figures. The contours of the king's figure undulate rhythmically from the tip of the white crown downward to his feet. The intersecting diagonals of his crown, the rays of the Aten, and the raised arms of all three figures animate the surface of the relief, contributing to an overall impression of liveliness.

A number of comparatively small stelae with representations of the royal family in a cultic

setting form a special group. For many years these objects were inaccurately described as altarpieces. In fact, their architectural and functional context is not known. The "family stela" (Berlin 14145), acquired in 1898, depicts both the king and queen seated in full regalia under the rays of the sun-disk and accompanied by the three oldest princesses. The king kisses his eldest daughter and the queen holds two younger princesses on her lap. Frankfort declared the stela's theme unsuitable: "What strikes one first, here, is the shocking display of the private life of royalty." His judgment was influenced no doubt by early-twentieth-century standards of decorum in the public presentation of royalty. Such scenes must, however, be considered against the background of traditional, "prerevolutionary" representations of the engendering and birth of the



Limestone stela of Akhenaten with his family (39.5 × 33 cm. [15.8 × 13.2 in.]), which was bought in Cairo in 1898. Scholars have noted the prominent role of women in Amarna reliefs. Now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN

divine king. The sculptor who designed the Berlin stela adapted a motif from that cycle, the god kissing his offspring to affirm his paternity. But while the theme is not new, the style is. In traditional relief, for example, the child's figure would not have overlapped that of her father. The seated postures of the royal couple are unconventional insofar as the figures do not follow the strict rule of axiality.

The draftsman employed a contact figure to unite the composition: the body of Princess Meketaten, who sits on her mother's lap, faces her father, toward whom she points, but her head turns back to face her mother, establishing the connection between the two groups of figures.

The stela's designer laid out the scene with a grid based on the smallest Egyptian unit of measure, the "finger." The composition is well balanced, but strict symmetry is avoided. As in other works of Amarna art, diagonals are significant for the composition's underlying structure, while the use of concentric arcs in the layout, identified in a study by Whitney Davis, represents a short-lived experiment.

A superb relief in the moderated style (Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek AEN 1776) derives from a nearly life-size representation of Kiya. The short valanced wig is characteristic for her iconography. After Kiya's fall from favor, the figure was transformed into a depiction of Akhenaten's daughter Merytaten by altering the contour of the cranium, applying plaster (now fallen away) over part of the wig, and changing the inscription behind the figure. Kiya's graceful profile was left untouched.

### *Statuary*

The face from a sandstone colossus that once stood in the temple of Aten at Karnak (Luxor Museum J.55) is a representative example of the king's portrait type as established early in the reign. In terms of human physiognomy, it can be described as an extremely long and narrow face with high cheekbones and an emphatic hanging chin; the nose, too, is long, with flaring nostrils and a knobby tip. The sculptor exaggerated each of the features that presumably characterized Akhenaten's actual physical appearance, reduced them to geometric forms, and, using the nose as a vertical axis, constructed a composition

within undulating contours to create a forceful likeness. Seen frontally, the outline of the chin's spherical mass is repeated by the drooping lower lip, and the incised lines indicating the nasolabial folds end in hooklike forms that seem to draw up the corners of the mouth into a haughty smile. The gently slanting eyes are little more than slits at either side of the nose.

The renowned life-sized bust of Nefertiti (Berlin 21300) is carved of limestone, partially covered with a layer of plaster, and brightly painted. The piece is virtually intact, except for the inlay missing from the left eye and the damaged uraeus. The queen's long neck seems to stretch forward, and the chin is raised in an attitude that occurs in some other likenesses attributable to her. The noticeably large planes of the upper eyelids reinforce the impression of a lowered glance. According to Egyptian custom, the eyes and eyebrows of the queen are depicted as if enhanced with cosmetics. The bust can be assigned to the later stylistic phase, but its composition preserves remnants of the earlier style. The neck, for example, is comparatively long, thin, and sinewy; the cheeks slightly sunken; and the face rather narrow.

The bust form is rare in Egyptian statuary. Borchardt believed the Nefertiti bust had been created as a studio model. But this interpretation cannot be reconciled with what is known about the working procedures of Egyptian sculptors. A more plausible suggestion is that the busts found at Amarna were created for domestic worship of the king and queen.

A head in brown quartzite that derives from the English excavations (Cairo JE 59286) has often been considered the most beautiful depiction of the queen in the round. The piece, which was intended to complete a composite statue, is unfinished. The fact that ears were not included with the head implies that the headgear was to have been a round wig, a type of coiffure rarely worn by Nefertiti. In comparison with the Berlin bust, the face is rounder, the nose is larger and not as straight, the mouth does not smile, the eyes are open wider and are less slanted, and the neck is shorter and not so thin and sinewy. Nothing is reminiscent of the early style.

Since Amarna art first came to the attention of scholars in the mid nineteenth century, it has elicited strong, even aggressive reactions from

specialists and laymen alike, ranging from extreme enthusiasm to indignation and outright rejection. Cultural bias and ideological prejudice have surely played their roles in the negative appraisals, quite apart from personal taste, just as Akhenaten's religious revolution has been greeted or rejected, depending on the religious conviction or ideological inclinations of the writer. Norman de Garis Davies said it succinctly: "The change has been belittled by those who hate sensation and distrust revolution."

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SEE ALSO *The History of Ancient Egypt: An Overview* (Part 5, Vol. II) and the accompanying map; *The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God* (Part 8, Vol. III); *Proportions in Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Part 10, Vol. IV), and *Ancient Egyptian Reliefs, Statuary, and Monumental Paintings* (Part 10, IV).