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AKHENATEN'S MONOTHEISM
IN THE LIGHT OF DISCOVERIES FROM
THE AMARNA WORKMEN'S VILLAGE

Over the course of many years of Amarna research the fundamental idea of Akhenaten's religious revolution has been a subject of much scholar debate. The question laying at the very foundation of these studies was whether the cult of Aten during that relatively short period of time was monotheistic, or whether it was in fact henotheistic, that is based on worshiping a single god while accepting the existence (or possible existence) of other deities. This subject often causes emotional and exaggerated reactions among many scholars, chiefly due to the fact that if Akhenaten's monotheism could be proved, it would make him one of the earliest propagators of this conception in the world, a predecessor of both Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Supporting this thesis, Herman Schlögl calls the pharaoh "a creator of the first monotheism in the history of mankind"¹. Although the idea seems very appealing, some researchers believe that there simply never was enough evidence to ultimately prove this thesis, with too many undermining questions pointing in fact to henotheism. Some new finds from the excavations and works of the Egypt Exploration Society in the Amarna Workmen's Village² are yet another contribution to the henotheism thesis and will be further discussed hereafter.

Except from the short period of Akhenaten's reign, Aten was never a chief member of the Egyptian pantheon and had it not been for the „heretic” pharaoh he would certainly be considered a secondary deity today. It is however untrue that the god was nonexistent among the Egyptians before this time and

¹ Schlögl H, *Das Alte Ägypten: Geschichte und Kultur von der Frühzeit bis zu Kleopatra*, München 2006, p. 225-240.

² Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *The Main Chapel at the Amarna Workmen's Village and its wall paintings*, EES Excavation Memoir 85, London 2007.

although he certainly obtained exceptional status in Amarna, his cult had also flourished quite independently before Amenhotep IV ruled from his desert city. Many scholars have proved that the term Aten first appeared as early as the Middle Kingdom, at that time signifying the sun disc, as E. A. Wallis Budge pointed out quite early in the history of Amarna studies³. Further connotations to this word appeared in the New Kingdom, especially in the 18th dynasty, when the term Aten was used to describe a „place” or „throne” of the sun disc, and – as Jan Assmana noticed on the basis of his studies of 18th dynasty texts – the word was written with the hieroglyphic sign for „god”, since the Egyptians would often personify some expressions. As a result the word Aten became directly associated with the concept of god, which led to becoming an immediate manifestation of the sun⁴. Sayed Tawfik also pointed out that the term Aten had four meanings: a disc; the sun as a heavenly body; a place where solar gods manifest; and finally the name of a deity, the final meaning appearing during the 18th dynasty and later. Along numerous examples of objects inscribed with the name of Aten we should mention the stela of King Ahmose where the King is regarded “as Aten [when he] shines” and the Horus name of Thutmose I, namely „who emerges from Aten”⁵. Another examples were given by Cyril Aldred, who noticed that during the reign of Thutmose IV Aten was considered a god of battles⁶, as well as Donald B. Redford, who writes that during the 18th Dynasty the word Aten was sometimes a synonym for Ra or Amun-Ra⁷.

Having established that Aten was a member of the Egyptian pantheon before the reign of Akhenaten, we must conclude that he had a cult of his own and furthermore, that it was very unlikely, if not impossible, that at the

³ Wallis Budge E.A., *Tutankhamen: Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism*, London, 1923, p. 79.

⁴ Assmann J., *Aton* [in:] *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Wiesbaden, 1975, vol. 1:526-540. Assman has also written numerous works on Amarna religion, tracing the monotheism of Moses back to that of king Akhenaten. Cf. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge, 1997, and *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (George L. Mosse Series In Modern European Cultural & Intellectual History), Madison, 2008.

⁵ Tawfik S., *Aton Studies I: Aton Before the Reign of Akhenaton*, MDAIK XXIX (1973) p. 77. This work also cites contradictory theories and is a good source on opposition to Aten being a pre-18th dynasty god.

⁶ Aldred C., *Akhenaten: Pharaoh of Egypt – a New Study*, London, 1968, p.166. Aten is mentioned as a god of battles on a scarab of Thutmose IV, with an inscription saying “the King fought with the Aton before him...in order to serve the Aton forever” (Tawfik S., *Aton Studies I...*, p. 78-9).

⁷ Redford D., *The Sun-disc in Akhenaten’s Program: Its Worship and Antecedents I*, JARCE vol. XIII (1976), p. 50.

time that cult had monotheistic foundations. A fine example of Aten's original place among Egyptian gods is the well known sun hymn of the brothers Suti and Hor, which praises Amun in many forms, as Ra, Kheperi, Harakhte, Khnum and Aten – it neither denies the existence of other sun gods, nor is Aten the most important among them⁸. Another clear proof of Aten's cult comes from the reign of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father, in the name of an official called Penbuy with the title of "scribe of the treasury of the temple of the Aten". According to Alan Gardiner, "it is difficult to interpret this otherwise than as implying that the Aten already received a cult at Thebes"⁹. Albeit we know that Aten has been worshiped prior to the Amarna period as one of the many manifestations of the sun, at the same time we must remember that there has long been an universalist tendency in Egyptian religion fueled by an expansion of the Egyptian empire that took place shortly before Akhenaten's reign. Both Assman with the idea of „New Sun Theology" and Gardiner proclaiming Egypt's „urge towards monotheism" claim that Akhenaten's revolution was only to be anticipated as a reflection of a general tendency during the 18th Dynasty¹⁰. The true question, however, is not what the beginnings of Atonism were, but what was the character of it's most developer form, as introduced by Amenhotep IV in his capital city. Was it in fact a monotheistic religion relentlessly persecuting other beliefs or was it rather henotheistic, allowing some space for the existence (and perhaps marginal cults) of other deities?

From the beginning of Amenhotep's reign (1382 – 1365 B.C.) it was clear that Aten was a particularly favored god, at the beginning as a manifestation of Re-Harakhty – only later the hawk-headed depiction was abandoned in favor of showing a solar disc (which would finally become one of the most recognizable symbols of Atenism – a disc emitting sun rays ending with human hands, giving the *ankh* sign signifying „life" to his worshipers). The gods formal name also evolved – at the beginning it was enclosed within two cartouches and translated as "The Living Horus of the two horizons, exalted in the Eastern Horizon in his

⁸ The term used on the famous stela of Suti and Hor containing two sun hymns (inv. no. 826 in the British Museum) is *Jtn n hrw*, which can be translated as „celestial disc of the day", with *Jtn* also translated as Aten. Some linguists argue that the word *Jtn* occurs here as a metonymy, but all agree that both content and expression closely resemble Akhenaten's famous psalm. Assmann J., *Zwei Sonnenhymnen der später XVIII. Dynastie in thebanischen Gräbern der Saitenzeit*, MDAIK XXVII (1971), p. 33.

⁹ Gardiner A., *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction*, Oxford 1961, p.217.

¹⁰ Assman J., *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*, London, 1995, p.16, Gardiner A., *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, p. 216.

name of Shu-who-is-in-the-Disk” by E. A. Wallis Budge¹¹, and as “Re-Harakhty who rejoices in the horizon in his name Shu, who is Aten” by Eric Hornung¹². This trinity of Re-Harakhty, Shu and Aten could also include the pharaoh himself, who’s name, Akhenaten, can be translated as „illuminated manifestation of Aten” and who referred to himself as a child of god in one of the most famous pieces of ancient Egyptian literature, the Sun Hymn of Akhenaten:

*Since you founded the world, you rouse them
for your son, who emerged from your body,
the king of the two Egypts, who lives on Maat,
Neferkheperure Waenre,
the son of Re, who lives on Maat,
the lord of diadems, Akhenaten, great in his lifetime [...]*¹³

The same hymn also places the king in the most privileged position – only he is the one that knows the god, only he knows the demands of Aten and only he is a link between his subordinates and the god:

*[...] there is no one else who knows you
except for your son, Neferkheperure Waenre,
whom you have taught your nature and your might [...]*

The pharaoh had the privilege of knowing how to please his god and how to make him listen, which was not available for other worshipers except maybe members of the royal family, that is queen Nefretete and their six daughters, often portrayed with Akhenaten during religious ceremonies (those depictions always feature the king and his family in the central, most prominently visible place, with the god above them). The king was therefore Aten’s chief priest, but at the same time he was a subject of worship of his subordinates as a direct link to god, perhaps a manifestation of the god or his aspect. While Aten was often called the „Heavenly Pharaoh”, Akhenaten could have been the „earthly god”, and – as Donald Redford suggests – a part of Aten’s titlature could have referred to the Pharaoh¹⁴. In this way the idea of earthly kingship was trans-

¹¹ Wallis Budge E.A., *Tutankamen: Amenism*, p. 79.

¹² Hornung E., *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, New York, 1999, p.34. At the same time Herman Schlögl claims that the new deity was not perceived as the sun disc, but rather as sunlight that radiates from the disc, and therefore the correct pronunciation of the god’s name should be „Yati(n)” (Schlögl H., *Aten* [in:] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, 2001, vol. 1, p. 157).

¹³ This and the following excerpts from the Sun Hymn of Akhenaten were translated by Erik Hornung (Hornung E., *Akhenaten and the Religion*, p. 83). Akhenaten considers himself a son of both Aten and Re and his throne name, Neferkheperure translates as “Perfect are the manifestations of Re” (translation by Schlögl H., *Das Alte Ägypten*, p. 225-240)

¹⁴ Redford D., *The Sun-disc*, p. 54.

ferred to the religious cult sphere, as the pharaoh became the only 'source' of god's will.

As Akhenaten's beliefs evolved and Aten ascended to the top of the Egyptian pantheon, so did the god's titlature. By year 9 of the Pharaoh's reign he removed the names of Shu and Harakhty from the god's cartouches, where only Aten and Re remained. The new name now read „Live Re, the ruler of the horizon, who rejoices in the horizon in his name Re the father (?), who returns as Aten”¹⁵. Although at first other gods, while diminished by Aten, remained on their former positions, during the later years of Akhenaten's reign persecutions began against them, which for some researchers are the most convincing argument for the king's monotheism. It is a certain fact that persecutions and acts against the other gods took place, but were they really a sign, as Hornung writes, that „for the first time in history [...] henotheism has been transformed into monotheism”¹⁶? If we look at the Pharaoh's persecutions closely, a visible inconsistency of his actions will strike us as strange in a declared monotheist that some researchers see in him.

The first gods to vanish from Egyptian cults were the ones connected to death and afterlife, namely Osiris and Sokar, with their dark world of the dead banished by the rays of Aten. However it was not the „dark” gods that faced the worst persecution, but another member of the solar pantheon, the god Amun. His name was not only removed from the Pharaoh's titlature, but also erased from his father's on various monuments and inscriptions – sometimes even as far as Nubia. Even the plural „gods” was sometimes avoided and changed to „god”, while „god” was at times changed to „Aten”¹⁷, as if to indicate that the word god was synonymous with Aten and no other. While some researchers believe Akhenaten evolved from henotheism to monotheism and others think he was monotheist from the beginning of the reign, it is certain that for a long time he tolerated or ignored the worship of other gods. H. Schlögl thinks that cult changes introduced by the pharaoh took place in phases, where the first phase was establishing Aten as the highest god of the Egyptian pantheon and the next phase was a step by step elimination of other gods, thus eliminat-

¹⁵ Hornung E., *Akhenaten and the Religion...*, p. 76. Other translations include „Reo ruler of the horizon in his manifestation of Reo, the father, who returns as the Aton” (Tawfik S., *Aton Studies IV: Was Aton – The God of Akhenaten – Only a Manifestation of the God Reo?*, MDAIK XXXII (1976), p. 220) and „the Living One, Sun, Ruler of the Horizon, who rejoices on the horizon in his name, which is Sunlight which comes from the disk” (Schlögl H., *Aten...*, p. 158).

¹⁶ Hornung E., *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many*, Ithaca, New York 1982, p. 246.

¹⁷ Breasted H., *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, London 1912.

ing henotheism and evolving towards Akhenaten's ultimate goal – monotheism¹⁸. Regardless what the ultimate goal of the pharaoh really was, plenty of evidence also exists that would suggest Akhenaten's persecutive actions to be mainly retaliatory. Since there was much opposition to his reforms from the priesthood of the old gods – and especially Amun – chiefly because he decided to take over a large portion of the temple income, the easiest way to suppress this opposition was to take strict actions against the god himself, which would also deal a sharp blow to the priesthood. This could suggest that his main goal was not wage a war against gods, but to crush his political enemies on earth.

Having dealt a successful blow to the cult of Amun, why didn't he act to swiftly replace it with the cult of Aten? It would seem obvious that he should do all in his power to promote the only true god – especially that he had all the means to do so being king of the country – instead he focused on destroying monuments, but not entire temples or cult centers. The destruction of monuments also does not seem a zealous, uncalculated act, with many omissions and the names of some gods left entirely untouched¹⁹. According to Norman de Garis Davies, the above fact is one of the chief premises to consider Atenism a henotheistic system, something that would arise from the clash of monotheistic beliefs in a polytheistic world²⁰. An interesting archaeological find that may be a contribution to the henotheism thesis is the Main Chapel in the Amarna Workmen's Village, and more specifically its wall decorations, which both in style and topic prove that even directly in Amarna, near the city itself, persecution of the old gods and traditions was not as harsh as it would seem and as many authors argue. A very interesting reconstruction of the chapel itself and its decorations, as presented in a new publication of the Egypt Exploration Society, should be thoroughly analyzed in this respect.

The workmen's village was built on the Amarna plain in a small valley facing south, with a view of the southern cliff, but not the city itself. On the east side of this location a slope rises towards another valley, and that slope was the construction site for many chapels serving the inhabitants of the village, with the Main Chapel situated closest to the settlement. A path leads from the entrance in the walls of the village to the front steps of the chapel. As Weatherhead and Kemp think, „its preferential position points to its status and to the likelihood that the location was early on selected, although this does

¹⁸ Schlögl H., *Das Alte Ägypten*, p. 225-240.

¹⁹ For instance Thot's name was not destroyed and even the Pharaoh's former name, Amenhotep IV, was sometimes left on monuments that were created before he changed his name.

²⁰ Davies N. de G., *Akhenaten at Thebes*, JEA IX (1923), p. 150.

not preclude the possibility that the chapel was rebuilt during its relatively short life²¹. The fact that the chapel survived in a relatively good condition, despite various attempts of robbers who dug into most of the site, is a lucky coincidence. Most of the site was discovered by Thomas Peet in 1921, during the first season of the Society's excavations in Amarna. He had started his digs up the slope and dumped the excavation spoil just below, on grounds that have not yet been investigated, and only later it luckily turned out that Peet's pile of rubble lay directly atop the Main Chapel, thus protecting it from any intrusions, even from the excavations of his successor, Leonard Wooley. It was not until excavation years 1979-86 that the pile had finally been removed and the Main Chapel had been excavated²².

The Chapel itself stands on a series of shallow terraces, cut to deeper levels as the slope around the building rises towards the east. As works progressed, members of the EES excavation team uncovered a structure larger than the surrounding chapels, consisting of numerous rooms courts. The entire structure was made of mud bricks joined by mud mortar, with some of the walls made of local stones in the lower part and completed with bricks. The main entrance led to the temple through a front court, from which the outer hall could be accessed (a side entrance was also available, leading to the hall through a side court). The outer hall, in a manner typical for traditional Egyptian chapel design, was the only way to enter the inner hall, from where the sanctuary with three alcoves could be reached. A smaller, side chapel could also be accessed from the inner hall. Smaller walled areas surrounded the halls and the sanctuary from both sides (more of them to the right side of the sanctuary than to the left) and from the rear, where a rear corridor had been built. The main structure was symmetrically located around an axis running through both halls and the sanctuary, but the adjoining areas and side structures showed no strict symmetry.

It was not the construction of the chapel, however, that made this discovery so unique, but a series of painted wall decorations uncovered within the struc-

²¹ All the following information regarding the excavations and reconstructions made by the Society in the Workman's Village comes from a recent publication regarding the Chapel (Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *The Main Chapel...*).

²² The excavation number of the object in question, for convenience named the Main Chapel, is Chapel 561 with Annexe 450. The decorated part of the chapel was excavated over seasons 1984-5, while the other, undecorated parts – in 1979 and 1986. For detailed information regarding the works, see Peet T.E., *Excavations at Tell el-'Amarna: a preliminary report*, JEA 7 (1921), p. 179-182; Woolley C.L., *Excavations at Tell el-'Amarna*, JEA 8 (1922), p. 48-60, Kemp B., *The Amarna Workmen's Village in retrospect*, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 73 (1987), p. 21-50, as well as Kemp's preliminary reports on subsequent years of excavations published in „Journal of Egyptian Archaeology” Nos. 64, 66, 67 and 69.

ture. Before having been painted the walls had been covered with alluvial mud or plaster, and on such foundations either a gypsum white coating or colored designs were applied. In some cases it was not absolutely certain whether a given room had been painted or just whitewashed, since some of the plaster had fallen from the walls and into other rooms. However, due to a painstaking and meticulous effort of the EES team, it was possible to match the pieces of the paintings together. In the course of their research they established that the painted rooms were certainly the Sanctuary corridor, the Inner Hall, most probably also the shrine room in the Side Chapel and the Outer Hall, the latter however is not certain. As a result of the research all the plaster coming from the Main Chapel was recorded and five decorative panels were reconstructed²³.

The most interesting and largest reconstruction comes from the east wall of the Sanctuary, which originally faced the entrance. The entire surface was separated by three sets of doors leading to the shrines, which automatically divided the space available for decoration between three panels above the doorways and two panels separating them. The panels above the side doors feature vultures, while above the central doorway a winged sun disc was depicted – all of them horizontal motifs. Both panels separating the doors on the other hand were decorated with vertical motifs of flowers and plants arranged into what we may call ‘bouquets’ or simply bunches. As a matter of fact, floral designs were prominently employed by the artists of the main Chapel and were often encountered in the entire structure. Each of the east wall panels was separated from the others by a triple line of black, red and white checked pattern of squares running from the bottom of the wall to the cavetto decoration painted above the vultures and sun disc. The lower part of the wall was decorated with a wainscot painted in black, white and red rectangular vertical geometric pattern, indicating a false door design. As mentioned previously, a cavetto cornice with a torus as well as a pattern imitating a ‘frieze’ and lotus petals were painted above the main decoration.

²³ Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *The Main Chapel*, p. 73. As described by the authors, the process of recreating the decorations required a great deal of work and patience – all the excavated pigmented fragments were placed in numbered trays and then carried by the local workforce to the EES camp, where they were stored. As mentioned above, many of the fragments had fallen into adjacent room lay among unpainted rubble, therefore it was impossible to determine which room they originally belonged to, making the job a great puzzle. They were later given find-spot numbers and matched based on color patterns and similarity. Firstly the largest and most distinguishable pieces were laid out, and later the other fragments were matched to form entire decorative panels. The works took place between seasons 1984 – 1993. A report on the decorations was first published by Kemp B. (ed.), *Painted Plaster from the Main chapel [in:] Amarna Reports II, Occasional Papers 2*, London 1985, p. 18-28.

We should now take a closer look at the main iconographic motifs of the scene, that is the sun disc flanked by two vultures and separated by flowers, as reconstructed by the EES team²⁴. The body of the vulture is red with a black outline. The wings are painted on a white background, in the outer part the feathers are black, while in the inner part – red. Both vultures have blue feet, clutching in their claws green *shen* signs, and a feather fan or feather standard is put into each of the *shen* loops (in fact it was the two left claws holding *shen* signs that survived and convinced the researchers that they were in fact dealing with two twin vultures instead of just one bird, which was their first assumption). The sun disc was painted red, with blue wing ribs emerging on each side and a white space marked with small red dots separating them from the actual feathers. The sun disc is encircled by the yellow coils of uraei, their heads and rearing bodies depicted on either side of the disc. Finally, the two large flower ‘bouquets’ separating the doorways comprise of three papyrus flowers. The central papyrus is light blue, flanked by two small blue cornflowers, while each of the side papyri is of a deeper blue hue, with small red and black poppy flowers on the sides. Below the main flowers smaller rows of floral motifs were depicted, all ending with a representation of bound flower stems.

The second scene that draws our attention comes from the north side of the Inner Hall and depicts a male and a female offering flowers. Only parts of the faces and flower offerings survived, so we know little about their clothing and arm arrangement, however all the remaining fragments are surprisingly quite traditional for the conventional New Kingdom art and are far from what is called the Amarna style, with no “distortions” characteristic for this period. Kemp and Weatherhead both agree that “from the surviving profile of the heads, particularly the consort’s, it is clear that the facial proportions are those of conventional Theban art, not the eponymous ‘Amarna’ style”²⁵. Both figures are facing right, with the woman portrayed in a classic manner behind

²⁴ This and all the below descriptions of the decoration of the Main Chapel are based on the reconstructions published by the EES. Cf. Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *The Main Chapel*. A very interesting method of reconstruction was employed by Kemp (Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *Ibidem*, p. 165). He first decided on the general outline of the vulture based on larger decoration fragments that survived. Then he used a model of vulture taken from the tomb of Ramses VI at Thebes and projected it to a screen, against which various small decoration fragments from the Amarna excavations were fitted. Finally the missing parts were drawn on the basis of the Ramesside vulture, but taking into consideration the design of the Amarna fragments. The reconstruction of the winged sun disc was a bit more problematic, since the preserved fragments came mainly from the center of the depiction and from the tips of the wings, leaving the rest open to interpretation. The surviving fragments were measured to establish proper proportions, a comparison to a similar winged sun disc from the shrine of Tutankhamen also proved helpful.

²⁵ Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *Ibidem*, p. 410.

the man. She wears a long wig decorated with a blue and white headband and two dark blue lotus flowers are placed on her head along with an white incense cone outlined in red. Her dress (what little survived of it) was white, decorated with a broad collar consisting of rows of white, red and blue stylized flowers, petals, beads and chequer patterns. The man's body, traditionally of a darker hue than the woman's, was most probably naked and also decorated with a collar, although it is just an assumption made by the reconstructing team. What we know for certain is that he also wore a wig, much shorter than his companion, with a large incense cone resting on top of his head. Both figures held flowers and were most probably members of a larger offering scene²⁶.

Complex and large reconstructions based on relatively few surviving original fragments are always encumbered with a margin of doubt. Especially the parts reconstructed on the basis of similar post-Amarna motifs, where no original decoration pieces remained, could be subject to some debate. For the purpose of this publication, however, it is not all that important whether the amount of feathers in each vulture wing or the uraei head color was correctly reconstructed, but what the entire iconography of this decoration implies – and it certainly is not representative for the Amarna style. Another important factor that can not be determined with absolute certainty is when during the reign of Akhenaten were those buildings constructed and painted? Since it was not possible to determine this exactly on the basis of stratigraphy, the first researchers found it tempting to date it after the death of Akhenaten – due to inscriptions discovered in the chapels by Peet and Woolley praising Amun and Shed as well as Aten²⁷. The gods mentioned on those inscriptions were later joined by Amun-Ra, whose name was discovered on a painted plaster fragment during later excavations and it is even possible it featured in the Main Chapel itself. Kemp and Weatherhead strongly disagree and, basing on the layout of buildings and roads on the entire site, argue that it would be against logic to leave the spot occupied by the Main Chapel empty until after the death of the pharaoh, especially that it is clear that other, smaller chapels were later built around it. They are therefore certain that the Chapel along with its traditional

²⁶ Although very little fragments of the larger composition survived, the EES members believe the entire scene to have consisted of the described couple (the deceased) sitting on chairs, with the female holding the male's arm, and with 3 other standing figures, perhaps a priest and two females (one of them holding a sistrum). A suggested version of this reconstruction, also based on similar scenes from the New Kingdom period, has been published in the Main Chapel study (Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *Ibidem*, 165), however it shall not be discussed further hereafter, since too little evidence remains to assess it with regard to stylistic principles.

²⁷ Peet T., Eric C. Leonard Woolley, *The City of Akhenaten, Part 1: Excavations of 1921 and 1922 at El-'Amarneh*, London 1923, p. 95.

decoration and inscriptions mentioning gods other than Aten belongs to the reign of the heretic pharaoh²⁸.

This brings us to yet another question – since the cult of Aten was supervised by the royal court and was practiced in roofless temples, where sun rays reached the pious, what was the purpose of the Main Chapel and other, smaller chapels in the Workmen Village? Surely they were built for religious purposes, but what was the object of worship? Since the buildings were rather dark inside and lack traditional depictions of Aten (sun disc and sun rays with hands), they must have been dedicated to other sanctities. Domestic cults and altars as well as many examples of private piety are widely known from Amarna, despite the above mentioned fact that the official cult of Aten seems to have been monopolized by the king and the royal family. Both Deir el-Medina and Amarna provided us with remains of public and private chapels and household shrines containing a small statue or stela, in Deir el-Medina dedicated to the cult of popular gods or the deceased members of the family, in Amarna usually depicting the King and his family worshipping the sun²⁹. The Main Chapel and the smaller chapels surrounding it were such places of private piety, this is a rather certain fact. What is interesting, however, is that apparently during Akhenaten's reign religious censorship was not as strict as it may seem. Not only were the workmen allowed to practice their private cults right next to the city of Aten, but also to decorate chapels in their own traditional way. After long years of Amarna research we are still unable to unambiguously state whether the reign of Akhenaten was a time of monotheism or rather henotheism in the kingdom of the Nile. The Main Chapel in the Workmen Village is yet another interesting find pointing to the conclusion that the times of Akhenaten were not as religiously zealous as it first seemed.

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²⁸ Kemp B., Weatherhead F., *The Main Chapel*, 410-411.

²⁹ Thompson S., *Cults*, [in:] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. I, New York 2001, p. 329.

