

# Evaluation of the historical reconstruction seen in the short story “Akhenaten, Aten and Religion”

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## Abstract

The reconstruction of events that happened in the past can be quite a difficult task, especially when there are lots of factors relating to a certain section in history that cannot be controlled at all. For example, archaeological evidence doesn't have one specific way of interpretation or simply blanks in history. Historical reconstruction can get even more complicated when historical accounts cannot be validated. These can be misleading to those who read history without the evaluation of sources or without researching archaeological evidence that potentially could disprove certain claims. A good example of this is Akhenaten, a unique figure in Egyptian history. Akhenaten, originally called Amenhotep IV, succeeded his father, Amenhotep III, as the tenth pharaoh of the 18th dynasty (Dorman, 2018). He is noted for changing the religion, art, and social structure of Egypt dramatically and founding “Atenism,” a completely new kind of religion that focused on the worship of one single god—Aten, characterized as a solar disc, a creator of lives and the chief god of the universe. Due to the peculiarity of the change and the elimination of elements of Egypt's traditional social and religious order, after his reign, priests and succeeding rulers restored the traditions, destroying his religious architecture and gradually erasing the heretic king from history (Kemp, 2014). Based on how his successors described him, it can be seen that in later times, he was portrayed as a tyrant or a villainous character. However, modern historiography re-evaluates this claim, leading to a debate about the nature of Akhenaten's new religion and his reign. This essay presents the basic facts of the period and evaluates the reconstruction of Akhenaten's reign in the form of a short story, “Akhenaten, Aten and Religion,” and uses archaeological evidence.

**Keywords:** historical reconstruction

## Main Body

### Background

Akhenaten (meaning “effective of the Aten”) was the tenth ruler of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt, reigning from c.a. 1353 to 1336 BC. His father, Amenhotep III, launched a period of prosperity when Egypt reached its height of international power (Abella et al., 2015). During Amenhotep III's reign, the worship of Amun, the local patron deity of Thebes now elevated to a national god, was still popular, and priests of Amun held great power. Akhenaten was originally named Amenhotep IV and was not the heir apparent to the Egyptian throne. However, after the first-born son of Amenhotep III and his mother, Tiye Thutmose, died, he was able to seize power, possibly by force, and co-ruled with his father for at least eight years. He drastically changed Egyptian society during his reign, abandoning previous religious, societal, and artistic traditions and establishing new ones. Historians and archaeologists are still debating the nature and extent of these changes and their impacts:

1. Shifting the national religion from worshipping the major god Amun to Aten, a god originally an aspect of the solar deity Ra and already worshiped during Amenhotep III's reign. Aten now has a solar disc design and multiple hands, through which it gives life to the world and the royal family. The new religion gradually became more radical when Akhenaten declared Aten to be not only the supreme god but also the only god in the Egyptian pantheon, banning the worship of all other gods. He also rejected certain Egyptian mythologies, such as the Osiris myth. The exact nature of the new religion (often named “Atenism” or “The Aten Religion”) has always been a subject of debate. It may seem like the monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam that dominate the world religion today, where there is only one god recognized. However, a more nuanced way of describing the religion based on the archaeological data might be either monolatristic (where other gods are recognized, but there is consistent worship of only one deity) or henotheistic (where other gods are recognized but only one supreme deity is worshiped). The nature of traditional Egyptian polytheism had been complicated, where a deity's name could be incorporated into

other deities' names, thereby functioning as an epithet and indicating that this manifestation of the deity would have the characteristics of both deities. For example, the sun god, Ra, could be merged with a solar aspect of the god of kingship, Horus, to form Ra-Horakhty, which means "Ra who is Horus of the Horizons," representing the sun's journey and conveying a sense of hope for rebirth. Akhenaten gave Aten a pair of cartouches in which the names of kings would be written, treating Aten like a king superior to him. In the two names Akhenaten offered, the tradition of using epithets is preserved: he referred to Aten as "Ra-Horus of the horizon" and "Shu who is the Aten." Ra and Horus are solar deities like Aten, and Shu is the deity of light and air through which the universe is created, consistent with Aten's role as a creator deity. Therefore, the new religion didn't seem to wholly exclude all deities, at least not the ones associated with creator and solar deities. The main goal of establishing this new religion is to weaken the power of Amun and his priests. Despite Amun and Aten being national gods of utmost importance, Amun has a more hidden nature and best represents the hidden force behind the world's creation. In contrast, Aten represents the solar power of life. Usually, the alterations made to the temples would merely deface any representation of Amun and his name due to his being considered a false god. For example, one of the Egyptian colonial towns in Nubia, Buhen, had a Temple of Horus where they worshiped a local form of the god. During the reign of Akhenaten, the Horus relief, the local protective deities Satis and Anuket and the reference to "gods," were untouched, and only a depiction of Amun was erased. This further shows that Atenism is more complicated than monotheism (Kemp, 2014).

2. Adopting a new art style, named by modern archaeologists as "Amarna art" after the site of Akhenaten's new capital. This new art style depicts human figures in quite a bizarre way: they now have extremely elongated heads, thick lips, long limbs and fingers, lowered eyelids, and fat on their stomach and hips. People are now always shown in profiles with both left and right feet compared to the traditional, half-front half-profile depiction with only left or right feet shown. Scenes in murals are now crowded with swaying, slender human figures with exaggerated extremities. Akhenaten was given feminine characteristics such as large hips and breasts, high cheekbones and elongated necks typical of the period. This could be either an artistic representation or a genetic disorder. The abandonment of the traditional art style in favor of this new art style is likely because Akhenaten wanted to ensure that the art was distant enough from the past so that his ideologies and reforms could be reinforced (McLaughlin, 2017).

3. Constructing a new capital, Akhetaten. Akhetaten

means "the horizon of Aten," and the construction of it was a part of his religious and political changes. The new capital's site is Amarna in the Minya Governorate of modern Egypt. The entire city was built on the east bank, consisting of the Northern Suburbs, Central City, Main City, and Southern Suburbs. Palaces and temples were found throughout the city, including The Great Palace, Small Aten Temple (Mansion of the Aten), Maru-Aten (a palace and sun temple in the south of the city), and most importantly, The Great Temple of Aten most of the religious activities are being performed. Archaeology has revealed craftsman areas, granaries, and residential areas with gardens, wells, and tree pits. Characteristics of the new religion, such as the sun, life, and nature, could be seen throughout the city (Kemp, 2014).

After the death of Akhenaten, there were one or two successors of unknown identity, Neferneferuaten or Smenkhkare, who might have been his principal wife, Nefertiti. Tutankhamun, the famous young pharaoh known for the excellent state of preservation of his burial goods, reigned after them. He rejected Akhenaten's ideas, changing his name to one related to Amun and abandoning Amarna, restoring the traditional polytheistic religion with Amun as the supreme god. After a short reign of Ay, probably a relative of Queen Tiye, general Horemheb from Lower Egypt took power and demolished all construction projects by Akhenaten, wiping Akhenaten, his family, and his achievements from history (Kemp, 2014).

The short story, also written by the author of this essay, is about the entirety of the Akhenaten reign and focuses on all the three changes mentioned and explained above. How each is incorporated into the story and presented will be analyzed further in the next section, and their impacts on the reconstruction and understanding of history will be discussed.

### **1: The setting of the story, characterization of Akhenaten, and his religious reforms**

A historically accurate portrayal of the controversial figure of Akhenaten can indeed be a difficult task to do. As said by Barry Kemp, a renowned Egyptologist and the director of the excavation works at Amarna, the ancient portrayal of Akhenaten after his reign is similar to how the English king Richard III was portrayed as a villain in William Shakespeare's plays (written a century after the king's death). Still, a modern reassessment of the playwright's claims reveals their likelihood of being false (2014). The author's original idea of making the main character of his short story Akhenaten was therefore abandoned, and Akhenaten only had minor appearances in the final version of the short story. The focus of the short story instead shifts to two fictional characters in a historical con-

text, each with their symbolism: Minmose and Djehuti. Minmose was a young man born in Akhmim. His name means “born of Min,” concerning the fertility god Min, who is also the patron deity of Akhmim. He symbolizes the perception of historical events and figures long after they ended. For example, the dialogue between him and his mother reveals the period in which he was born (Ma, 2023):

“... Especially on such a special occasion, when General Horemheb of Lower Egypt took power and became our new ruler.” His mother ordered, “We should celebrate this event for better or worse...”

This reveals that the story happened after Horemheb took power. Based on archaeological findings, any evidence of Akhenaten’s era would be erased to consolidate the old religion and the new pharaoh’s power. Therefore, the only way that Minmose could truly understand the nature of Akhenaten’s reign was to consult people who experienced it. Minmose also understood that any accounts of historical events or figures after the period are not entirely trustworthy, especially those with elements of propaganda (Ma, 2023):

“He could still remember when he was little, the short-lived pharaoh Tutankhamun issued a memorial that harshly criticized that era, stating that the temples from the delta to Elephantine once all fell into decay, as the gods all left Egypt. “It must be an age of darkness,” he thought. “Did all our mighty gods abandon us because of that pharaoh Djehuti once worked for?” He could faintly recall the pharaoh’s name—Akhenaten, a man he regarded as an evil and insane ruler who would only worship something he thought to be very laughable—a glowing disc. Nevertheless, Minmose knew deeply that these were rumors after all...”

This extract reveals more about Minmose’s life and how he perceived history. The memory from his childhood indicates that Tutankhamun was still alive when he was very young. Tutankhamun was the first pharaoh who restored the traditions and the Amun cult. Therefore, it would make sense that he would criticize Akhenaten’s era for his advantage. How temples “fell into decay” conveys a sense of darkness and disorder within the era, which is probably more fabrications and distortions of history made by Tutankhamun than what the period was actually like. The extract also illustrates the impact of Tutankhamun’s account on ordinary citizens of Egypt: they would likely have a negative impression of the pharaoh and his reign. This is shown by Minmose, one of them, stating that his impressions of Akhenaten are “evil and insane.” However, it is later revealed that Minmose’s opinions lean slightly skeptical, as he described any account from his period as “rumors.” In other words, he realized that those accounts

could not be proven or there was a general lack of evidence to support them. Whether Ancient Egyptians evaluated history cannot be known, and therefore Minmose’s opinions are purely part of the author’s characterization of this fictional character.

Djehuti, on the other hand, represents history as told by eyewitness accounts or perhaps a primary source, a piece of information created during a certain period. Djehuti, at the time of the story, was an old man and a relative of Minmose, but his life started during the reign of Amenhotep III. Djehuti is another name for Thoth, the ibis-headed god of wisdom that scribes worshiped (Gaur et al., 1998). As suggested by his name, he came from a family of scribes and worked as one during the reigns of Akhenaten and, for a brief period, Amenhotep III. He experienced the revolutionary period of Akhenaten and could truly feel its impact on his life and those around him. Thus, his eyewitness accounts are a much more reliable source of history and make up a major part of the story in the form of a flashback, where he answered the questions of the curious Minmose when they met at a banquet celebrating the ascension to the throne of Horemheb.

Djehuti’s memories of the past form most of the short story, chapters 2-4, before the perspective shifts back to the banquet at the beginning. His past includes his family background, his early years as a scribe after his graduation from his school, his experience of living in Akhetaten, the new capital, and his observations of changes in terms of lifestyle and religion. His scribal work, including designing the temple reliefs under the supervision of Panehesy, who was a real historical figure and an Egyptian noble who served as “Chief servitor of the Aten in the temple of Aten in Akhetaten” (Kemp, 2014), was described in detail, as well as his internal conflict of the longing for the old life in Thebes and the new environment and religion. He described Akhenaten as “ambitious, “ but overall remained somewhat neutral in his opinions of the historical figure, as shown by not directly answering Minmose’s questions regarding whether Akhenaten was a tyrant.

The design of the basic setting of the story and how it characterizes Akhenaten and some elements of his religious reforms have a few strengths and weaknesses. One of its strengths is that it avoids the direct characterization of Akhenaten, as it would almost be impossible to characterize such a controversial figure with a high degree of historical accuracy. Therefore, using the accounts of fictional characters set within the historical framework creates an effect akin to primary sources (University of Maryland, 2013). Primary sources refer to sources that were created at the time under study. This can include any documents, diaries, manuscripts, autobiographies, and eyewitnesses. The account of Djehuti fits best in the category of eyewitness.

ness accounts. The presentation of semi-fictional primary sources like Djehuti's account thus allows the reader to study and evaluate history, crucial for understanding historical periods like Akhenaten's reign with unclear details or contradictory sources. This also creates an experience for the readers to use historical methods to build their understandings of the historical figure Akhenaten rather than creating a subjective generalization of his character. Another strength of this design is that the topic of religion is frequently discussed throughout the story, and a range of different perspectives on this topic are likely present during the time period. For example, Panehesy, the figure who served in a position similar to a priest of Aten, strongly supports the religious reform by Akhenaten:

*"Djehuti, you should be very honored and proud of yourself, for you're in the more sacred part of the city that only elites and high officials like me have access to, as well as the king. Aten rises from the eastern horizon, removing the darkness and granting his rays, and rests on the western horizon in the manner of death. The creator is always responsible for the circulation of life, and you should be one of the many citizens of this holy city contributing to pleasing him for the sake of the entire world..."*

This extract from the dialogue between him and Djehuti clearly reflects his devoutness to the new religions. Panehesy restates the basic theology of Atenism, indicative of his loyalty to his faith. He further calls Amun "a false god" and claims he "never existed." To Panehesy, the previous eras of polytheism were also "complicated and hypocritical." These facts portray Panehesy as someone who rejected tradition and embraced the new religion. Indeed, this can be quite common during the Amarna era, as various archaeological evidence shows that residents of Akhetaten, regardless of status, felt guided by the new supreme god Aten to reflect on their daily lives, with some instances even referring to Aten as guidance in the making of personal decisions (Kemp, 2014). This is in direct contrast to Djehuti, who, despite enjoying the new, more energetic life in Akhetaten, still connected with the polytheistic tradition of Egypt and the former life in Thebes. This is causing lots of internal conflict, evident in some extracts:

*"Somehow, I still couldn't face the fact that our supreme god, Amun, might be forever gone with merely a change of our ruler. Although the solar god Aten's force of life is more powerful, I suppose I still wasn't satisfied with the change. It just felt different, as if something was missing. I'm not a person who is used to changes, and I feel like I still miss the old life in Thebes."*

Therefore, the contrast between the ideas and opinions of the characters provides readers with different perspectives regarding the reign of Akhenaten, which they can then use to evaluate its nature and the personality of Akhenaten. Nevertheless, this design has limitations: Although there is a strong element of historical explorations and evaluations in the short story, there is never a clearly defined nature of Akhenaten and his reign. This is even reflected in some parts of the ending:

*"Oh, you're expecting a yes or no, right or wrong answer? Haha!" Djehuti chuckled, "Why would there be one? The religion and Akhenaten continue to be a controversial matter. Therefore," he lowered his voice, "I want you to have your own critical thinking and never call Akhenaten a tyrant again only because of some political propaganda. I wouldn't allow you to insult him like that."*

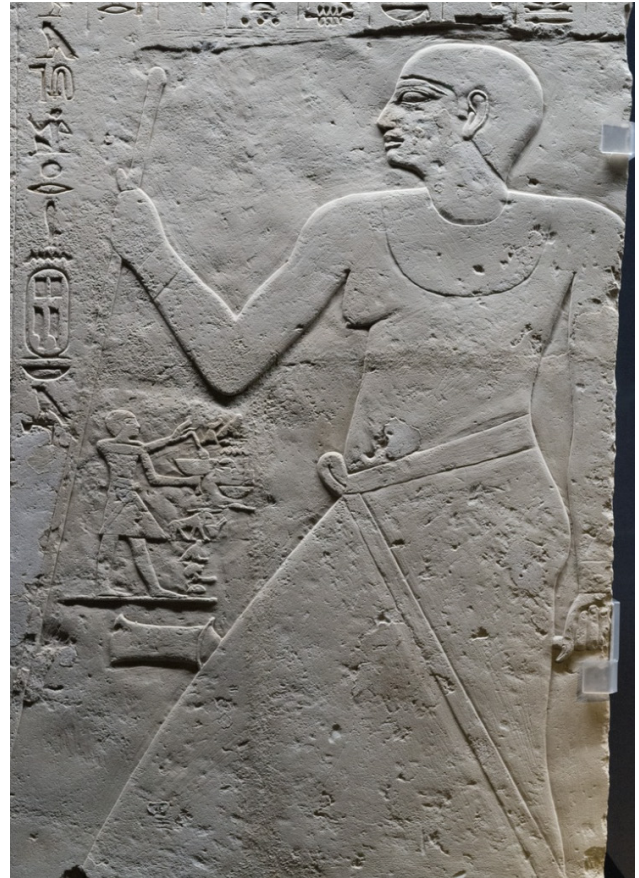
Djehuti advocates for critical thinking regarding controversial historical matters and advises not to use extreme terms such as "tyrant" to describe Akhenaten. Although this further contributes to the overall objectivity of the story, the author's intention becomes somewhat unclear at this point. Throughout the text, the readers are seemingly encouraged to think of their definition of Akhenaten and his reign based on the accounts and historical background provided. However, Djehuti's dialogue shifts the aim to a more neutral side due to the encouragement of critical thinking and objectivity. Moreover, Because Akhenaten is seen and described from the characters' perspectives, he has a minor role in the story and is only seen briefly. The indirect characterization can often be weak and fails to build a strong character for this king, shifting the story's focus towards the fictional characters in a historical background rather than the actual historical figure. Additionally, there seems to be too much emphasis on Akhenaten's role as a ruler and its nature, without the proper mentioning of other roles he played in his era, such as a "teacher" who spreads the thoughts of the new religion (Kemp, 2014). To conclude, the story's setting and characterization of Akhenaten emphasize the process of exploring and evaluating history to avoid one-sided opinions and for readers to understand how historians and archaeologists reconstruct the historical era. At the same time, it struggles to find a balance between objectivity and strong characterization based on evidence occasionally, focusing more on the historical setting and fictional characters rather than Akhenaten.

## 2: Amarna art

The art of Ancient Egypt is a core part of the civilization that often reflects the religious beliefs and political



structure. Spanning from Predynastic periods up to the Christianisation of Egypt, it had more functional purposes intended to represent political ideologies and religions. Therefore, there was no concept of “art” in Ancient Egypt, and many art forms remained conservative, idealized, and followed strict rules. As a result, the art style of Ancient Egypt changed very little over time, except for periods of foreign rule where clear influence from other cultures can be seen. Conventions of human figures are maintained throughout the entire history of Ancient Egypt. This includes legs and head seen in profile but torso in front view; male figures painted darker than female figures, and figures with higher status (kings, officials, nobles) portrayed taller and larger than those of lower status (servants, entertainers) (Smith, 1998). Symbolism is another important element of the art of Ancient Egypt. For example, symbols usually seen on pharaohs and gods, such as the uraeus (upright cobra) and the crook and flail, represented sovereignty and divine authority (Budge, 1978) (Steele, 2002). Different colors also possess different symbolism. For instance, red and yellow represented masculinity and femininity, respectively; blue represented birth and the life-giving water of the Nile; green represented vegetation and rebirth, often used as the skin color of Osiris; black represented the fertile soil and is associated with regeneration and fertility (Mark, 2017). Finally, most artworks are left anonymous because they are created collectively (Constantin 1980).





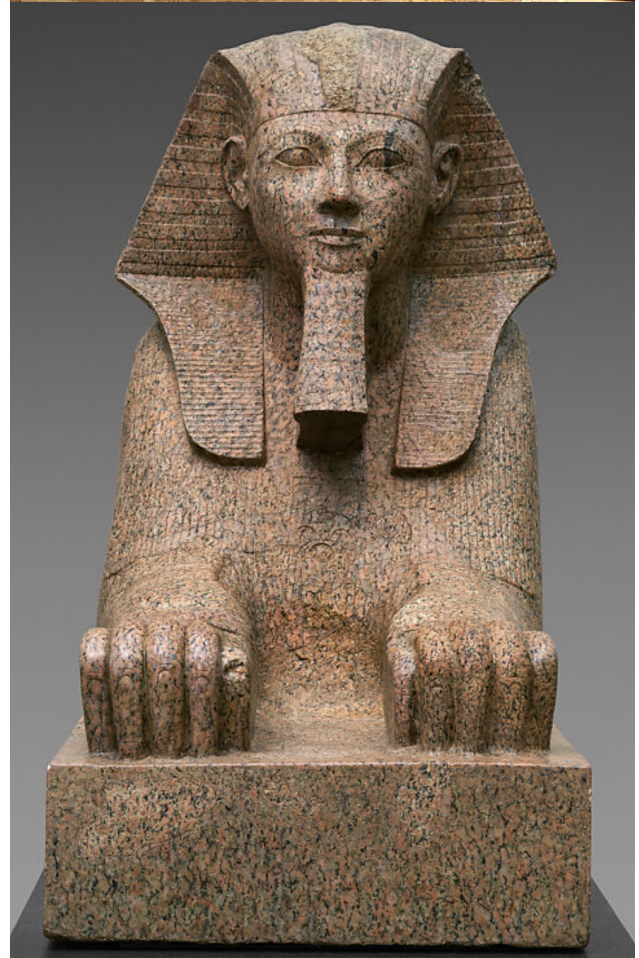


From left to right, top to bottom: Narmer, the first king of Egypt, as shown on the Narmer palette (3200-3000 BC) (Mark, 2016), Tomb relief of Iny from the Old Kingdom (23rd Century BC) (東京国立博物館 - トーハク -, 2020), Relief of Mentuhotep, the first king of the Middle Kingdom (2010-2000 B.C.) (The Met, 2020), Tutankhamun as shown in his tomb KV62 (1323 BC) (Pruitt, 2019), Pinedjem II, the High Priest of Amun shown on his Book of the Dead (976 BC) (The British Museum, n.d.) The depiction of human figures remains mostly unchanged, always with head and legs shown in the side view but torsos in the frontal view.





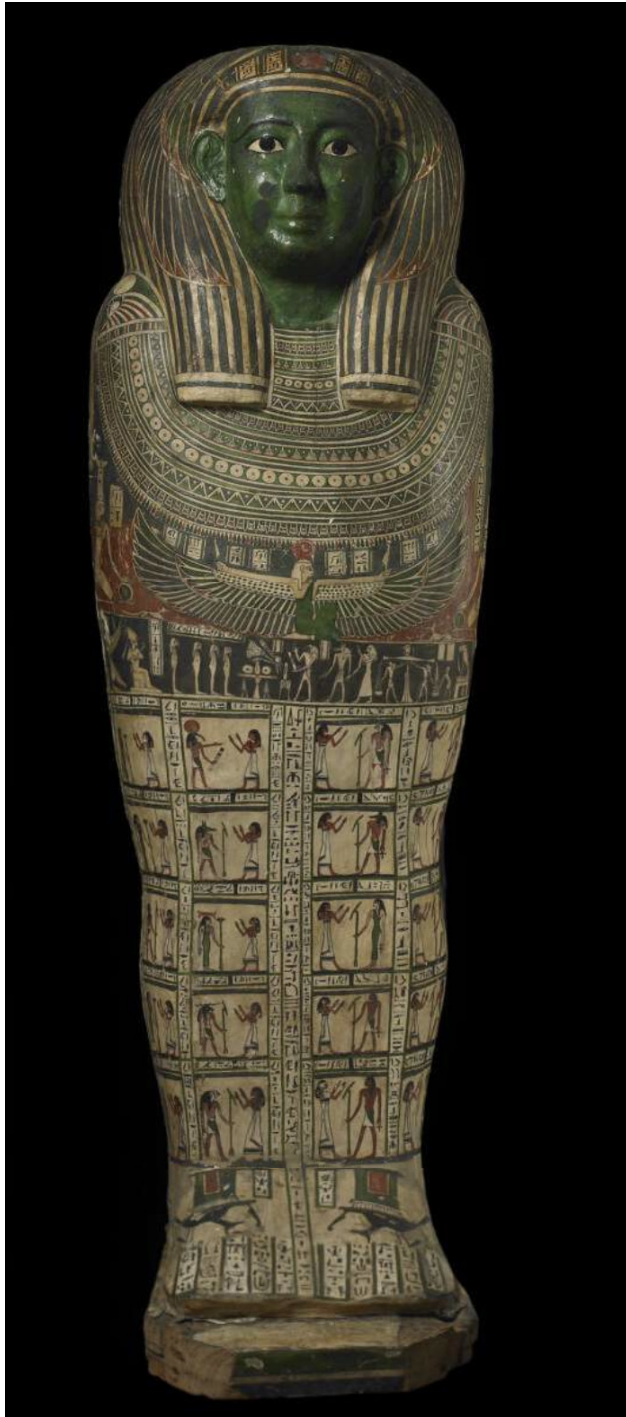
*Coffin of an individual (40-60 CE) from the Roman Period of Egypt. Only in eras when Egypt was under foreign rule did the art change. Here, Roman influence can be seen as the deceased figure is depicted wearing a Roman civic costume. Some native art elements remain, as seen in the depiction of the sky goddess of Nuts and pseudo-hieroglyphs on the base (The British Museum, n.d.).*



*From left to right: Mummy of the estate manager Khnumhotep wearing a cartonnage mask (1981-1802 BC) (The Met, n.d.), Sphinx of Hatshepsut (1479-1458 BC) (The Met, 2019)*

*Here are two examples of symbolism. Khnumhotep's mask includes a uraeus on his head, symbolizing supreme power, and a false beard, associated with kings, the god of the afterlife, Osiris. Therefore, his mask gives him a divine*

appearance for him to be resurrected. Despite being a female ruler, Hatshepsut dons the royal regalia (nemes headdress and false beard) traditionally worn by male rulers to truly establish herself as a pharaoh.



From left to right: Late Period coffin (The British Museum, n.d.), Tutankhamun's ka (soul) statue (Egypt Museum, 2022)

Here are two examples of color symbolism. The face of the coffin is painted green, the color of rebirth, to ensure that the deceased could be reborn in the afterlife. Tutankhamun's statue depicting his ka (soul, life-energy) is black, representing the fertile soil of the Nile and associated with resurrection.

During the reign of Akhenaten, the period of religious and artistic innovation saw the disappearance of the traditional art form. Before Akhenaten's era, portraits of people were often idealized, especially by rulers. The kings and queens had facial features made more attractive and symmetrical, with kings often portrayed as muscular and queens slim and possessing proportional female physiques. The idealized portraits of royals ensured their cults of personality and conveyed the idea that the pharaohs were strong leaders and maintained order in the society. However, the portraits of human figures during Akhenaten's era are radical departures from this tradition. Statues of Akhenaten, for example, portray him with exaggerated deformities such as an elongated head and neck, a sloping forehead and nose, high cheekbones, large eyes, ears, and lips. The portraiture of all human figures in the period was distorted similarly, with the addition of swaying bodies, long limbs, and fingers. Akhenaten and most female figures are portrayed with large hips and breasts (Hansen, 2020). The unusual portrayal of Akhenaten has led some scholars to suggest that hereditary traits or genetic disorders caused



by inbreeding are common to the 18th Dynasty royal family. However, discovering a male skeleton purported to be Akhenaten slightly undermines their argument. The final resting place of Akhenaten, KV55, was discovered in 1907 in Luxor. Due to the damaged burial goods, artifacts with characteristics of Amarna art, as well as the defacing of the coffin inside, archaeologists suggested that the tomb likely belonged to Akhenaten and some royal family members of the same period and that Akhenaten's body was relocated to the old capital after the destruction of the original burial in Amarna. Inside the coffin was a skeletonized, badly preserved mummy. The mummy was found with wide hips, seemingly supporting the hypothesis that it was the remains of Akhenaten. However, the skull showed no other deformities, and its facial reconstruction does not resemble Akhenaten as portrayed on his monuments. Therefore, this suggests that the portrayal of the human body during the period was mostly ceremonial and aided the religious reforms.



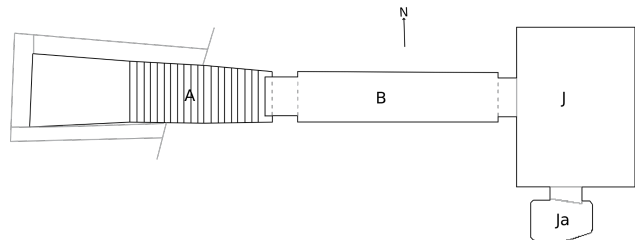
*The Colossal Statue of Akhenaten shows his unique traits (Egyptian Museum, 2022). This is being compared with the famous sculpture of Khafre Enthroned (2570 BC) (Egypt Museum, 2022b), portraying the Old Kingdom king in an idealized manner that is standard throughout almost all of Ancient Egyptian history.*





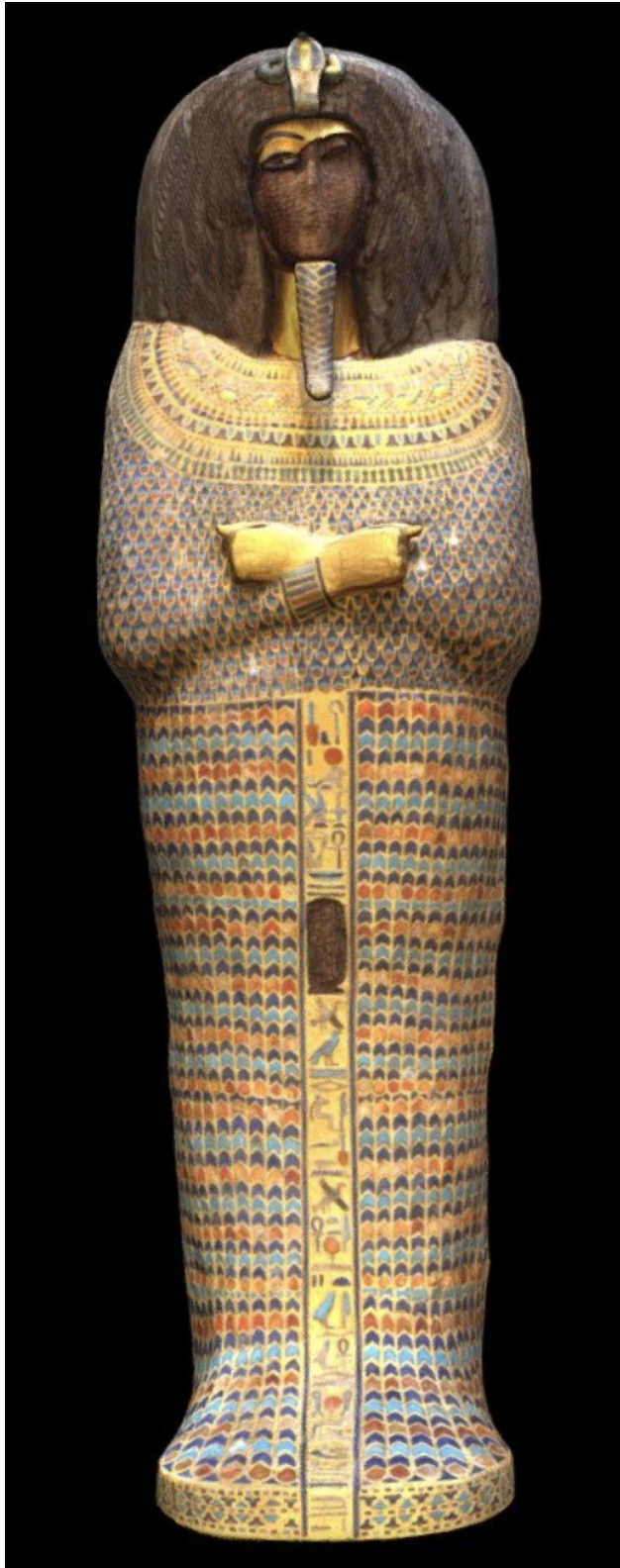


*A scene showing Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti, and three daughters under the Aten. The scene is crowded, showing figures with elongated limbs, fingers, and wide hips with folds within the skin (Egypt Museum, 2022a).*



*From left to right: Head of a princess, showing an extreme degree of skull elongation and exaggerated facial features (Amin, 2014); trial piece with the relief of Akhenaten, showing the features of large ears and eyes, thick lips and a long neck (The Met, n.d.), Fragment of a queen's face, showing the characteristic thick lips (The Met, 2022)*





Top, from left to right: Layout of the tomb KV55, photograph taken from the 1900s showing the rotten wooden coffin containing the mummy (de la Bédoyère, 2023)

Bottom, from left to right: Funerary equipment found in the tomb, the wooden coffin lid, and a canopic jar, with characteristics of Amarna art (Brown, n.d.) (The Met, 2020a). The wooden coffin had its face and the cartouche containing the king's name removed.



FIGURE 2. Skull of KV 55 in right lateral view showing defects and restoration of temporal, frontal and facial regions. Photo E. Strouhal.

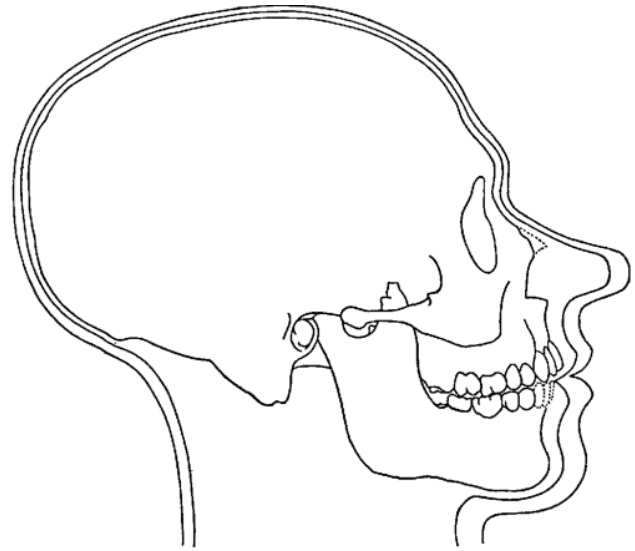


FIG. 2. Reconstruction of two outlines of the right lateral view of the head and face on the skull of KV 55. Photo E. Strouhal.

*From left to right: The mummy found in KV55 is likely Akhenaten (Miller, n.d.); the profile of the skull (Strouhal, 2010) and its facial reconstruction (Harrison, 1966) show no particular resemblance to the depictions of Akhenaten.*

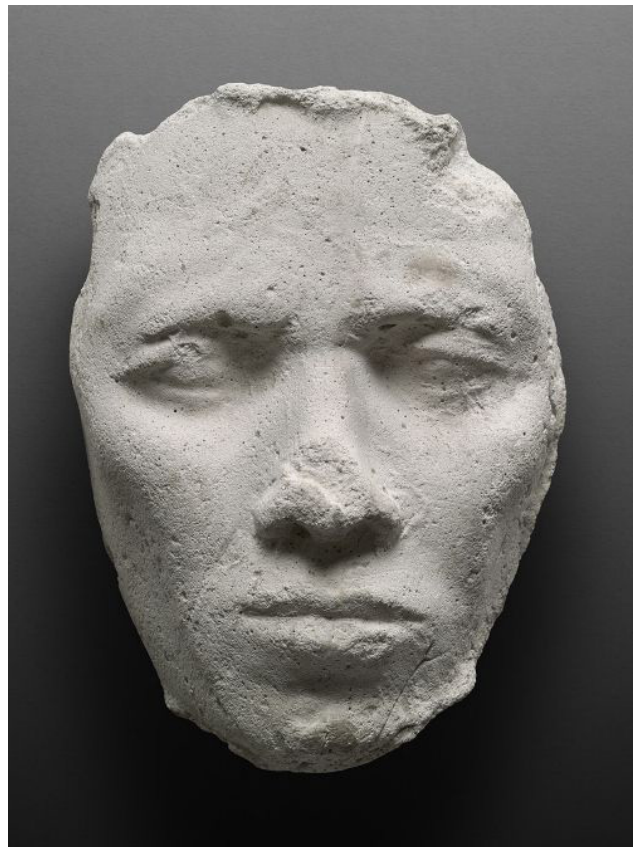
Akhenaten's innovative art style and the odd portrayal of the human body can be seen in the last part of the story when Djehuti worked on the decoration of the Great Temple of Aten under the supervision of Panehesy. Because of his occupation as a scribe (Wilson, 2019), Djehuti was employed by Panehesy as the designer of the hieroglyphs on the temple walls. Djehuti described his first impressions as follows:

"The form of the humans seemed unfamiliar—I can barely tell they are Egyptians. Their body proportions are distorted, with long, swaying arms and fingers, protruding mouths with thick lips, and frighteningly elongated skulls that make them seem like a foreign population. The figures representing Akhenaten and Nefertiti were both on the wall, and it was the first time I saw Akhenaten's appearance. He looked drastically different from the preceding pharaohs. While other pharaohs were portrayed as handsome, muscular men with fine features, he had exceedingly ugly features, such as an elongated head and thick lips like everyone else in the relief, and unusually feminine features, such as large hips. His swaying arms surrounded that of Nefertiti beside him, who was this time portrayed with the same out-of-shape facial features as Akhenaten... (Ma, 2023)"

The extract accurately describes the characteristics of the art form at the time, and it reconstructs a possible reaction



of the people at the time to the new art style: Djehuti was very surprised and puzzled due to being so used to the traditional art style of Egypt. The section of the story in which art is referenced also compares minor stylistic differences between artists and the extent to which the new religious ideas are conveyed. Although the general art trend was stylized and followed by most sculptors like the chief royal sculptor, Bek, some sculptors preferred a higher degree of realism, such as Thutmose, the sculptor of the famous Nefertiti Bust.



*From left to right: The Nefertiti Bust, depicting Akhenaten's wife Nefertiti, is more realistic compared to contem-*

porary artworks (Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin, 2012), various plaster masks from Thutmose's studio depicting an old woman and a man. Both are very realistic, with the mask of the old woman showing wrinkles, a departure from the traditionally idealized Egyptian art (Friederike Kampp-Seyfried and Ägyptisches Museum Und Papyrus-sammlung (Berlin, Germany, 2012).

The Nefertiti Bust appeared in the story and caused Djehuti to be astonished since it didn't differ from the traditional Egyptian art much with less protruding features. Furthermore, it was being created with a high degree of realism:

*"I stood there with astonishment caused by both the queen's stunning appearance and Thutmose's craftsmanship, for almost a minute, as if having lost the ability to think and walk."*

Djehuti later inquired about the stylistic differences between Thutmose's work and the carvings in the Great Temple of Aten, to which Panehesy answered:

*"Oh, these were carved before Thutmose succeeded Bek as the sculptor. Bek was the previous sculptor we employed, and the style favored by our king is quite abstract, as you can see. But again, in the temple, we deal with abstract ideas and have more spiritual experiences as we connect with the Aten. Therefore, I don't have any issues with the art. I think Thutmose, obsessed with precision, might sometimes complicate simple things. Last time I visited his workshop, I saw a giant pile of busts of the king and queen at different stages of their life!"*

Panehesy directly indicates the difference between the two styles in his answer by describing Bek's work as "abstract" and Thutmose as "obsessed with precision." He also makes his opinion clear that he prefers the more abstract style rather than the realistic style, fitting his position as a priest of Aten due to the art helping spread the religious ideas of Akhenaten.

The inclusion of artworks from the reign of Akhenaten and the emphasis on artistic changes has several strengths. Firstly, the inclusion of Thutmose and his works, as well as temple carvings, helps to reconstruct the era in the aspect of art, therefore making the reconstruction much more complete. Secondly, the inclusion of art blends well with the general discussion of religion in the short story. An evaluation of art is seen, connecting the abstract and stylistic elements with new religious ideas Akhenaten introduced, fully conveying that the spread of distinct re-

ligious ideas causes the drastic change in the mostly conservative art form of Ancient Egypt. However, the design also has some weaknesses. Djehuti is seen as surprised and confused when he first encounters the "Amarna art" style. On the other hand, how ordinary citizens of Egypt viewed the new art is not entirely known. It is even possible that they find the art completely normal, as funerary reliefs from the same period completely accept Akhenaten's new ideas, praising both the king and Aten. Thus, the reconstruction of people's opinions towards the new art might be too assured and less accurate, guiding the readers to think more objectively aligned with the author. In conclusion, including art adds a new dimension to the discussion of religion in the short story. Still, some parts of the reconstruction related to art disrupt the overall objectivity.

### 3: The new capital

The short story mainly takes place in Akhetaten, the new capital that Akhenaten built. Because of its present-day location in Amarna, Minya, the period from Akhenaten to the next few kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt is also called the Amarna era. The new city was quickly abandoned during the reign of Tutankhamun, with its building materials being largely reused by the reign of Horemheb (Kemp, 2014).

Akhenaten intended to build a capital where the new supreme deity, Aten, could reside. Thebes, the old capital, could not be chosen as they were closely linked to its patron deity, Amun, and the Amun creation myth, where Amun is the hidden force that gave birth to the world. Therefore, a newly discovered land in Middle Egypt was intended as the location where the capital would be built since it was just a desert and mountain uncontaminated by any previous ownerships, and it was a sacred land for any other creation myth or deity. In other words, it was reserved for Aten only (Kemp, 2014).

The site consists of a small arc-shaped section of the desert on the east bank of the Nile, a large tract of land used for agriculture, and a small section of the west bank. The whole tract of land measured 20-25 km across the valley and 13 km from north to south. The land was marked by the numerous stelae carved into the cliffs on either side. The modern-day name for these stelae is "Amarna Boundary Stelae." All stelae have horizontal hieroglyphic texts on their main rectangular parts, alongside carvings showing Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and several of their daughters worshipping the Aten. The texts are mainly proclamations that Akhenaten made during his reign about Akhenaten's

intention of making the newly discovered land entirely Aten's property, his temple construction plans, and plans for the burials of the royal family. In the text, Akhenaten often refers to Aten as his "father" (Amarna Project, n.d.). This can be considered a tradition of pharaohs claiming descent from a major deity, such as Ra of the Old Kingdom and Amun of most of the New Kingdom. It also reveals his intention of formally making Aten the chief deity and making himself a representative of the deity to aid the teaching of his new religious ideas.

The city can be divided into several suburbs and city centers. Some main buildings include the Great Temple of Aten (original Egyptian name meaning "House of the Aten"), where most religious activities took place, alongside a "Mansion of the Aten," which is a smaller Aten temple. Others include the various palaces built for the royal family. The city was largely built on the east side of the Nile, a place traditionally associated with the sun rising and rebirth, corresponding to the new religion focusing on the life-giving qualities of the sun and hence the name Akhetaten, "the horizon of Aten" (Kemp, 2014).

There was adequate greening of the new city, thanks to a water-raising device that first appeared in the period: the shaduf, allowing water to be efficiently raised from the Nile by a long pole with a counterweight. The limestone blocks used to build temples were changed to 27\*27\*54 cement size, making mining and construction easier (they are now called talatats, the name originating from the Egyptian Arabic word "three" because they are three handspans long). People lived in houses built from sun-dried mud bricks, some larger mansions including a garden with trees aligned in pits, wells with spirals, descending staircases, and a small chapel to worship deities (Kemp, 2014).

Aside from the greening, there were other forms of imitating nature, mainly as temple and palace decorations. For example, three columns can be observed in the Great Palace at Amarna, all of which are imitations of different plants, which is a continuity of the architectural traditions of Egypt to some extent. One takes the shape of curving fronds with bulbous tips, imitating date trees. The leaves of the trees were inlaid with bright colors such as red and yellow. Another is shaped like multiple papyrus stalk bundles, curving inwards at the top because they are not in flower yet. The third type represents the papyrus plant in flower, with details being painted, stems ending in blossoming lily flowers, and usually with the accompaniment of friezes of red grapes or dead waterfowls hanging upside down. In addition, trailing vine patterns sometimes

occupy the space above scenes of the royal family in the Great Temple of Aten, and green faience tiles decorate the columns of the Great Palace to imitate reeds. Another artifact commonly found at Amarna is a bunch of grapes made with faience, the glazed material often used in Egyptian Art. The ornament has holes or a stepped design for attaching them to wooden beams. Tomb reliefs at Amarna show the ornaments suspended on wooden shrines flanked by multiple uraeus. The imitation of nature can also be seen in the wall paintings discovered at the palaces. For example, the paintings at North Palace depict papyrus plants grown from the swamps providing shelter for birds and butterflies, pools of water with fish and fowl, or birds feeding under supervision. The ceilings of the Great Palace were painted with grapevine patterns. The painted floors at the Great Palace and Maru-Aten depict grass with the accompaniment of birds and calves surrounding ponds. The ponds were painted in the Great Palace, represented by zigzag lines with interruptions by lily flowers, fish, and ducks, while those in the Maru-Aten, itself a water garden, are actual t-shaped ponds filled with water. The imitation of nature seen throughout Amarna can be seen as the illusion of harmony with nature around the capital, quite relevant to the new religion, in which Aten is also a manifestation of Ma'at, the natural order of the universe, as the deity ensures the peace and prosperity of the world by offering the energy of life (Kemp, 2014).

Elements of the plan, architecture, and daily life were mentioned in the short story. Aside from the granaries, temples, and the fields where the scribes would work, the city plan was mentioned by Djehuti when he first moved to Akhetaten:

*"Akhetaten was a city completely illuminated by sunlight, creating a sharp contrast that made me doubt if the city was only in my imagination. The greening was done exceptionally well, making the city itself a strip of green along the central part of the Nile. The streets bustled with excited noises of street vendors and happy children. The city center was well-organized, with sections clearly distinguished from each other—the suburbs in the north, the central city with a magnificent temple dedicated to Aten, the northern and southern main city, and the southern suburbs. Our new house was situated in the northernmost part of the main city, consisting of a main building, a garden filled with trees that can withstand the harsh environment of the desert aligned in tree pits, a well with descending steps and a water-raising device for watering the plants, as well as a small shrine. I placed a statue of Thoth in the shrine for worshipping for fear that my memory of the wise god would fade in the new environment."*



Not only were the city plan and the basic structure of the house described, but Djehuti's opinions towards the city were also included: he found the city to be "illuminated by sunlight." This description, alongside a later one describing the city as "terrifyingly surreal," fits with the overall different atmosphere created at Akhetaten, in which everything was more or less related to the new religion centered around the sun.

Similarly, architectural elements were first mentioned when Djehuti first saw Panehesy. He described the columns as "colossal" and "nature-inspired." The architectural elements are described more in detail later in the story:

*"As Panehesy would always say in the later years of our collaboration, we should be grateful for what the great Aten had done for Egypt: by regenerating and providing the energy of life—commonly associated with nature. Therefore, the nature elements could also be a form of praise by presenting how the power of Aten has sustained life in Akhetaten. I had already observed that the columns would always be either an imitation of palm-date leaves as a bulbous tip of the columns, a bundle of papyrus stems that gather together at the top, or a blossoming papyrus flower with additional decorations of long stems ending in lotus flowers. In the case of the Great Temple, the columns were of the second type, shown as clumps of papyrus stems, with additional coloring and decorations of what seemed to be dead waterfowls hanging upside down at the top. Most columns were plain and without any inscriptions or reliefs. However, I could already notice some carouches of people of significance being carved, and, above them, some patterns of flowing and entangled vines..."*

The descriptions correspond with the architectural elements mentioned earlier in this essay section. In addition, a section of the short story includes another detail of the design of the Great Temple, closely related to the Aten religion:

*"entire courts filled with lines of offering tables, directly exposed to the sun above. I found myself surrounded by mountains of offerings. Chicken, lamb legs, bread, honey. Some even started to rot due to the exposure for days, even months, emitting a putrid smell. How the sun was directly scorching the offering echoes the image of Akhenaten directly passing offerings to the hands of the Aten I saw hours ago."*

Unlike the temples at Thebes, the Great Temple had no ceiling, so sunlight could directly pass through, shining

on the offerings for them to be received by the god. This further reflects the importance of sunlight in the new religion as a life-giving energy offered by Aten and as a way via which people in Egypt at the time could communicate with the divine.

Other architectural findings mentioned earlier in the section, such as the boundary stelae, the grape-shaped ornaments, several palaces like Maru-Aten, etc., were only mentioned briefly in the section where Djehuti and Panehesy took a tour of the city for Djehuti to accept the new religion. Including the basic facts of Akhetaten contributes to building a different, sacred world dedicated to Aten. It is mostly relevant to Atenism, and the story could be improved by incorporating more architectural findings to add nuance to the world-building and adding or elaborating the religious aspects related to them, to ensure that the story does not depart too much from religion, the main point of discussion. For example, Akhetaten was not built as a "city" but more as a "sacred land" reserved for the Aten, explained by the boundary stela inscriptions not mentioned in the story. Panehesy could also use the imagery of nature seen throughout the city as examples to corroborate his arguments when he tried to persuade Djehuti to worship Aten to strengthen the bond between the manifestations of Atenism and the religion itself.

## Conclusion

As a short story aiming at reconstructing the controversial historical era of Akhenaten's reign and discussing the religious changes in Ancient Egypt, Aten, Akhenaten, and Religion is mostly successful at achieving its aims. The short story used a combination of historical accounts and archaeological findings as its main sources, making the reconstructed past more accurate and more likely a reflection of the actual historical event rather than later modified historical accounts to fit a certain narrative. Through the use of dialogue between characters and the personal reflection of the main character, the story, while making a clear distinction between the traditions of Egypt and the new ideas introduced in Akhenaten's era, also encourages the readers to investigate vague, debatable historical periods with both primary and secondary sources and with varied sources, so that their approach becomes more objective and devoid of the influence from strong opinions. However, its weaknesses ultimately made the reading experience less satisfying. Sometimes, the dialogues seem to encourage the readers to formulate their own opinions towards the reign of Akhenaten, departing from the aim of achieving neutrality. Compared to Akhenaten himself, the



imbalanced focus on the fictional characters also makes the characterization of the historical figure less defined. Furthermore, in parts of the story about the city plans and architecture, the link between them and discussions about religion is inadequate. In some parts, there is not even enough description based on archaeological findings, diminishing the short story's value for readers who would like to learn about city construction and architecture in Ancient Egypt and how they link to religion.

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