

The Influences of the State on the Egyptian Decorative Arts in Tel el-Amarna**Dr. Fayrouz Mohamed Mahmoud**

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Introduction:

Ancient Egyptian art, which remained relatively stable over a period spanning 3,500 years, aimed to not only preserve political and religious order but to also modify life (Brewer & Teeter 2007:189). Yet, during the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca.1351-1334 BCE) Amenhotep IV, later in his reign known as Akhenaten, replaced the various traditional Egyptian deities by one deity, namely the Aten (Silverman 1997:221). This major transformation resulted in not only major cultural changes but also radically unorthodox Egyptian art forms which were all linked to Akhenaten's religious agenda (Tiradritti 2002:78-83).

The paper attempts to discuss the impact of the new ideology of Akhnaten on urban development in the new erected capital, which had embraced the Aten and his messenger, Aknaten. Moreover, the current paper aims to examine the main artistic characteristics of Amarna art, and to explore tell what extend the Akhenaten's monotheistic religion's ideology had reflected in the nature of the art in this particular period.

In addition, the paper will highlight the prominent features of the paintings and murals in the Great palace and the King's house as both structures had endured abounded of paintings and architectural attributes that help to identify the artistic features in Amarna Art.

Akhnaten and his capital City, Ahetaten:

During Amenhotep IV's early years of his reign, he decided that the Aten needed a new metropolis (Hari 1985:8). As a result, the king changed his administrative capital from Thebes to Amarna or 'Akhetaten 'horizon of the Aten' (Fig 1) (Wilkinson 2003:240-241). The city (Fig 2) was designed differently with open altars, open courtyards, and a royal road for the king. This new city had witnessed the birth of Armana art style.

The structure of the Great Palace of Aketaten:

The Great Palace (Fig 3) of Amarna was laying on the west side of the royal road paralleling to the River Nile from its east bank. It was measuring around 400 m from north to south and around 250 m from east to west. The "North Harem" wing was located in the South east of the Great Court,. The Great Palace was probably the administrative central of the royal affairs with most of the public service buildings close by. (Aldred 1988: 61)

Various of painted floors were found at the Great Palace, which mostly located in the private section , that was dubbed as the palace 'Harem'.

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Fig 3 imaginary illustration for the Great palace showing the connecting bridge to the small temple of Aten on the west side of the royal road.

The Palace was firstly excavated by Petrie in late of 19th century and followed by excavation seasons by Pendlebury and Egypt Exploration Society in 1934-1935, who assigned letters (A through Z) to the excavated rooms of the Great Palace (Pendlebury 1951: 33-45), and other excavation seasons in 1990's by Weatherhead (Weatherhead 1992: 179) who pointed out to some mistakes in dimensions for rooms around the main hall by Petri (Fig 4,5).

During time of Petri's excavations, three of the best preserved floors were unearthed but many parts were rotten and were found in poor condition. The plaster floors were constructed on a foundation of brick and covered by fine concrete. By wetting the last layer of dust with a tapioca-water solution and letting it seep into the pores, then letting it dry, he managed to harden the floors out and prevent some of the damage that would have been done to the paintings. (Franken 2015: 34). Petri had noticed other older painted parts were under the excavated one. He assumed that former designs were applied on the floors and then repainted again to be maintained in later phases due to the extensive use of the floors. (PETRIE 1974:12-13).

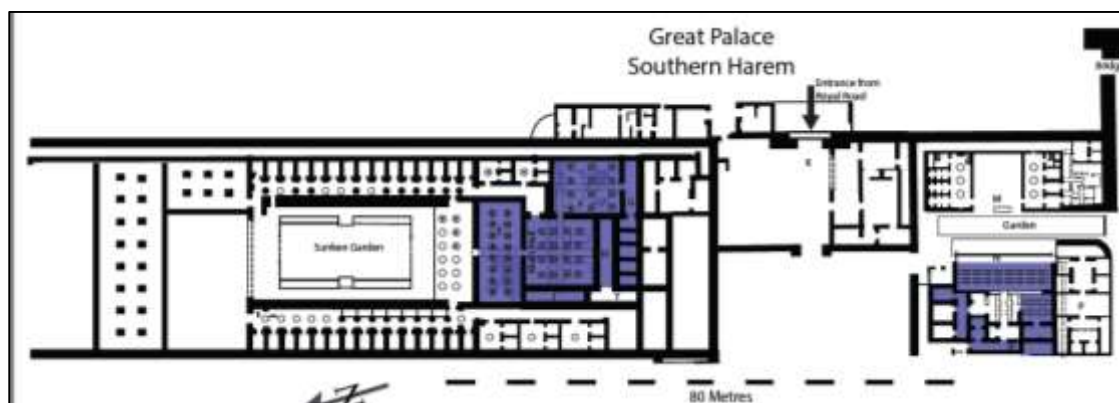


Fig 4 This map presented above is the EES floor plan with Weatherhead's adjustments incorporated into them.

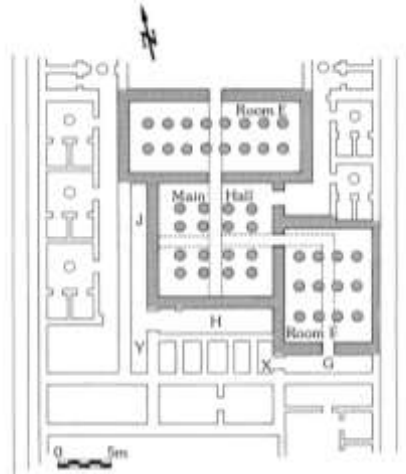


Fig 5 detailed plan for the main hall, room E and room F

The most distinguish areas are the Main Hall, room E and room F.

The area of the main hall is 33.5 sq.m, unfortunately the floor decoration were not conserved. Yet, there are scene for captives in pathway from both north to south and from east to west (Fig 6).

A curious feature of the fragments found in the south part of the Main Hall is the fact that they show the plant bases and the feet of the flying ducks facing out towards the walls. In rooms E and F the orientation of these motifs is in towards the central ponds (Weatherhead 1992: 185)

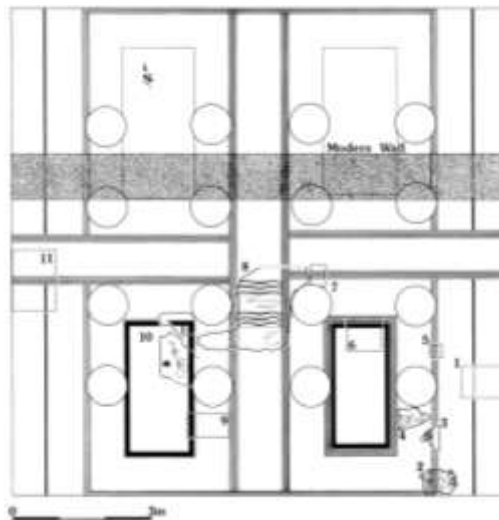


Fig 6 illustration for captives' scenes in the main hall.

In 1891 -2. Petrie discovered wall- floor-paintings and decoration on the east wall in room E. The most notable example being the famous painted pavement in the cross-the so-called North Harim (Fig 7). The magnificent floor pavement measured around 15.5 x 6.5 m. Petrie managed to illustrate the western half of it, and it was assumed that the eastern side is symmetrical to the western side (Fig 8). The decorations in the centre were surrounding an illustration for a pool in which assorted fishes were being depicted with lilies. In the corridor it can be seen the illustration of bows captives. (Franken 2015: 29)



Fig 7 The Great Pavement, looking to the East while still in-situ

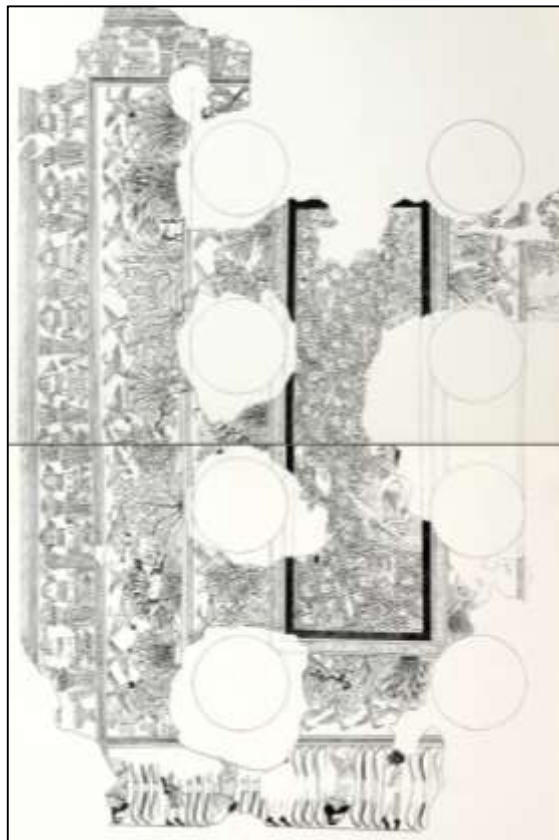


Fig 8 The Western part of the Great Pavement of room E. As illustrated by F. W. M. Petrie in TEA, Pl. II.

In room F, Petrie recorded that about half of its area had intact painted pavement. The design was similar to that in room E, but looks in a poorer state. (Weatherhead 1992 : 185). The room contained 12 columns and it is clear that of captives were again depicted on the pathway leading to room G.(Fig 9).

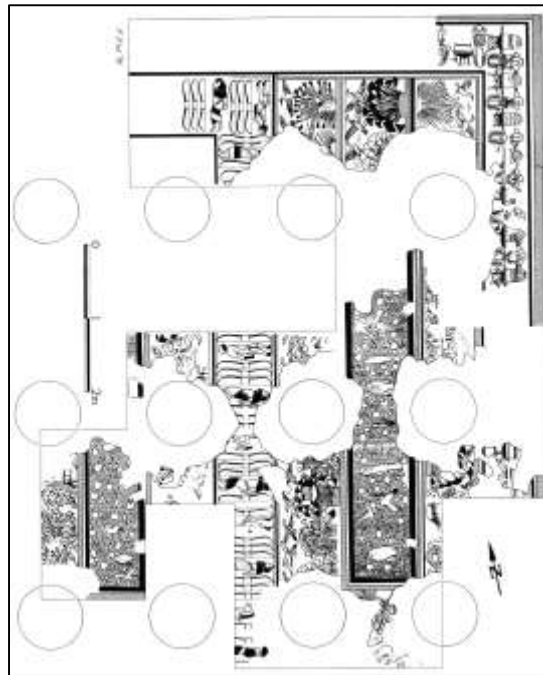


Fig 9 Floor paintings from room **F** of the Great Palace as drawn up by Petrie and restored by Weatherhead.

After Weatherhead 1992

During Pendlbury excavations, more painted pavement was uncovered in the corridor South of the Main Hall. As seen in room H which consisted of corridor and five rooms. Corridor floors were painted by ritual bouquet and led to another area room J which its floor contained different style of several rectangular panels (Daressy 1903: 184 -194) (Fig 10) . These panels were about 1.20 by 2.10 meters and were filled up with two larger plants and sometimes accompanied by fowl and occasionally a calf or secondary foliage (Franken 2015: 44)

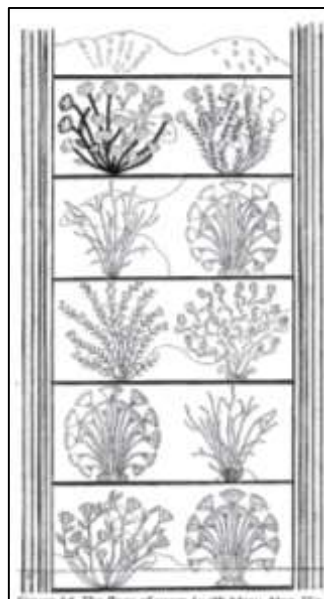


Fig 10 The floor of room **J** As illustrated by R. S. Lavers in COA III, 1951.

The central corridor design composed of captives from different races, as their customs and appearance are quite different from each other. There are five dark skin people, probably Nubians. Other captives look Asian and can be identified from their beards. two pools are depicted on either side of the central pathway, yet one of them is to some extent larger than the other, where fish and plant life were illustrated. The weaves of the water run across the distance of the ponds. In addition, Petrie noted animals existence in the scene, calf can be seen and unusual depiction (fig 11). (Weatherhead 1992: 187, 188,190)



Fig 11 unusual movements for animals in landscape depicted in Great Palace of Akhnaten

Overall, Paintings on the floor of the Great Palace are showing two important points to be considered here. Firstly, depicting the wild and marsh scenes, refers to abundance of natural elements around the artist in the new capital, Aketaten, which helped him to emphasize and elaborate the scenes.

Secondly, the power of the King, which is dominated of course with his divine Aten power, is seen in depiction of foreign captives on the floor and in particular the corridors which mostly host heavy movement and usage rather other parts of floor around, they are under the feet of the king and showing his ego and greatness, in order to give an impressive image of Akhnaten and how powerful he is.

The Influences of the King (State) on the Identity of the Egyptian art:

It was crucial for Egyptians to maintain order in their society and they relied on their king to achieve that purpose (Robins 1997:17). The king was seen as the sole person who could connect with the gods and as a result, throughout Egyptian history, was viewed as the most vital human being in Egyptian society and ensured continued support from all Egyptians (Shaw 2000:92).

One should assume the theological vision of Egyptians had reflected on artists' methodology. Ancient Egyptian art was characterized by various dominant features. Scale in Egyptian art was crucial for Egyptians. The size of a figure indicated the importance of the figure illustrated (Silverman 1997:213,215). Especially when depicting the kings, as the king always illustrated larger than any human figures. Artists committed to portray figures in idealized and

motionless form, because they not only wanted to be remembered for the ideal form in which they wanted to remain in the afterlife but they also wanted to preserve the order in their perfect world (Brewer & Teeter 2007:189-190).

During the Middle Kingdom statues and depicting bodies were usually characterized with sharp and strong appearance. While paintings were still influenced by rigid of old-kingdom portrayals style (Franken 2015: 38). Yet, in the early New Kingdom, art was evolved into more rounded, fleshy and elegantly curved portrayal with ageless features, which reached its peak during regime of Tuthmosis III (ca. 1479- 1425 B.C.) and his co-regents Hatshepsut who drew the newly developed 'Theban style'. (ca. 1473-1458 B.C.) (Aldred, C. 1988). The Theban artists took inspiration from the early Middle Kingdom, resulting in more grandeur and sternness in the visualizations (Aldred, C., 1985 p.147), these early changes had paved the way for Amarna art.

Amarna Period:

Amarna art shows that Akhenaten's reign and artistic rebellion was marked by a dimension of creativity unheard of and that his impact on Egyptian history was gigantic and revolutionary (Brewer & Teeter 2007:52). Yet some scholars pointed out to influences of earlier styles on Amarna art.

Yanik states that the first known floor paintings were excavated in 1888 at the Malkata palace by Georges Daressy. The paintings depicted natural scenes for papyrus clumps in which birds nestled, and waters, with fish (Daressy G. 1903: 165-166) were very similar to floor paintings in Great Palace in Tel el- Amarna. Not only the natural elements, but also the depiction of captives enemies who were illustrated on the painted steps in site Kom el-Samak (Fig 12), south of Malkata.

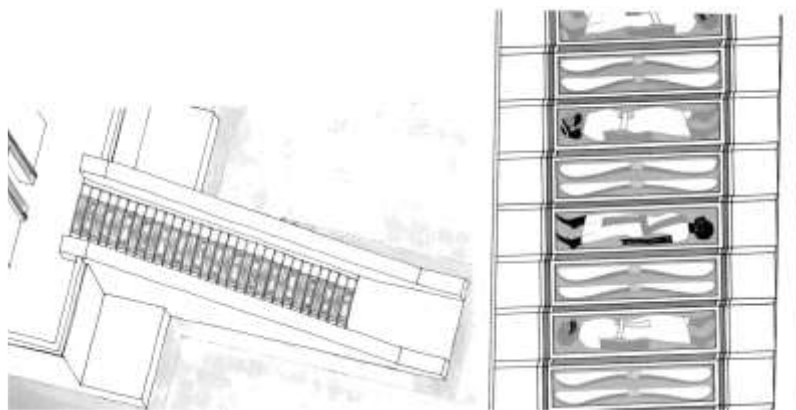


Figure 12 Reconstruction of the Kom el-Samak painted stairs. Watanabe 1986, Figure 2-3.

Creativity also can be seen in the decorative elements of royal buildings that simulate natural patterns, which were depicted as realistically and colourful as possible (Fig 13)

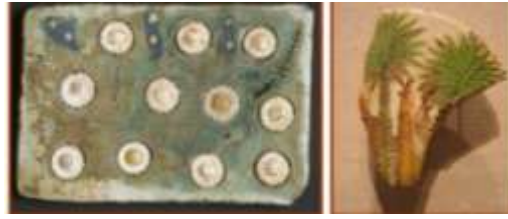


Fig 13 Finance tile with floral inlays

Monotheism: The Aten depiction in Amarna art:

Egyptian gods were the centrepieces in ancient Egyptian art. During the first three years of Akhenaten's reign the Aten was at the head of the pantheon whilst other deities were allowed to maintain their positions therein (Schlögel 2005). However, during Akhenaten's fourth year in power, former gods would not be allowed to be depicted in formal ceremonies or public buildings. Aten was never illustrated as a human figure but rather a sun-disk in an abstract form (Schlögel 2005). The falcon-headed god was now replaced with the non-anthropomorphic. Each of these rays ended in a minuscule hand which held the 'ankh' symbol of life. It is here, one can notice that ideology is reformed by a visual imagery from nature. This abstract image of the Aten gave Akhenaten, and his royal family, the chance to centralize most of murals and reliefs in Amarna art (Fig 14). The king and royal family effectively replaced the conventional divine family triads with one god, namely the Aten (Schlögel 2005).



Fig 14 Akhenaten, Nefertiti offering to the life-giving rays of the Aten. Meritaten stands behind, playing the sistrum. Cairo museum.

The royal family depiction in Amarna art:

Aten, Akhenaten and to a lesser degree the royal family were omnipresent in Amarna reliefs, palace murals, stelae and other arts (Robins 1997:152-154). Akhenaten is seen in most works below Aten, making offerings. Akhenaten was usually illustrated larger than other figure

depicted, which was different from traditional art, as early artists mostly used to depict the king and the deities in equal stage.

However, the new habit to concentrate on Aten and Akhenaten resulted in a drastic change from customary Egyptian art as the Aten, Akhenaten and the royal family infiltrated every aspect of non-royal Egyptians' lives (Stevens 2006:5-6).

Actually, this change had resulted in depiction of cohesion and warmth of feelings between members of the royal family 'to the extent that Akhenaten has been referred to by James Henry Breasted as the "...first individual in history" (Brewer & Teeter 2007:205). The close relation between Akhenaten and Nefertiti was depicted in many scenes. On a painted limestone model wherein Nefertiti offering flowers to Akhenaten (Fig 15) (Tiradritti 2002:79), and also seen in the famous dynamic scene for the royal family(Fig 16), as the king is putting one of his daughters sitting on his knees whilst she points to her mother, the queen, in a childish manner and the other daughter on the queen legs is playing whilst the third daughter on her mother shoulder playing with the queen earring. Both king and queen are sitting relaxing and some of their custom are flying with air to right and left. The lively scenes of the royal family showing kisses



Fig 15 Nefertiti giving flowers to Akhenaten



Fig 16 Akhenaten, Nefrtiti and three daughters, Amarna period, Ägyptisches Museum/Neues Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

Realistic depiction :

The realistic artistic movement of portrayal was introduced in statues, reliefs as well as paintings showing the king with noticeable signs of aging (Aldred C. 1985: 170) had reached its peak during Amarna period.

Before Amarna era, Egyptian artists did not use to apply shades or perspective depth on the depicted forms. Yet, in Amarna art one can see distinctive attributes for using of different tones and colors to show the depth of the forms in the space, which gesture form of naturalistic image.

The naturalistic trend clearly seen in such depictions the signs of aging and fine lines around mouth and eyes, and wrinkles of neck and elbow skin. However, the different appearance of the king and his family member was questionable point as Akhenaten's family usually depicted with long faces and skull, exaggerated feminine features. One would agree with Kemp's explanation that it might had been Akhenaten's way of showcasing both his ascendance above regular humanity as well as his benevolent and loving ways (Franken, 2015: 41). In addition, one may assume that person like Akhenaten, who abolished all inherited restrictions that lasted hundreds of years, he would never mind to show himself whether in his actual physical form or even to be depicted in new stylistic appearance. Although it cannot be neglected the suggestion that Akhenaten might suffer from a connective tissue disorder such as Frolich's Syndrome¹, or the Marfan syndrome²

Conclusion:

In general talking, ancient Egyptian art can be characterized as conceptual instead of perceptual (Brewer & Teeter 2007:194-196). Egyptian art was functioned mostly to serve the

¹ Physical effects of this disease are a tall body with stretched appendages, a stretched skull and feminine fat formation

² This disease causes abnormal growth and a long, stretched head.

state from political and religious perspectives. the importance of the gods and the power of the king usually depicted in tradition art in an idealistic form. Egyptian artists never aimed to integrate depth and volume in their work but rather aspired to render a masterpiece in its most appealing trait (Robins 1997:19,21), and if an artist had to depict the pharaoh as he was in real life it would have been unacceptable (Frankfort 1958:159).

Yet, the revolution of art during Amarna period was significantly remarked among entire old Egyptian history. Although the actual regime of its founder, Akhnaten, did not exceed two decades, its art had received praise and interest of archaeologists, art historian and academic scholars from different disciplines.

Establishing a new city to represent Aten and Akhetaten, has important connotation to be concerned. One can assume that Akhenaten needed to start a new life in new place to house the new birth of his Aten God's ideology. The king illustrated his ideology in architecture and art of the new capital city of Aten.

By Aknaten's ideological changes in religion, the focus on idealism had shrunk and the trend of personalizing the new identity in a creative sense increased. Artistic expressions for depiction the realism instead of idealism, were elaborated and were represented in depicting the depth in order to show the naturalistic life and emotions. Paintings and murals of Amarna buildings were concerned about life of royal family, lively wild and freely dynamic animals actions. Structures were exaggeratedly covered with such scenes in order to emphasize the actual visualization of the representation of ideology of the center of the Aten.

The ubiquity of Amarna art, resulted from that artists had more freedom to express their creativity (Frankfort 1958:158-159), and this new development in religion resulted in a brand new creative standard, breaking the customary way in which Egyptians have always expressed themselves (Dorsch 1991:2-4),

Overall though, art during the reign of Akhenaten served to bolster his religious propaganda and intellectualism, resulting in an epoch of realism (Dorsch 1991:2-4).

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