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AKHENATEN AND DURKHEIM

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There is probably no justification for publishing any new study of the Amarna period that does not contain at least a small quantity of fresh data that will help to resolve some of the uncertainties that surround this controversial episode in ancient Egyptian history. For a long time speculation has been so rampant that the line separating historical studies from historical fiction has become blurred. Yet at least some of the problems result from the lack of an adequate theoretical perspective for collecting and analysing data. By limiting itself to a consideration of theoretical issues and avoiding, whenever possible, the temptation to indulge in further inconclusive speculations about the events of the period, the present paper seeks to justify its existence.

PATTERNS OF EXPLANATION   Despite abundant speculations about Akhenaten's reign, the main analytical perspectives that have guided interpretations of this period are few in number. If we set aside some Marxist explanations that, even on their own terms, have not been particularly successful (Aldred 1968 : 257), most interpretations can be assigned to one of three types. Although these have had a long history and most Egyptologists have used more than one of them concurrently, each has been especially popular at a different time. The first of these explanations to become popular was a rationalist one. While Cyril Aldred (1968 : 257) has ascribed its development to the influence of « American Non-conformist liberalism », more fundamentally it embodies the cultural evolutionary thought of the Enlightenment, in which monotheism was viewed as a rational intellectual advance over polytheism. Akhenaten came to be viewed, either as an individual thinker or as the patron of a progressive clique at the Egyptian court, as the originator and champion of ideas that were far in advance of his time and that, perhaps for that very reason, were inevitably doomed to fail. He was described by his admirers as the world's first individual, internationalist, and pacificist (at a time when the latter quality was admired) and his teachings were construed as prefiguring those of Christianity. This view received its classic exposition in J.H. Breasted's (1912) *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt,* which sought to trace the

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progress of religious concepts in Egypt from earliest times to the Christian era. Breasted's work embodied the idealist conviction that there is a single path along which the human intellect can fashion or discover religious truths; because of the nature of the human mind, animism must precede polytheism and polytheism precede monotheism. The same view makes it possible for gifted individuals to discover such truths ahead of their time. The increasingly pervasive materialistic orientation of modern society and scholarship greatly has undermined faith in such an approach. Since then, greater efforts have been made to try to understand the Amarna period in the context of its own time and of ancient Egyptian culture, rather than as a phenomenon involving the « premature » realization of « more advanced » spiritual concepts.

Other scholars have viewed the Aten cult as a means by which the Pharaohs of the late Eighteenth Dynasty sought to protect their power against encroachment by the increasingly wealthy and influential priesthood of the god Amun. This view conceptualized Egyptian history in terms of the struggles between the Roman Church and various states that recurred in Europe from the medieval period into the nineteenth century. This struggle was seen as reaching its climax when Hrihor, the high priest of Amun, arrogated to himself the kingship at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. This interpretation has encouraged scholars to view the religious innovations of the Amarna period, rather simplistically, solely as a means of pursuing political objectives. For example, F.J. Giles (1970 : 139) has claimed that the Aten cult « was constructed (sic !) for personal or political purposes by the rulers rather than evoked as a response to some particular religious need ». This Machiavellian view appears grossly to underestimate the complexity of the interrelationships between religious sentiments and political activities and hence fails to take account of the significant role that was played by religion in the operation of ancient Egyptian society. It too views the Amarna period anachronistically, in this case in terms of a secular framework evolved in our own industrial societies.

Although the anthropologist Leslie White (1948) tried, in a controversial and not very successful study of the Amarna period, to demonstrate that the social structure of all early civilizations, including Egypt, was such that there was a strong possibility of struggles between Church and State, modern Egyptologists have not been impressed by his arguments. Most of them now doubt the existence, even during the New Kingdom, of a priestly organization that would have been capable of challenging the power of the Pharaoh. Aldred (1968 : 258), for example, affirms that « the idea of a separation of functions between the priesthood and the [government] administration is, in fact, a modern concept; and in Egypt during the New Kingdom, these two aspects of government were as indissolubly linked as they had ever been ». Unfortunately, this is not a view that he espouses

consistently in his work. It is also noted that the appointment even of minor posts in the Amun priesthood required royal sanction and that the king's close relatives often held important ones. The massive endowments that were made to temples throughout the New Kingdom are viewed not as alienations of royal wealth and power, but rather as a « banking » of possessions that could be withdrawn and put to other uses at the king's pleasure (Aldred 1968 : 193-4; Kemp 1972). Finally, Hrihor is now believed to have been a military officer who usurped the high priesthood of Amun from the family that had previously held it (Kitchen 1973 : 16-20).

Especially in recent years, a third type of explanation has attempted to account for the Amarna period largely in terms of the personality of Akhenaten. Old medical speculations, based on representations of Akhenaten, have been revived which suggest that he suffered from a severe endocrine malfunction, perhaps to the extent that he was incapable of having children (Aldred 1968 : 144-45). It has also been suggested that he was a homosexual and an « egocentric megalomaniac ». Parallels have been drawn between his reign and those of the Roman Emperor Caligula or the mad Bavarian king Ludwig II (Aldred 1968 : 260). One commentator has suggested that he may never have been regarded as fit to rule and that, except for a brief period, power was exercised by his father, during a long co-regency, then by his mother, Queen Tiye, and his brother Smenkhakare. The city of Amarna is viewed by this author as a grandiose insane asylum where Akhenaten was kept from actually ruling Egypt (Giles 1970 : 92). Others have argued that the wishes of an Egyptian king could only have been questioned after he was dead; hence no one could have opposed any innovations that Akhenaten or any other monarch sought to accomplish (Aldred 1968 : 194-5). In terms of the *real-politik*, even of ancient societies, this is an extraordinary doctrine of royal power.

While many contradictory speculations about Akhenaten's rule are seen to be based on the assumption of his psychopathology, the weakness of this type of approach has not been carefully examined. The illnesses and deviant personalities of rulers have undoubtedly played a role in human history. Yet, even in cases where the medical and historical documentation is unambiguous, it is notoriously difficult to evaluate the historical impact of such factors. Lacking the physical remains of Akhenaten, it is impossible to be certain what he looked like or from what diseases he may have suffered in the course of his lifetime. It has long been recognized that iconographic considerations, rather than his own physical peculiarities, might have influenced the bizarre and variable manner in which he, his family, and his entire court were represented in the art of the period. Similar iconographic problems, as well as much bizarre speculation about the identity and even the sex of Smenkhakare, also becloud discussions of Akhenaten's alleged

homosexuality. Yet, even if he were physically diseased and homosexual (and these two factors are not necessarily medically related), this would not by itself account for the specific events of his reign. Nor would the assumption that he was insane explain how he was able to translate his thoughts into actions.

Efforts to understand Akhenaten's behaviour are hindered, first of all, by lack of specific knowledge about the events of his reign, which extends to the continuing lack of an adequate chronological framework. The failure, despite prodigious efforts, to resolve the problems of an alleged co-regency with Amunhotpe III is probably the most striking example of this. Equally important is the failure to date when, and for how long, in his reign Amun and the other gods were « suppressed » by having their names and images erased from the monuments. It has very different implications if this action ceased with the co-regency of Smenkhakare (Giles 1970 : 92) than if it began only after the latter's death (Aldred 1968 : 246) or went on during much of Akhenaten's reign. Variant interpretations of the chronology of the Amarna letters create problems for understanding Akhenaten's policies, both foreign and domestic. Likewise, the apparent cessation of work on many of the nobles' tombs that had been begun at Amarna by the middle of his reign raises unanswered problems of an administrative and possibly a theological nature.

Yet, in spite of all these problems, certain reasonably firm conclusions can be reached about Akhenaten as a ruler. We now know that he was able to sponsor massive building projects at Thebes at the beginning of his reign (Smith and Redford 1976) and later at Amarna and that throughout his reign he lavishly supported specific cultic practices and his own court. Surely no minor ruler in a co-regency would have been able to command such resources. There is also little doubt that he sponsored, if he did not personally originate, the far-reaching religious innovations that characterized his reign. Although Aldred (1975 : 52) has denied this, the economic and administrative changes that inevitably must have been associated with these innovations do not suggest a largely passive ruler who devoted all of his time to speculative and aesthetic activities, while letting others govern in his name. His innovations, as far as they are understood, also appear to have followed a steady course, in which changes in the iconography and titulary of the Aten represented the elaboration of a considered policy involving the ever greater exclusiveness and de-anthropomorphization of the Aten. There is no evidence that he indulged in a series of erratic initiatives that would be indicative of « a disordered brain », as Giles (1970 : 113) and others would have it. In particular, there is no evidence that his conduct resembled the insane behaviour of a Caligula. Finally, an unspecified number of Egyptian kings fell victims to assassination; a clear limitation of the absolute power that Aldred has ascribed to them. We do not know how Akhenaten died. Yet he managed

to reign for 17 years and to effect massive changes without being dethroned by a dissatisfied senior co-regent or being murdered by a rebellious family, court, or nation. The long duration of his reign suggests that he was not necessarily more lacking in political sagacity than were his predecessors of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

None of the above modes of explanation is adequate from a theoretical point of view. Psychological explanations are not informative, unless sufficient attention also is paid to their social context. The social context is itself highly complex. The innovations of the Amarna period involved massive changes not only in religious dogmas and practice but also in related political, economic, and social matters. An adequate discussion of these changes therefore requires that due attention be paid to economic and political factors, as well as to religious beliefs. On the other hand, religious beliefs cannot be treated as a simple reflection or rationalization of economic and political activities, any more than they can be treated as independent determinants of the social order. What is needed is a theory that provides a sound and sufficiently comprehensive description of the relationship between social and religious phenomena in early civilizations.

The need for such a perspective was recognized many years ago by the French Egyptologist Alexandre Moret. Moret became interested in the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim and attempted to apply his theories to the study of Egyptian civilization, especially in two books that he wrote for the series *L'Evolution de l'Humanité,* organized by Henri Berr. The first of these books, *Des Clans aux empires* (1923), was written in collaboration with Georges Ambroise Davy, a member of the Durkheimian school of sociology (Gugler 1968). In it, a succinct treatment of the rise of Pharaonic power by Davy was followed by a lengthy study of the history of Egypt's foreign relations by Moret. In a companion volume, *Le Nil et la civilisation* (1926), Moret traced the internal development of Egyptian society, paying close attention to the relationship between political and religious factors. Both books were quickly translated into English, the first by the influential archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, and were published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company in their influential *History of Civilization* series. They were called *From Tribe to Empire* (1926) and *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* (1927). Their collective purpose was to explore the origin of the Egyptian state, the organization of power, and the relationship between political institutions and the structure of society at different periods of Egyptian history.

DURKHEIMIAN SOCIOLOGY
Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) expounded his theories in four books : *De la division du travail social* (1893), *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), *Le Suicide* (1897), and *Les Formes élémentaires*

de la vie religieuse (1912). His work represented a reaction against both the social conflict theories of Karl Marx and the social and political instability of France in the nineteenth century. His main ambition was to account for the factors that hold society together and make it function well. He rejected explanations based on biological or individual psychological factors, arguing that social facts and much of human psychology have to be understood in social terms. In modern scientific terms, he was an anti-reductionist. According to Durkheim, in highly evolved societies social solidarity was promoted by economic interdependence. This permitted the development of a certain degree of individualism, although it did not eliminate the need for governmental regulation. The social coherence of such societies was said to be based largely on organic solidarity. In less complex societies, the cohesion of individuals depended entirely on their sharing of common beliefs, sentiments, and goals, which constituted a collective consciousness (*conscience collective*). The solidarity of these more or less uniform and undifferentiated societies was hence of a mechanical type. He proposed an evolutionary sequence in which societies held together entirely by mechanical solidarity gradually evolved into ones in which organic solidarity played a greater role.

Durkheim also argued that the basic concepts of religion originate in the recurrent occasions in which members of groups experience the power and majesty of their own collective existence. Such categories are invented to explain the unseen but perceived force of the collective consciousness. More specifically, he viewed Australian totemism as a spiritual reflection of the egalitarian social structure of hunter-gatherer populations. Yet, in his view, neither religion nor the collective consciousness could be regarded as a simple epiphenomenal expression of social life. He believed that, once created, religious sentiments, ideas, and images were capable of obeying laws of their own. While the idealization of society constitutes the core of religious beliefs, it is conversely true that all major social institutions are born in religion (Harris 1968 : 464-82; Parsons 1968).

Moret's collaborator Davy based his views of the evolution of religion squarely on those of Durkheim. In his book, *La foi jurée* (1922), he interpreted the potlach, a ceremonial distribution of property and gifts to affirm social status, as found among the Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia, as evidence of a social transformation that altered totemic concepts formerly shared by whole clans into names and blazons that could be exchanged among individuals He saw this as representing a stage marked by the introduction of a contractual element into social life.

While Davy (in Davy and Moret 1926 : 52) expressed doubt that « religious categories are nothing else than a mode of translating the essence and structure of the social group »,

he agreed with Durkheim that the unity of the simplest hunter-gatherer societies springs from the fact that each possesses its own name and emblem and that its members have communion in the same totemic cult, the totem being, in effect, « the diffuse soul of the clan » (*ibid.*, 45-46). The sovereignty of each such group is thus diffused through the whole of it, rather than being concentrated at any one point or in any one individual. Totemism was therefore viewed as being both religious and social in character (*ibid.*, 52). It was claimed that religious roles imperceptibly give rise to political office and kingship emerges as chiefs, by identifying their clan totems with the spirits of their own ancestors and hence becoming their hereditary owners, make it possible for a leader to acquire and absorb the totems, and hence the sovereignty, of many groups. In this way, a single man can incarnate in his own person all the religious authority that had once been diffused throughout the many clan groupings over whose descendants he now rules. A king thus becomes the living synthesis or embodiment of all the energies, capacities, and privileges that were latent and diffuse in primitive societies (*ibid.*, 80-81, 85). Neither Durkheim nor Davy saw the origin of true sovereignty as being associated with violence or despotism, even though these forces might play a significant role in the development and expansion of states. True sovereignty has its roots deep in the collective heart of the earliest human groups and endures, however much groups are transformed and expanded as a result of the enlargement of kingdoms. It was agreed that the individual had been subject to the group long before he was subject to kings (*ibid.*, 110-11).

In Section I of *From Tribe to Empire*, Davy followed in the tradition of nineteenth century evolutionists, including Durkheim, by trying to arrange ethnographic facts concerning geographically diverse and historically unrelated peoples into a single developmental sequence. The Australian Aborigines and the native peoples of the northwest coast of North America were seen as stages leading to the divine kingship found in ancient Egypt. Yet, in an addendum to the second French edition of *Des Clans aux empires* (the one that was translated into English), Davy noted that there was little evidence in Africa of potlach-like institutions such as he believed explained the emergence of chiefship elsewhere. He suggested that, among « Bantu and Nilotic societies », military power played an analogous role. Coming together for defence, clans needed « a single god [in addition to their individual clan ones] as much as a single military chief... Military power and religious power are thus the attributes with which political power appears when it is concentrated » (Moret and Davy 1926 : 112). Thus Davy moved away from a simple, unilinear view of the evolution of religion and kingship, though too late to influence his collaboration with Moret.

MORET AS A DURKHEIMIAN   However questionable the historical inferences of
                                    Durkheim and Davy now may appear to be, they
provided Moret with a view of ancient society in which religion and politics were seen
as functionally interrelated and historically interdependent. While not committing himself
to the proposition that totemism, in the strict sense, had ever existed in Egypt, Moret
believed that prior to the development of agriculture the Egyptians had lived in clan
groups that were politically and socially egalitarian and in which clansmen shared all
forms of authority (Moret and Davy 1926 : 356). As they settled down, power began
to individualize, in the hands first of a council of elders and then of a chief. Later, but
still in prehistoric times, chiefs conquered neighbouring groups and absorbed their leader-
ship roles, totems, gods, and all other appurtenances to become their heir, a god incarnate
upon the earth who was responsible for the life and nourishment of his subjects. This
process continued until a single ruler had concentrated in his own person all the political
and religious authority and the wealth previously dispersed among the clan chiefs and
early regional kings. At the same time, totems of clan spirits became linked to specific ter-
ritories and were transformed into the fetiches and gods known in historic times (*ibid.,* 133).

    Moret concluded that, from earliest times, the Pharaohs were responsible for the worship
of the gods, the defence of Egypt, and ensuring the agricultural and economic prosperity
of the kingdom (*ibid.,* 145). He believed that royal power continued to increase during
the Early Dynastic Period until, by the Fourth Dynasty, the king was an absolute ruler
who had concentrated all authority in his own person. He was not only a god but alone
knew and could perform all the rites that mediated between man and the supernatural.
In theory, he alone discharged all of the leading sacred, administrative, and military
functions; while, in fact, the highest offices were delegated to his closest relatives. While
the kings provided tombs and burial equipment for those who served them, no gods
were mentioned or portrayed in these tombs. Only the king could expect to be identified
after death with the gods Rê and Osiris (Moret 1927 : 203).

    Later in the Old Kingdom and in the First Intermediate Period, these exclusive royal
prerogatives gradually were stripped away by priests, court officials, and the emerging
provincial nobility. Burial rites that originally had been restricted to the king alone were
extended to the entire population. Moret saw the admission of the masses to these rites,
and in particular to those associated with the burial cult of Osiris, as permanently altering
the social and political system of ancient Egypt (*ibid.,* 248). In his poorly-chosen and
anachronistic terminology, the absolutism of the Old Kingdom gave way to the « state
socialism » of the Middle Kingdom. The new social and moral order was one in which,
once again, everyone, not just the king, had a role to play.

As royal power again increased during the Middle Kingdom, the provincial nobility that had survived from the First Intermediate Period was suppressed and the royal court recovered its role as the hub of the national administration (*ibid.*, 241). While Osiris grew increasingly popular as a god with whom ordinary people as well as the king could identify, the celestial Rê of Heliopolis remained the special god and patron of the royal family. Moret viewed the identification at this time of most of the gods of cities and nomes as forms or manifestations of Rê as a process parallelling and reinforcing the monarchical centralization that was being attempted by the Pharaohs during the late Middle Kingdom (*ibid.*, 245).

Moret also interpreted the reunification of Egypt at the beginning of the New Kingdom and the development of an empire in Nubia and Asia as greatly strengthening kingship (*ibid.*, 291); although the heightened authority of the kings was slowly offset by their ceding of royal lands to soldiers and temples (*ibid.*, 302). The Pharaohs were assisted in their efforts to contain the rising power of the priests of Amun by « the rival priesthood of Heliopolis, which had inherited the monarchic traditions of the Old Kingdom, and perhaps by a military party as well » (*ibid.*, 306). The Aten revolution was seen as an attempt to return to the Crown the lands and goods of the god Amun. These remained under royal control rather than being turned over to the priests of the new state cult. This, according to Moret, « shows us what lay beneath the religious revolution, the economic and political objectives of the rupture » (*ibid.*, 324).

Moret went further, however, and argued that Akhenaten's experiment in « more or less strict monotheism » was inspired by the needs of the time; in particular by the need for religion to enhance and rationalize the power of the king in the service of Egyptian imperialism. In arguing thus, he was adopting and extending Breasted's (1912 : 315) suggestion that « Monotheism is but imperialism in religion ». As Moret saw it, the sun-god was meant to be a bond between the Egyptians and other peoples of their empire. At the same time, however, the doctrine of the king as the sole prophet and interpreter of this god « pressed the Pharaonic theory to its last logical conclusion » (Moret 1927 : 325). « Religion and kingship were merged, as in ancient times, but the King alone knew and understood the god, and represented him among men » (*ibid.*). The new solar cult « soared far above the democratic religion of Osiris ... the Osirian privileges to which the people attached such importance ... which made up for the social inequalities and miseries of earthly life, were held of no great account in the circle of the King. Akhenaten's attempt was, first and foremost, an act of political unification, but it was also, in Egypt itself, an effort to restore the King to his privileged position in the religious domain of dogma and ritual, while reducing the temporal power of the priests. Once more it was from the King,

and by his favour, that man would win immortality, and not by the universal grace of the Osirian revelation » (*ibid.*).   Moret concluded, like many of the conventional political interpretations of the Amarna period, that « the centralization of the gods was the result of a political idea rather than of any religious need of the Egyptians.   The proof of this is the failure of Akhenaten's attempt at monotheism » (*ibid., 379*).

Moret's interpretations of Egyptian history are based on data that in many cases have since been shown to be erroneous or inadequate.   They also incorporate in an uninspired fashion many conventional views, particularly concerning the Amarna period.   Yet the lasting value of his work was to show, in a general way, how Egyptological data could be interpreted within a conceptual framework in which religious beliefs and society are treated as parts of a single, functioning, and interrelated system.   Changes in one may stimulate or necessitate changes in the other; resistance to change in one may inhibit change in the other.   A functional viewpoint does not imply that religion, or the ideology that is the functional equivalent of religion in modern secular societies, is merely an epiphenomenon of society or economy anymore than the latter are epiphenomena of religion.   A study of social change in early civilizations must view religious changes in a holistic social context and, at the same time, must pay attention to the role played by ideological factors in promoting or inhibiting such changes.   This means that, before we attempt to explain the religious innovations of the Amarna period in terms of the personality of Akhenaten, we must try to understand both the societal factors that may have encouraged these innovations and the social milieu in which they were attempted. Only by carefully relating the former to the latter can the reasons for the success or failure of Akhenaten's innovations be understood or, indeed, what he was attempting to do become comprehensible.   While Aldred (1968 : 191), in his major study of the Amarna period, has stated that the « worlds of religion and politics ... interacted with [each] other on a reciprocal basis », the implications of this assertion remain to be investigated systematically.   Such an investigation is a functional prerequisite for any further consideration of the psychological dimensions of Akhenaten's behaviour.

THE CONTEXT OF AMARNA STUDIES   In the final substantive section of this paper, we will proceed from Moret's work to consider the implications of the Durkheimian approach for achieving a contemporary understanding of the Amarna period.   We are not able in the scope of a brief paper to analyse systematically all aspects of Egyptian society as they relate to the religious innovations of that period. Instead, we must be content to investigate a few selected problems.   These are important ones, however, and have been chosen because each has implications for further epigraphic

and archaeological research. Yet, before we proceed to these problems, certain weaknesses in the Durkheimian approach must be noted and allowances made for them.

One of these problems is the undue emphasis that Durkheim placed on social solidarity and integration, even in the study of social change. This diverts attention from the tensions and instability that are inherent in societies, and especially in complex societies. Some conflicts between different interest groups are sufficiently severe that they threaten the continued existence of the state and can only be resolved by major and irreversible shifts in power. In Egypt, where there was a tendency for the national state to disintegrate into nomes or regions whenever royal control weakened, the central government employed at various times many different strategies to counteract the efforts of administrators and local notables to usurp power. The failure of these policies permitted hereditary nomarchs or other regional leaders to assert total independence of the central government. Such actions were assisted by local loyalties that the central government was never able totally to extinguish. Even if the local ruling families that had emerged in the protohistoric period were effectively suppressed within the early Pharaonic state and replaced by royal officials who moved from one district to another in the course of their career, the local gods remained and the kings' support for their temples served as a concrete expression of respect by the central government for each region. The kings took care to establish a filial relationship to each such deity and were in theory its priest, who alone was able to present offerings to it. Hence they were the sole intermediary between the sacred and the profane in each region. The kings were also viewed as the son and successor of each local god. This arrangement was an affirmation, on the religious plane, of royal power in the face of regional divisiveness. While the king was the lynch-pin holding together the many regions of Egypt, the local gods and temples were evidence that the Crown was unable, in Durkheimian terms, to absorb all of the sovereignty inherent in local groups. Instead, it had to try to curb, control, and enlist the support of these local forces (Trigger 1979 : 42-52).

From early Predynastic times onward, there was a strong emphasis on funerary cults in Upper Egypt. These activities absorbed increasing amounts of wealth and labour for tomb construction and grave offerings. They also stimulated craft production and the procurement of raw materials from outside the Nile Valley. In historic times, the funerary cults of the Pharaohs were immensely elaborate and viewed as supernaturally essential for national prosperity. The burial cult of the kings and upper classes gradually became dependent upon exotic materials, especially raw materials procured either through foreign trade or by sending expeditions into the surrounding deserts. Obtaining such materials quickly became a prerogative of the Crown. This greatly increased its power, since it

gave the king control over materials that were not only highly valued by the rich and powerful but also essential parts of their funerary cult, including mummification. The absence of alternative procurement systems for these exotic raw materials no doubt stimulated efforts to restore a centralized administration during the First Intermediate Period. Symbolically, all offerings to the dead were conceived of as being royal gifts (*ḥtp-di-nsw*), and many were technically royal in origin, since they were reversions by contract from temple offerings (Gardiner 1950 : 170-73). Hence religion played an important role in Egyptian political life both in reinforcing a centralized government and in giving expression to regional interests that, especially in times of strongly centralized administration, were not clearly expressed in political terms.

The Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty controlled a tribute-paying empire that extended deep into the Sudan and into southwestern Asia. Raw materials, manufactured goods, and slaves (who were sometimes skilled workers) were sent from these regions to the royal court. It is known from other civilizations that control of tribute and the related ability to distribute it as largess inevitably enhance the power of a king and increase the willingness of his native subjects to support him. As military leaders subduing foreign lands, the monarchs of the New Kingdom also commanded a larger and more professionalized army than any of their predecessors had done. These rulers indulged in unprecedented programmes of temple-building, especially at the dynastic capital of Thebes, where the largest and most splendid temples, including the royal mortuary temples, were dedicated to the god Amun-Rê. It is now generally agreed that these activities did not involve an alienation of royal wealth but rather were an expression of it.

These developments were accompanied by increasing ritual emphasis on the status of the monarch. By the reign of Amunhotpe III, the king and his chief wife were being worshipped in various temples as gods in their own lifetime. It also has been observed that in the texts of the Eighteenth Dynasty growing attention was paid to the connection between the kingship and the worship of the sun-god Rê. It is suggested that this was either because the worship of Rê was recognized as an ancient cult of kingship or because the heirs to the throne spent much of their youth in the north where they came under the influence of the priests of Heliopolis; the two explanations are not mutually exclusive. As the empire gave new meaning to the themes of conquest and universal dominion, increasing emphasis was also laid on an image, which can be traced back to the Middle Kingdom, of the king as a dazzling solar-disk ruling over all lands and standing at the head of his armies (Redford 1976 : 50). Sometimes, beginning in the reign of Tuthmoses I, the word for the solar-disk (aten) was supplied with a divine determinative (Giles 1970 : 114-123).

Under Akhenaten's sponsorship, the sun-god Rê-Herakhty was identified as the living solar-disk. Later in his reign, perhaps in conjunction with the suppression of the names of all the other gods (although this is by no means certain), Rê-Herakhty became simply Rê, the Ruler of the Horizon. Akhenaten's emphasis on a single solar deity greatly exceeded previous efforts to identify local gods as forms or manifestations of the sun-god. The new god soon was no longer represented in human or animal form, but simply as a solar-disk supplied with arms representing sunlight. This exclusive identification of divine power with the physical sun eliminated all of the rituals that centred on cult statues within the temples. Instead, the sun was worshipped in open temples that are alleged to have had much in common with the traditional solar ones at Heliopolis (Aldred 1968 : 237).

Thus in the Amarna period both the king and the supreme creative power were identified with the physical sun. The Aten, not surprisingly, was above all a royal deity. His arms accepted offerings and bestowed life and prosperity on his royal worshippers, but on no one else. His name, like that of the king was written within two cartouches and supplied with royal epithets. Heb-seds and, on occasion, regnal dates were also ascribed to him. Like all kings, Akhenaten claimed to be the son of the sun-god; in this case, the beautiful child of the Aten who came forth from his body or his rays. He also claimed exclusive knowledge of his divine father's wishes and that his teachings alone could reveal what the Aten wanted. Yet Akhenaten's claim to divine status appears to have been more insistent and heavily-stressed than was that of his father or any earlier monarch of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Egyptologists have concluded that his share in the divinity of the Aten approached close to complete identity or consubstantiability (Aldred 1968 : 185; Barguet 1968; Assmann 1972; Wilson 1973). His name may have meant « the Effective Spirit (ȝḫ) of the Aten », which Aldred (1968 : 185) interprets as signifying that the same power that was present in the sun was manifested in his own person.

Both Akhenaten and Nefertiti are cited in tomb inscriptions at Amarna as the recipients of their courtiers' prayers of adoration and requests for boons, and most requests to the Aten were made through them. In particular, Akhenaten was looked to provide burial and care after death for those who had served him (Wilson 1973). The Aten, Akhenaten, and Nefertiti are thus believed to have functioned as a divine triad. The depiction of Nefertiti alone, or accompanied only by her daughters, in the presence of the Aten on a major monument from Thebes may symbolize a divine union in which the queen served as the consort of the senior deity, a theme already treated in anthropomorphic representations in the reigns of Amunhotpe III and Hatshepsut. Yet, even if this theme represents an Atenist rendition of the traditional claim that the heir to the throne was sired by the god Amun or Rê, in the person of the king, the prominence given to it may indicate an

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enhanced ritual role for Nefertiti, perhaps as a replacement for the traditional mother goddesses. This would have been further manifested by her occupying the places of tutelary goddesses on the sarcophagus of Akhenaten.

However extreme and unorthodox the Aten cult may have been in suppressing some customary religious practices, it also seems to have represented a radical intensification of the traditional supernatural sanctions that supported monarchical power. The strong emphasis given to the king as the major officiant in cult scenes stressed more than ever the monarch's traditional role as an intermediary between mankind and the supernatural. The diminutive scale and postures of exaggerated reverence in which Akhenaten's courtiers and retainers are consistently represented, both in sacred and secular contexts, further suggests an assertion of the power and majesty of the king.

What is not clear is the broader social context in which these claims were being advanced. Was it simply that the Egyptian monarchy, perhaps beginning cautiously with Amunhotpe III, sought to express on a theological plane the wealth and power that it had acquired politically ? Or had the tributary system on which its power rested ceased to expand and did this lead Amunhotpe III and, later and even more radically, Akhenaten to seek to establish a new rationale for royal power ? An unambiguous answer to this question requires a more precise and detailed knowledge of political and economic conditions during the « golden age » of Amunhotpe III than we currently possess. His reign is generally regarded as an era of great prosperity, but one in which there was little military activity. Yet Egyptologists are not agreed whether these are indices of royal power being effectively maintained or of incipient decline in the crucial area of foreign affairs. A better understanding of the reign of Amunhotpe III is therefore essential for understanding the social and political circumstances that surrounded the promulgation of the Aten cult and would have conditioned its acceptance or rejection.

A second set of problems concerns the institutional arrangements relating to Aten worship. Akhenaten's building projects and the service staff and daily offerings that were provided for the Aten at Thebes and Amarna clearly involved massive allocations of human resources and the expenditure of vast amounts of wealth. It has been suggested that the use of talatats was introduced in order to employ more unskilled manpower, which inscriptions state was levied from the whole country, to hasten construction work. Aldred (1968 : 194) assumes that the temple lands of the great gods were reallocated to sanctuaries of the Aten throughout Egypt, with many of them being assigned to the shrines at Amarna. Elsewhere he proposes that confiscated temple lands became Crown property that was managed by the king's high officers of state and that much revenue from them was probably used for constructions at Amarna that were intended for the use

of king and court, rather than for the Aten cult in a narrower sense (Aldred 1975 : 52-53). It is possible that, at least in the short run, these activities would have increased the disposable revenues of the monarch and hence his power; much as the ability to assign sequestered monasteries to his supporters bolstered the power of Henry VIII, in England, during another period of religious innovation. It has also been assumed that the large-scale disruption of the traditional management of temple estates must have resulted in general mis-administration and economic chaos, which in the longer run undermined Akhenaten's power. Aldred (1975 : 52-53) assumes that these estates were managed by army officers, which encouraged corruption and abuse as too much power was concentrated in the hands of officials of the central government.

Yet, in fact, we know very little about the propagation of the Aten cult outside of Thebes and Amarna; the latter a site purposely chosen to be consecrated to the Aten because it had allegedly never belonged to any other god or goddess. Apart from the great state temples, Aten shrines were constructed in the gardens of the houses of courtiers there. References to « houses » of various Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, some of them associated with temples at Amarna, suggest that royal mortuary cults may have been established and maintained at the new capital (Pendlebury *et al.* 1951, I : 200). Could this have been as a substitute for traditional mortuary cults suppressed at Thebes ? Yet amulets and other evidence indicate that traditional religious beliefs may have persisted among many levels of society even at the main centre of Aten worship.

The architectural and inscriptional information currently available identifies only a small number of Aten temples elsewhere in Egypt or the Egyptian empire (Giles 1970 : 131-36). The question therefore remains open : how far and in what manner was the worship of the Aten established in the many traditional cult centres of other gods throughout Egypt ? Were these traditional cults at any time proscribed, so that no cultic practices were allowed to be observed in these places ? Or were they replaced by the Aten cult and, if so, what architectural and cultic innovations were introduced and did these temples continue to receive revenues at their previous level ? Or did the local cults continue to be celebrated even when the names and images of the old gods were being erased from monuments in major centres ? Either of the first two solutions, while constituting an assertion of royal power, would also have disrupted, to differing degrees, the traditional balance between kingly authority and local traditions. For both religious and political-economic reasons, the suppression of local deities probably would have mobilized considerable popular opposition against Akhenaten. On the other hand, if local cults never were disturbed in most centres throughout Akhenaten's reign, the Aten cult must be seen much more as a phenomenon of the court and a more conservative view must be adopted of

its social and theological implications. So far, we have only the description of desolate sanctuaries in Tutankhamen's « Restoration Stela » to suggest that the suppression of cults was at all general. Yet even this phraseology may incorporate traditional stereotypes of an interregnum more than it reflects reality. Until more is known about how the Aten cult affected religious practices not only at Thebes (and how much do we really know for certain about Thebes ?) and Amarna but also in many other major and minor cult centres throughout Egypt, we will be unable to assess the overall social, political, and theological implications of Akhenaten's innovations.

A similar problem is posed by burial practices. Many of the traditional outward forms of burial continued to be observed at Amarna. Rock-cut tombs were constructed for the royal family and courtiers, bodies continued to be mummified and supplied with coffins and sarcophagi, grave goods were deposited in tombs, including shawabtis — although these lacked their traditional inscriptions —, and the dead continued to be referred to, in terms of Osirian theology, as *mꜣꜤ-ḫrw*. Yet the rest of Osirian ritual and prayers was banished from the texts and decoration of these tombs. Instead, Akhenaten appears as the patron of the dead, practising the same control over them as he had exercised in their lifetime (Aldred 1968 : 191-92). The dead looked forward to seeing the sun, who would revivify them as well as the living each day, and to receiving offerings from the temples as well as their estates in Akhetaten (Wilson 1973 : 191-92). The decorations and inscriptions in the tombs of the courtiers at Amarna, on which curiously little work seems to have been done in the last years of Akhenaten's reign, indicate that these royal officials had to conform to a new Atenist eschatology, in which they continued to participate after death in the life and worship at Amarna. Aldred (1968 : 192) proposes that in doing this « they were reverting to beliefs current in the Old Kingdom when the mastaba tombs of the dead were erected in rows around the pyramids of the sun-kings whom they had served in life ».

Moret (1927 : 325) suggested long ago that this aspect of Amarna theology may not have been simply another manifestation of « monotheism » but a deliberate attempt to suppress Osirian beliefs that since the Old Kingdom had been raising the ritual status of the individual in relationship to that of the monarch. This change may also be reflected in the replacement of traditional scenes in which the tomb-owner appears as the principal figure by ones featuring the royal family and in which the tomb-owner is shown, if at all, in a very minor position serving or being rewarded by them. Yet, only when more is known about how the innovations of the Amarna period affected burial practices among all classes of people and in different parts of the country can it be determined how far-reaching and disruptive they were. Did they affect the burial customs of only a small circle of

officials who lived close to the king or did Akhenaten try to alter burial rituals throughout the country ? It is still another question how extensively Akhenaten intended his innovations to be carried out and how far his intentions actually were implemented. Yet even this question may be answered if archaeological evidence from lesser centres can be taken into account and reveals whether innovations in burial practices and cultic activities were far-reaching, sporadic, or totally absent.

CONCLUSIONS   It has been suggested that the Aten cult represented an attempt to restore the supremacy of the Pharaoh to what it had been in the Fourth Dynasty (Aldred 1968 : 258). It has even been proposed that this tendency was nurtured by a self-conscious antiquarianism that had developed in court circles in the reign of Amunhotpe III (Aldred 1975 : 52). At the same time many believe that the driving force behind this movement was Akhenaten's « egocentric megalomania ». Yet, before we can discuss even how far Akhenaten attempted to push his claim of royal supremacy and to what degree he succeeded or failed, we must know much more about what happened during his reign, not merely at the royal court but also in ordinary cult centres and burial places throughout Egypt. Only by learning much more about the Amarna period at such sites can we hope to understand how extensively Akhenaten sought or temporarily succeeded in altering traditional Egyptian culture.

These questions must also be answered before anyone can claim that Akhenaten's absolutism (if that is how his reign should be characterized) was not effective because he was so engaged in religious schemes that he left the *minutiae* of a vastly-expanded government to be carried on by poorly-controlled and ultimately corrupt officials. It may be wrong to assume that our own stereotypes of a dichotomy between religious and secular activities applied in ancient Egypt and that therefore, because Akhenaten was interested in religion, he was necessarily unworldly. For all we know, he may have been an effective administrator who was able to pursue what we see as religious and political objectives equally effectively. It is likewise premature to assume that Akhenaten's innovations might have succeeded if only he had been a more effective administrator. Aldred (1975 : 52-53) suggests that the over-centralized control of land that resulted from the confiscation of temple lands led to corruption and mismanagement and that this brought upon Akhenaten the odium of later generations. Even if this actually happened, such an explanation would probably be too crudely economic to account for the failure of Akhenaten's innovations. Herodotus reported that the Egyptians detested the memory of Cheops and Chephren so greatly that they did not like to mention their names. This was because they had closed the temples and refused to offer sacrifices to the gods, but rather compelled the people

to labour in their service. Aldred (1968 : 260) suggests that a folk memory may have transfered the events of Akhenaten's reign to the Old Kingdom. Yet perhaps these two periods of Egyptian history were both ones when royal power sought to encroach unduly upon local and individual prerogatives. In both cases the experiment may have proved to be an excess from which the Crown, in the person of later monarchs, was forced to retreat; though the behaviour of the rulers of the Nineteenth Dynasty suggests that the retreat may by no means have been total. There is no reason to believe that local and individual interests and prerogatives throughout Egypt would have bent indefinitely as a result of « blind acceptance » of a king's will. In the long run, studying the events of the Amarna period may prove far more valuable for understanding the limits of Pharaonic power than for the insights they provide into the mind and personality of Akhenaten. Moreover, a firm sociological understanding of that period is a necessary prerequisite for any psychological speculation about that still very enigmatic monarch. To obtain such an understanding, the Amarna period must be studied as it manifested itself in minor centres as well as major ones. Difficult as this may be to do, given the poor preservation of evidence, it is a part of the more general problem of understanding ancient Egyptian civilization from the bottom up as well, as has traditionally been attempted, from the top down.

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