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**Melissa Pankuch**

The Royal Women of Amarna: Faces of a Revolution

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of the royal women in the Amarna period and the necessity for a female presence in the Amarna religion. It analyzes the traditional Egyptian concept of duality and the myths regarding creation and rebirth, as well as the adaptations made to these myths, in particular the Heliopolitan cosmogony, during the Amarna revolution. Through the evaluation of the art mediums of sculptures and reliefs depicting Nefertiti, the minor queen Kiya, the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and the entire royal family, it is clear that the female entity was essential to the acceptance and growth of the Amarna religion. The Amarna religion elevated the role of the royal woman from a pharaoh's counterpart to the living embodiment of a deity, aiding in the subjugation of chaos and supporting the creation and rebirth myths understood by the citizens of ancient Egypt.

## Introduction

When delving into an investigation of ancient Egypt, the religion of this civilization is a topic that has fascinated historians, and the world, for centuries. From the pantheon of gods to an intense focus on the after-life, the religion of ancient Egypt has immense intrigue, and its unique, almost equal roles for women and men within religion, creation, and rebirth present a concept not often seen in a religious context. From an analysis of the creation myths of ancient Egypt, it is clear that both the concepts of birth and rebirth are core principals of the religion. In addition, the concepts of duality seen within these creation myths not only express the formation of the world, but reveal the importance of both male and female power to maintain the balance of the world, promote order, and subjugate chaos.

The traditional religion of ancient Egypt was tightly woven into day-to-day life, making it essentially impossible to identify oneself as a non-religious Egyptian. As observed by Emily Teeter and Douglas Brewer, practically every aspect of Egyptian culture and civilization, including astronomy, medicine, geography, art, and civil law are manifestations of religious belief.<sup>1</sup> These aspects of culture and civilization, no matter how large or small, had an overlying deity, creating a polytheistic structure best identified by R. J. Spencer in two categories, “The Great Tradition” and the “Little Tradition.”<sup>2</sup> The “Great Tradition” included aspects of religion such as creation myths, the concept of rebirth, the subjugation of chaos, etc., while the “Little Tradition” included tasks of daily life and individual academic disciplines. The fact that tasks ranging from baking bread to worshiping the gods were categorized as either the “Great Tradition” or the “Little Tradition,” makes it clear that most aspects of the Egyptian religion can be tied to the Egyptian’s interpretation of their environment.<sup>3</sup>

As the environment of the ancient Egyptians widened with the implementation of new technologies, interactions with foreign civilizations, and the refinement of Egyptian law, their religion began to encom-

<sup>1</sup> J. Douglas and Emily, *Egypt and the Egyptians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. Bleeker, *The Rainbow: A Collection of Stories in the Science of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas and Teeter, 6.

pass newer concepts and ideas. During the reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten, religious focus shifted entirely from the standard, polytheistic worship of the gods to a worship of the Aten. In the Aten religion, the role of royal women was elevated, past the traditional female counterpart of the pharaoh to an essential female counterpart to the Aten; a necessity to the creation and continued prosperity of the world. Nefertiti, Akhenaten's wife, was a strong supporter and performer within the Aten religion, but it is not solely through her efforts that women gained such a pivotal role in the Amarna period.

A unique female religious role was developed, creating a counterpart for the great Aten and Pharaoh Akhenaten in order to fulfill the needs of the religion. In contrast to the queen being a female counterpart to the pharaoh and fulfilling the Egyptian need for duality in leadership, the role of the queen was promoted as the manifestation of a living deity on Earth. Through the investigation of the portrayal of all royal women of Amarna, this paper uncovers the true, definitive role of women within the Amarna religion, and how a strong female presence of any form, not simply Nefertiti, was necessary to fulfill the traditional concepts of duality, rebirth, and femininity that were merged into the Aten religion.

### **Creation Myths in Egyptian Religion**

Before analyzing the role of women in the Aten religion, it is vital to understand the founding principles of the traditional ancient Egyptian religion, and the roles and rights of women within it. Perhaps the most pertinent of these is the idea of duality. As previously mentioned, the citizens of ancient Egypt lived based on "a relationship to a series of oppositions."<sup>4</sup>

All of Egyptian society was structured around pairs of complementary entities. This juxtaposition is seen at the very basics of Egyptian thought, from geographical division into Upper vs. Lower Egypt (and the separation of the government of each)<sup>5</sup>, to language consisting of the ideas of nnt "what is"<sup>6</sup> and jwtt<sup>7</sup> "what is not."<sup>8</sup> In its most basic form, duality

<sup>4</sup> Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala: [Universitetet] 14, 1986.), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Servajean, "Duality," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles, 2008), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford Griffith Institute, 1962), 142.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Servajean, 2.

can be seen in the idea of male and female. In order for the world to be created and to continue to create/be reborn, both male and female entities are necessary. In order to express these oppositions that surrounded their environment, the people of ancient Egypt formulated creation and resurrection myths that indicated the need for both these male and female beings. Whether the myth contains an androgynous deity or a pair, the interaction of male and female is a prerequisite for both creation and resurrection. In this sense, the royal women of the traditional Egyptian religion stood as the female counterparts to the pharaoh, the descendant of Horus and the creator himself.

The most popular of the creation myths was derived from the Heliopolitan Cosmogony, whose foundations lie in the Old Kingdom period. This cosmogony begins with the Nun, the primordial ocean that represents unorganized chaos and nothingness;<sup>9</sup> a lake of both chaos and darkness.<sup>10</sup> According to Utterance 527 of the pyramid texts,

Atum is he who (once came into being)<sup>11</sup>, who masturbated in ON. He took his phallus in his grasp that he might create orgasm by means of it, and so were born the twins Shu and Tefnet. May they put the king between them and set him before the gods in front of the Field of Offerings.<sup>12</sup>

Atum, in this case, exemplifies the combination of opposing genders by not only claiming he is both male and female,<sup>13</sup> but also in his creation of the first two divinities, Shu (male, air) and Tefnut (female, humidity).<sup>14</sup> This thought continues in the procreation of the rest of the founding gods and goddesses, each being born under the jurisdiction of gender duality.

The need for gender opposition in the creation myth not only illustrates the requirement of both genders for creation purposes, but also gives a glimpse into the pivotal role that royal women played as the symbolic

<sup>9</sup> Alexandre Moret, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1927), 374.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*. Translated by Ian Shaw, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992,) 265.

<sup>11</sup> El-Sayed el-Aswad, "Archaic Egyptian Cosmology" *Anthropos Institute* (Anthropos, Bd. 92, H. 1./3. 1997,) 70

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Faulkner *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 194.

<sup>13</sup> De Buck 1929, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts Volume 2: Texts of Spells* 76-163, OIP 49. Coffin Texts spell II, 161a.

<sup>14</sup> Servajean, 3.

embodiment of their divine counterparts. Beginning with Atum, the Heliopolitan cosmogony continues with separate male and female children born as complements to one another until the arrival of the Pharaoh, a direct descendant of the creator god. However, in order to continue the genetic line of Atum, the pharaoh must have a female companion, and the royal queen fulfills this role. Therefore, the royal women of the standard Egyptian religion are held in high esteem, for they are half of the reason the divine, royal line can be continued and provide an integral part of the balance of the cosmos for the ancient Egyptians.

The pharaoh, and by association, the royal women of Egypt, had a responsibility to continue the genetic line of the divine through creation, giving them immense power, status, and responsibility to all of Egypt. The Pharaoh and his female counterpart, were relatable to the common man and his environment, and enhanced the respect and power given to royal women, because without them, the continuation of the creation cycle of divine kings would be halted.

### **Analysis of Rebirth Myths in Traditional Egyptian Religion**

A second category of myth in the traditional Egyptian religion, the cycle of rebirth, further solidifies the importance of the royal female relationship with the creator. It is clear that the purpose of this royal feminine prototype is to generate new life, and to provide the renewal of life force in the family context, not only propagating the line, but also resurrecting it if necessary.<sup>15</sup> In the Osiris myth of rebirth, this role of the female entity becomes most clear. This myth is the continuance of the Heliopolitan cosmogony, and tells the story of Osiris and Isis, who rule alongside their siblings Seth and Nephtys.<sup>16</sup> Seth became jealous of the power Osiris had, and killed his brother, cutting his body into many pieces and distributing them throughout Egypt. Isis set out to find all the pieces of Osiris' body and with the help of Nephtys, collected all the parts. Once reassembled, Isis breathed life into his body, resurrecting him, and they were together again. Isis became pregnant soon after, giving birth to Horus the hawk-

<sup>15</sup> Troy, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Snape, *Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death* (West Sussex, Blackwell Publishing, 2011.), 8.



god, and Osiris descended into the underworld, becoming lord.<sup>17</sup> This story attests to the truly essential role of the royal woman in the traditional Egyptian religion. Here, Isis claims the title as immediate protector of the divine king, collecting Osiris' body parts, ensuring his return and the continuation of his genetic line.

Through the analysis of the mythology of the standard Egyptian religion, it is clear that the royal women held a great position in the religion of the period. Lana Troy encapsulates the reasoning for women's presence in these myths, claiming that:

The expressions of the mythic pattern have three basic functions in the life of man. They convey to him the principles of the organization of the cosmos. They describe the relationship between his own life and that organization. And finally they show him how to participate in the powers inherent in that organization.”<sup>18</sup>

At its true essence, the royal women of traditional Egyptian religion fulfilled the inner need of ancient Egyptians to utilize duality and myth, to understand the role they played, and be able to interpret the royal women as the embodiment of the divine women of the creation and rebirth myths. Thus, the citizens of ancient Egypt understood through these myths that a female entity is vital to the perseverance, continuance, and success of Egypt, and that the royal women of the time represented the continuance of Egypt's success as a world power.

### **Overview of Amarna Religion**

With the revolution that was the Amarna, Akhenaten brought about an attempt to replace the polytheistic concepts of traditional religion with a “sole god, with no other except him,”<sup>19</sup> a new “solar theology”<sup>20</sup> - with the reign of Amenhotep IV. At some point between Year 8 and Year 12 of Amenhotep IV's reign, this sun-god gained sole supreme status; the names of past gods, and the term ‘gods’ itself were erased from all monuments.<sup>21</sup> This year span also marks the period in which Akhenaten reframes the

<sup>17</sup> Bettina Knapp, “The Archetypal Woman Fulfilled: Isis, Harmony of Flesh/Spirit/Logos.” *Symposium* 50.1 (1996), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Troy, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Maj Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten: Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca* 8 (Brussels: 1938,) p.9.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Assman *Ägypten. Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*. Kholhammer Urban-Taschenbuch-er 366 (Stuttgart: 1984) pp.235-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Allen 4.

name of his god, from Re-Horakhty to Sun, ruler of the Akhet “who becomes active from the Akhet in his identity as the light that comes in the sun disk.”<sup>22</sup> This distinction in word choice in the translation of the name of his god proves that Akhenaten’s true religious focus was on light itself, and disregarded the previous views on duality with the dark.

Another important aspect of the Amarna religion that distinguishes it from the previous tradition is the focus on the present. Akhenaten maintained a strong hold on his seemingly “open” religion. He, along with Nefertiti, were the sole intercessors for the citizens of Egypt to speak to their Aten, stating strictly in texts that “there is no other who knows you except your Nefer-kheperu-re-wa-en-re (Akhenaten).”<sup>23</sup> The people were meant to worship Akhenaten and Nefertiti, since “everyone that hurries on foot... you sustain them for your son... Akhenaten... and the chief queen, his beloved.”<sup>24</sup> Through these texts, it is clear that Nefertiti, as well as Akhenaten, had the highest status and most power, forging a new and incredibly high role for a royal woman.

### **Analysis of Creation Myths in Amarna Religion**

In this intercessor-sole god relationship that was promoted through the Amarna religion, it became the responsibility of Akhenaten and Nefertiti to modify the old Egyptian religious and “mysterious” concepts into ideas that aligned with their present-focused, single god state of mind. While a shift away from the traditional ancient focus on duality could potentially undermine the power and influence of women within the new religion, the concept of duality was still consistently represented in the traditional Egyptian. The Aten is, in a well-known hymn, identified as an androgynous being, standing as both “father” and “mother” of his creation.<sup>25</sup> This identity as both mother and father is not often mentioned within textual sources, but can be seen in the images of Amarna. In particular, in the reliefs from the rock cut tombs of Amarna (Fig. I),<sup>26</sup> the hand of Nefertiti functions as the consort of the Aten, taking on the role of female consort.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Sandman, 95, 1. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Sandman, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Davies, Norman de Garis, and Seymour de Ricci. *The Rock Tombs of el Amarna*. (London: Sold at the Office of the Egypt Exploration Fund 1905.) See note 35.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Troy, 21.

With the Aten's male form manifested in the rays of the sun, the "ultimate creator" forms his children, Akhenaten and Nefertiti. This myth allows the royal couple to be divinely tied to the Aten, and the only gods outside of the Aten. Further, it allows the royal female figure to not only become a part of the creation myth itself, giving her ultimate power, but a life source for the continuance of the world.

With regards to reliability, the citizens of Egypt were not simply able to connect this idea of creation to their present environment; the world began with Akhenaten and Nefertiti, their present rulers, and the concepts of this creation could easily be understood. However its deterrence from the mythical, mysterious ideas of the traditional religion created confusion and potential failure of the religion, due to the citizens "lacking of such romantic hindsight...only viewing Amarna theology in the context of their own religious traditions."<sup>28</sup> The "limitations" created by the lack of creativity in the citizens of Egypt gave Akhenaten no choice but to utilize a mythic structure that was familiar to them.

### **Analysis of Rebirth Myths in Amarna Religion**

The quick formation of the Amarna religion is exemplified in the lack of depth in the myths of rebirth, arguably the most important aspect of the life for an ancient Egyptian. With his strong aversion to the traditional pantheon, Akhenaten essentially eliminated the entire myth of rebirth, and the importance of Isis (and the role of royal woman) within it. In its place, Akhenaten provided a ritual much like tradition, including mummification, canopic jars, and the deposit of grave goods.<sup>29</sup> Yet in the place of an eternal life in the realm of the gods, Akhenaten provides an empty void; a place untouched with the light of the Aten.<sup>30</sup> Eliminating the female role in rebirth completely, the afterlife revolved solely around the king, the dispenser of life after death:

May your corpse be firm, may your name last...May you inhale the breezes of the north wind. May you be given offerings and provisions, and may you revive-sacrificial food which is the king's to give [with] bread, beer, and food in every place of yours...May you occupy your place which is the king's to give in the necropolis of Akhet-Aten [Tell el Amarna.]<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> James Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*. (New Haven: Yale Egyptological Studies, 1988), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt*. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988.), 234.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Brewer and Teeter, 190.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.), 13.

This is further exemplified in the tomb of Kiya, who much more poetically calls on her lover to take care of her in the afterlife:

May I breathe the sweet air that issues from thy mouth. May I behold thy beauty every day—that is my prayer. May I hear thy sweet voice in the North wind. May my body grow vigorous with life through thy love. Mayest thou give me thy two hands bearing thy sustenance, and I receive it and live by it. Mayest thou ever call upon my name and it shall not fail on thy lips.<sup>32</sup>

In the royal tomb of Amarna, the instructions to the citizens of Egypt are clear:

Worship the king, unique like Aten, without another who is great except for him, and he will give you a lifetime of tranquility with food and provisions which are his to give. How prosperous is one who carries out his teachings, for he shall reach the district of the favored ones [the necropolis].<sup>33</sup>

This instruction intentionally omits not only the female aspect of rebirth, but also any other deity, proving that Akhenaten was the only being on earth that could grant eternal life due to his qualities that were “unique like Aten.” However, even with this elimination of the female role in myths of rebirth that Akhenaten implemented during Amarna revolution, he has to maintain the female presence in the creation myth and balance the universe; through Nefertiti’s role as an intercessor for the Egyptian people, she is showered with admiration and love, and therefore becomes an essential asset in convincing the Egyptian people that the Aten was the new and true power, with foundations not much different from the traditional pantheon of the gods they had once worshipped. Nefertiti was an outlet for the citizens of Egypt to worship and achieve the favor of the king, implying that although she may not have had a direct mythical connection to the afterlife in the Amarna religion, Nefertiti’s favor was essential to the rebirth of an Egyptian citizen.

The single-deity basis of the Amarna religion dealt a huge blow to the citizens accustomed to the polytheistic beliefs of ancient Egypt, and reduced the power of his female citizens through his adaptations on traditional myth, yet Akhenaten could not undermine the importance of a female higher-power. His maintenance of the concepts of duality (seen in his reliance upon Nefertiti), the reformation of the traditional Heliopolitan Ennead to include light, and conformity of his family to the traditional

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Aldred, 247.

<sup>33</sup> Davies, Norman de Garis, and Seymour de Ricci. *The Rock Tombs of el Amarna*. (London: Sold at the Office of the Egypt Exploration Fund 1905.) See note 35.

myth are all symbols of Akhenaten's acknowledgement of the importance of women in religious power. The persistence and elevation of royal females' importance through the Amarna period proves that royal women could not only be viewed as an essential component to the continuance of the royal lineage, but to the continuance and prosperity of the world; in Amarna, women stand as ultimate creators.

## Artistic Analysis

### Nefertiti: Divine Queen

The vital presence of the royal females of the Amarna period as symbols of creation, rebirth, and duality is promoted significantly through the artistic works of the Amarna period and most significantly in the artistic representations of Queen Nefertiti. Nefertiti is known as one of the strongest women in the history of Ancient Egypt; her representations within the art of Amarna not only reveal her political power and prestige during the Amarna revolution, but the vital nature of a female entity of power in the Amarna religion. As seen in the creation myths within and outside of the Amarna religion, the female and male deities are equally responsible for the formation of the world. The Aten, defined as a male being, has no direct female consort, much like the creator god Amun.<sup>34</sup>

As previously discussed, Aten is the direct father of Nefertiti and Amun, giving them a divine lineage. One clear representation of Nefertiti's divine status is a fragment from Akhenaten's sarcophagus from the Royal Tomb at Amarna. This particular fragment is from the corner of the sarcophagus, illustrating a woman, arms outstretched and wearing an elaborate headdress, accompanied by the rays of a sun,<sup>36</sup> and a section of text in both sunken and unusually high relief. Through the collection of fragments from the sarcophagus of Akhenaten, inscriptions have been translated which identify the female figure as Nefertiti.<sup>37</sup> The iconographic tradition of women with outstretched arms on the corner of a sarcophagus is prominent in the post-Amarna period, with its foundation coming

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See Note 35.

<sup>36</sup> Not depicted in this fragment, but confirmed from other fragments of the sarcophagus at the Egyptian museum in Cairo.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Martin, 6-9.

from the sarcophagus of Akhenaten itself. On other sarcophagi with these female forms, the corner figures are reserved for the four goddesses and divine protectors of the dead: Nephthys, Neith, Isis, and Selket.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the representation of Nefertiti within this revered space adds the title of Goddess to her repertoire, and places her as the only person other than Akhenaten who could play the role of intercessor with the Aten.

However, this elevation of Nefertiti to the rank of goddess is not universally accepted. L. Green has most recently argued that many of the iconographic attributes that are seen in representations of Nefertiti are intended to convince the viewer of her role of divine pharaoh being shared with Akhenaten, not giving her individual divinity.<sup>39</sup> In a society such as Ancient Egypt, where there was no line of separation for the worldly and the divine, any figure, animal, or even object could represent a god, without being an identical entity.<sup>40</sup> The clarification of whether Nefertiti represented a shared or individual divine being is unnecessary in this paper; in either instance, this representation of Nefertiti (or any female deity) on Akhenaten's sarcophagus, his vessel to the afterlife, proves that a female presence was vital and a necessity in the process of rebirth in the Amarna period.

In both the traditional Egyptian and Amarna religions, the concept of duality is necessary in the cosmic power of the gods, and Nefertiti is the prime example of this female entity. With representations such as the sarcophagus of Akhenaten that include images of Nefertiti in a divine nature, it is acknowledged that she, as deity and human, can stand as a consort to the male ruler or a male god. This is illustrated in a depiction of the royal family under a baldachin found in the tomb of the Overseer of the Royal Quarters, Meryre, at Amarna.<sup>41</sup> At first glance, it is easy to interpret the image as one of a single figure. Upon further investigation, it is clear from the multiplied foot outlines that the large seated figure is actually two, representing both Akhenaten and Nefertiti. According to Dorothea Arnold, this visual technique is utilized so the viewer interprets the royal couple as twins, with the figures sharing the palanquin to the festival grounds,

<sup>38</sup> John Wilson, "Akh-en-Aton and Nefertiti" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. 32 (January-April 1973), 235-41.

<sup>39</sup> L. Green "Queen as Goddess: The Religious Role of Royal Women the Late Eighteenth Dynasty." *The Amarna Letters*. 2 (San Francisco: 1992) 28-41.

<sup>40</sup> Cyril Aldred, *The Royal Women of Amarna: Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996.), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Drawing by Norman de Garis Davis, 1903.

indicating their religious status as children of the divine. The depiction of the throne also represents the forum where they would receive representatives from foreign countries, illustrating their political power.<sup>42</sup>

This image is unique in the fact that Nefertiti is named, but the twin iconography deems it impossible to identify her by physical characteristics. This unidentifiable form helps promote the idea of duality that was familiar to Egyptians. The illustration of the royal family at the tomb of Meryre at Amarna proves that it is not solely because of her power and presence that Nefertiti held such a prominent role in the Amarna religion, but the responsibility to fulfill the concept of duality; that in order for the subjugation of chaos to occur, the dual nature of the Aten (and Akhenaten respectively) had to be counteracted with a female form, held most prominently by Nefertiti.

### **Minor Queen Kiya: A Major Player in Amarna Religion**

Although Nefertiti was the most prominent royal woman in the Amarna period, she was not the only royal female to be represented in a way that complimented Akhenaten and fulfilled the needs of the Amarna religion within the concepts of duality, creation, and rebirth.<sup>43</sup> Another such royal female figure is the minor queen Kiya, titled as “the wife and great beloved of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt” on artifacts within the British and Metropolitan Museum.<sup>44</sup> Her name was eradicated from monuments in the last years of Akhenaten’s reign (and replaced with the name of a daughter of Nefertiti, either Meretaten or Ankhesenpaaten), and to this day her exact position and disappearance from the Amarna court remain a mystery to scholars.<sup>45</sup>

Through one particular artifact, it is clear that Kiya was not simply a consort of Akhenaten, but had enough importance to be represented in the same positions as the divine queen Nefertiti. In a fragment from Hermopolis found in Copenhagen,<sup>46</sup> a female figure identified as minor queen Kiya is shown represented in a form identical to the relief in the tomb of

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Arnold *Royal Women of Amarna*, Fig. 78, 88.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>44</sup> William Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.), 90.

<sup>45</sup> Rainer Hanke, *Amarna-Reliefs aus Hermopolis: Neue Veröffentlichungen und Studien*. (Hildesheim: 1978.), 188-96.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, 88.

the Overseer of the Royal Quarters, Meryre, at Amarna.<sup>47</sup> Although this image is highly damaged, it is clear that Kiya is given the same “divine twin” status as Nefertiti. There is no evidence that Kiya maintained power within the Amarna religion equal to Nefertiti, but this image does endorse the argument that Nefertiti does not have her strong religious and political power because of her personal intelligence or importance, but for the more basic fact that she is a female entity who is necessary to create duality. The personal identity did not matter, Nefertiti, Kiya, or one of Akhenaten’s daughters; all that was necessary was a female counterpart.

A second artifact that promotes the importance of a female in the Amarna religion is a relief showing the purification of the minor queen Kiya, which was also changed at a later date to be a relief of Princess Meretaten.<sup>48</sup> This relief from the Metropolitan Museum represents Kiya in a purification scene, with the zigzag lines incised around her representing water being poured over her head. From small details of the relief around the portrait image of Kiya, the overall image can be hypothesized as an altar-offering scene. The direction of the ray hands of the Aten as well as an unidentified curved object (sometimes identified as the neck of a duck)<sup>49</sup> are best explained if the viewer interprets this fragment as Kiya standing in front of an altar or offering table, presenting gifts to the deity.<sup>50</sup> In either case, Kiya is performing a respected priestly function, an honor not bestowed on many citizens of Egypt, let alone women of Amarna. Yet this task is bestowed upon Kiya, as well as examples illustrating Nefertiti and the daughters of Nefertiti and Akhenaten, performing similar tasks, proving that the royal women of Amarna were given superior priority and responsibility within the religion.

### **Daughters of the Royal Couple: Promises of the Future**

These two queens of the Amarna revolution clearly indicate the importance of a female deity within the religion, but the artists of Amarna solidify these ideas through their interpretations of the daughters of Nefertiti and Akhenaten. One of the most controversial artistic qualities of the

<sup>47</sup> James Allen, “Akhenaten’s ‘Mystery’ Coregent and Successor.” *Amarna Letters*. 1 (San Francisco: 1991.), 74-85.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*., 106.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Hanke, 128-129.



art of Amarna, and in particular the royal family, are the egg-like heads that are illustrated in relief and sculpture. In particular, the heads of princesses found in the Ägyptisches Museum of Berlin are prime examples of these bare, egg-shaped heads included in this discourse.<sup>51</sup> Ricardo Caminos ties this egg-shaped cranium to the Hermopolitan cosmogony, replacing the symbol of the lotus flower with an egg, which hatched to birth the sun-god Ra.<sup>52</sup> As previously discussed, the Amarna religion has its own interpretation of the creation myths, but none such as a lotus flower or an egg. However, in The Great Hymn to Aten, we are provided with a description of a chick hatching from an egg as an allegory to the divine origin of life:

When the chick is in the egg, speaking in the shell, you [Aten] give him breath within it to cause him to live; and when you have made his appointed time for him, so that he may break himself out of the egg he comes out of the egg to speak at his appointed time and goes on his two legs when he comes out of it [the egg].<sup>53</sup>

These egg-shaped heads are most likely the Thutmose artists paying homage to this creation myth. In the context of Amarna creation myth, the daughters of Akhenaten played the important role of the symbolic children of Shu and Tefnut (represented through Akhenaten and Nefertiti), embodying the “Seed/Egg” of creation placed by Aten as the creator of all things.<sup>54</sup>

A relief from Hermopolis with two princesses, a fragment of which is displayed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, illustrates both the vulnerability of youth and the promise of eternal life.<sup>55</sup> In this relief, the two princesses are turned towards each other, an attribute that both isolates them from the rest of the image, but also creates the idea that these princesses, gazing at each other, are not personally involved in the action happening within the rest of the scene.<sup>56</sup> As Dorothy Aldred discovered, these princesses are characterized as belonging to a world of youth and beauty, which is not only treasured by society, but is also an indicator of what they all will return to in the next life.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*., 54.

<sup>52</sup> See note 35.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Murnane, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*., 108.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*., Fig. 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

It may have been that Akhenaten utilized his beloved daughters in artistic relief to remind the people of Amarna that the only way they would be able to return to this state of youth and beauty was through the worship of him and the Aten. As the sole judge of the next life, Akhenaten held all of the power, and these representations of his daughters may have served as a reminder and inspiration to continue worship of the Aten/Akhenaten in order to achieve the ultimate afterlife.

Specifically for Akhenaten's daughters Meretaten and Ankhesenpaaten, the symbols of youth and the divine power of Akhenaten were not the only benefits they were given. After Kiya left the Amarna court, her images were struck out and replaced by one of these two princesses. A relief of Kiya from Hermopolis<sup>58</sup> is a prime example of an image of Kiya superimposed with the qualities of a princess, in this case Princess Meretaten. In the two columns of texts to the right of the figure, there are two legible lines of text. The first (clearer) inscription indicates the figure is "daughter of the king of his flesh, his beloved... Meretaten." The second, more difficult inscription reveals that the figure used to be "the wife and [great] beloved of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, who lives on [Maat]," which is known to be the beginning of Kiya's titulary.<sup>59</sup> The depiction of her hair indicates the identity switch; originally a Nubian wig, the hair was modified by an added layer of plaster to be transformed into a broad side lock that signified the figure was a princess.<sup>60</sup>

This change from Kiya to Meretaten does not simply signify the decline of Kiya's favor with Akhenaten and the court of Amarna. It is speculated that perhaps this re-appropriation illustrates the death of family members from a plague that may have struck Egypt.<sup>61</sup> No matter the exact reason for Kiya's descent from the king's favor, this re-appropriation of images occurred around the time of Nefertiti's controversial elevation to the role of coregent.<sup>62</sup> With this promotion, the role of the Great Royal Wife would be empty. Within the religion of Amarna, this role would be vital to the fulfillment of the concepts of duality. A co-regency between Akhenaten and Nefertiti, making one being, both male and female, would

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Hanke, 140.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Figs. 60, 61: B 1-4.

<sup>61</sup> Rita Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamun*. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts in Association with Bulfinch Press, 1999.), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

give the earthly, pharaoh-king a female counterpart. With Akhenaten and Nefertiti both potentially holding the role of pharaoh, Nefertiti's appropriation of divine androgynous role (alongside Akhenaten) would off-balance the concept of mythic duality. The role of Great Royal Wife would have to be filled to continue the divine myths and allow the citizens of Egypt to understand the new religion due to the traditional duality between gods and goddesses in both creation and rebirth myths.

These representations of the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti represent not only the continuance of the divine line, created directly from the Aten, but the promise of eternal life given through Akhenaten's omnipotent power. Furthermore, the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti stand as symbols of fertility, not only for the king and the continuance of his family, but representing the great "fruit" that is given unto the people of Egypt under the reign of Akhenaten. The abundance of children represent the fertility of the Nile, giving the citizens of Egypt better crops, and through that, greater wealth and quality of life. His daughters are living examples of his creative power, and the fertility he provides; their constant presence in the art of Amarna is yet other way for the Amarna artists to connect the new Aten religion to the environment, which the people of Egypt inhabit.

### **The Royal Family: Myth Come to Life**

Another vital component to be considered are the images of the royal family as a whole. Perhaps one of the most popular depictions of the royal family in its entirety is the Berlin Stela, from the early phase of Amarna relief art.<sup>63</sup> The Berlin stela serves as a physical reminder of the creation myth according to the Amarna cosmogony. The stela shows triad illustrated through Atum and his children, Shu and Tefnut.<sup>64</sup> As previously stated, the roles of Atum, Shu and Tefnut were recast during the Amarna revolution, and the triad exemplified within the Berlin Stela illustrate the Aten, Nefertiti, and Akhenaten as the divine triad of creation.

A shocking attribute found in the Berlin stela are the pointing fingers of the princess who sits upon the lap of Nefertiti. Most representations that illustrate children pointing are found in fishing and fowling

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*., Fig. 88, 98.

<sup>64</sup> See note 35.

scenes.<sup>65</sup> The pointed finger was interpreted as a magical gesture utilized to divert evil, often used when herdsman were crossing a canal known to have crocodiles or when a calf was being born.<sup>66</sup> In the same way, this image of the princess, a divine being, pointing to Akhenaten, who embraces one of his children, provides protection for those created from Akhenaten, and therefore created by the Aten.<sup>67</sup>

Within this image, the royal women play copious roles. Most fundamentally, Nefertiti stands as the divine female counterpart to Akhenaten, because of who the world and all within it are created. She is the beginning of all Egyptian creation, and serves as an intercessor for the citizens of Egypt. Furthermore, the princesses not only illustrate the great quantity of life that has been formed because of these two divine figures and the ultimate Aten, but also serve as a symbol of protection over those created by the divine triad, and a reminder of the only living figures able to connect with the Aten, passing judgment for the afterlife.

### **Analysis and Conclusion**

The art of Amarna clearly exemplifies the crucial importance of Akhenaten's female relatives and consorts on a personal level, but it is not the main reason for their elevated role within the Amarna revolution; the female presence was a necessity to the basic structure of the Amarna faith and logic.<sup>68</sup> The ancient Egyptians perceived their reality in terms of oppositions. The complimentary nature of Upper and Lower Egypt, birth and rebirth, and the ebb and flow of the Nile are all essential to ancient Egyptian logic and thinking.<sup>69</sup> With this interpretation of the world through oppositions, it is no wonder that Akhenaten chose to raise the status of royal female women and incorporate them into the most elite levels of religion and society. His adaption to the Heliopolitan creation myth to incorporate the Aten as well as his entire lineage not only exemplifies his promotion of his divine origin, but his acceptance of the importance of duality with the Aten religion. Without the female counterpart, he cannot truly fulfill the creation myth and maintain his power.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.), 185-186.

<sup>66</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.), 59-60, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *The Royal Women of Amarna*., 100.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*., 118.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Troy *Patterns of Queenship*, 7.

Although his interpretation of the myth of rebirth implies that only he is the sole judge of who may join the Aten in the afterlife, Nefertiti is promoted to the role of co-intercessor with Akhenaten. As seen in the relief in the tomb of Meryre,<sup>71</sup> Akhenaten and Nefertiti are illustrated as a merged entity, representing the primeval twins Shu and Tefnut.<sup>72</sup> This representation gives Nefertiti equal divine power to Akhenaten, and reveals her high status as a component of the creation myth, the continuer of the divine line, and the only other intercessor to the Aten.

However, Nefertiti is not the only royal female within the Amarna period to be elevated to such a high status. Through reliefs such as the fragment from the Metropolitan Museum, Kiya is also seen as a woman with a particularly high status within the Amarna revolution.<sup>73</sup> The analysis of this particular art of Amarna exemplifies the true nature of the prominence of femininity under the rule of Akhenaten: that it is not solely sourced from the greatness of Nefertiti, but from the necessity of a female entity to maintain a cosmic balance. Kiya's images are also seen re-appropriated to represent the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti.<sup>74</sup> This consistent change of the identity of the female counterpart in images depicting rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations illustrate the female as a "guarantor of life, fertility, and rejuvenation."<sup>75</sup>

However, there is no particular scene that is reserved for a particular royal woman alone. Reliefs of both Nefertiti, Kiya, and the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti are shown performing various rituals and ceremonies that are reserved for the highest female title. The interchangeable nature of these images prove that it is not because of the greatness and admiration from the pharaoh that these women possessed that allowed them such privilege within the Amarna revolution (although the favor of pharaoh was certainly not a hindrance). It was the assurance of the truth of myths, the fulfillment of the myths of creation and rejuvenation, which gave them such an important role in society. Without the women of

<sup>70</sup> See note 35.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Allen, "Akhenaten's 'Mystery' Coregent and Successor." *Amarna Letters*. 74-85.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *The Royal Women of Amarna*., 88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 118.

Amarna, the divine lineage of the Aten would not be continued, causing

chaos within Egypt. In the role of creator and counterpart of Akhenaten, the sole essential quality was the factor of femininity, meaning that one royal woman could fulfill this role as equally as another. Nefertiti may have held a specific, higher status due to the role she held with the Amarna cosmogony, but the female role within creation and rejuvenation could be played by any one of the royal women, and Akhenaten's dependence on duality and these myths made the royal women of Amarna essential to his success and continued reign.

This importance of female entity is further exemplified within the depictions of the royal family of Amarna. Particularly in the Berlin Stela,<sup>76</sup> the royal females are represented as the primeval illustration of the promise of creation, fertility, and rebirth. As seen in the "twin image" of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, we are shown the creation myth illustrated through the divine triad of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and the Aten.<sup>77</sup> The daughters further stand as a testament to the creation of multitudes of people, all deriving from the primeval pair. However, the presence of the royal princesses with pointed fingers also stands as an assurance of Akhenaten as the protector of his creations (his children) and his connection with the Aten.<sup>78</sup> This gives the female role an added element: a signifier of the power of Akhenaten. Whether it is through the magic insinuated by the pointed finger gesture or the affection shown by Akhenaten to his female companions, the female counterpart further represents the protecting power that Akhenaten has over his people. The female women of Amarna stand as a vehicle for Akhenaten that allows the citizens of Egypt to connect with his logic and religion, and serve as symbols to the world of his creative power, in life and in the afterlife.

It is clear, through in-depth research of the royal women of Amarna, that femininity was an essential asset to the reign and religion of Akhenaten. Although the driving feminine force derives from his chief wife Nefertiti, both his children and minor wife Kiya contribute to the balance of the Aten religion. Without a feminine counterpart to the male Aten, the religion, and through that, Egypt herself, would fall into chaos. It is

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Aldred, *Royal Women of Amarna*, Fig. 88, 98

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Assman, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, 80.

<sup>78</sup> Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 159160, 121

only through the establishment of a strong female presence that Akhenaten

finds success, however short-lived it may have been. Each royal woman of Amarna provides an essential service to the Amarna religion, allowing Akhenaten to maintain power throughout his reign.

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Fragment with the head of Queen Nefertiti from Akhenaten's sarcophagus, the Royal Tomb at Amarna. Granite. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

Pillars from colonnade in Mansion of the Ben-ben, Karnak. Redford, Akhenaten, *The Heretic King*, page 77.

Bust of Nefertiti from the Thutmose workshop at Amarna. Painted limestone with gypsum plaster layers. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

The royal family under a baldachin during the presentation of tribute. Drawing by Norman de Garis Davies after a relief in the tomb of the Overseer of the Royal Quarters, Meryre, at Amarna.

Fragment with the faces of Akhenaten and the minor queen Kiya (as changed into Princess Meretaten) Tell el-Amarna, Limestone. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen (A.E.I.N. 1797)

Relief showing the purification of the minor queen Kiya, later changed into Princess Meretaten. Limestone. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Head of a princess from the Thutmose workshop at Amarna. Brown Quartzite. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

Torso from the statuette of a princess, excavated at Amarna. Reddish brown quartzite. Petrie Museum, University College, London.

Shrine stela with relief showing Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Princesses Meretaten, Meketaten, and Ankhesenpaaten. Limestone. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

Fragment of a stela excavated at Amarna showing Akhenaten with Nefertiti and the children on her lap. Limestone. Musée du Louvre, Paris.