

Continuity, Discontinuity and Change

Perspectives from the New Kingdom
to the Roman Era

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Continuity, Discontinuity and Change in Non-Royal Tombs at Memphis, Amarna, and Thebes

Towards a Synthesis

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I. THE AMARNA PERIOD: JUSTLY A SYNONYM FOR RADICAL CHANGE?

When Egyptologists use the term “Amarna period”, they refer to the events that took place in the reign of king Akhenaten (ca. 1339–1322 BCE). The name given to this era is derived from the modern village of El Amarna, which is the site of the short-lived residence city the ancient Egyptians called Akhetaten (“Horizon of the Aten”).¹ The Amarna period has become synonymous for radical change. It supposedly turned the county upside down and affected various aspects of Egyptian life and afterlife. This is why Egyptological studies commonly differentiate between the period before and after “Amarna”, whether it be in relation to art, society, kingship, or religion, to name just a few examples. The division of history into a pre- and post-Amarna period sets the brief, 17 year “interlude” apart from the remaining roughly 500 years that make up the New Kingdom (ca. 1539–1078 BCE). Is the weight attached to the period in sync with the impact it really had?

Egyptologists’ *communis opinio* of the changes brought about in the realm of religion is aptly articulated by Jan Assmann, whose work has greatly influenced the field’s attitude towards this topic:

Gerade durch die Gemeinsamkeit des monistischen Ansatzes erweist sich die Lehre von Amarna als die genaue Gegenposition zur traditionellen Religion. Daher führte auch die Auseinandersetzung mit Amarna letztlich zu einer gedanklichen Verarbeitung des Alten und zur bewußten Ablehnung des Neuen. (...) Die Amarna-Religion hat als Herausforderung klärend, aber nicht reformatorisch wandelnd gewirkt. Die traditionelle Religion ist sich ihrer selbst in dieser Konfrontation mit ihrem Gegensatz nur umso bewußter geworden.²

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- 1 For a succinct overview of Amarna, see: A. STEVENS, “Tell el-Amarna”, in: W. WENDRICH (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles 2016, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1k66566f>. Introduction to the Amarna period, see: J. WILLIAMSON, “Amarna Period”, in: W. WENDRICH (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles 2015, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/77s6rozr>.
- 2 J. ASSMANN, “Die „Häresie“ des Echnaton: Aspekte der Amarna-Religion”, in: *Saeculum* 23, 1972, 125.

In all fairness, the study just quoted was published almost 50 years ago. Of course the field has moved forward since.³ Yet, qualifications such as “revolutionary” or “heretic” are still frequently employed by scholars to refer to both the Amarna period and to the king Akhenaten. It is equally common to find studies that regard the religion as a “doctrine”. All such qualifications imply radical transformation. One of the most significant changes, it is argued, was felt in religious practice and experience – of the king and, by extension, of all his subjects. Text sources, especially those derived from Amarna, purportedly show evidence of the fact that the multiplicity of gods was abandoned in favour of a single, all-encompassing state deity: Aten, the physical sun disk. The transfer of the king’s residence and his court to virgin ground in Middle Egypt, to a site with no roots in existing traditions, has been identified as another major change. Away from the contemporary centres of power – the old residence city Memphis and the “home base” of the dynasty, Thebes, with its all too powerful priesthood of Amun (in the opinion of the king, that is)⁴ – the new residence was carefully designed according to, and expressing notions of the novel religious views. It served two clear purposes: to be a royal city and centre for the cult of the Aten.

Current academic engagement with the same sources stresses that the long-held attitudes and strong views towards the Amarna period are in need of more nuance. For example, scholars are becoming increasingly more sensitive towards the everyday experiences of the people who lived through the Amarna period.⁵ In the above quote of Assmann, for example, the actual practitioners of the religion are nowhere to be found. The predominantly top-down approach centred on powerful individuals such as the king, with studies focused on larger politico-religious narratives of the rise and fall of Amarna,⁶ are being gradually exchanged for a more bottom-up approach focused on lived experiences. Discussions centred on grand socio-political movements and theological affairs make place for more detailed attention to what these developments meant for people’s daily lives and (preparations for) death and the afterlife. A shift from the macro to the micro level, if you will.

A change of focus from texts and images, traditionally overrepresented in Egyptological narratives, towards archaeology has likewise significantly changed our perspective of daily life in ancient Egypt. Certainly at Amarna, where the monumental is being exchanged for the mundane. Scholars no longer look exclusively to texts sanctioned by the king and priesthood to study aspects of religion. The changed approach shows that there existed a discrepancy between theory (“what the texts say”) and practice (what people actually do, how they (re)act). Thus, from the perspective of the Amarna “doctrine”, which supposedly leaves room for only one god, the Aten, it would seem rather surprising to find material evidence for snake cults within houses, and archaeological remains of traditional community shrines, including one replete with a stela depicting the triad of deities of Elephantine – Khnum, Anukis, and Satis –,

3 N. REEVES, *Akhenaten. Egypt’s False Prophet*, London 2001, offers a compelling example of the state-of-the-art at the turn of the 21st century.

4 REEVES, *Akhenaten*, 111.

5 N. STARING/H. T. DAVIES/L. WEISS (eds.), *Perspectives on Lived Religion. Practices – Transmission – Landscape*, PALMA 21, Leiden 2019.

6 E.g. A. DODSON, *Amarna Sunrise: Egypt from Golden Age to Age of Heresy*, Cairo 2014; A. DODSON, *Amarna Sunset: Nefertiti, Tutankhamun, Ay, Horemheb, and the Counter-revolution*, Cairo 2009.

to mention just two examples.⁷ The latter may represent the community shrines that were a common sight at the neighbourhoods whence the new inhabitants of Amarna came from. It shows that people's traditional ways of life had all but vanished. It also demonstrates that the new "state" religion need not have clashed with traditional religious views and practices, even at its centre of gravity, at Amarna, the city that allegedly breathed Atenism.

At this point we should briefly dwell on the opposition of the "traditional" and the "new". Let us again bring in Assmann's quote. There he argues that the new "doctrine of Amarna proves to be the exact opposite of traditional religion". The opinion focuses on the reducing of the pantheon of gods to a single one, but ignores the fact that the changes were made by the people who are indigenous to the culture and society that brought about said changes. It should be stressed that the "new" religion built forth upon the existing worldview – one that was not static but continuously in motion – employing the readily available (linguistic, artistic, architectural, etc.) toolkits to express the altered notions of god and his place in the Egyptian world. The conceptual underpinnings of the Amarna religion are not alien to Egypt of the late Eighteenth Dynasty. Only the people who lived at that place and time could have shaped "Atenism" into the unique shape that it took.

Let us move from the "theology" to the place where Atenism was actually practised and experienced. Akhetaten has long been treated as an atypical example of an ancient Egyptian city. Perhaps because of that reason, its potential has not been utilised to the fullest. More recently the site has been recognised as presenting a privileged setting for studying the cemeteries in their lived urban context. It allows us to view the tangle of tombs of both the upper and lower classes, the urban and suburban living areas that housed the "people behind the tombs", and the network of paths and tracks that connect all built features in the landscape.⁸ Whereas the purpose-built royal and state-administrative buildings in the city's centre were carefully laid out to convey (on a monumental scale) certain messages, comparably strict suburban planning of the living quarters seems not to have been a reality.⁹ Clearly, the king had no interest in the organisation of the neighbourhoods that settled his subjects. It has been observed that, albeit short-lived, these suburban areas grew rather organically, and that the spatial distribution of houses, the clustering of large urban villas with their "villages" of dependents, seem to have continued local and traditional customs. One should bear in mind that the people who settled Amarna came from elsewhere, and they moved not alone. They carried with them the baggage of different local traditions. The dwelling spaces of the living were re-created at a new location precisely according to what people were used to in their towns of origin. The hometowns were likely from across the kingdom. One wonders if the same "disinterest" of the king and the observed spatial organisation and growth of the suburbs also applied to the necropoleis, the literal cities of the dead. The former imply that the social fabric of society

7 B. J. KEMP, "How Religious were the Ancient Egyptians?", in: CAJ 5/1, 1995, 29–33; A. Stevens, *Private Religion at Amarna: The Material Evidence*, Oxford 2006.

8 A. STEVENS, "Death and the City: The Cemeteries of Amarna in Their Urban Context", in: CAJ 28/1, 2018, 103–126.

9 B. KEMP, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and Its People*, London 2012, 163, characterising Amarna as the "antithesis of city planning, a notable avoidance of what, to us, looks like a perfect opportunity to engineer a complete society".

was apparently little affected by the new “theology”. It was certainly not changed overnight. So, what effect(s) did the new religious views have on the private tombs, then, if any?

II. TAKING A STEP BACK: ON THE RUN-UP TO AMARNA

Not just the supposed universal effects of the religious changes brought about in the Amarna period are being questioned by current scholarship. The run-up to Amarna has been pushed back in time, also. For example, it is clear now that “innovations” attributed to the reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten had, in fact, germinated in the preceding reign of Amenhotep III. The shift towards a solar theology can already be detected in the course of his reign,¹⁰ and may even be discussed in connection with the reign of Thutmose IV.¹¹ Certain architectural elements inextricably linked to the reign of Akhenaten can actually be found as early as the preceding reign of his father. These include the so-called *talatat* style, employed in the temple of Millions of Years at Kom el-Hettan on the Theban west bank¹² and in some of Amenhotep III’s buildings at Karnak.¹³

Another element present already during the reign of Amenhotep III is the construction of grand non-royal tombs. The funerary monuments display for the first time a hypostyle hall, which allows the structures to be compared to contemporary temples. Examples of such tombs in the Theban necropolis include those built for Ramose (TT 55), Amenemhat Surer (TT 48), and Kheruef (TT 192). Instead of pillars, these tombs utilise a certain type of column otherwise attested at the temple of Luxor. The one columned hall after the other also challenges the traditional tomb layout. Another reference to contemporary temples includes the new emphasis on relief decoration instead of the wall paintings that are observed in earlier private-tomb context.

At Memphis we are still ill-informed about the private necropolis before the Amarna period. Yet, the move towards temple-shaped tombs commenced before the reign of Akhenaten. The earliest, archaeologically accessible temple-shaped tombs are those of Meryneith and Ptahemwia. The construction of their monuments commenced in the very early reign of Akhenaten, before the move to Amarna, and more decontextualised museum objects derived from other “lost” tombs point to them bearing similar elements in the reign of Amenhotep III. The early date makes clear that the architectural layout of the monuments was not influenced by the religious shifts that occurred later in Akhenaten’s reign. Instead, the form represents a development that had started as late as the reign of Amenhotep III. Moreover, if we take “Amarna” out of its spatio-temporal isolation and view private-tomb development in the *longue durée*, we will observe that architecture and iconography were never a given. Instead, the form, layout, decoration, and so forth, were constantly subject to change, reflecting contemporary ideas of what an official’s tomb should ideally look like. Such ideas changed as times changed. Periods deemed not (or less) “revolutionary” being no exceptions. If change was such an integral part of the course of things, we should approach more critically qualifications such as “traditional” and “revolutionary”.

10 D. LABOURY, *Akhénaton, Les grands pharaons*, Paris 2010, 74–80.

11 For example in: A. DODSON, *Amarna Sunrise*, 34–35, with a list of references.

12 H. SOUROUZIAN, “L’art proto-amarnien au temple d’Amenhotep III à Thèbes”, in: *Memnonia* 26, 2015, 157–177.

13 S. BICKEL, “Amenhotep III à Karnak. L’étude des blocs épars”, in: *BSFE* 167, 2006, 12–32, especially 29–31.

III. AMARNA, PRIVATE TOMBS, AND CHANGE

The above observations lead us to pose the question how strong the actual impact of the assumed significant cultural changes actually was on the non-royal funerary monuments. Did these changes affect the necropolises of the major urban centres and residence cities of the time – Memphis, Amarna, Thebes –, and if so, all to the same degree? Does the word “change” really capture the reality in these cemeteries? Or would continuity be more applicable? And what about the years following the death of Akhenaten and, with him, the (royal, religious) ideologies so characteristic of the period? Did this time of major religious changes impact on the private monuments at all? If so, in what way, and why? Or were the non-royal tombs in their architectural layout and iconographic programmes perhaps rather oriented to the time prior to Amenhotep IV?

The latter question considers the observation that in times of new beginnings and socio-political stabilisation there tends to be a strong notion of referring back to earlier times. For example, at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom we can observe iconographic and stylistic references to the Old Kingdom.¹⁴ Likewise, at the beginning of the New Kingdom references were made to the Middle Kingdom.¹⁵ Can we observe a similar reactive response in the immediate post-Amarna period, perhaps in the form of a tendency to revert back to more “traditional” (or rather, established) decoration of the pre-Amarna Eighteenth Dynasty? What was the legacy of the Amarna period? The commonplace opinion to describe the reaction toward this period in later times is articulated in the following quote, again by Assmann:

Akhenaten’s monotheistic revolution met with two different kinds of responses. One is practical and consists in the dismantling of his buildings, effacement of his traces and elimination of his name from the king list. The other one is intellectual and consists in changes in the worldview and basic ideas of god which seem to react to Akhenaten’s revolutionary ideas.¹⁶

Views such as these lay focus on larger politico-religious narratives in viewing Amarna’s legacy. In so doing they almost ignore the actual agents that make the story, the people who lived through and shaped the period. What practical effects had all this on the lived experience of people as far as we can tell from the tombs they built? Was Amarna really the great revolution or is it rather an Egyptological construct?

14 D. P. SILVERMAN/W. K. SIMPSON/J. WEGNER (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Haven/Philadelphia 2009.

15 Compare for the Eighteenth Dynasty e.g.: S. BICKEL (ed.), *Vergangenheit und Zukunft: Studien zum historischen Bewusstsein in der Thutmosidenzeit*, AH 22, Basel 2013; A. STUPKO-LUBCZYŃSKA, *Offering Scenes in the Chapel of Hatschepsut: Diachronic Development of Their Composition and Content*, Deir el-Bahari VII, Waszawa 2016.

16 J. ASSMANN, “Theological Responses to Amarna”, in: G. N. KNOPPERS/A. HIRSCH (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World. Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, Leiden/Boston 2004, 179.

IV. THE NATURE OF THE NECROPOLISES

When talking about developments in the three necropolises – at Memphis, Amarna, and Thebes – and addressing the question of the impact that certain historical developments had on them, it is necessary to first consider the respective sites in diachronic view. At Amarna, it is evident that the areas selected for the North and South Tombs were previously unoccupied. The cemetery of rock-cut tombs was built from the ground up. The purpose and meaning of the tombs had not changed, however. These continued to act as a “monumental statement” to communicate the owner’s elevated place in society, his socio-professional affiliation, and the religious environment.

What did differ, markedly even (compared to Memphis and Thebes), were the social make-up of the tomb owners at Amarna, and the themes used in the tombs’ decoration. How could the differences be explained? To start with, the move to Amarna was induced by Akhenaten. The high officials who came along with the king were there because they stood in close proximity to him. The private rock-cut tombs that were built for a small selection of the resident court officials, all realised to varying degrees of completion, should be evaluated in that light. The tomb owners do not represent a random cross section of society. They were part of the king’s inner circle, *šn.wt*, his entourage. As such they played a crucial part in the life world of the king. It placed them in a privileged position to start constructing tombs in a city that was still under construction. A remarkable feat, because one may expect that human and material resources were in high demand and low in supply. Skilled craftsmen, conceptual artists, and sculptors, for example, would have had no shortage of work to be carried out at “state”-sponsored construction works such as temples and palaces. Literally hundreds of metres of relief and painted decoration had to be realised. The court officials with monumental tombs may have shared in the resources available to the king to build up the city, so as to create their own private funerary monuments. Their privileged position within society as well as their dependence upon the king were visualised in the decoration of their tombs. It highlighted their status and ubiquitously included the king and queen. This overt closeness to the king and prominence of the royal couple has thus far been interpreted as a break with tradition. However, if we focus on the question of how people were able to make for themselves such tombs more generally, looking beyond Amarna both in time and space, it soon appears that the special case of Amarna displays traits that are in fact ever-present. In general, we can posit that status, financial means, and professional affiliation,¹⁷ as well as access to networks of power, were crucial parameters for tomb construction in all periods and at all necropolis sites. At Thebes before the Amarna period, professional ties with the temple of Amun¹⁸ and/or

17 N. STRUDWICK, “The population of Thebes in the New Kingdom. Some Preliminary Thoughts”, in: J. ASSMANN/E. DZIOBEK/H. GUKSCH/F. KAMPP (eds.), *Thebanische Beamtennekropolen. Neue Perspektiven archäologischer Forschung. Internationales Symposium Heidelberg 9.–13. 6. 1993*, SAGA 12, Heidelberg 1995, 97–105; B. ENGELMANN-VON CARNAP, “Soziale Stellung und Grabanlage. Zur Struktur des Friedhofs der ersten Hälfte der 18. Dynastie in Scheich Ab del-Qurna und Chocha”, in: J. ASSMANN/E. DZIOBEK/H. GUKSCH/F. KAMPP (eds.), *Thebanische Beamtennekropolen. Neue Perspektiven archäologischer Forschung. Internationales Symposium Heidelberg 9.–13. 6. 1993*, SAGA 12, Heidelberg 1995, 107–128.

18 S. S. EICHLER, *Verwaltung des „Hauses des Amun“ in der 18. Dynastie*, BSAK 7, Hamburg 2000; B. HARING, “The rising power of the House of Amun in the New Kingdom”, in: J. C. MORENO GARCÍA (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Administration, HdO I. Ancient Near East 104*, Leiden 2013, 607–637.

being part of, or closely connected to powerful families who often held high offices for generations on end,¹⁹ would have secured access to the necessary material (human and financial) and imaginative (e.g. knowledge) resources. The same situation can be hypothesised at Memphis, although we have very limited data regarding the private tombs built earlier in the New Kingdom. At Amarna, on the other hand, the traditional networks of power, albeit local, were replaced by the king, who took centre stage in his city. He was the central node in the underlying social network.

The next field of focus is the landscape setting of the cemeteries and the individual tombs therein. At sites such as Saqqara, the main necropolis site of ancient Memphis, and Western Thebes, both with a long history of tomb building, large areas were already occupied with older monuments. Such is especially noticeable at Thebes, because the areas suitable for making rock-cut tombs was naturally not infinite. Thus, already by the time of Amenhotep III it becomes a challenging feat to find a good spot in the areas of the necropolis previously preferred for siting tombs, for example at Sheikh Abd el-Gurna and the little hill of El Khokha. These were the areas that were situated on a visible axis and in proximity to the mortuary temples of past and contemporary rulers and/or facilitated prime access to main procession routes and necropolis paths. In that way, the tombs located in those areas were able to support the desired self-fashioning strategies of their owners. Viewing the use of the West Theban landscape in the long run, it appears that every period (measured by the reigns of individual kings) favoured their specific parts of the necropolis.

The situation at Saqqara differed from that at Thebes. The old necropolis is located on an elevated desert plateau. The local geology effected the choices and range of possibilities for making tombs, which resulted in overwhelmingly freestanding funerary monuments. Areas with rock-cut tombs have been identified also, but these are underrepresented. The sections of the necropolis selected for making tombs in the New Kingdom were sited in the same general areas where tombs had been built for hundreds of years on end. In the Teti Pyramid Cemetery, the Old Kingdom private necropolis was largely covered under a thick deposit of sand and rubble. It offered the foundation for the construction site of the people in the New Kingdom. The Unas South Cemetery was probably still dotted with centuries-old mastabas. All but a few remaining structures were pulled down and the limestone blocks were reused in the new constructions. It is presently difficult to tell exactly why precisely these areas of the plateau were selected for tomb building in the New Kingdom. One reason is that we know so little about the contemporary urban areas. Thebes may offer a justifiable parallel, and so the cemeteries at Saqqara were likely linked to certain habitation areas and temple structures at and around Memphis.

19 B. M. BRYAN, "The 18th Dynasty before the Amarna Period (c.1550–1352 BC)", in: I. SHAW (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford/New York 2000, 261–264; J. J. SHIRLEY, "Crisis and Restructuring of the State: from the Second Intermediate Period to the Advent of the Ramesses", in: J. C. MORENO GARCÍA (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Administration*, HdO I. *Ancient Near East* 104, Leiden 2013, 582–596.

V. THE TOMB OWNERS

The social and professional backgrounds of the tomb owner yield some differences when comparing the three necropolises.

The owners of rock-cut tombs in the North and South cemeteries at Amarna seem to be, at first glance, the same sort of people one would normally expect to find at Thebes before the reign of Akhenaten. They are individuals of high rank who served in various spheres of administration. Included are viziers, high priests, and court officials. At Amarna, the careers of these men were closely tied to the king and his household. Similarly-titled officials are also attested at Thebes and Memphis. However, unlike at Amarna, the other two major necropolis sites additionally housed (for eternity) a much wider variety of officials. Powerful networks organised along family or professional ties played an important role at the necropolises before Akhenaten entered the stage.²⁰ Access to or membership of such networks provided access to human and material resources which, in turn, made it possible for officials, high and low and everything in between, to make a tomb. The situation at Thebes started to change in the Amarna period. Only a few tombs can be dated to the reign of Akhenaten, even to his early years before the move to Amarna. For about a decade or so, covering the height of the Amarna period, we have evidence for no large tomb at all. This leads us to the question: What happened with those belonging to the Theban upper classes that remained at Thebes? For example, where are the tombs of the high priest of Aten and the municipal administrators such as the mayors? We can only speculate that perhaps a lack of an available workforce led to tomb-building projects being put on hold. If such were the case, we need to assume that the workers, craftsmen, artists, and all others usually engaged in the making of a Theban private tomb were relocated to work at Amarna. The tomb of the high priest of Amun, May (No. -383-), who served early in Akhenaten's reign might show the earliest symptoms of the hypothesised decreasing availability of the specialised workforce. The tomb is rather small, certainly for someone of his stature, and the architectural layout quite simple. If the transfer of the specialised workforce to Amarna serves to explain the low in tomb making, one would perhaps expect to find a similar situation at Saqqara. Again, the situation in the northern necropolis is more difficult to evaluate from a diachronic point of view, because we know so little about the structure of the cemeteries before Akhenaten. Construction of large monuments that were started at the beginning of the king's reign, such as that of Meryneith, were temporarily halted, to be finished only after the abandonment of Akhetaten. The tombs that we know were built in the heyday of "Amarna" were usually modest structures, built for individuals who were not members of the very highest echelons of society. Tomb building received a notable boost when Tutankhamun ascended the throne and left Amarna in favour of Memphis. This trend seems to support the hypothesis floated above: the ebbs and flows in the quantity and quality of private tombs was to a certain degree tied to the availability of a skilled workforce. The workforces in question were appar-

20 As for Thebes see: J. J. SHIRLEY, "Viceroys, viziers & the Amun precinct: The power of heredity and strategic marriage in the early 18th Dynasty", in: *JEH* 3/1, 2010, 73-113; W. HELCK, "Soziale Stellung und Grablage (Bemerkungen zur thebanischen Nekropole)", in: *JESHO* 5, 1962, 225-243; W. HELCK, "Wer konnte sich ein Begräbnis in Theben-West leisten?", in: *GM* 135, 1993, 39-40. In Saqqara important families with positions as vizier/high priest of Ptah are the Ptahmose/Meryptah family (tem. Amenhotep III) or Amenhotep Huy/Ipy (temp. Amenhotep III/Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten).

ently mobile, and since these fell under the direct responsibility of the king, they were sent to wherever they were needed by him. The Amarna project required an unprecedented large workforce, thus drawing on both Memphis and Thebes to meet the requirements.

Patterns in tomb construction after Amarna further corroborate our view. By the time of Tutankhamun, tomb construction was slowly revived at Thebes. Things did not return to how they were before Amarna, however. Most notably, the tomb owners no longer display the wide range of office titles from the lowest to highest ranks. The funerary monuments now belong to local functionaries and supreme authorities of the Amun temple administration. There are a few exceptions, such as Amenhotep Huy, the viceroy of Kush, and the artisans in Deir el-Medineh. Moreover, compared to the situation before Akhenaten's reign, the bearers of particular offices are no longer attested in the last two decades of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The "butlers" present but one example. They only reappear in the Ramesside period, at a time when many more individuals held the office simultaneously. The rank title "fan bearer on the right of the king" is only attested among the immediate post-Amarna tomb owners. They were all members of the highest elite, and officiated in the reigns of Tutankhamun and Ay. The title was held alongside other high offices, such as "king's son of Kush", "overseer of the southern countries" (TT 40), "overseer of the double granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt" (TT 46), and "overseer of the royal quarters and overseer of works" (TT 271).

At Saqqara, we can observe a much wider spectrum of tomb owners. They include both the very highest administrators of the kingdom, including the treasury overseer, Maya, and general-in-chief, Horemheb, who practically reigned the country in tandem. And we meet the lower clergy of temple and town administration. The individuals engaged in work production (artists, makers of lapis lazuli, goldsmiths, overseers of work) may also be singled out.

In the 12 year "life" of Amarna, no less than 25 monumental tombs were made, albeit not all of them finished. In contrast, so far only 15 Theban tombs can be attributed to the reigns of Tutankhamun to Horemheb, which covers a time period of circa 27 years. Just a handful of the tombs can be attributed with certainty to the reign of Tutankhamun. The sheer number of tombs attested for the reign of Tutankhamun at Saqqara dwarfs the productivity at Thebes.

VI. TOMB ICONOGRAPHY

Tomb decoration is generally defined by an interplay of linearity and tradition on the one hand and innovation and the ongoing "expansion of the existing"²¹ on the other. Together with stylistic developments, tomb iconography expresses certain influences and shifts of perspective. Despite a strong canonical tradition, it reflects appropriate aesthetical concerns, the relevant style of each successive period, and distinct creative choices. Themes, motifs, types, iconography and style refer to different frames of traditions and references, and to some individual decisions made by the artist(s) and/or patron(s).²² With regards to our question

21 "Erweiterung des Bestehenden": E. HORNING, "Von zweierlei Grenzen", in: *Eranos Jahrbuch* 49, Frankfurt am Main 1981, 404.

22 A. G. SHEDID, *Stil der Grabmalereien in der Zeit Amenophis' II - untersucht an den thebanischen Gräbern Nr. 104 und Nr. 80, AV 66*, Mainz am Rhein 1988, 64; N. STARING, "Fixed rules or personal choices? On the composition and arrangement of daily life scenes in Old Kingdom elite tombs", in:

of Amarna's impact, it is particularly the wall decoration of tomb chapels that yields significant information. After all, image creation and the developments of forms reflect social and theological changes in a unilateral way, aside from the given religious and cultic contexts of a funerary monument. It is evident that iconic representations and entire monuments alike were powerful media for a manifold "self-thematisation",²³ linking identity to its social context. In form of monumental visual communication, the members of the elite expressed their status and linked themselves to the court.

Many tombs of the New Kingdom in particular display multiple styles inside a single cult chapel. This can be explained by the many years it took to make and decorate tombs. There are numerous examples available at Saqqara and Thebes. That it took more than just a few years to make a tomb is also clear from the evidence at Amarna. None of the 25 tomb chapels were completed within the 12 years that the city was inhabited. The commissioning patrons belonged to the upper class of society and stood in close proximity to the king, and yet the decoration of their tombs was left unfinished, without exception. In some cases, work had not even progressed to the stage of decorating. A plausible explanation for this state of affairs might be that work forces – architects, craftsmen, artists, etc. – were not continuously available.²⁴ Most probably they had other commitments, working for their main employers. The latter were, in all likelihood, the local "state" institutions (e.g. the palace) and temple.²⁵

In keeping with the general, long-term developments at Saqqara, Thebes, and even at Amarna, during and after the Amarna period, new images were combined with more "traditional" solu-

N. STRUDWICK/H. STRUDWICK (eds.), *Old Kingdom, New Perspective. Egyptian art and archaeology 2750–2150 BC*, Oxford/Oakville 2011, 256–269; G. PIEKE, "Eine Frage des Geschmacks. Anmerkungen zur Grabdekoration auf dem Teti-Friedhof von Saqqara", in: K. A. ΚÓTHAY (ed.), *Art and Society: Ancient and modern contexts of Egyptian art: Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 13–15 May 2010*, Budapest 2012, 123–138; G. PIEKE, "Lost in Transformation: Artistic Creation between Permanence and Change", in: T. Gillen (ed.), *(Re)productive Traditions in ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Liège, 6th–8th February 2013*, AegLeod 10, Liège 2017, 259–304.

- 23 In the field of Egyptology see: J. ASSMANN, "Preservation and presentation of self in ancient Egyptian portraiture", in: P. DER MANUELIAN (ed.), *Studies in honor of William Kelly Simpson 1*, Boston 1996, 55–81; M. HARTWIG, *Tomb Painting and Identity in Ancient Thebes, 1419–1372 BCE*, MonAeg X, Turnhout 2004; E. HOFMANN, *Im Dienst des Pharao – Loyalität und Selbstdarstellung. Innovative Bilder in thebanischen Beamtengräbern in der 18. Dynastie*, HÄB: Sonderband 2, Hildesheim 2012.
- 24 It should be added here that we do not know precisely when the construction of each individual tomb was begun. The projects were not all started from the moment Amarna was founded. Perhaps work on some tombs had commenced shortly before the city was abandoned again. In that light, it is quite logical that some tombs were not even close to being finished. That not a single tomb had been finished points to the possibility of different causes, too.
- 25 This does not automatically mean the main temples, like e.g. the Amun temple at Karnak, the Ptah temple in Memphis or the diverse sanctuaries at Amarna. In Thebes, in fact, the largest building projects which needed artisans and artists were most of all the new mortuary temples on the west bank for almost each ruler. Moreover, the royal palace(s) in all likelihood did profit from talented painters, as we have well-attested evidence in Malqata. For artists in general see: SHEDID, *Stil der Grabmalereien*, 95–102; D. LABOURY, "Designers and Makers of Ancient Egyptian Monumental Epigraphy", in: V. DAVIES/D. LABOURY (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptian Epigraphy and Palaeography*, New York 2020 85–101.

tions. The parallel use of multiple iconographic concepts, in this case the new Amarna images and the longer-established corpus of themes and motifs, as well as related distinct styles is well attested in several tombs. Thus we find clear references to both pre-Amarna and Amarna art as part of the wall decoration at all three sites. In the context of visual networks, a strong linkage between Amarna and the other necropolises can be observed on different levels. The tomb chapel testifies to the ongoing transmission of images from Thebes and Memphis to Akhetaten and back again to Thebes and Memphis. In a sense, Amarna became a receptacle of artists, motifs, styles, and so forth, from Thebes and Memphis. When the city was eventually abandoned, new ideas, motifs, and styles, travelled along with the artists who moved (back) to Memphis and Thebes.

Evidently there were no workshops at Amarna before Akhenaten. Thus, construction works and the realisation of pictorial decoration were dependent on craftsmen and artists who were drawn from elsewhere to the new city. Interestingly there are some direct iconographic links, which provide hints that at least some of the artists came from Thebes. In fact, at a closer look the Amarna tomb decoration reveals that it is far less revolutionary than previously assumed. For example, classical funerary scenes are attested in several main cult places. As observed by previous authors, and always recognised as a distinctive feature,²⁶ the Amarna tombs implement rather prominently royal motifs. These came at certain costs of the images of the tomb owner. He no longer features as the main figure present on all walls. The new themes introduced in Amarna tombs are mainly those related to the royal family. On the other hand, the pictorial decoration takes up themes and motifs that were already present in the preceding period. These are in particular scenes connected with the occupation of the owner, views of the agricultural sphere, and workshops. In these scenes a direct link can be found with specific tombs at Thebes. The tomb of Meryre (AT 4) offers a striking case. The scene depicting the royal visit to the temple of Aten might be based, in terms of motif, composition, and iconic references, on the Theban tomb of the Useramun (TT 131). This pictorial citation might be related to the wish of showcasing a rare and curious motif, which could function as visual hook for the visitors of the tomb. It is questionable if and to what degree Meryre wanted to be associated with Useramun, the Upper Egyptian vizier of the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, and the owner of two prominent tombs in Sheikh Abd el-Gurna (TT 61 and 131),²⁷ and thus the precise reference could be understood as a so-called “identifying copy”.²⁸ A strong case has also been built to identify this Meryre I as the Memphite official who started building a tomb at Saqqara when he was still named Meryneith.²⁹ Elements of the same scene depicting the

26 See, A. DAVID, *Renewing Royal Imagery: Akhnaten and Family in the Amarna tombs*, HES 11, Leiden/Boston 2020 with bibliography.

27 E. DZIOBEK, “Theban Tombs as a Source for Historical and Biographical Evaluation: The Case of User-Amun”, in: J. ASSMANN/E. DZIOBEK/H. GUKSCH/F. KAMPP (eds.), *Thebanische Beamtennekropolen. Neue Perspektiven archäologischer Forschung. Internationales Symposium Heidelberg 9. –13. 6. 1993*, SAGA 12, Heidelberg 1995, 129–140.

28 A. DEN DONCKER, “Identifying-copies in the Private Theban Necropolis. Tradition as Reception under the Influence of Self-fashioning Processes”, in: T. Gillen (ed.), *(Re)productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Liège, 6th-8th February 2013*, AegLeod 10, Liège 2017, 333–370.

29 For the identification of the Memphite Meryneith alias Meryre with the Amarna Meryre I, see VAN WALSEM, in RAVEN/VAN WALSEM, *The Tomb of Meryneith*, 51–53. Van Walsem also lists arguments against the identification. For example, the name of his/their wife/wives differs, as does the list of

temple of Aten are present in both his Memphite tomb and at Amarna. Such links may allow us to identify the actual individual(s) behind the mechanics of image transmission.

In general image transfer and networks of iconographic correspondence, respectively a system of references between distantly located sites such as Amarna, Saqqara, and Thebes, are related to travelling of artists and/or travelling motifs.³⁰ Both are not new phenomena but well attested also for previous periods. The transfer of images to nearby monuments but also other necropolises can be imagined either from tomb to tomb, hereby mainly depending on a visual memory of artists, or by easily portable image carriers, like papyri or drawing boards.³¹ In this process of iconographic and stylist reinterpretation, the chosen themes and motifs were normally adapted and developed further.

VII. WRAPPING UP

The question whether the Amarna period is a just synonym for radical change should be answered with “no”. At least from the perspective of the sources studies in this section, namely the private tombs at Memphis, Amarna, and Thebes. The decoration of tombs at Amarna was influenced by both Theban and Memphite “traditions”, and in the period after Akhenaten, tombs at Thebes and Saqqara build further on what was realised at Amarna. Overall, the Amarna period seems not to have impacted as markedly as previously thought and the 17 years of Akhenaten’s reign had less influence on the funerary landscapes than other periods that are regularly designated as “crises”. It is only by the very end of the Eighteenth Dynasty that the clear references to Amarna ideas and motifs loses their impact and noteworthy religious shifts led to lasting effects on non-royal tombs.

The deepest effect of the “Amarna interlude” for the three cemeteries discussed in this section appears the substantially altered role of Thebes. Already during the reign of Akhenaten the necropolis loses its position as one of the most important burial places for the Upper Egyptian elite and changes from a populous elite cemetery to a site of more local importance. It was no longer an anchor point for the wider region. Even though the cult of Amun revived at Thebes after the abandonment of Amarna, the status of the city had transformed, and society’s focus was shifted elsewhere. After all, it was Memphis that was the place selected to serve as the more-or-less permanent residence of the king accompanied by a circle of high dignitaries. They left their lasting marks on the city’s necropolis – one that has been rediscovered comparatively recently.

titles held by the tomb owner. The chapter by Nico Staring accepts the identification, that of Dana Bělohoubková tends to give more credibility to the option that the two Meryre’s were not identical.

30 I. VIVAS SAINZ, “Egyptian artists in the New Kingdom: Travelling artists and travelling ideas?”, in: J. CHYLA/K. ROSIŃSKA-BALIK/J. DĘBOWSKA-LUDWIN/C. WALSH (eds.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2016, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Symposium, Philadelphia/Oxford 2017*, 107–120.

31 For overview see, T. A. BÁCS, “When Ancient Egyptians Copied Egyptian Work”, in: V. DAVIES/D. LABOURY (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptian Epigraphy and Palaeography*, Oxford 2020, 147–162.

It is understood that the present discussion on New Kingdom Egypt's three major necropolises could only address individual aspects of rather complex issues, about which many historical and cultural-anthropological questions still remain open. Future studies will hopefully be able to shed more light on the problem of artistic workshops or differentiate better various forms of interference. Forthcoming research may get us closer to an improved understanding of the necropolises through the Amarna and post-Amarna period by keeping focus on the human element.

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