

# Akhenaton



*Statue of Pharaoh of Egypt Akhenaton in the early Amarna style*

## Reign

1353–1336 BC or  
1351–1334 BC, Eighteenth dynasty of Egypt

## Predecessor

Amenhotep III

## Successor

Smenkhkare or Neferneferuaten

## Royal titular

## Consort(s)

Nefertiti.....Kiya.....Meritaten.....Ankhesenamun.....An unidentified sister.....Children

Smenkhkare.....Meritaten.....Meketaten.....Ankhesenamun.....Neferneferuaten Tasherit

Neferneferure.....Setepenre.....Ankhesenpaaten-ta-sherit.....

## Father

Amenhotep III

## Mother

Tiye

Died 1336 or 1334 BC.

## Akhenaton (/ˌɑːkəˈnɑːtən

Spelled Echnaton, Akhenaton, Ikhnaton, and Khuenaten; meaning "living spirit of Aten") known before the fifth year of his reign as Amenhotep IV (sometimes given its Greek form Amenophis IV, and meaning Amun is Satisfied), was a Pharaoh of the Eighteenth dynasty of Egypt who ruled for 17 years and died perhaps in 1336 BC or 1334 BC. He is especially noted for abandoning traditional Egyptian polytheism and introducing worship centered on the Aten, which is sometimes described as monotheistic or henotheistic. An early inscription likens the Aten to the sun as compared to stars, and later official language avoids calling the Aten a god, giving the solar deity a status above mere gods. Akhenaton tried to bring about a departure from traditional religion, yet in the end it would not be accepted. After his death, traditional religious practice was gradually restored, and when some dozen years later rulers without clear rights of succession from the Eighteenth Dynasty founded a new dynasty, they discredited Akhenaton and his immediate successors, referring to Akhenaton himself as "the enemy" in archival records

He was all but lost from history until the discovery, in the 19th century, of Amarna, the site of Akhenaton, the city he built for the Aten. Early excavations at Amarna by Flinders Petrie sparked interest in the enigmatic pharaoh, whose tomb was unearthed in 1907 in a dig led by Edward R. Ayrton. Interest in Akhenaton increased with the discovery in the Valley of the Kings, at Luxor, of the tomb of King Tutankhamen, who has been proved to be Akhenaton's son according to DNA testing in 2010. A mummy found in KV55 in 1907 has been identified as that of Akhenaton. This man and Tutankhamen are related without question, but the identification of the KV55 mummy as Akhenaton has been questioned.

Modern interest in Akhenaton and his queen, Nefertiti, comes partly from his connection with Tutankhamen, partly from the unique style and high quality of the pictorial arts he patronized, and partly from ongoing interest in the religion he attempted to establish.

### Early reign as Amenhotep IV



*Relief representing Amenhotep IV before he changed his name to Akhenaton, Neues Museum, Berlin*

The future Akhenaton was a younger son of Amenhotep III and Chief Queen Tiye. The eldest son, Crown Prince Thutmose, was recognized as the heir of Amenhotep III but he died relatively young and the next in line for the throne was a prince named Amenhotep.

There is much controversy around whether Amenhotep IV succeeded to the throne on the death of his father, Amenhotep III, or whether there was a coregency (lasting as long as 12 years according to some Egyptologists). Current literature by Eric Cline, Nicholas Reeves, Peter Dorman and other scholars comes out strongly against the establishment of a long coregency between the two rulers and in favor of either no coregency or a brief one lasting one to two years, at the most. Other literature by Donald Redford, William Murnane, Alan Gardiner and more recently by Lawrence Berman in 1998 contests the view of any coregency whatsoever between Akhenaton and his father.



*Bronze Akhenaton British Museum.*

Amenhotep IV was crowned in plate with the titular of Amenhotep IV before he changed his name to Akhenaton. **Thebes** and there he started a building program. He decorated the southern entrance to the precincts of the **temple of Amun-Re** with scenes of himself worshipping **Re-Harakhti**. He soon decreed the construction of a temple dedicated to the **Aten** at the Eastern Karnak. This temple was called the **Gempaaten** (“The Aten is found in the estate of the Aten”). The Gempaaten consisted of a series of buildings, including a palace and a structure called the **Hwt Benben** which was dedicated to Queen **Nefertiti**. Other Aten temples constructed at Karnak during this time include the **Rud-menu** and the **Teni-menu** which may have been constructed near the Ninth Pylon. During this time he did not repress the worship of Amun, and the **High Priest of Amun** was still active in the fourth year of his reign. The king appears as Amenhotep IV in the tombs of some of the nobles in Thebes: Kheruef (TT192), **Ramose (TT55)** and the tomb of **Parennefer (TT188)**.








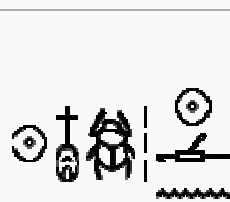


In the tomb of Ramose, Amenhotep IV appears on the west wall in the traditional style, seated on a throne with Ramose appearing before the king. On the other side of the doorway Amenhotep IV and Nefertiti are shown in the window of appearance with the Aten depicted as the sun disc. In the Theban tomb of Parennefer, Amenhotep IV and Nefertiti are seated on a throne with the sun disc depicted over the king and queen.

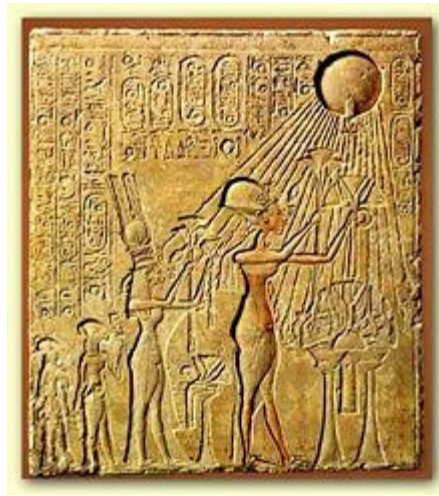
One of the last known documents referring to Amenhotep IV is two copies of a letter from the Steward of Memphis Apy (or Ipy) to the Pharaoh. The documents were found in Gurob and are dated to regnal year 5, third month of the Growing Season, day 19.



**Name change to Akhenaton**

On day 13, Month 8, in the fifth year of his reign, the king arrived at the site of the new city **Akhenaton** (now known as **Amarna**). A month before that Amenhotep IV had officially changed his name to Akhenaton Amenhotep IV changed most of his **5 fold titulary** in year 5 of his reign. The only name he kept was his prenomen or throne name.

	Amenhotep IV	Akhenaton
<b>Horus name</b>	 <b>Kanakht-qai-Shuti</b> "Strong Bull of the Double Plumes"	 <b>Meryaten</b> "Strong Bull, Beloved of Aten"
<b>Nebty name</b>	 <b>Wer-nesut-em-Ipet-swt</b> "Great of Kingship in Karnak"	 <b>Wer-nesut-em-Akhetaten</b> "Great of Kingship in Akhet-Aten"
<b>Golden Horus name</b>	 <b>Wetjes-khau-em-Iunu-Shemay</b> "Crowned in Heliopolis of the South" (Thebes)	 <b>Wetjes-ren-en-Aten</b> "Exalter of the Name of Aten"
<b>Prenomen</b>	 <b>Neferkheperure-waenre</b> "Beautiful are the Forms of Re, the Unique one of Re"	 <b>Neferkheperure-waenre</b>
<b>Nomen</b>	 <b>Amenhotep Netjer-Heqa-Waset</b> "Amenhotep god-ruler of Thebes"	 <b>Akhenaton</b> "Effective for the Aten"



### Religious Policies

Pharaoh Akhenaton (center) and his family adoring the **Aten**, with characteristic rays seen emanating from the solar disk. The next figure leftmost is **Meritaten**, the daughter of Akhenaton, adorned in a double- feather crown.



*Talatat blocks from Akhenaton's Aten temple in Karnak*

Some recent debate has focused on the extent to which Akhenaton forced his religious reforms on his people. Certainly, as time drew on, he revised the names of the Aten, and other religious language, to increasingly exclude references to other gods; at some point, also, he embarked on the wide-scale erasure of traditional gods' names, especially those of **Amun**. Some of his court changed their names to remove them from the patronage of other gods and place them under that of Aten (or **Ra**, with whom Akhenaton equated the Aten). Yet, even at Amarna itself, some courtiers kept such names as Ahmose ("child of the moon god", the owner of tomb 3), and the sculptor's workshop where the famous Nefertiti bust, and other works of royal portraiture, were found, is associated with an artist known to have been called **Thutmose** ("child of Thoth"). An overwhelmingly large number of **faience** amulets at Amarna also show that talismans of the household-and-childbirth gods Bes and Taweret, the eye of Horus, and amulets of other traditional deities, were openly worn by its citizens. Indeed, a cache of royal jewelry found buried near the Amarna royal tombs, (now in the National Museum of Scotland) includes a finger ring referring to Mutt, the wife of Amun. Such evidence suggests that though Akhenaton shifted funding away from traditional temples, his policies were fairly tolerant until some point, perhaps a particular event as yet unknown, toward the end of the reign.

Following Akhenaton's death, change was gradual at first. Within a decade a comprehensive political, religious and artistic reformation began promoting a return of Egyptian life death, particularly during the reigns of **Horemheb** and the to the norms it had followed during his father's reign. Much of the art and building infrastructure created during Akhenaton's reign was defaced or destroyed in the period following his early **Nineteenth Dynasty** kings. Stone building blocks from Akhenaton's construction projects were later used as foundation stones for subsequent rulers' temples and tombs.

## Pharaoh and family depictions

Styles of art that flourished during this short period are markedly different from other Egyptian art. In some cases, representations are more naturalistic, especially in depictions of animals and plants, of commoners, and in a sense of action and movement—for both nonroyal and royal people. However, depictions of members of the court, especially members of the royal family, are extremely stylized, with elongated heads, protruding stomachs, heavy hips, thin arms and legs, and exaggerated facial features. Questions also remain whether the beauty of Nefertiti is portraiture or idealism. Significantly, and for the only time in the history of Egyptian royal art, Akhenaton's family are shown taking part in decidedly naturalistic activities, showing affection for each other, and being caught in mid-action (in traditional art, a pharaoh's divine nature was expressed by repose, even immobility).



*Small statue of Akhenaton wearing the Egyptian Blue Crown of War*

The depictions of action may correspond to the emphasis on the active, creative nurturing of the Aten emphasized in the "Great Hymn to the Aten" and elsewhere. Nefertiti also appears beside the king or alone, (or with her daughters), in actions usually reserved for a Pharaoh, suggesting that she enjoyed unusual status for a queen. Early artistic representations of her tend to be indistinguishable from her husband's except by her regalia, but soon after the move to the new capital, Nefertiti begins to be depicted with features specific to her. Why Akhenaton had himself represented in the bizarre, strikingly androgynous way he did, remains a vigorously debated question. Religious reasons have been suggested, such as to emulate the creative nature of the Aten, who is called in Amarna tomb texts, "mother and father" of all that is. Or, it has been suggested, Akhenaton's (and his family's) portraiture exaggerates his distinctive physical traits. Until Akhenaton's mummy is positively identified, such theories remain speculative. Some scholars do identify Mummy 61074, found in KV55, an unfinished tomb in the Valley of the Kings, as Akhenaton's. If so—or if the KV 55 mummy is that of his close relative, **Smenkhkare**—its measurements tend to support the theory that Akhenaton's depictions exaggerate his actual appearance. Though the "mummy" consists only of disarticulated bones, the skull is long and has a prominent chin, and the limbs are light and long. In 2007, **Zahi Hawass** and a team of researchers made CT scan images of Mummy 61074. They have concluded that the elongated skull, cheek bones, cleft palate, and impacted wisdom tooth suggest that the mummy is the father of Tutankhamen, and thus is Akhenaton.

## Family and relations



*Akhenaton, Nefertiti and their children*

As Amenhotep IV, Akhenaton was married to Nefertiti at the very beginning of his reign, and six daughters were identified from inscriptions. Recent DNA analysis has revealed that with one of his biological sisters, the **Younger Lady mummy**, Akhenaton fathered Tutankhamen (later **Tutankhamen**). The parentage of Smenkhkare, his successor, is unknown, and Akhenaton and an unknown wife have been proposed to be his parents.

A secondary wife of Akhenaton named **Kiya** is known from inscriptions. Some theorized that she gained importance as the mother of Tutankhamen, Smenkhkare, both.

This is a list of Akhenaton's children with suggested years of birth:

- **Smenkhkare** ? – year 35 or 36 of Amenhotep III's reign
- **Meritaten** – year 1.
- **Meketaten** – year 3, possibly earlier.
- **Ankhesenpaaten**, later Queen of **Tutankhamun** – year 4.
- **Neferneferuaten Tasherit** – year 8.
- **Neferneferure** – year 9.
- **Setepenre** – year 9.
- **Tutankhaten** – year 8 or 9 – renamed Tutankhamun later.

His known consorts were:

- **Nefertiti**, his **Great Royal Wife**.
- **Kiya**, a lesser Royal Wife.
- A daughter of **Šatiya**, ruler of **Enišasi**
- A daughter of **Burna-Buriash**, King of Babylon

It has been proposed that Akhenaton may have taken some of his daughters as sexual consorts, to attempt to father a male heir by them, but this is very debatable. It does seem certain that like his father, Amenhotep III, Akhenaton named at least one daughter as **Great Royal Wife**. But this does not exclusively indicate she was his sexual consort as the position was also an important ceremonial position

- Meritaten is recorded as Great Royal Wife to Smenkhkare in the tomb of Meryre II in Akhet-Aten. She is also listed alongside King Akhenaton and King Neferneferuaten as Great Royal Wife on a box from the tomb of Tutankhamen. Letters written to Akhenaton from foreign rulers make reference to Meritaten as 'mistress of the house'.
- Meketaten, Akhenaton's second daughter. Meketaten's death in childbirth is recorded in the royal tombs of Amarna about the year 13 or 14. Since no husband is known for her, the assumption has been that Akhenaton was the father. The inscriptions giving the filiation of the child are damaged to prevent resolving the issue.
- Various monuments originally for Kiya, were reinscribed for Akhenaton's daughters Meritaten and Ankhesenpaaten, the revised inscriptions list a Meritaten-tasherit ("junior") and an Ankhesenpaaten-tasherit. Some view this to indicate that Akhenaton fathered his own grandchildren. Others hold that since these grandchildren are not attested to elsewhere, that they are fictions invented to fill the space originally filled by Kiya's child.

Two other lovers have been suggested, but are not widely accepted:

- Smenkhkare, Akhenaton's successor and/or co-ruler for the last years of his reign. Rather than a lover, however, Smenkhkare is likely to have been a half-brother or a son to Akhenaton. Some have even suggested that Smenkhkare was actually an alias of Nefertiti or Kiya, and therefore one of Akhenaton's wives (see below).

- Tiye, his mother. Twelve years after the death of Amenhotep III, she is still mentioned in inscriptions as Queen and beloved of the King, but kings' mothers often were. The few supporters of this theory (notably **Immanuel Velikovsky**) consider Akhenaton to be the historical model of legendary King **Oedipus** of **Thebes, Greece** and Tiye the model for his mother/wife **Jocasta**.

### International relations



*Akhenaton in Amarna period style*

Important evidence about Akhenaton's reign and foreign policy has been provided by the discovery of the **Amarna Letters**, a cache of diplomatic correspondence discovered in modern times at el-Amarna, the modern designation of the **Akhenaton** site. This correspondence comprises a priceless collection of incoming messages on clay tablets, sent to Akhenaton from various subject rulers through Egyptian military outposts, and from the foreign rulers (recognized as "Great Kings") of the kingdom of **Mitanni**, Babylon, Assyria and Hattie. The governors and kings of Egypt's subject domains also wrote frequently to plead for gold from Pharaoh, and also complained of being snubbed and cheated by him.

Early on in his reign, Akhenaton fell out with the king of **Mitanni**, **Tushratta**, who had been courting favor with his father against the Hittites. Tushratta complains in numerous letters that Akhenaton had sent him gold plated statues rather than statues made of solid gold; the statues formed part of the bride price which Tushratta received for letting his daughter **Tadukhepa** be married to Amenhotep III and then Akhenaton. Amarna letter EA 27 preserves a complaint by Tushratta to Akhenaton about the situation:

"I...asked your father, **Mimmureya**, for statues of solid cast gold, one of myself and a second statue, a statue of Tadu-Heba (Tadukhepa), my daughter, and your father said, 'Don't talk of giving statues just of solid cast gold. I will give you ones made also of lapis lazuli. I will give you, too, along with the statues, much additional gold and (other) goods beyond measure.' Every one of my messengers that were staying in Egypt saw the gold for the statues with their own eyes. Your father himself recast the statues [i]n the presence of my messengers, and he made them entirely of pure gold....He showed much additional gold, which was beyond measure and which he was sending to me. He said to my messengers, 'See with your own eyes, here the statues, there much gold and goods beyond measure, which I am sending to my brother.' And my messengers did see with their own eyes! But my brother (ie: Akhenaton) has not sent the solid (gold) statues that your father was going to send. You have sent plated ones of wood. Nor have you sent me the goods that your father was going to send me, but you have reduced (them) greatly. Yet there is nothing I know of in which I have failed my brother. Any day that I hear the greetings of my brother, that day I make a festive occasion...May my brother send me much gold. [At] the kim [ru fe]ast...[...with] many goods [may my] brother honor me. In my brother's country gold is as plentiful as dust. May my brother cause me no distress? May he send me much gold in order that my brother [with the gold and m] any [good]s, may honor me." (EA 27)





*Plaster portrait study of a pharaoh,*

This portrait was discovered within the workshop of the royal sculptor Thutmose at Amarna; now part of the [Ägyptisches Museum collection in Berlin](#).

While Akhenaton was certainly not a close friend of Tushratta, he was evidently concerned at the expanding power of the [Hittite](#) Empire under its powerful ruler [Suppiluliuma I](#). A successful Hittite attack on Mitanni and its ruler Tushratta would have disrupted the entire international balance of power in the Ancient Middle East at a time when Egypt had made peace with Mitanni; this would cause some of Egypt's vassals to switch their allegiances to the Hittites, as time would prove. A group of Egypt's allies who attempted to rebel against the Hittites were captured, and wrote letters begging Akhenaton for troops, but he did not respond to most of their pleas. Evidence suggests that the troubles on the northern frontier led to difficulties in [Canaan](#), particularly in a struggle for power between

[Labaya of Shechem](#) and [Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem](#), which required the Pharaoh to intervene in the area by dispatching [Medjay](#) troops northwards. Akhenaton pointedly refused to save his vassal [Rib-Hadda of Byblos](#) whose kingdom was being besieged by the expanding state of [Amurru](#) under [Abdi-Ashirta](#) and later [Aziru](#), son of Abdi-Ashirta, despite Rib-Hadda's numerous pleas for help from the pharaoh. Rib-Hadda wrote a total of 60 letters to Akhenaton pleading for aid from the pharaoh.

Akhenaton wearied of Rib-Hadda's constant correspondences and once told Rib-Hadda: "You are the one that writes to me more than all the (other) mayors" or Egyptian vassals in EA 124.<sup>[32]</sup> What Rib-Hadda did not comprehend was that the Egyptian king would not organize and dispatch an entire army north just to preserve the political status quo of several minor city states on the fringes of Egypt's Asiatic Empire. Rib-Hadda would pay the ultimate price; his exile from Byblos due to a coup led by his brother [Irirabih](#) is mentioned in one letter. When Rib-Hadda appealed in vain for aid to Akhenaton and then turned to Aziru, his sworn enemy to place him back on the throne of his city, Aziru promptly had him dispatched to the king of Sidon where Rib-Hadda was almost certainly executed. [William L.](#)

[Moran](#) notes that the Amarna corpus of 380+ letters counters the conventional view that Akhenaton neglected Egypt's foreign territories in favor of his internal reforms. There are several letters from Egyptian vassals notifying Pharaoh that the king's instructions have been followed: To the king, my lord, my god, my Sun, the Sun from the sky: Message of Yapahu, the ruler of [Gazru](#), your servant, the dirt at your feet. I indeed prostrate myself at the feet of the king, my lord, my god, my Sun...7 times and 7 times on the stomach and on the back. I am indeed guarding the place of the king, my lord, the Sun of the sky, where I am, and all the things the king, my lord, has written me, I am indeed carrying out--everything! Who am I, a dog, and what is my house...and what is anything I have, that the orders of the king, my lord, the Sun from the sky, should not obey constantly? (EA 378)When the loyal but unfortunate Rib-Hadda was killed at the instigation of Aziru Akhenaton sent an angry letter to Aziru containing a barely veiled accusation of outright treachery on the latter's part. Akhenaton wrote:

Say to Aziru, ruler of Amurru: Thus the king, your lord (ie: Akhenaton), saying: The ruler of Gubla (ie: Byblos), whose brother had cast him away at the gate, said to you, "Take me and get me into the city. There is much silver, and I will give it to you. In abundance of everything, but not with me." Thus did the ruler (Rib-Hadda) speak to you. Did you not write to the king, my lord saying, "I am your servant like all the previous mayors (ie: vassals) in his city"? Yet you acted delinquently by taking the mayor whose brother had cast him away at the gate, from his city.



*Head of Akhenaton*

He (Rib-Hadda) was residing in **Sidon** and, following your own judgment, you gave him to (some) mayors. Were you ignorant of the treacherousness of the men? If you really are the king's servant, why did you not denounce him before the king, your lord, saying, "This mayor has written to me saying, 'Take me to yourself and get me into my city'"? And if you did act loyally, still all the things you wrote were not true. In fact, the king has reflected on them as follows, "Everything you have said is not friendly." Now the king has heard as follows, "You are at peace with the ruler of Qidsa. (**Kadesh**) The two of you take food and strong drink together." And it is true. Why do you act so? Why are you at peace with a ruler whom the king is fighting? And even if you did act loyally, you considered your own judgment, and his judgment did not count. You have paid no attention to the things that you did earlier. What happened to you among them that you are not on the side of the king, your lord? Consider the people that are training you for their own advantage. They want to throw you into the fire....If for any reason whatsoever you prefer to do evil, and if you plot evil, treacherous things, then you, together with your entire family, shall die by the axe of the king. So perform your service for the king, your lord, and you will live. You yourself know that the king does not fail when he rages against all of Canaan. And when you wrote saying, 'May the king, my Lord, give me leave this year, and then I will go next year to the king, my Lord. (ie: to Egypt) If this is impossible, I will send my son in my place'--the king, your Lord, let you off this year in accordance with what you said. Come yourself, or send your son [now], and you will see the king at whose sight all lands live." (EA 162)

This letter shows that Akhenaton paid close attention to the affairs of his vassals in Canaan and Syria. Akhenaton commanded Aziru to come to Egypt and proceeded to detain him there for at least one year. In the end, Akhenaton was forced to release Aziru back to his homeland when the Hittites advanced southwards into **Amki** thereby threatening Egypt's series of Asiatic vassal states including Amurru. Sometime after his return to Amurru, Aziru defected to the Hittite side with his kingdom. While it is known from an Amarna letter by Rib-Hadda that the Hittites "seized all the countries that were vassals of the king of Mitanni" (EA 75) Akhenaton managed to preserve Egypt's control over the core of her Near Eastern Empire which consisted of present day Israel as well as the Phoenician coast while avoiding conflict with the increasingly powerful Hittite Empire of **Suppiluliuma I**. Only the Egyptian border province of Amurru in Syria around the Orontes River was permanently lost to the Hittites when its ruler Aziru defected to the Hittites. Finally, contrary to the conventional view of a ruler who neglected Egypt's international relations, Akhenaton is known to have initiated at least one campaign into Nubia in his regnal Year 12, where his campaign is mentioned in Amada stela CG 41806 and on a separate companion stela (carved or inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes) at **Buhen**.( an **ancient Egyptian** settlement situated on the West bank of the Nile near the 2<sup>nd</sup> cataract )

## Death, burial and succession



Akhenaton's *sarcophagus* , now in the *Egyptian Museum*, Cairo reconstituted from pieces discovered in his original tomb in *Amarna*.

The last dated appearance of Akhenaton and the Amarna family is in the **tomb of Meryra II**, and dates from second month, year 12 of his reign. After this the historical record is unclear, and only with the succession of **Tutankhamun** is somewhat clarified. However, recently, in December 2012, it was announced that a Year 16 III Akhet day 15 inscription dated explicitly to Akhenaton's reign which mentions, in the same breath, the presence of a living Queen Nefertiti, has now been found in a limestone quarry at **Deir el-Bersha** just north of Amarna .The text refers to a building project in Amarna. It establishes that Akhenaton and Nefertiti was still a royal couple just a year prior to Akhenaton's death. Akhenaton planned to relocate Egyptian burials on the East side of the Nile (sunrise) rather than on the West side (sunset), in the **Royal Wadi** in Ak coregency hetaten His body was removed after the court returned to **Thebes**, and recent genetic tests have confirmed that the body found buried in tomb **KV55** was the father of Tutankhamun, and is therefore "most probably" Akhenaton although this is disputed. The tomb contained numerous Amarna era objects including a royal funerary mask which had been deliberately destroyed. His sarcophagus was destroyed but has since been reconstructed and now sits outside in the **Cairo Museum**.



Fragmentary *ushabtis* of Akhenaton from his original tomb in *Amarna*, now in the *Brooklyn*

Similarly, although it is accepted that Akhenaton himself died in Year 17 of his reign, the question of whether Smenkhkare became co-regent perhaps two or three years earlier or enjoyed a brief independent reign is unclear. If Smenkhkare outlived Akhenaton, and became sole Pharaoh, he likely ruled Egypt for less than a year. The next successor was Neferneferuaten, a female Pharaoh who reigned in Egypt for two years and one month She was, in turn, probably succeeded by Tutankhamen (later, Tutankhamun), with the country being administered by the chief vizier, and future Pharaoh, Ay. Tutankhamun was believed to be a younger brother of Smenkhkare and a son of Akhenaton, and possibly Kiya although one scholar has suggested that Tutankhamen may have been a son of Smenkhkare instead. DNA tests in 2010 indicated Tutankhamun was indeed the son of Akhenaton. It has been suggested that after the death of Akhenaton, Nefertiti reigned with the name of Neferneferuaten but other scholars believe this female ruler was rather Meritaten. The so-called Coregency Stela, found in a tomb in Amarna possibly shows his queen Nefertiti as his coregent, ruling alongside him, but this is not certain as the names have been removed and recarved to show Ankhesenpaaten and Neferneferuaten. With Akhenaton's death, the Aten cult he had founded gradually fell out of favor. Tutankhamen changed his name to Tutankhamun in Year 2 of his reign (1332 BC) and abandoned the city of Akhenaton, which eventually fell into ruin. His successors Ay and Horemheb disassembled temples Akhenaton had built, including the temple at Thebes, using them as a source of easily available building materials and decorations for their own temples.

Finally, Akhenaton, Neferneferuaten, Smenkhkare, Tutankhamen, and Ay were excised from the official lists of Pharaohs, which instead reported that Amenhotep III was immediately succeeded by Horemheb. This is thought to be part of an attempt by Horemheb to delete all trace of Atenism and the pharaohs associated with it from the historical record. Akhenaton's name never appeared on any of the king lists compiled by later Pharaohs and it was not until the late 19th century that his identity was re-discovered and the surviving traces of his reign were unearthed by archaeologists.

### Plague and pandemic

This Amarna Period is also associated with a serious outbreak of a pandemic, possibly the plague, or polio, or perhaps the world's first recorded outbreak of influenza, which came from Egypt and spread throughout the Middle East, killing Suppiluliuma I, the Hittite King. Influenza is a disease associated with the close proximity of water fowl, pigs and humans, and its origin as a pandemic disease may be due to the development of agricultural systems that allow the mixing of these animals and their wastes. Some of the first archaeological evidence for this agricultural system is during the Amarna period of Ancient Egypt, and the pandemic that followed this period throughout the Ancient Near East may have been the earliest recorded outbreak of influenza. However, the precise nature of this Egyptian plague remains unknown and Asia has also been suggested as a possible site of origin of pandemic influenza in humans. The prevalence of disease may help explain the rapidity with which the site of Akhetaten was subsequently abandoned. It may also explain why later generations considered the gods to have turned against the Amarna monarchs. Arielle Kozloff discusses the evidence, arguing that the epidemic was caused by Bubonic plague over polio.

### Atenism

*Atenism, or the Amarna heresy, is one of the earliest known, well-documented, monotheistic religions*

In the early years of his reign, Amenhotep IV lived at Thebes with Nefertiti and his 6 daughters. Initially, he permitted worship of Egypt's traditional deities to continue but near the **Temple of Karnak** (Amun-Ra's great cult center), he erected several massive buildings including temples to the **Aten**. Aten was usually depicted as a sun disc. These buildings at Thebes were later dismantled by his successors and used as infill for new constructions in the Temple of Karnak; when they were later dismantled by archaeologists, some 36,000 decorated blocks from the original Aton building here were revealed which preserve many elements of the original relief scenes and inscriptions.



*Akhenaton depicted as a sphinx at Amarna.*

The relationship between Amenhotep IV and the priests of Amun-Re gradually deteriorated. In Year 5 of his reign, Amenhotep IV took decisive steps to establish the Aten as the exclusive, **monotheistic** god of Egypt: the pharaoh "disbanded the priesthoods of all the other gods...and diverted the income from these [other] cults to support the Aten". To emphasize his complete allegiance to the **Aten**, the king officially changed his name from Amenhotep IV to Akhenaton or 'Living Spirit of Aten'.<sup>1</sup> At the site known today as **Amarna** and on his fifth year he also marked the beginning of construction on his new capital, **Akhenaton** or 'Horizon of Aten'. Very soon afterwards, he centralized Egyptian religious practices in Akhenaton, though construction of the city seems to have continued for several more years. In honor of Aten, Akhenaton also oversaw the construction of some of the most massive temple complexes in ancient Egypt. In these new temples, Aten was worshipped in the open sunlight, rather than in dark temple enclosures, as had been the previous custom. Akhenaton is also believed to have composed the **Great Hymn to the Aton**.

Initially, Akhenaton presented Aten as a variant of the familiar supreme deity Amun-Re (itself the result of an earlier rise to prominence of the cult of Amun, resulting in Amun becoming merged with the sun god Ra), in an attempt to put his ideas in a familiar Egyptian religious context. However, by Year 9 of his reign, Akhenaton declared that Aten was not merely the supreme god, but the only god, and that he, Akhenaton, was the only intermediary between Aten and his people. He ordered the defacing of Amun's temples throughout Egypt and, in a number of instances; inscriptions of the plural 'gods' were also removed

Aten's name is also written differently after Year 9, to emphasize the radicalism of the new regime, which included a ban on **images**, with the exception of a raid solar disc, in which the rays (commonly depicted ending in hands) appear to represent the unseen spirit of Aten, who by then was evidently considered not merely a sun god, but rather a universal deity. Representations of the Aten were always accompanied with a sort of "hieroglyphic footnote", stating that the representation of the sun as All-encompassing Creator was to be taken as just that: a representation of something that, by its very nature as something transcending creation, cannot be fully or adequately represented by any one part of that creation.



*Sculptor's trial piece of Akhenaton.*

Akhenaton's status as a religious revolutionary has led to much **speculation**, ranging from bona fide scholarly hypotheses to the non-academic **fringe** theories. Although many believe that he introduced monotheism, others see Akhenaton as a practitioner of an Aten **monolatry**, as he did not actively deny the existence of other gods; he simply refrained from worshipping any but the Aten while expecting the people to worship not Aten but him.

### Akhenaton and Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheism

The idea of Akhenaton as the pioneer of a monotheistic religion that later became Judaism has been considered by various scholars. One of the first to mention this was **Sigmund Freud**, the founder of **psychoanalysis**, in his book **Moses and Monotheism**. Freud argued that Moses had been an Atenist priest forced to leave Egypt with his followers after Akhenaton's death. Freud argued that Akhenaton was striving to promote monotheism, something that the biblical Moses was able to achieve. Following his book, the concept entered popular consciousness and serious research.

Other scholars and mainstream Egyptologists point out that there are direct connections between early **Judaism** and other **Semitic** religious traditions. They also state that two of the three principal Judaic terms for God, **Yahweh**, **Elohim** (morphologically plural, lit. "Gods"), and **Adonai** (lit. "my lord") have a connection to Aten. Freud commented on the connection between Adonai, the Egyptian Aten and the Syrian divine name of Adonis as a primeval unity of language between the factions; in this he was following the argument of Egyptologist **Arthur Weigall**. Jan Assmann's opinion is that 'Aten' and 'Adonai' are not linguistically related. Although there are similarities between Akhenaton monotheistic experiment and the biblical story of Moses that have been explored in mainstream culture they include, the idea that Akhenaton is the real character for the mythical Moses, Ahmarna the place as a literary misinterpretation of God raining an unknown fruit called manna while the Jews were wandering in the desert and the concept of a deity directing a group to a promised place which is the main theme in both stories.

**Ahmed Osman** has claimed that Akhenaton's maternal grandfather **Yuya** was the same person as the **Biblical Joseph**. Yuya held the title "Overseer of the Cattle of Min at Akhmim" during his life. He likely belonged to the local nobility of **Akhmim**. Egyptologists hold this view because Yuya had strong connections to the city of **Akhmim** in Upper Egypt. This makes it unlikely that he was a foreigner since most Asiatic settlers tended to cloister around the **Nile Delta** region of **Lower Egypt**. Some **Egyptologists**, however, give him a **Mitannian** origin. It is widely accepted that there are strong similarities between Akhenaton's **Great Hymn to the Aten** and the **Biblical Psalm 104**, though this form is found widespread in ancient Near Eastern **hymnology** both before and after the period and whether this implies a direct influence or a common literary convention remains in dispute. Others have likened some aspects of Akhenaton's relationship with the Aten to the relationship, in Christian tradition, of **Jesus Christ** with God - particularly in interpretations that emphasize a more monotheistic interpretation of Atenism than henotheistic. **Donald B. Redford** has noted that some have viewed Akhenaton as a harbinger of Jesus. "After all, Akhenaton did call himself the son of the sole god: 'Thine only son that came forth from thy body'." **James Henry Breasted** likened him to Jesus, **Arthur Weigall** saw him as a failed precursor of Christ and **Thomas Mann** saw him "as right on the way and yet not the right one for the way".

**Redford** argued that while Akhenaton called himself the son of the Sun-Disc and acted as the chief mediator between god and creation, kings for thousands of years before Akhenaton's time had claimed the same relationship and priestly role. However Akhenaton's case may be different through the emphasis placed on the heavenly father and son relationship. Akhenaton described himself as "thy son who came forth from thy limbs", "thy child", "and the eternal son that came forth from the Sun-Disc", and "thine only son that came forth from thy body". The close relationship between father and son is such that only the king truly knows the heart of "his father", and in return his father listens to his son's prayers. He is his father's image on earth and as Akhenaton is king on earth his father is king in heaven. As high priest, prophet, king and divine he claimed the central position in the new religious system. Since only he knew his father's mind and will, Akhenaton alone could interpret that will for all mankind with true teaching coming only from him.

#### **Redford concluded:**

Before much of the archaeological evidence from Thebes and from Tell el-Amarna became available, wishful thinking sometimes turned Akhenaton into a humane teacher of the true God, a mentor of Moses, a Christ like figure, a philosopher before his time. But these imaginary creatures are now fading away one by one as the historical reality gradually emerges. There is little or no evidence to support the notion that Akhenaton was a progenitor of the full-blown monotheism that we find in the Bible. The monotheism of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament had its own separate development—one that began more than half a millennium after the pharaoh's death.

However, **Greenberg** argues that Judaism shows signs that in its early forms it had Henotheistic characteristics and that it later was refined into a monotheism around the time of King Josiah, relegating that which previously were considered gods, into gods that ought not be worshipped, i.e. angels.

#### **Possible illness**

The rather strange and eccentric portrayals of Akhenaton, with a sagging stomach, thick thighs, larger breasts, and long, thin face — so different from the athletic norm in the portrayal of Pharaohs — has led certain Egyptologists to suppose that Akhenaton suffered some kind of genetic abnormality. Various illnesses have been put forward. On the basis of his longer jaw and his feminine appearance, **Cyril Aldred** suggested he may have suffered from **Froelich's Syndrome**. However, this is unlikely because this disorder results in **sterility** and Akhenaton is known to have fathered numerous children — these children are repeatedly portrayed through years of archaeological and iconographic evidence — at least six daughters by Queen Nefertiti, well known as the King and Queen's six princesses of Amarna, as well as his successor **Tutankhamen** by a minor wife.

Another suggestion by **Burridge** is that Akhenaton may have suffered from Marfan's Syndrome. **Marfan's syndrome**, unlike Froelich's, does not result in any lack of intelligence or sterility. It is associated with a sunken chest, long curved spider-like fingers (**arachnodactyly**), occasional congenital

heart difficulties, a high curved or slightly cleft palate, and a highly curved cornea or dislocated lens of the eye, with the requirement for bright light to see well. Marfan's sufferers tend towards being taller than average, with a long, thin face, and elongated skull, overgrown ribs, a funnel or pigeon chest, and larger pelvis, with enlarged thighs and spindly calves. Marfan's syndrome is a dominant characteristic, and sufferers have a 50% chance of passing it on to their children. All of these symptoms arguably sometimes appear in depictions of Akhenaton and of his children. Recent CT scans of Tutankhamun report a cleft palate and a fairly long head, as well as an abnormal curvature of the spine and fusion of the upper vertebrae, a condition associated with scoliosis, all conditions associated with Marfan's syndrome. However, DNA tests on Tutankhamun, in 2010, proved negative for Marfan syndrome. More recently, Homocystinuria was suggested as a possible diagnosis. Patients suffering from Homocystinuria have Marfan habitus, however, as an autosomal recessive disease it seems to fit better into Akhenaton's family tree - Akhenaton's parents, Amenhotep III and Tiye, were most probably healthy, and Marfan Syndrome was ruled out following DNA tests on Tutankhamun in 2010. However, Dominic Montserrat in Akhenaton: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt state that "there is now a broad consensus among Egyptologists that the exaggerated forms of Akhenaton's physical portrayal... are not to be read literally". Montserrat and others argue that the body-shape relates to some form of religious symbolism. Because the god Aten was referred to as "the mother and father of all humankind" it has been suggested that Akhenaton was made to look androgynous in artwork as a symbol of the androgyny of the god. This required "a symbolic gathering of all the attributes of the creator god into the physical body of the king himself", which will "display on earth the Aten's multiple life-giving functions". Akhenaton did refer to himself as "The Unique One of Re", and he may have used his control of artistic expression to distance himself from the common people, though such a radical departure from the idealized traditional representation of the image of the Pharaoh would be truly extraordinary.

Another claim was made by Immanuel Velikovsky, who hypothesized an incestuous relationship with his mother, Tiye. Velikovsky also posited that Akhenaton had elephantiasis, producing enlarged legs. Based on this, he identified Akhenaton as the history behind the Oedipus myth, Oedipus being Greek for "swollen feet", and moved the setting from the Greek Thebes to the Egyptian Thebes. As part of his argument, Velikovsky uses the fact that Akhenaton viciously carried out a campaign to erase the name of his father, which he argues could have developed into Oedipus killing his father. This point seems to be disproved, however, in that Akhenaton in fact mummified and buried his father in the honorable traditional Egyptian fashion prior to beginning his monotheistic revolution.

In the same 1960 work, Oedipus and Akhenaton, Velikovsky not only saw Akhenaton as the origin of Oedipus, but also identified him with a Pharaoh mentioned only in Herodotus, "Anysis of the city of the same name" — Akhenaton of Akhetaten. Like Oedipus, Anysis was blinded, deposed and exiled.

Recently a surgeon at Imperial College London (Dr Hutan Ashraffian) has analyzed the early death of Akhenaton and the premature deaths of other Eighteenth dynasty Pharaohs (including Tutankhamun and Thutmose IV). He identifies that their early deaths was likely as a result of a Familial Temporal Epilepsy. This would account for the untimely mortality in Akhenaton, his abnormal endocrine body shape on sculptures and can also explain Akhenaton's religious conviction due to this type of epilepsy's association with intense spiritual visions and religiosity.

Historian James Henry Breasted considered Akhenaton to be "the first individual in history," as well as the first monotheist, romantic, and scientist.

In 1899, Flinders Petrie opined,

If this were a new religion, invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions, we could not find a flaw in the correctness of this view of the energy of the solar system. How much Akhenaton understood, we cannot say, but he certainly bounded forward in his views and symbolism to a position which we cannot logically improve upon at the present day. Not a rag of superstition or of falsity can be found clinging to this new worship evolved out of the old Aton of Heliopolis, the sole Lord of the universe.

Henry Hall contended that the pharaoh was the "first example of the scientific mind."

In *Akhenaton: Egypt's False Prophet*, [Nicholas Reeves](#) construes the pharaoh's religious reformations as attempts at the centralization of his power and solidification of his role as "divine monarch."

### Smenkhkare

Various unscribed and damaged stelae depict Akhenaton with what appears to be a coregent wearing a king's crown, in familiar if not intimate settings (even naked). Since Smenkhkare was known to be a male, this led to the speculation that Akhenaton was homosexual. These notions were discarded once the coregent was identified as a female, most likely his wife.

In the 1970s, John Harris identified the figure pictured alongside Akhenaton as Nefertiti, arguing that she may have actually been elevated to co-regent and perhaps even succeeded temporarily as an independent ruler, changing her name to Smenkhkare.

Nicholas Reeves and other Egyptologists contend that Smenkhkare was the same person as [Neferneferuaten](#), who ruled together with Akhenaton as co-regent for the final one or two years of Akhenaton's reign? On several monuments, the two are shown seated side by side. More recent research by James Allen and Marc Gabolde has led to an "a fair degree of consensus" that [Neferneferuaten](#) was a female ruler apart from Smenkhkare.

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