

And I know thee as never before.  
I have reached home at last,  
Lost in thy ocean of light,  
To change, but not to die.

For this death which is life, I thank thee, my father,  
Thou infinite, undying light of the world,  
Aton, sole God!

## THE RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION OF AMEN- HOTEP IV.<sup>1</sup>

BY M. A. MORET.

AMENHOTEP IV, who ruled somewhere about 1370 B. C., had the most peculiar, as well as the most enigmatic, physiognomy of all the Pharaohs—enigmatic although numerous monuments of him have come down to us. In that Egypt where tradition was all-powerful, among those Egyptians, “the most religious of all men,” Amenhotep IV conceived and accomplished a religious revolution: he turned away from the great national divinity Amen-Ra, and substituted for him the God, Aten, whose worship he forced upon his court, the priests, the people of Egypt, and his foreign subjects.

The break in relations between the State and the priesthood which has control of the State religion is a difficult task in all countries and at all times, but how difficult was its realization in Egypt! Like all other Pharaohs, his ancestors, Amenhotep IV was considered as the son and heir of the gods, and in particular as the successor of Amen-Ra, patron deity of Thebes, the capital of Egypt at the time of the New Empire. Upon the walls of the temples were to be found the traditional scenes which attested the truth of the procreation of the king by the god.<sup>2</sup> At Luxor, for example, there was a representation of the union of Amen with Queen Mutemua, mother of Amenhotep III, the actual father of the revolutionary king. There were other representations to the

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the *Annales du Musée Guimet (Bibliothèque de vulgarisation)*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 225ff, by C. E. Eggert.

<sup>2</sup> The union of the god, Amen-Ra, and the queen is represented at Deir-el-Bahari (Ed. Naville, *Deir-el-Bahari*, II, Plate 57) and at Luxor (Gayet, *Le temple de Louxor*, Plate 63). See translation and commentary on the texts in A. Moret, *Du caractère religieux de la royauté pharaonique*, pp. 50ff.

effect that on the completion of the months of pregnancy, the queen gave birth to a son with the assistance of goddesses, and that taking the little king in his arms, Amen acknowledged him as his son and consecrated him as his heir. A similar story was passed on and believed in the case of Amenhotep IV, Amen's fatherhood of the king being the surest guaranty of his divine origin and of his right to rule over men.

More than that, in this epoch, at the end of the XVIIIth dynasty, Amen had acquired new claims to the gratitude of the kings. Scarcely two centuries had elapsed since the era when the invaders from Asia, the Shepherd-kings, were in possession of the Delta and Middle Egypt, exerting their authority over the cities, pillaging the fields, and ruining the temples of the native gods for the profit of their own divinities, Asiatic Baal and the great warrior, Sutekh. It was by the might of Amen that the petty kings of Thebes of the XVIIth dynasty had been able to commence the war of independence, pushing the Shepherd-kings little by little out of Egypt until Aahmes I had definitely expelled them. So if Tahutmes I and Tahutmes III had been able to conquer the seaports of Syria, to cross Lebanon, to pass the Orontes and reach the banks of the Euphrates; if their successors, the Amenhoteps, held Syria and Palestine in the north and Nubia in the south under their protectorate: was it not because Amen fought with Pharaoh and guided the archers and the chariots of Egypt in the thick of battle? At any rate, the official accounts of the campaigns, chiseled on the walls of Karnak and Luxor, attested that these victories were the exploits of Amen, that the captive countries were Amen's prisoners, and that all the tribute raised in Syria and Nubia was to swell the coffers of Amen. Enriched and increased in power by so many victories, the Theban god was now the national god, the god of revenge against the Asiatics.

Finally Amen was the god who, by the mediation of his priests, gave the kings strength and authority in the internal government of Egypt. After the glorious reign of Tahutmes I dynastic quarrels had weakened the royal house; there had been the spectacle of kings driven from their thrones, supplanted by a woman—Queen Hatshepsut—then recalled, banished anew, and at last triumphant. The high priests of Amen had presided over these intrigues, now giving, now withdrawing their support. In this way they had become veritable mayors of the palace, disposing of civil power as they did of religious functions: under Hatshepsut,<sup>3</sup> Prince Hapusenb, under

<sup>3</sup> Breasted, *History of Egypt*, and *Ancient Records*, II, p. 160.

Amenhotep III. Ptahmes, were "prophets-in-chief of Amen, superintendents of all the prophets of the South and of the North, superintendents of the city of Thebes, viziers of all Egypt."<sup>4</sup> How many temporal and spiritual functions concentrated in the same hand! Something eminently dangerous for the Pharaoh. It is well known how such equivocal situations end, where the servant takes precedence over his master, pushes him gradually from the throne, and some fine day takes his place. That is what actually happened in



DEATH-MASK OF KHUENATEN  
(Petrie.)



STATUE OF KHUENATEN  
(Rayet.)

Egypt some centuries later, at the end of the XXth dynasty, when the priests of Amen did become Pharaohs. At the end of the XVIIIth dynasty, this sacerdotal revolution was already in the air, but Amenhotep IV was the man who foresaw and changed the course of affairs. He did not think of permitting the priests of Amen to dethrone the kings: on the contrary, he tried to destroy

<sup>4</sup> Statuette of Ptahmes, published by Legrain, *Recueil*, XXIX, p. 83; cf. the stele of Lyons, published by Devéria, *Cuvres*, in *Bibliothèque égyptologique*.

the hierarchy of Amen by annihilating the priests and their god at the same time.

Was the man who did not shrink back before god Amen one of those colossuses whose physical strength and advantageous build explain their moral vigor and personal ascendancy? By no means. Amenhotep IV was a man of medium stature, of small frame, with rounded, feminine contours. The sculptors of his time have faithfully reproduced for us this androgynous form whose prominent breasts, too broad hips, and too shapely thighs have an equivocal and morbid aspect. His head is not less singular with its very refined oval face, its eyes set slightly askant, the softened outline of a long thin nose, the prominence of an advanced lower lip, and a skull both rounded and receding. The head leans forward as if the neck were too weak to support it. The total impression is that of an overrefined and effeminate person. Physically it is a Pharaoh who is the last of his race. The question has been asked whether this somewhat degenerate body was the product of two Egyptians of good stock. Tyi, the mother of the king, had been the favorite wife of Amenhotep III, and she is known to have been of vulgar birth. Her father Yuua and her mother Thuua bear names in which it has been suggested a certain Semitic<sup>5</sup> assonance is recognizable. The idea occurred to many authors that on the side of his mother, Tyi, Amenhotep IV had Scmitic blood in his veins, and as the religious reform heralded by him is of a monotheistic tendency, they were pleased to explain the ideas and the singular character of the son by the direct and indirect influence of the mother.<sup>6</sup>

Egypt's soil itself has permitted us to solve this little enigma. In the month of February, 1905, Mr. Theodore Davis had the good fortune to excavate at Thebes intact the tomb of Queen Tyi's parents. Now, "everything that has come from the subterranean chamber is of the most beautiful Egyptian style, and nothing indicates the least trace of foreign influence. . . . the mummies themselves can afford no positive information."<sup>7</sup> Thuua was of pure Egyptian type. Yuua had a face adorned with a big arched nose,

<sup>5</sup> Numerous scarabs that Amenhotep III had engraved on the occasion of his marriage with Tyi, give the names of her parents. See Maspero, *History of Egypt* (Engl. ed.), V, pp. 78f. These names are evidently of Egyptian origin, as Maspero has demonstrated in *Recueil de travaux*, III, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Occasionally doubt has been raised whether Amenhotep III were possibly the son of Tyi (Wiedemann in *Proc. S. B. A.*, XVII, p. 156), but the letters of the correspondence of El-Amarna designate Amenhotep IV as the son of Tyi (Petrie, *History of Egypt*, II, p. 209).

<sup>7</sup> Legrain, *Thèbes et le schisme de Khouniatonou*, p. 13 (see Bessarione, XI, 1906).



but not of a distinctly Semitic type.<sup>8</sup> From the titles which he bears the grandfather of Amenhotep IV seems to have come from Akhmim, a city in the center of Egypt.

Let us then admit that the Pharaoh reformer was of good Egyptian stock. In any event if his physical type is a little degenerate, his mind was not at all decadent. To judge from the religious hymns composed by him, he had a subtle, mystical intellect, and very lively, human sensibilities. From pictures of the times we know that he adored family life; his mother Tyi, his wife, and even his four daughters appear about him, not merely in the privacy of his own apartments, but when he receives a high official, when he goes to the temple and in every public ceremony. As far as can be judged, Amenhotep IV seems to have been of a simple, good character, of subtle intelligence, tenacious and systematic. This dreamer and mystic pursued his ideas to their logical conclusion and proceeded swiftly to extreme resolutions.

We have seen above that from the beginning of his reign Amenhotep saw himself in the presence of a god, the Theban Amen, who through the policy of his priests had become too greedy for wealth, too preoccupied in making the palace the servant of his desires, too exclusively national for a country which made pretensions to the assimilation of Nubia and Syria.

Now we have to state that in the sixth year of the new reign a radical political and material revolution was effected.<sup>9</sup> Thebes is no longer the capital of Egypt. What had been the city of Amen becomes the city of Aten; the corporate property of the Theban god is confiscated for the profit of the god Aten; the high priest of Amen and all his priesthood cease to exist, for the worship of Amen is forbidden over the entire territory of Egypt. The very name of Amen must no longer be pronounced; it must no longer be written on stone or papyrus, and since, in the silence of the present, the past recalled that name on thousands of monuments, the reformer king methodically undertook the destruction, not of the monuments, but of the name of the god Amen. On all walls, on columns, at the top of obelisks, down in the tombs, everywhere iconoclasts sent by the king strained their eyes to discover the condemned hieroglyphics, and pitilessly chiseled off the name of Amen and

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Catalog of the Museum of Cairo*, "Tomb of Yuaa and Thuia," 1908, Plates LVII-LX and frontispiece.

<sup>9</sup> Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, III, 110, b.

<sup>10</sup> See Lefébure, "La vertu et la vie du Nom, en Egypte," in *Mémoires*, VIII (1897), pp. 229-231: "Chiseling out of the name was a real murder....: the names of persons condemned or disgraced were chiseled out...."

that of Mut, the goddess sharing his throne. To chisel out the name of the god meant to kill his soul,<sup>10</sup> to annihilate his double, to destroy the title to his possessions, to annul his victories and his conquests. It meant to make a new history of Egypt, in which the glory of exalted deeds accomplished would be left to their true authors, the Pharaoh's, and not be accredited to the haughty god, who called himself their father and inspirer. Finally, to mark well his complete break with an abhorred past, the king changed his name from Amenhotep to that of Khu-en-aten or "he who pleases the god Aten."<sup>11</sup>

There was probably a terrible resistance on the part of Amen's priests, but we do not know its circumstances. Much later, when after the death of the reformer king the priests of Amen, restored to power, were lauding the merits of Tutankhamen, who reestablished them in their privileges, this is how they described the state of Egypt after the revolution:

"The world was like the time of chaos, the property of the gods was laid waste from Elephantine down to the Delta; their sanctuaries and fields were going to rack and ruin, noxious weeds grew rank there; the granaries and the sacred enclosures were pillaged, delivered over to passers-by. The world was defiled, the gods departed, turning their backs on man, their hearts disgusted with their creatures. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

This picture is strongly exaggerated. Where the text speaks of *gods*, it should read *the god* Amen. The distress of a single god and of a single object of worship did not imply the ruin of the other divinities nor of the other priestly orders.<sup>13</sup> The king had directed his efforts of destruction against a single god, and in his place he had installed a divinity more ancient, more venerated, and perhaps more popular, the god Aten, whose name forthwith served to designate the king and the capital of Egypt.

Aten is the solar disk, the tangible and visible form of Ra, the sun-god, perhaps the most ancient and the most popular of the

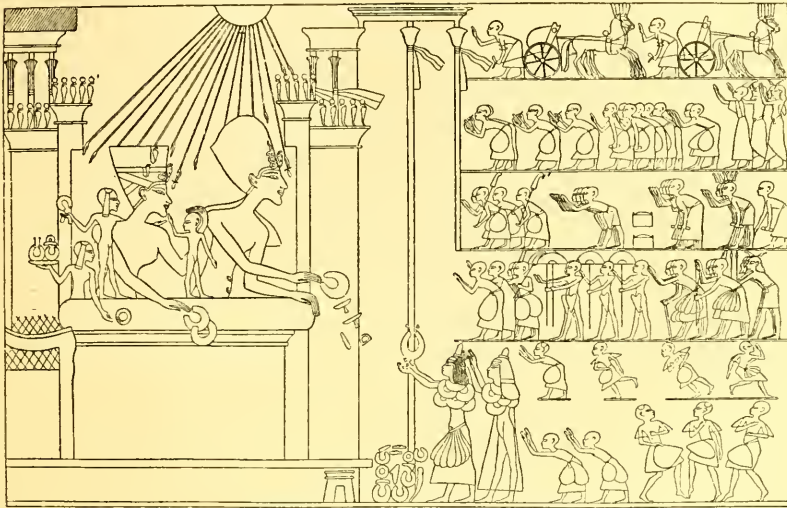
<sup>11</sup> The meaning of this name (which was up to then translated "glory" or "spirit of the god Aten") has been recently reestablished by Sethe, *Aegyptische Zeitschrift*, XLIV, p. 117. Schaefer remarks that King Mineptah Siphtah took a name of the same type, Khu-en-ra, "he who pleases Ra." As Sethe shows, Khu-en-aten practically means with reference to Aten what Amen-hotep signifies with respect to Amen, "rest, peace, of Amen."

<sup>12</sup> Legrain, "La grande stèle de Toutankhamon." *Recueil*, XXIX, p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> It is still a debated question whether Khuenaten proscribed the worship of other gods than Amen. Breasted remarks that in the tomb of Rames, and elsewhere, they have carefully chiseled out not only the name of Amen, but the word "gods" (*Aeg. Zeitschrift*, XL, p. 109); see, however, what is said below.

Egyptian gods. He is represented under the form of a disk the center of which is adorned by a coiled uræus snake. The rays of the disk fall clear to the ground like arms provided with hands; these hands take the offerings from the altars, extend the key of life (☩) to the nostrils of the king, and hold him and his family embraced.<sup>14</sup> In a word, what Amen was for the predecessors of Khuenaten, Aten is for the latter, a beneficent god, a father god, but he is no longer a tyrant god.

In fact, the king was very careful not to reconstitute for the service of Aten, a priestly order of the type of that which used to sway the destinies of Thebes. Like Ra, Aten came from Heliopolis,



KHUENATEN MAKING THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT PROSPEROUS  
(From Meyer, *Geschichte Aegyptens.*)

and his high priest bears the same title, Ur Maa, "the great seeing one," as the high priest of Ra. But the king did not entrust the guardianship of the new cult to the old priestly city of Heliopolis. It was in a new city, Khut-aten, "Horizon of Aten," the modern El-Amarna on the right bank of the Nile between Memphis and Thebes, that he founded the temple with its central obelisk consecrated to the god Aten. Gem-Aten, another city in Nubia near the third cataract, and a city in Syria the name of which is not

<sup>14</sup> However, the representation of the "radiant disk" which is characteristic of monuments of Amenhotep IV is not a personal innovation of this king. The radiant disk is already traced on monuments of his father Amenhotep III (Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, III, 91, g). After Amenhotep IV, the use of this decorative feature disappeared completely.

known to us, also served as capitals in conquered countries for the new god of the State.<sup>15</sup> The king himself administers the property necessary to the dignity suitable to the god, for he is "prophet-in-chief of Ra-Harmakhis"<sup>16</sup> and "grand seer of Aten." This double title is very interesting from the fact that it shows the material unity of the cults of Harmakhis and of Aten, and the joining of the administration of their temporal property in the hands of the king. Besides, we know from a statuette in the Turin Museum that the relations between the family of Amenhotep IV and the priests of Heliopolis were ancient. A brother of Queen Tyi, therefore the uncle of the reformer king, was already "grand seer in Heliopolis" at the same time that he was "second prophet of Amen."<sup>17</sup> Pursuant to this position as head of the hierarchy of Heliopolis and Aten, both uncle and nephew were granted the administration of the vested properties conceded to Aten and of those of Amen confiscated for the profit of Aten. It was a secularization of Amen's property, a resumption of possession of sacerdotal lands, which the king brought about. Nevertheless, when at the end of his reign the Pharaoh confided to his most devoted friend, Meryra,<sup>18</sup> the office of high priest and great seer of Aten,<sup>19</sup> he was very careful not to release any civil functions to him, and to entrust the financial and judicial administration of Egypt to others.<sup>20</sup> The high priest of Aten remained a subordinate of the king—no danger of his ever becoming a too powerful mayor of the palace.

If the Pharaoh assumed the personal management of the property of the new god of the State, he took an even greater interest in religious teaching. He made a strong effort to prevent the revolution which he had effected from remaining merely political and economical. The king was not satisfied with having put a hand upon the hierarchy and vested properties, he presumed to mould souls and to give to faith a direction toward a new and more human development.

To attain this end, it is probable that the king covered the land with temples in honor of Aten. Of these edifices, which were de-

<sup>15</sup> Breasted, *History of Egypt*, p. 364. and *Ägyptische Zeitschrift*, XL, pp. 106ff.

<sup>16</sup> Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, III, 110, i.

<sup>17</sup> L. Borchardt, "Ein Onkel Amenophis III. als Hoherpriester von Heliopolis," in *Ägyptische Zeitschrift*, XLIV, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Breasted, *History of Egypt*, p. 367.

<sup>19</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records*, II, p. 405.

<sup>20</sup> The most powerful of these was the vizier Rames, who was not a high priest of Aten. Breasted, *Ancient Records*, II, pp. 385f.



stroyed almost everywhere after the death of the king, hardly anything remains but the débris at Thebes, Hermonthis, Memphis, Heliopolis;<sup>21</sup> but just because it was abandoned by the successors of the reformer king, the capital of the cult of Aten has preserved to our day ruins where it is possible to make out the remnants of palaces and temples,<sup>22</sup> and especially of the tombs where the favorites of Khuenaten have represented the king in his relations to them. There we see the king, visiting his subjects, receiving them in his palace, appearing on the balcony to throw coronets and collars to them, which are as many marks of his royal favor, and he reserves this favor especially for those "who have carefully listened to his words and who have understood and practised his doctrine."<sup>23</sup> On several tombs, in order to show their zeal, his favorites have reproduced the verses of hymns composed in honor of Aten by the Pharaoh himself. For us these hymns are texts of unique and invaluable importance. In translating them, we take account of the enthusiastic and mystical spirit which animated the king, and we can appreciate what conception of greater humanity the establishment of the cult of Aten concealed.

#### HYMN OF AMENHOTEP IV.<sup>24</sup>

*Adoration of Harmakhis who riseth on the horizon in his name of "Heat of the solar disk . . ." by King Khu-en-aten and Queen Aten-nefer-neferu.*

He speaks:

"Thou risest in beauty on the horizon of the sky, O Aten, initiator of life.

"When thou growest round in the east, thou fillest the earth with thy beauties (rays).

"Thou art charming, sublime, shining high above the earth. Thy rays envelop the lands and all that thou hast created. Since thou art Ra (creator) thou conquerest what they give and thou bindest the bonds of thy love. Thou art far away, but thy rays are on (touch) the ground. When thou art in the sky, day accompanieth thy steps.

<sup>21</sup> See the texts cited by Breasted, *Ägyptische Zeitschrift*, XL, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Petrie, *Tell el Amarna*, 1894. See Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, I-VI, 1902-1908, and Bouriant, Legrain, Jéquier, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire du culte d'Atonou*, I, 1903.

<sup>23</sup> Breasted, *History of Egypt*, p. 367.

<sup>24</sup> Breasted, *De hymnis in solem sub rege Amenophide II' conceptis*, 1894.

*Night:*

"When thou restest in the western horizon<sup>25</sup> the earth in darkness is like the dead at rest in their rock-tombs, with their heads swathed, their nostrils stuffed up, their eyes sightless (eye does not see eye); all their possessions, even what is under their heads, might be stolen from them without their perceiving it. Then every lion cometh out of his den, every serpent stingeth, it is as black as in an oven, earth is still. He who hath created all this slumbereth in his horizon.

*Day, Humanity:*

"The dawn cometh, thou risest at the horizon, thou shinest as Aten in the daytime, the darkness fleeth when thou shootest thy arrows, the two lands make holiday. People awaken, leap to their feet, for thou causest them to arise; they wash their limbs, take their clothing; their hands venerate thy rising, all the earth returns to labor.

*Animals:*

"All animals return to their pastures, trees and plants grow, birds fly in the thickets with wings straight in adoration of thy double, the beasts bound. All birds which had been under cover revive when thou risest for them.

*Water:*

"The boats ascend and descend the river, for every way openeth at thy appearance; the fish of the river leap toward thee, thy rays penetrate to the bottom of the sea.

*Men and Animals:*

"It is he who produceth the germ in woman and who createth seed in man, he who causeth the babe to live in the womb of its mother, he who sootheth the babe, that it may not cry! he nurseth it through the breast [of its mother], he giveth the breath of life to vivify all that he createth. When the babe falleth from the womb on the day of its birth, thou openest its mouth for words and thou satisfiest its needs.

"When the chick is in the egg—a cackler in rock—thou givest to it breath in the interior of the shell to give it life. When thou hast caused its development in the egg to the point of bursting it, it cometh out of the egg to announce its existence, and it walketh

<sup>25</sup> Here I employ Maspero's translation, *History*, V, p. 90.

on its feet as soon as it cometh out. How numerous are thy works. Thou hast created the earth in thy heart (when thou wast entirely alone), the earth with its people, big and little animals, all that liveth on the earth and walketh on foot, all that liveth in the air and flieth with its wings, foreign countries, Syria, Nubia, Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

"Thou puttest every man in his place, creating what is necessary to him, each with his patrimony, and his property, with his varied language, his form and particular color of skin. Thou, master of choice, thou hast distinguished [from us] the foreign races.

"Thou createst the Nile in the other world, thou ledest it [upon the earth] when thou willest, to support man. . . ., thou permittest the Nile to descend from the sky toward them, thou createst on the mountains lakes [as large] as seas, thou inundatest the fields in their territories. . . ., thou givest milk to every territory.

"Thou hast made the seasons of the year to make everything grow that thou hast created, winter to refresh [thy creatures], summer [to warm them up again]. Thou hast created the distant sky in order to rise in it and to see from there all that thou hast created, thou entirely alone. Thou dawnest in thy form of Aten living, thou risest radiant, thou departest and thou returnest; thou hast created all forms, thou entirely alone, the provinces, cities, fields, roads, water. Every eye beholdeth thee above itself, for thou art the disk of day above the earth.

"Thou art in my heart, none other existeth who understandeth thee except me, thy son. . . . O thou, who makest men live when thou risest. . . . who, when thou goest to rest, causest them to die. . . ., teach them for thy son, who hath come from thy flesh, Khuenaten."

All readers of the hymn of Amenhotep IV will agree in praising its beauty of inspiration and expression. It is perhaps more difficult to attribute to this poetry the quality of *originality* which most Egyptologists discover in it. It is admitted among scholars that the hymn engraved at Khutaten expresses new concepts in the theological literature of the Egyptians: the adoration of a god qualified as the *only, sole, all-powerful* creator, the expression of a feeling for nature which associates, with man, animals, plants, water, and earth in the adoration of the god, the sole Providence of all that exists and of all that lives. Are these sentiments and their expression a new thing in Egypt and do they date precisely from

<sup>26</sup> It is very remarkable that in this enumeration, the king has given the first place to foreign countries.

the epoch of Khuenaten? To decide, it would be necessary to have other hymns, anterior to those of El-Amarna; the comparison of these texts with ours would permit judging of the originality of the latter.

Now, the religious poetry before the XVIIIth dynasty is—up to the present—composed only of very short bits, little hymns engraved on funerary steles, generally addressed to Osiris or to Ra, but the extremely concise redaction of which, considering that space is limited, gives no material for lyric development. However, there is one monument which has preserved for us a great hymn anterior to Amenhotep IV, and up to now no one has thought of comparing it with the texts of El-Amarna. It is a stele in the *Bibliothèque nationale* bearing the "Hymn to Osiris"; it was chiseled for a keeper of the cattle, Amenemhat, in whose name the initial part, Amen, was broken out in the epoch when Khuenaten caused the name of Amen to be erased on all monuments. As Chabas says, who has published the stele in magnificent style,<sup>27</sup> "we must then regard it as certain that this monument is anterior to Khuenaten." Now this highly developed hymn to Osiris which the stele contains, proves at the very outset that the worship and the praise of Osiris, of Isis, of Horus, of Atum, of Seb, of Nut, divinities whose names have not been broken out, were respected by the iconoclastic officials of Khuenaten. Let us finally note that Osiris is there adored as the first of the gods, as the creator of all that exists, land, water, plants, animals, men, and gods, as the Good-in-Being, the Providence whose care is extended to all creatures and to all parts of the universe. From this comparison, the result seems clear that the material developed in the hymns of Khuenaten is composed of themes that had been employed in Egyptian religious literature before and were probably well known to everybody. The "originality" granted to the hymns of Khuenaten reduces itself probably to the new expression, with a more personal accent (as far as we can judge), of an ancient thought.

It seems to us that other facts confirm this view. If the hymns anterior to Amenhotep IV are exceedingly rare, those are numerous which have come down to us in compilations, dated after his time. Now these hymns addressed to Amen, Thoth, Ptah, etc., reproduce almost literally a good number of the passages characteristic of the hymns to Aten: like the god of El-Amarna, Amen is called the only one, the sole, the creator of lands, waters, and animals; he, too, has

<sup>27</sup> Chabas, "Un hymne à Osiris," in *Bibliothèque égyptologique*:—Chabas, *Œuvres*, I, p. 95.



modeled with his powerful hand races of human beings, differing in color and language. Must it be concluded that the hymns of Aten have been plagiarized, in their most remarkable expressions, by the priests of the rival god, Amen of Thebes? It seems very astonishing that, if these expressions were peculiar to literature pertaining to Aten, they were not condemned like the cult of the god himself. We believe it more reasonable to admit that the school of El-Amarna derived its developments from a source which also fed the rival schools; the alternately preponderant gods of the various historical capitals were sung in the course of centuries in the same keys, however with shades of expression corresponding to this or that intellectual or moral preoccupation of the epoch in which the hymn was edited.

This being posited, it must be recognized that several of these general ideas have been developed by Khuenaten with singular force and poetry. Everywhere the intention of the king seems to me to have been as follows: no longer to hold up for the adoration of the Egyptians a god peculiar to one city and of a well-defined national character, but a god really superior to others through the role which he plays in nature, and of universally human character.

For this the king chose an old national god, the sun, whose power, beneficent to some, redoubtable to others, appears nowhere more absolute than in the countries of the Orient. This god is no longer represented to men, as in former times, by the odd form of a heraldic falcon (Harmakhis), but he is a radiant disk which becomes the speaking likeness of the divinity, a hieroglyphic which all people, Egyptians or foreigners and even moderns, can read and understand at the first glance.

This god, who personifies light, heat (from his name of "Heat which is in the disk"), and motion, is really the benefactor and animator of all that exists. With a native charm full of poetry, a freshness of impression, and a profusion of imagery which is felt to be very close to the poetic source, the hymn marvelously expresses more or less conscious or confused sentiments of adoration which animate men, animals, stones, and plants when face to face with him who dissipates night, puts wild beasts to flight, causes the growth of vegetation, and feeds man's offspring.

Such sentiments are common to all people, so perhaps for the first time in the history of the world, we see a king making the appeal to strangers, Nubians and Semites, to adore Aten, the universal benefactor, side by side with his own people. For the first time religion is conceived as a tie that binds people differing in

race, speech, and color. Khuenaten's god does not distinguish between Egyptians and barbarians, all people are in the same degree his children and must regard one another as brothers.

Thus there is at the center of the world a beneficent and thinking Energy which plays the role of Providence before living creatures. This Energy is both Heat and Thought. Such ideas were in the air at that time, and we know a text, the form of which seems old, in which god Ptah, with the same attributes as Aten in this case, is called "the intelligence and the language of the gods, source of the thoughts of every god and of every man and of every animal."<sup>28</sup>

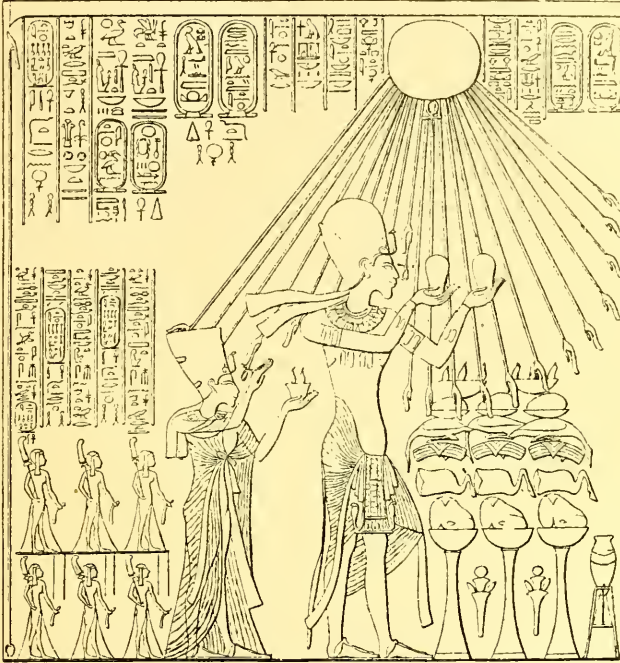
Accordingly this god, with whom the king lives on terms of intimacy, whom only he can understand and interpret to men like a prophet inspired by revelation, is a god of all humanity, an intellectual god, a god who assumes a reasonable and beautiful form. For all these reasons he deserved to become the god of the Egyptian Empire at that time when Egypt was encroaching on other nations and presuming to force its arms and its ideas upon them.

Judged from this point of view, the undertaking of Amenhotep IV exceeds the range of a political reaction against the invading power of those mayors of the palace, the high priests of Amen—we see in it a very interesting effort toward the establishment of a cult comprehensible to peoples differing in civilization and nationality. To sum up, the reform of Amenhotep IV is a return to a more human form of religion, and probably to an archaic conception which had already flourished in its prime in the times of the Ancient Empire when Ra was chief god of the living.

In like manner as in modern times, this return to simpler forms of religion was accompanied by a renewal of art and by a return to traditions of sincere and realistic observation of nature. Just in proportion as the power of the priests of Amen had developed, the Theban artists, engaged to decorate the temples or to make statues of gods and kings, had also risen to the employment of a style which was classical, artificial, and conventional, but of a majesty and coldness suitable to the majesty and authority of Amen. From sincerity and conviction, King Khuenaten withdrew his favor from Theban art and encouraged provincial artists who were less able but remained closer to nature. As the Pharaoh, in his acts and person, was the subject customarily proposed to artistic conception, he demanded that they should represent him and his family just as he was naturally, with his physical imperfections and in the

<sup>28</sup> Breasted, *Aegyptische Zeitschrift*, XXXIX, pp. 39ff.

intimacy of his family, as well as in the pomp of court. Hence those pictures from the tombs where the king appears to us in familiar attitudes surrounded by his wife, daughters, and friends. Court festivities, celebrations staged on the occasion of a reward accorded to this or that good servant, ceremonies of the temples, or the mourning service held by the king at the time of the death of his favorite daughter, Baktaten, such were the subjects chosen. They were treated by the artists with that love of life, that joy animating all nature, that freedom of expression which strike us



KHUEENATEN, HIS QUEEN, AND HIS SIX DAUGHTERS, MAKING SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS TO THE SUN.

in the hymns discussed above. It is the same spirit that animates liturgical poetry and plastic arts alike at this epoch.

But it turned out that several of these artists exaggerated the qualities of observation and of sincerity to excess. Perhaps they were not sufficiently masters of their art to be great artists while being faithful observers, several have given us portraits of the king and of his relatives, which are nothing but caricatures. But one artist at least has been found who could combine the realistic tendencies of the new school with the traditions of the pure and

classical style of the school of Thebes. To this we owe the statue of Amenhotep IV [see above] and the bust of the Louvre, and perhaps the head of a little girl and the torso of young girl, probably one of the royal princesses. These form a group of works which, from their perfection of modeling, sincerity of observation, and their lofty style of execution, count among the most lifelike marvels of sculpture of all time.

Amenhotep reigned scarcely sixteen years, and perhaps—at least to judge from certain effigies of him—the struggle against the priests of Amen shattered his health and brought him to old age before his time. His work did not survive him, his second successor, Tutankhamen, son of another wife of Amenhotep III, restored the cult of Amen and the power of the high priests, thus preparing, in a little distant future of about three hundred years, the accession of the priest-kings at Thebes. In their turn the temples of Aten were shattered and the memory of Khuenaten mocked. In an official document of the XIXth dynasty they do not even dare to pronounce his name, they designate him by a roundabout term, “the prostrated one, the criminal Khuenaten.”<sup>29</sup>

The work undertaken by Khuenaten had perhaps been premature, certainly too hasty. Nothing durable is made without the collaboration of time. Khuenaten had thought to be able in a few years to communicate to his subjects and to the priests the devouring fervor from which his own soul, the reflection of the solar disk, had been kindled. Could his work survive him? That is the question that arises with regard to all reformers. In general their labors do not endure; the current of the past, dammed up for an instant, and the force of tradition, chained for a moment, return with formidable momentum and overwhelm the as yet poorly consolidated work of the innovators.

So it was with Amenhotep IV. Even official art, rejuvenated for a moment, relapsed after him into a hieratic and artificial solemnity. His reform seems not to have sensibly modified the development of Egyptian civilization, but if it counts for relatively little in the history of Egypt, it has great value for the history of humanity. Perhaps in the hymns of El-Amarna the idea of a Providence helpful to all living souls was for the first time worthily sung.

<sup>29</sup> Loret-Moret, “Inscription de Mes,” in *Aegyptische Zeitschrift*, XXXIX