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The "Wicked Priest" in Egyptology and Amarna Studies: A Reconsideration*

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Abstract: The "Wicked Priest" in Egyptology and Amarna Studies: A Reconsideration
It is often the case in Egyptology that the priesthood, especially that of Amun in the 18th dynasty, is portrayed as a power hungry, underhanded, political force. This paper will argue that such portrayals are influenced by the assumptions of the Enlightenment and, in particular, Deism. It often happens that assumptions held at the time of the inception of a discipline have a lingering influence on their field. Within scholarship the conclusions of those seen as ground breaking pioneers can also be very influential. This paper examines the reasons for the growth of the "wicked priest" discourse in Egyptology and its application to Amarna Studies. In an attempt to stop the lingering influence of this discourse, some tentative alternate suggestions are made regarding two areas of this application: 1) Akhenaten's religious reforms and change of capital; 2) The hacking out of Akhenaten's name and the reaction to his rule.

Keywords: Amarna – Akhenaten – Egyptology – religion

Resumen: El "sacerdote impío" en Egiptología y en los estudios de El Amarna: una reconsideración.
Es frecuente el caso en los estudios egiptológicos que el sacerdocio, en especial el de Amón en la dinastía XVIII, sea retratado como una fuerza política hambrienta de poder y engañosa. Este trabajo demostrará que tales representaciones son influenciadas por los supuestos del Iluminismo y, en particular, del Deísmo. Con frecuencia sucede que tales supuestos, que tuvieron lugar en los inicios de una disciplina, tienen una influencia persistente en sus campos. En el mundo académico las conclusiones de aquellos

* Artículo recibido: 19 de Marzo, 2008; aprobado: 18 de Junio, 2008. It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this paper to Dr Noel Weeks, a great teacher who always worked for the good of his students. To some extent the topic and initial line of attack in this paper arose from comments made by Dr Weeks while I was a student under him. Hopefully his superb critical analysis of the presuppositions underlying ancient near eastern studies will find some reflection here.

vistos como pioneros pueden ser también de mucha influencia. Este trabajo examina las razones para el crecimiento del "discurso del sacerdote impío" en Egiptología y su aplicación a los estudios de El Amarna. En un intento para frenar la influencia permanente de este discurso, se realizan algunas sugerencias alternativas en relación con dos áreas de aplicación: 1) las reformas religiosas de Ajenatón y el cambio de capital; 2) la persecución del nombre de Ajenatón y la reacción a su reinado.

Palabras Clave: Amarna – Ajenatón – Egiptología – religión

The Problem

The priesthood has been a main focus in the study of Ancient Egypt since at least the Classical Period. Depictions of this group have ranged from the wise, secretive initiates of the classical literature, to the deviously cunning and politically manipulative power mongers represented in many works of the modern era. This paper aims to examine the origins of the "wicked priest" theory in Egyptology and, more specifically, its application to the Amarna period. Akhenaten's battle with the Amun priesthood has now been a central tenet of most depictions of Amarna Egypt for over a century. In more recent times some have begun to question the evidentiary basis for the existence of such a quarrel.[1] I am in sympathy with this more critical approach and will argue that theories proposing this almighty conflict between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood owe much more to the historical, religious, political and personal contexts of the scholars who contributed to the "wicked priest" discourse in Egyptology than they do to the historical sources available. Though there are certainly sharp ruptures or changes in discourses about Egyptian priests, the "wicked priest" discourse seems to develop, with earlier versions impacting upon later.[2] Classical period depictions had an enormous impact upon the portrayals of the Renaissance which in turn set the framework of understanding which was reshaped under the impact of Deism, its anti-clericalism and criticisms of institutionalised religion. To a great extent these frameworks of understanding have had a lingering impact on Egyptology even after decipherment, with similar arguments, ever shaped by context, being supported by a new body of evidence. The Romanticism of the early 19th Century and then the increasing political focus of history which coincided with the growth of nation states later that century both influenced the picture portrayed. With regards to Egyptology, and especially Amarna studies, all of

[1] Montserrat 2000: 36.

[2] Compare Foucault's notion of discontinuity between disparate discourses.

this (amongst other factors) comes to a head in the person and work of James Henry Breasted. His depiction of the Amun priesthood, particularly under Akhenaten, has had an enormous impact on Egyptology since. After critically exploring the creation of the myth of Akhenaten's battle with the Amun priesthood, some alternate explanations will be discussed with regard to two main issues surrounding the Amarna period: 1) Why Akhenaten changed the religion and the capital; 2) The reasons behind the hacking out of Akhenaten's name and the reaction to his rule. Given the nature of the evidence available in Amarna studies, the historiographical outline will be more firmly founded than the alternate historical explanations put forward.

To begin it is perhaps worth outlining the general contours of the "wicked priest" theory as applied to Amarna. Breasted's account of this era[3] depicts a power hungry Amun priesthood, populated by the priestly families of Thebes who have risen to prominence on the back of the empire and Thebes' status as capital city. These priests had dragged the obscure god Amun into the limelight by solarising him (attributing to him the qualities of Re). This priesthood had been given enormous amounts of land and wealth to administer (much of the latter coming from the conquests of the empire), thus raising its political influence. Their prominence was aided particularly by Thutmoses III and Hatshepsut who owed their ascendance to the throne to the Amun priesthood and were obliged to repay him via an increase in power and wealth.[4] Akhenaten, a *"god intoxicated man"*,[5] came into conflict with this *"sacerdotal organisation"*[6] as he began to espouse his new universal, monotheistic ideas about the sun-god. His new religion was open and accessible to all; as opposed to the secretive rites of the priests of Amun (the god's very name means "hidden one"). The reaction of the Amun priesthood to these new reforms led Akhenaten to close down their temples and wipe out the name of Amun. Akhenaten built up a powerful court party in opposition to the disbanded priesthood and moved his capital away from Thebes. Akhenaten created a group of out of work priests *"nursing implacable hatred"*[7] towards him. This *"dangerous secret opposition"*[8] plotted his downfall, eventually manipulating

[3] See Breasted 1951 (originally 1905, second edition 1909): book 5; 1972 (originally 1912): lectures 9 and 10; and 1934: chapters 15-16.

[4] Breasted 1951: 272, 362.

[5] Breasted 1972: 334.

[6] Breasted 1972: 319.

[7] Breasted 1972: 341.

[8] Breasted 1972: 342.

the boy king Tutankhamun to restore Amun worship.[9] After Akhenaten's reign Amun and his priesthood were once again in ascendancy in Egypt.

Each element in this portrayal has had an enormous impact on Amarna studies and has been picked up and repeated by other scholars. That said, other accounts of the Amarna period which take the conflict between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood as a central tenet often involve slight variations on Breasted's depiction. Some, not holding to Breasted's high regard for Akhenaten's "pure religion", see the conflict merely as an attempt to wrest power away from the Amun priesthood.[10] Some have also portrayed his move of capital as a way of escaping from the opposition of this priesthood in Thebes.[11] Apart from a possible reference which occurs in a fragmentary section of a boundary stele[12] and is open to manifold different interpretations, there is not a shred of evidence of any opposition to Akhenaten during his lifetime, let alone evidence specifically tying such opposition to the Amun priesthood. How then did such an interpretation arise and why have so many accepted it uncritically? To answer this question we need to explore the development of ideas about the Egyptian priesthood more generally.

Development of Ideas about the Egyptian Priesthood

Though much of the writing about Egypt during the Classical period[13] portrayed the culture as barbaric or other,[14] certain depictions laid the groundwork for the picture of a powerful, knowledgeable priesthood. Egypt was depicted by Herodotus as the most religiously observant of peoples.[15] Herodotus and Diodorus make frequent reference to the priests from whom they gathered their knowledge. Diodorus also portrays these priests as having instructed many famous Greeks.[16] Many writers depicted Egypt as an ancient land, with a long tradition of learning. Some Classical writers connected this to religion, portraying Egypt as the source of much religious knowledge *e.g.* Diodorus

[9] Breasted 1951: 392-395.

[10] Reeves 2005; Giles 2001: 250.

[11] e.g. Reeves 2005: 104 and 111 where he speculates that there may have been an attempt on Akhenaten's life. Gardiner 1961: 219.

[12] Stela K, lines 20-21 and Stela X lines 22-23. For the text see Murnane and Van Siclen 1993: 26. For a recent English translation of this section of the boundary stele see Murnane 1995: 78.

[13] For an examination of this more generally see Matthews and Roemer 2003, or for Greek ideas about Egypt as a land of wisdom and mystery, Assmann 2000.

[14] See Tait 2003: 23; Hornung 2001: 25.

[15] *Histories* II.37.

[16] See Hornung's discussion of other writers ascribing the learning of famous Greeks to Egypt (2001: 22-23). See also Tait 2003: 33.

claims that the Greek divinities stemmed from Egypt.[17] This was often painted in terms familiar to the ancients from their knowledge of Hellenic mysteries *e.g.* Iamblichus mentions Pythagoras' initiation into the divine mysteries after a 22 year stay in Egypt.[18] The figure of Hermes (Trismegistus after the third century CE) is important in this context. The 42 books of learning ascribed to him by those such as Clement of Alexandria included much religious knowledge that was supposedly only for the priests, *"the guardians of Egyptian philosophy"*.[19] Ideas about the mystical and allegorical nature of the hieroglyphs, and the notion that they were used to conceal secret knowledge, have their origin in the writings of some Classical period authors, in particular Neo-Platonists such as Clement and Plotinus.[20] Lucian's staged discussion between Momos and Zeus, though critical, reflects the fact that others at the time saw Egyptian religion as of mystic significance and available only to initiates.[21] With the Renaissance's "revival" of Classical learning, and Neo-Platonism in particular, this material was used to depict the Egyptian priesthood as an ancient, all-wise, powerful group who were the holders of important and secret knowledge of mystic significance, available only to initiates.[22]

Such notions of Egyptian religion and the priesthood were important for the development of the "wicked priest" theory, and they survived into the seventeenth century and beyond.[23] Despite the importance afforded to the supposed writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, these notions lingered on after Casaubon's exposure of the corpus as a late forgery in 1614. Athanasius Kircher was important in securing this by continuing to treat the corpus as genuine. By this and his re-espousal of the theory that the hieroglyphs were symbols encoding past wisdom, he helped ensure that Egypt was again seen as the holders of secret, mystical religious wisdom, guarded by priests. The interest in Plotinus and Iamblichus during the Renaissance period in general was also an aid in this.[24] By Kircher's time, the depiction of Egyptian religion was already being used in debates between Protestants and

[17] *Library of History* I 9, 6.

[18] Cited in Hornung 2001: 22.

[19] Tait's paraphrase, 2003: 24.

[20] See Iversen 1961: ch. 2.

[21] Cited and discussed by Hornung 1982: 15.

[22] For a detailed examination of the picture of ancient Egypt during the Renaissance see Curran 2003.

[23] Whitehouse has argued that this influence is still felt: "Renaissance thought has been of lasting effect in providing much of the conceptual basis for the perception of Egypt in the West, its ideas surviving the radical transformation in knowledge brought about by the growth of Egyptology." (1995: 17).

[24] See Whitehouse 1995: 15.

Catholics,[25] and was connected to theories that the belief in one god could be coterminous with or predate that in the Old Testament.[26] Kircher argued that Egypt was the origin of true religious belief, which was passed down and inherited by the Catholic Church.[27] The idea that true religion began in Egypt and has been passed down to modern Christians is seen in Breasted's work. In contrast to Kircher's picture, the priests of Egypt do not play such a positive role in Breasted's work. This is partly due to the Protestant leanings of Breasted as we will explore later. To paint his picture of the priests, Breasted may have been able to draw on a picture created in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

After the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, the depiction of the Egyptian priesthood began to take on a more sinister character, while Renaissance notions continued on. The more sinister depiction of the priesthood finds its fullest development within the works of the eighteenth century deists such as Toland, though there are precursors as early as Conring (mid to late seventeenth century). This focus on a malevolent priesthood grew out of ideas about their holding of secret knowledge available only to initiates. In the seventeenth century it became common to contrast an esoteric monotheism only available to kings and initiated priests with a polytheism for the masses.[28] In Conring's work, anticipating the later deists, the priests are seen as corrupting religion for the masses by adding cult ceremonies, duping the people so as to control them more effectively.[29] Similarly Sprat argued that the priests concealed *"the true Philosophy of Nature"* from men *"in the dark Shadows of Hieroglyphicks"* as *"a sure way to beget a Reverence in the Peoples Hearts towards themselves (*i.e. *the priests)"*.[30] Fontenelle reflected this trend in his depiction of conniving priests manipulating oracles for political purposes.[31] Cudworth is unusual for the period in that he connects the priests' concealment of monotheism, via hieroglyphs (thus tricking the

[25] With Kircher a Catholic priest and Casaubon a Protestant. See Hornung 2001: 103; Grafton 1983.

[26] Kircher saw Hermes as a contemporary of Abraham while others followed Diodorus in having him as a contemporary of Moses.

[27] See Champion and Ucko 2003: 14. Compare Iversen's more nuanced depiction of Kircher's notions of universalism with regard to religion, with Egypt merely as the best pre-Christian manifestation of a "timeless emanation of divine truth" (1961: 94).

[28] Cudworth (see Hornung 2001: 103); Conring 1669 (see Hornung 2001: 98-99); Sprat 1667: 5 (see Haycock 2003: 137).

[29] Cited in Hornung 2001: 98.

[30] Sprat 1667: 5 as cited in Haycock 2003: 137.

[31] 1686. See the discussion of Assmann 1997: 214 and Manuel 1959: 47-53. Fontenelle's focus was on the Delphic oracle though he also mentioned Egypt. His theory has been applied by Egyptologists with regards to the accession of Thutmose III via the oracle of Amun, supposedly controlled by the priests of Amun. For an example of this argument see Breasted 1951: 284-285, 362 or Gardiner 1961: 181-182.

people) to the concept of a natural religion, common to all rather than secret esoteric knowledge.[32]

Within eighteenth century Deism, these theories were routinely popular. Manuel contrasts one branch (Condorcet and Trenchard) of Deism which argued that the priests knew about monotheism and allowed the masses to add polytheism and superstition in order to keep them ignorant and to gain power for themselves; another which saw the priests as having been duped themselves by politicians; and a more minor one in which the priests were seen as having become enveloped in the darkness they created.[33] With Toland, de Boulanvillier and Holbach, the picture of wicked, political, deceitful, conniving priests was firmly entrenched.[34] That this notion became widespread and popular is demonstrated in Terrason's use of this picture of the Egyptian priesthood in his novel *Sethos*.[35] Like Sprat, Montagu also argued that hieroglyphs were a tool of the priests used to *"make the common people imagine that some mystery was couched under them."*[36] Making clear the real object of attack here, Catholic priests, Haycock paraphrases Montagu as claiming that this use of hieroglyphs assured the Egyptian priests *"in their own positions of power, as only they could interpret them."*[37] Manuel, Assmann and others have correctly outlined the manner in which the work of the deists, including their treatment of Egypt, was constructed *"to speak about the present without risking persecution"*.[38] Assmann phrases it well when he claims that within these works: *"The model of the treacherous Egyptian priests was meant to act as a mirror of contemporary clerical institutions."*[39] The Reformation, Counter-reformation, religious wars and the involvement of clerics in politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries clearly helped set the conditions in which these views were articulated.[40] These events fulfilled a similar function with regard to the Enlightenment more generally, with its aversion towards organised religion and any form of superstition. Within the writings of the Enlightenment, the veiled attacks of the deists, using critiques of "barbarian pagan religion" to critique Christianity more generally, gave way to openly hostile criticisms of religion in general and an espousal of secularism. In this

[32] See Assmann 1997: 80-84.

[33] Manuel 1959: 68-69.

[34] See Manuel 1959: 192, 230.

[35] 1731. See the discussion of Montserrat 2000: 53.

[36] Montagu 1799: 419 as cited in Haycock 2003: 149.

[37] Haycock 2003: 149.

[38] Assmann 1997: 215.

[39] Assmann 1997: 215.

[40] See Gascoigne's similar position, 1991: 195.

context, Wengrow has argued that one result of the French Revolution was that the portrayal of Egypt was transformed from that of a source of high culture and wisdom to a part of a generalised Oriental sphere, associated with what France was no longer *i.e.* a hierocratic order based on sacred kingship.[41] This reinforced the notion of wicked deceitful priests, challenged the concept that they were holders of important religious knowledge, and paved the way for more racial interpretations of Egyptian religion. This will be explored later when we treat the impact of the rediscovery of Egypt.

Criticism of established religion was not the only motive for this negative portrayal of the Egyptian priesthood in this era. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries debate centred on whether similarities between Christianity and other forms of religion, such as that in Egypt, revealed the truth of the revelations within Christianity or demonstrated that such revelation was not necessary. Renaissance writers and later followers of Hermetism or mysticism believed that *"all knowledge is obtained through revelation and not reason."*[42] Deists argued otherwise, focusing on the corrupting nature of religions claiming specific revelations, and building on Cudworth's concept of a natural religion, common to all.[43] Those such as Newton, Stukeley, Shuckland and others involved with Freemasonry continued to argue that some hidden knowledge had been passed down via the Egyptian priesthood.[44] Within this train of thinking, however, Newton also argued that corrupt Egyptian priests had distorted this original Noachic moral philosophy via star worship and hieroglyphs.[45] Warburton repeated the argument about duality within Egyptian religion, with an official polytheism designed to create political order and a secret monotheism in an attempt to contrast this to Christianity and defend its outward, institutional forms which he argued were consistent with the true beliefs of the religion.[46] Haycock has pointed out that Warburton's arguments were appropriated by deists *"who denied the truth of any one religious doctrine."*[47] Newton's work had deistic elements in his focus on natural/general rather than special revelation or providence, with true knowledge and ethical teaching established well before Christ or the Prophets.[48] The Classical

[41] Wengrow 2003: 179-185.

[42] Hornung 2001: 52.

[43] See Assmann 1997: 80-82. Cudworth claimed that what was common to all religions was what was true.

[44] See Haycock 2003: 138-139.

[45] Haycock 2003: 141; Gascoigne 1991: 192-194.

[46] See the discussion of Assmann 1997: 96-105.

[47] Haycock 2003: 159.

[48] See the discussion of Gascoigne 1991: 184-187.

and Renaissance notion of secret esoteric wisdom passed on by the priests survived this period and grew again in popularity during the Romantic era.

The Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw many of the Renaissance notions of the priesthood and Egyptian religion resurface, as well as a focus on nature religion. This said there was diversity within depictions. Romanticism's notion of the original as the ideal leant itself to depictions of Egypt as originally monotheistic with polytheistic corruptions coming later. We have already seen how Newton's theory was quite similar. Freemasonry developed within this mould also. Dupuis had argued for just such an approach in 1795, contrasting a true and pure religion based on sun-worship which was debased by *"a corrupt, state-organised religion which deliberately set out to deceive a whole people through a tyrannical bargain between the priesthood and the monarchy."*[49] This focus on an originally pure, universal nature religion grew in popularity during the early nineteenth century and has had an influence down to our day.[50] This tended to reverse the negative picture of the priesthood set up within deistic and Enlightenment works and revived their positive role as in the Renaissance. Given Romanticism's *raison d'être* as a reaction to the Enlightenment this makes perfect sense. Gascoigne has also connected this wane in writing "to undercut the power of priestcraft" with the rise of the Whigs in England.[51] Though some Romanticist works explored the dark side of Egypt, sometimes including pictures of wicked priests,[52] in general the focus was on the role of Egypt in the rise of monotheism or, increasingly, pantheism.[53] This universal, somewhat pantheistic nature religion, focusing on the worship of the sun makes its reappearance in Breasted's work on Akhenaten. In his depiction, however, the wicked priests work against such a religion while Akhenaten tries to promote it. Breasted thus mixed elements of the portrayal of Egyptian religion and the priesthood under Deism and Romanticism.

The rediscovery of ancient Egypt under Napoleon, and particularly the decipherment of hieroglyphs also had an impact upon the way Egyptian religion and its priests were portrayed. In general, religion became less of a focus for Egyptology, though such studies still centred on comparison to the Old Testament and old ideas continued on. Towards the end of the nineteenth

[49] Montserrat's paraphrase 2000: 126. His work was quite popular during the Romantic era.

[50] For a more detailed discussion of Romanticist approaches to ancient Egypt see Hornung 2001: ch. 15; Assmann 1997: 125-143

[51] Gascoigne 1991: 203. The argument is that with the decline in the power of the Catholic Church, a criticism of "priesthood" was less necessary.

[52] e.g. Desprez as discussed by Hornung 2001: 137.

[53] See Assmann's discussion of the notion of *hen kai pan*, 1997: 139-143.

and the beginning of the twentieth century, race and politics became more central in studies of Egyptian religion. As mentioned earlier, the French Revolution had helped push Egypt from its place as the origin of western civilisation to a more negative "oriental" sphere. Champion has argued that western contact with Egypt had the same effect, as did the rise of linguistics and a focus on ethnology.[54] He also argues that the rise of geological sciences and the theory of evolution made Egypt's antiquity seem less impressive and that Egyptology became much more specialised and did not attempt to answer broad questions tied to science, religion, philosophy and origins as often as those writing about Egypt previously had.[55] Many of those writing, however, had cut their teeth in classical or biblical studies and thus brought with them a great number of presuppositions and, for the biblical scholars, a tendency to focus on how Egypt related to the Old Testament.[56]

During the nineteenth century many variant pictures of Egyptian religion and their priesthood arise. Within Champollion's own work one finds references to powerful priests in some sort of competition with royalty as well as the repetition of mystical notions about Hermes and the ineffable god.[57] The notion of duality within Egyptian religion (a public polytheism for the masses and a monotheism/pantheism for the priests) reappeared in many works,[58] and was criticised by others.[59] Hornung has pointed out that the idea of early monotheism in Egypt was dealt a serious blow by the discovery of Early Dynastic period material and the Pyramid texts which clearly showed Egypt to be polytheistic at this early stage of her history.[60] In the works treating Egyptian duality, some portrayed the priests negatively, as deceitful power mongers[61] while others focused on their role transmitting important knowledge[62] or combined such notions[63]. By the time of the rediscovery of

[54] Champion 2003: 161-163. For the latter see the works of S. G. Morton in the bibliography of Ucko and Champion 2003: 203.

[55] See the comments of Gascoigne 1991: 206.

[56] See the discussion of Jeffreys 2003: introduction.

[57] See Champollion 1971: 47-48, 64-66.

[58] See Wilkinson 1841: 171-170; 1878: 158-9, 174-178; Rawlinson 1890: 38-39; de Rougé, Creuzer and Mariette, see Koch 1989: 38-39.

[59] e.g. Renouf who argued that polytheistic and monotheistic elements worked together consciously as part of Egyptian pantheism, 1884: 217. See Hornung 1982: 18-21 for detailed discussion of the various positions formulated.

[60] Hornung 1982: 23-24.

[61] e.g. Wilkinson 1878: 174, 177, 471 even though he argues that such duping was necessary for social order.

[62] de Rougé 1869 and others. See Hornung 1982: 18-21.

[63] As seen in Wilkinson's works.

Amarna, there were a number of versions of Egypt's religious past and the role of her priesthood to draw upon. The next section will explore the depictions of Amarna and the Amun priesthood in this context.

Depictions of Amarna

The rediscovery of Amarna in the nineteenth century occurred amidst this mix of ideas about Egyptian religion and priests. Some of the elements of Breasted's wicked priest theory find precedents in this literature. Lepsius' drawings of the inscriptions and reliefs at Amarna in 1845 led him to note Akhenaten's opposition to the worship of Amun. Like many others, he speculated that this strange religion of Akhenaten's was due to foreign influence from Nubia or Western Asia.[64] Rather than conniving priests with political power, however, Lepsius repeats notions about learned priests protecting Egyptian wisdom, even connecting this with Hermetism.[65] He saw opposition to Akhenaten's reforms coming from the national hierarchy while Brugsch saw it as originating within the people and the priesthood, with them driving Akhenaten from Thebes.[66] Osburn referred to "Amonian fanatics" destroying Akhenaten's buildings in Karnak[67] and Amarna,[68] and erasing his name and that of his successors,[69] with Thebes being placed back in ascendancy after Tutankhamun's death.[70] Maspero depicted the rising wealth and power of the Amun priesthood just prior to Akhenaten's rule.[71] Rawlinson argued that Akhenaten changed his capital due to the pollution of Thebes with polytheism and the worship of Amun.[72] In his picture, Thebes was seen to be in opposition to Akhenaten's reforms.[73] Brugsch and Maspero similarly saw Akhenaten as

[64] See the discussion of Hornung 1999: 3-4. Compare the racial explanation of Brugsch 1859, connecting the religious reforms to Tiy's foreign nationality. This theory is repeated by Rawlinson 1890: 223. Osburn connects it to a new sect of religionists from Africa, 1854: 326-327.

[65] Lepsius 1853: 380-400.

[66] See Hornung 1999: 7-8.

[67] Osburn 1854: 334.

[68] Osburn 1854: 336.

[69] Osburn 1854: 337.

[70] Osburn 1854: 345.

[71] Maspero 1891: 60, 66. Though none seem to connect this rise with Hatshepsut or Thutmose III in the way Breasted does. For a brief survey see Wilkinson 1841: 38ff; Sharpe 1846: 28-29; Rawlinson 1890: 170-207; Osburn 1854: 248. Though the latter does mention the zeal of Thutmose III for Amun, he does not explicitly link this to a rise in political power for his priesthood.

[72] Rawlinson 1890: 227.

[73] Explicitly stated by Rawlinson 1890: 229-230.

subject to a curse from the Theban priests.[74] Brugsch,[75] Osburn,[76] Rawlinson[77] and Petrie[78] all praised the religious reforms of Akhenaten, with some of them contrasting this to the religion of Amun. The ideals of nature worship focused on the sun, monotheism and an ethical focus make up part of this picture in the works. Notions of a conflict, both religious and political, between the Amun priesthood and Akhenaten clearly predate the work of Breasted. This picture was not held by all before Breasted, however. Petrie anticipates much of Breasted's portrayal of Akhenaten's religious reforms[79] but on this matter merely noted a swing in the period between devotion to Aten or Amun with no reference to conniving priests.[80] Renouf argued that Akhenaten's religion was nothing other than "ordinary Egyptian orthodoxy" with its pantheistic mixture of monotheistic and polytheistic elements.[81] With Erman, Breasted and Weigall we reach both the high point of popular interest in Amarna, and the formation of the popular image of he and his period, in particular, the Amun priesthood.

The portrayals of Erman, Breasted and Weigall drew on a long history of negative depictions of the Egyptian priesthood as well as notions of a conflict between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood which had begun to appear in scholarship just prior to their own works. Their depictions are reflected in many later Amarna studies.[82] For all three of these scholars the reign of Akhenaten was seen as the religious highpoint of Egyptian history. Each of them portrayed Akhenaten's religion in a deistic fashion and each portrayed Akhenaten as being engaged in a pitched battle with the Amun priesthood. In 1904 Erman argued that Akhenaten's faith resembled that of the modern era.[83] Akhenaten's religion is depicted as before his time, universal rather

[74] Supposedly fulfilled in Akhenaten's castration in Amenhotep III's Nubian campaign. See Hornung 1999: 9.

[75] See Hornung 1999: 8.

[76] Osburn 1854: 333 where he describes the moral improvement as due to greater theological truths.

[77] Rawlinson 1890: 224, where he describes this sun-disk worship as the most natural form of nature worship and p. 226 where he speculates that perhaps Joseph's descendants had taught the disk worshippers monotheism. An interesting argument given the more popular theory that Akhenaten taught monotheism to Moses.

[78] See discussion of Hornung 1999: 12.

[79] See Aldred's description 1988: 110-112; Petrie emphasised the life-giving energy of the suns rays, the replacing of tradition and the supernatural with the scientific and realistic with an emphasis on truth, the higher ethical ideals of Akhenaten as displayed in his family life on the reliefs, etc.

[80] Petrie 1904: 227-246.

[81] Renouf 1884: 230.

[82] And studies of the eighteenth dynasty more generally, especially concerning the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.

[83] Erman 1907: 67: "This new faith resembles our own so closely, that we feel our sympathies unconsciously drawn to its courageous founder."

than national, ethical rather than cultic or superstitious.[84] That Erman's picture drew on the same assumptions, if not the works, of the earlier deists is quite clear. His picture of Akhenaten's religion fits the ideals of Deism as opposed to institutionalised religion and its functionaries, the priests. Erman contrasts Akhenaten's *"deism of his day"*[85] with the opposition from the Amun priesthood,[86] whom he portrays as being politically powerful.[87] The end of Akhenaten's reign is portrayed as a victory for the followers of Amun.[88] As Breasted was a student of Erman's in Berlin it is not surprising that all of these elements are found in his works also.[89]

Montserrat's analysis of Breasted's depiction of Akhenaten focuses on the influence of his Protestant background.[90] Breasted originally studied at Chicago Theological Seminary and his anti-catholic stance is clear throughout his works. His negative depiction of the Amun priesthood draws on a number of anti-papal criticisms. He refers to the high priest of Amun as "the first *pontifex maximus*", and to the Amun priesthood as a "papacy" and as "sacerdotal".[91] He contrasts Akhenaten's religion with *"traditional theology"*.[92] Making the reader recall the indulgences of Martin Luther's day, Breasted refers to "mechanical magical agencies for insuring justification" being repelled by Akhenaten.[93] There are other indications of his Seminary learning in his repeated connection between Akhenaten's religion and that of the Hebrew psalms and prophets.[94] His description of the iconography of Atenism[95] as well as the purpose of Akhenaten's new capital,[96] makes Akhenaten and his religion appear evangelistic in missionary zeal. Breasted's claim that the craftsmen would have hated Akhenaten because they could no longer sell amulets in the temple gateway[97] was drawn from the description of the Ephesian craftsmen

[84] Erman 1907: 65-67.

[85] Erman 1907: 67.

[86] Erman 1907: 63-64.

[87] e.g. Erman 1907: 71: "the high priests of Amon were men of almost royal rank."

[88] Erman 1907: 69-71.

[89] For a discussion of both Erman and Breasted's approaches to Egyptian religion see Koch 1989: 45-52.

[90] Montserrat 2000: 98-103.

[91] Breasted 1972 [1912]: 319.

[92] Breasted 1972 [1912]: 321.

[93] Breasted 1972: 339.

[94] e.g. Breasted 1972: 334, 343.

[95] Breasted 1972: 320 where the sun disk is praised as being universally intelligible as opposed to traditional Egyptian iconography.

[96] Breasted 1972: 322: "intended as a centre for the dissemination of Solar monotheism."

[97] Breasted 1972: 341.

in Acts 19 after Paul teaches against Artemis rather than from Egyptian evidence of such opposition.[98] While Breasted's anti-catholicism and his biblical training clearly impacted upon his picture of Akhenaten, he was not a defender of conservative Protestant Christianity. Breasted's depiction of the substance of Akhenaten's religion makes it clear that he has a form of Deism in mind. As with Erman, Breasted portrays Akhenaten's religion as universal rather than parochial,[99] as a nature religion,[100] focused on worship of the sun, as ethical in contrast to sacerdotal and traditional. Akhenaten's religion *"anticipates much of the later development in religion even down to our own time"*[101] for Breasted. As with some before him, and many after, Breasted combines Romanticist notions of nature and light[102] with deistic assumptions about the importance of general (or natural) rather than special revelation. As opposed to the religion around Amun, "the hidden one", Akhenaten's religion is depicted as coming from "the present and visible evidences of his god's dominion, evidences open to all".[103] It is a *"discernment of the presence of God in nature, and an appreciation of the revelation of God in the visible world"*.[104] That what is envisaged is deistic nature worship is further exemplified in Breasted's declaration that *"it is a gospel of the beauty and beneficence of the natural order"*.[105] Breasted's depiction of Akhenaten is perhaps due more to his somewhat secular liberal humanism, the impact of higher criticism and his own experience of doubting Christianity. Kuklick's account of Breasted emphasises the impact of Dewey's progressivist thought upon him. He portrays this influence, along with higher criticism, leading Breasted to replace theology with humanism, Christian with Western civilisation as end points on the path of progress.[106] For Breasted, Akhenaten was an important step on this path. The form of religion praised by Breasted, as well as the development of religion he followed, owed much to higher criticism. The notion of the development of religion from a parochial or nationalistic and harsh god, originally connected to a local cult (J or E) towards the high point of "ethical monotheism" (D), which is then corrupted by a priestly cohort (P) is reflected somewhat in Breasted's account of Egyptian religious history.

[98] One could imagine Breasted's Amonite followers crying out: "Great is Amun of the Thebans!"

[99] Breasted 1972: 331-332.

[100] e.g. Breasted 1972: 334-336.

[101] Breasted 1972: 334.

[102] See for example Breasted 1972: 334 where he links Atenism to Wordsworth.

[103] Breasted 1972: 339.

[104] Breasted 1972: 334.

[105] Breasted 1972: 335.

[106] Kuklick 1996: 122, 185.

The ideal of "ethical monotheism" is also shared, reflecting much of deistic thought. Breasted's Akhenaten and his battle with the Amun priesthood are reflective of the impact of higher criticism, secular liberal humanism, Deism, Romanticism and his Protestant background. In a more general sense they also reflect the notion that Egypt is a source of wisdom, which Breasted uses as part of a racial history which takes the Jews out of a central role within the development of religion. Breasted's depiction also reflects his early twentieth century context with history's focus on the political.

Breasted's picture of Akhenaten's rule, and of Egyptian religion and priesthoods has been perhaps the most influential due to both his esteemed position and the popular nature of many of his works. It is his work more than any other that has ensured that the notion of a wicked, scheming priesthood has been incorporated into Egyptian history. Not long after Breasted's *History of Egypt* (1905), Arthur Weigall produced the first biography of Akhenaten, crediting Breasted's work as a source of information in the opening pages.[107] Weigall's picture is very reminiscent of Breasted's and its own popularity helped to spread the picture of Akhenaten that Breasted had created. As Montserrat has argued, Weigall, also had ties to Protestantism, and, like Breasted, "his own religious beliefs were inclusive, almost deistic."[108] Weigall was certainly more inclusive than Breasted, but the similarity in approach led to a similar picture being painted. The picture of a conniving priesthood in ancient Egypt, and in particular that of Amun during the reign of Akhenaten, was subsequently repeated in numerous works. Kees translated Weigall's work and repeats the priestly conspiracy theories in his own analysis of Egyptian religion.[109] Baikie does likewise, following Weigall and Breasted.[110] Another influential Egyptologist, following in the footsteps of Breasted with hugely popular works was Sir Alan Gardiner. His *Egypt of the Pharaohs,* dedicated to the memory of Breasted, very much builds on the notion of a scheming priesthood and has kept this theory alive and well.[111] While every element of Breasted's description of Akhenaten's reign has not been taken over wholesale, with many having been criticised, the general picture of a conflict with the Amun priesthood has remained in many works.[112]

[107] Weigall 1922: 2-3.

[108] Montserrat 2000: 103. See citation from Weigall's letter on that page also.

[109] Kees 1953.

[110] 1926 e.g. see pp. 173-175 where he describes the opposition of the Amun priesthood to Akhenaten.

[111] See especially his description of the reigns of Thutmose III, Hatshepsut and Akhenaten.

[112] See especially Reeves 2005.

Questioning Assumptions and New Suggestions

The creation of the "wicked priest" theory and its application to Amarna is not based on any firm evidence and reflects the historical, religious, political and personal contexts of the scholars who have put it forward. As Montserrat claims for pictures of Akhenaten in general: "one thing which underpins many of them is the desire to find an antecedent for oneself or one's beliefs in ancient Egypt."[113] This was certainly the case with the depictions of Erman, Breasted and Weigall, contrasting a deistic Akhenaten with wicked sacerdotal priests. Though absence of evidence does not necessarily equal evidence of absence, it does raise the possibility of non-existence. The only evidence supporting the "wicked priest" theory at Amarna is open to varying interpretation and is quite circumstantial. There is some evidence which can be used to question the picture created and other interpretations are possible.

The documentary evidence used to support the "wicked priest" theory at Amarna consists of one broken passage of a Boundary Stele. In addition to this, the circumstantial evidence of Akhenaten's change of capital and religion, the hacking out of Amun's name by Akhenaten as well as the treatment of Akhenaten's name and memory after his rule have also been used to bolster this picture. Within such a portrayal, Akhenaten's change of capital is designed to escape or to break the power of the Amun priesthood.[114] Some have also portrayed his religious changes as stemming from the same motives,[115] though Breasted thinks the motivation was truly religious.[116] Many have described the hacking out of Amun's name in a manner that implies that this was carried out as part of an attack by Akhenaten on the priesthood of this god.[117] Most of the scholars who paint such a picture see the hacking out of Akhenaten's name as a response in kind by the Amun priesthood.[118] Though these interpretations are possible, they are not supported by evidence and are based on modern assumptions about the relationship between the state and religion[119] as well as negative stereotypes of priesthoods, especially those of ancient Egypt. There is evidence which can be used to question the notion of a battle between the Amun priesthood and Akhenaten, as there are different ways of interpreting

[113] Montserrat 2000: 2-3.

[114] Reeves 2005: 104. Weigall 1922: 79.

[115] Giles 2001: 12; Cannuyer 1985.

[116] Breasted 1972: 334.

[117] Gardiner 1961: 228; Breasted 1951: 363.

[118] Breasted 1972: 343.

[119] As Montserrat agrees: "They also subtly superimpose western ways of thinking about monarchy, art and religion onto a world where their meanings and ideological underpinnings were very different" (2000: 12).

the changes of the Amarna period, the hacking out of names and the reaction to Akhenaten's rule.

Some of the arguments against the notion of "wicked priests" conniving against the throne in ancient Egypt, and a battle between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood in particular, stem from a more general understanding of the role of the priesthood and religion and their relationship to kingship in ancient Egypt. Those depictions containing a conflict between priesthood and king tend to paint a picture of a priesthood who are fairly independent of the royal household, whose power is based on either their wealth and land holdings[120] or the prominence of their god's city.[121] Such a picture ignores the dependence of the priesthood upon the royal household and the king in particular. Though there is an element of heredity within priestly office, each and every priest in ancient Egypt is considered to be royally appointed. Rather than being independently wealthy, there is good reason to believe that the priesthoods were administrators of pharaonic wealth which was still at royal disposal. Given the official nature of the religion the Egyptian priesthood were involved in it is unlikely that it had any large scale popular following; though the evidence available from Egypt leaves us unable to judge this effectively. The idea that religion and politics were two separate spheres in ancient Egypt, particularly with regard to official religion connected to the kingship and the royal household, is based on assumptions created in the post-Enlightenment western world rather than an understanding of the nature of Egyptian religion and kingship.[122] Less importantly, the notion that the power of a particular god is connected to the power of its home city has never had any firm basis in Egyptology despite its long popularity. There are numerous prominent gods, Amun included, for whom we do not know their home city. It is quite possible that Amun was chosen to be part of the official Egyptian religion due to his quite unknown, and thus malleable, status. The last point, in this more general regard, is that the nature of the thought surrounding Egyptian kingship would make political opposition during a king's lifetime quite difficult. Within a highly centralised system portraying the king as divine, and Egyptian mores and practices as unchanging, it would be difficult to rise up against a current king and replace him. If it caught on that the king was quite fallible and so easily done away with the whole system of thought surrounding the institution

[120] Breasted 1972: 319; Weigall 1922: 79; Giles 2001: 7; Redford 1984: 158.

[121] Breasted 1972: 318; Giles 2001: 5.

[122] That the two go hand in hand in ancient Egypt does not necessarily rule out the notion that some took the official religion seriously, nor, given the official nature of the religion we tend to have evidence for, that there was not a widespread, more genuine or popular set (or sets) of religious beliefs in ancient Egypt.

of kingship would be open to question. Within such a system where kings did not openly deride their predecessors, it would be impossible to justify any such coup. The only evidence we do have from Egypt of attempts at such a coup, is to do with the harem conspiracy during the reign of Ramesses III.[123]

This understanding of ancient Egypt obviously does not sit well with the "wicked priest" theory or its application at Amarna. There is some more specific evidence which questions it also, though the significance of much of it differs depending on one's theory with regard to the question of co-regencies during Akhenaten's reign. One of the arguments which has been put forward for the idea that Akhenaten was trying to break the power of the old priestly bureaucracy focuses on the change in personnel from Amenhotep III's reign from Thebes to Akhenaten's at Amarna. This argument has been accounted for by Aldred who has pointed out that, what evidence we have supports the belief that Akhenaten's "new officials" were the sons of his father's officials, and that it would have been difficult for Akhenaten to locate the number of literate and capable administrators he needed from any other body of people.[124] He also pointed out that these officials' claims to have been advanced by the king are merely conventional acknowledgements of the fact that the king appointed them.[125] Given Amenhotep III's long reign, it should be unsurprising that there is only really evidence for the existence of officials who served under him turning up under Akhenaten during the early Theban period of his rule, some as functionaries of the Aten.[126] The fact that many of Akhenaten's officials turn up during the reigns of his successors also questions the idea that the Amarna aftermath consisted of a reaction by the Amun priesthood, and a regathering of their power over the royal household.[127] Material from early in Akhenaten's reign and late in the reign of Amenhotep III shows the co-existence of the Amun and Aten cults, and the control of each by the king. For example, a Ramose was Steward of the Mansion of the Aten while his wife was chantress of Amun,[128] and another Ramose includes references to both Amun and the

[123] The Instruction of Amenemose depicts the assassination of the pharaoh, though the message of the text seems to be that all is well as the rightful heir, Sesostris, is on the throne and will rule wisely.

[124] Aldred 1968: 259. Though see Leprohon 1985: 95 for a different interpretation based on Tutankhamun' Restoration Stela.

[125] Aldred 1968: 259.

[126] For some such evidence see the tomb inscriptions of Ramose and Aper-el in Helck 1955-58: text 634, pp. 1776, 1778, 1780-83, 1788-89 and Zivie 1990: 151-166. Translations in Murnane 1995, section 2, texts 32-A-F (Ramose) and 26-A (Aper-el).

[127] See Aldred 1988: 248 regarding those who turn up after Akhenaten. The notion that the Amun priesthood were regathering power after Akhenaten is clearly argued by Breasted 1951: 393-401.

[128] Helck 1955-58: text 753, p. 1995. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 31.

Aten in his tomb,[129] as does Kheruef.[130] A text from Wadi Hammamat from the fourth year of Akhenaten's rule shows the continued existence of a high priest of Amun, who takes his orders from Akhenaten.[131] Of course, this material dates to the period before Akhenaten moved his capital and began hacking out the name of Amun and thus very little reaction would be expected from the Amun priesthood. However, as circumstantial evidence, it fits a picture where the king is in control of the official religion, including both the cult of Amun and Aten. At the least it can be used to question Giles' notion that the Aten cult was designed to limit the power of the Amun priesthood from its inception.[132] The fact that Akhenaten's successors continued to refer to Aten in their texts as well as Amun could also be used to question the idea that there was some conflict between Akhenaten's Atenism and the worship of Amun.[133] That Amenhotep III simultaneously promoted Aten while pouring wealth into the Amun administration and building numerous edifices dedicated to Amun raises similar problems. Even more so if one accepts the arguments for a long co-regency for Amenhotep and his son.[134]

Given the nature of the evidence available for the Amarna period it is not possible to disprove the application of the "wicked priest" theory there. What we will do, however, is to set out some of the other possible interpretations regarding those areas in which this theory has had an influence in Amarna studies, namely: Akhenaten's change of religion and capital; the hacking out of names during the period; and reactions to Akhenaten's rule. To some extent these are based on certain notions regarding Egyptian historiography and the portrayal of the pharaoh. We shall begin with Akhenaten's religious changes.

Above it was demonstrated that a number of historians have contrasted Akhenaten's lofty religion with traditional Egyptian religion, highlighting the superior nature of the former. Many other historians have not been so kind, using these changes to highlight his deranged state.[135] A number of studies have also

[129] Helck 1955-58: text 634, pp. 1776, 1778, 1780-83, 1788-89. Translation in Murnane 1995: texts 32-A-F.

[130] Epigraphic Survey 1980: 34-37, plates 12-15. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 30-B.

[131] Goyon 1957: texts 90 and 91, pp. 106-7, plates xxv and xxxi. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 35-A.

[132] Giles 2001: 12.

[133] e.g. in Tutankhamun's reign: Helck 1955-58: text 789, p. 2063. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 101-C where he is described as "son of Amun, child of Aten"; Ay: Schaden 1984: 53, fig. 31. Translation also in Murnane 1995: text 104-A, where Aten is back to being an aspect of the sun god; Horemheb: Martin 1989: 78-84, plate 191 and 94-97, plates 111-115. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 105-A; Helck 1955-58: text 804, pp. 2089-94. Translation in Murnane 1995: text 105-B.

[134] This writer does not mean to imply that he does. We will not venture into that quagmire here.

[135] e.g. Giles 1970: 92, 113 and Redford 1984: 232-234.

focused on the fact that much of the substance of Akhenaten's Atenism was in existence, or at least developing, before he came to the throne.[136] Some of this earlier development consisted of raising Re to a greater prominence, portraying him almost as a sole god.[137] Whereas earlier Re had been accompanied by other gods during his nightly underworld journey who aided him against his enemies, just previous to Akhenaten's reign, Re was depicted as travelling alone, with other aspects of the sun-god accompanying him such as the disk, or Aten. Along with this henotheistic focus on Re, went an increase in the status of the Pharaoh. It is not hard to see how Akhenaten's religious changes continued this development. Rather than stopping at henotheism, he moved to monotheism.[138] In contrast to Breasted's depiction of the religion as open and accessible to all, Akhenaten makes himself the sole access to the one god, taking on the role of sole high priest. Some have acknowledged this centralisation of power in the king during Akhenaten's reign and have seen in it an attempt to wrest power away from the Amun priesthood, and place it back in the hands of pharaoh.[139] This is unnecessary speculation for which there is no evidence. It is quite possible to read Akhenaten's changes without such conflict in the background. Some have done so, referring to Akhenaten as deranged or as a megalomaniac. Though there may be some argument for traces of the latter, given the paucity of the evidence available any speculation as to the cause for some derangement, whether based on psychological, physiological or medical arguments is baseless. There is overwhelming evidence demonstrating the concentration of power in the hands of Akhenaten within Atenism. There are also some good reasons to suspect that changes in the official religion of Egypt go hand in hand with political changes. However, we will follow Giles' advice where he failed to follow it himself and refrain from speculating as to the motivations behind Akhenaten's religious changes.[140] We merely wish to point out that whatever his motivation, and whether he truly believed in what he espoused or not, it is unnecessary to presuppose a violent (or any for that matter) conflict with the Amun priesthood in the background for our reconstruction of the religious changes that occurred during his rule.

Akhenaten's change of capital has similarly been put down to his conflict with the Amun priesthood, with many seeing Akhetaten as either a refuge

[136] See Assmann's seminal work, 1995. Giles, 1970, focused on these earlier developments, which very much fits his picture of Akhenaten as incompetent as opposed to the visionary of Breasted's works.

[137] See Assmann 1995: ch. 3.

[138] But see Krauss 2001.

[139] e.g. Reeves 2005: 104-111; Giles 2001: 12-13.

[140] Giles 1970: 29; 2001: 3.

from their scheming where he can hide away and focus on his religion,[141] or as a political move on his part, again, in an attempt to wrest power from the priesthood.[142] This imagined conflict need not impinge upon our notions regarding the causes behind Akhenaten's change of capital. Other motivations are possible, and Akhenaten does state his own motivations somewhat in his boundary stele.[143] Montserrat has raised the possibility that the move of capital, as well as being theological, also fulfils the traditional requirement of pharaohs to be seen as great builders.[144] In the boundary stele, Akhenaten states quite simply that he has chosen the site for the Aten, as directed by him.[145] Though we may not believe Akhenaten that the Aten actually directed him to the site, there is no real reason to question the idea that Akhetaten was built primarily for theological purposes, including piety towards the Aten.[146] Within the boundary stele there is an emphasis on being able to observe the Aten rising.[147] Aldred, among others, has observed that the site chosen has a band of cliffs to the east so that the rising sun would form *"a gigantic representation of the hieroglyph akhet, 'horizon"*.[148] Another emphasis within the boundary stele is that the site was previously unused, and not dedicated to any other gods.[149] Numerous historians have argued that part of the reason Akhenaten changed his capital was that he found "Thebes embarrassed by too many theological traditions."[150] The idea that Akhetaten was built so that Atenism was not confronted by surviving traces of other forms of worship has some merit. Throughout Egypt's long history, there is a tendency for official texts

[141] Hornung 1999: 63.

[142] Reeves 2005: 104-111.

[143] We have mentioned earlier that the broken section of the earlier boundary stele mentioning some form of opposition is too fragmentary to connect to any specific form of opposition, let alone to that of the Amun priesthood. Stela K, lines 20-21 and Stela X lines 22-23. For the text see Murnane and Van Siclen 1993: 26. For a recent English translation of this section of the boundary stele see Murnane 1995: 78. Aldred has argued that there was perhaps some opposition by officials to being buried at Akhetaten rather than in their previously allocated burial spots, possibly in Thebes or Memphis, (1988: 270).

[144] Montserrat 2000: 17.

[145] Stela K, columns xix-xxi; lines 2, 5. For the text see Murnane and Van Siclen 1993: 20-22. For a recent English translation see Murnane 1995: text 37, pp. 74-75.

[146] Whether it was also intended as an administrative centre is open to debate. For some of the arguments against this notion see Hornung 1999: ch. 5, though the presence of the diplomatic archive suggests otherwise.

[147] Stela K, line 3. For the text see Murnane and Van Siclen 1993: 21-22. For a recent English translation see Murnane 1995: text 37, p. 75.

[148] Aldred 1988: 269.

[149] Stela K, line 1. For the text see Murnane and Van Siclen 1993: 21. For a recent English translation see Murnane 1995: text 37, p. 75.

[150] Breasted 1972: 322.

to portray things as unchanging.[151] This may be connected to the conception of kingship in Egypt and the tendency to avoid open criticism of preceding practice. As mentioned earlier, to criticise a previous pharaoh would be to imply that he was not infallible, perhaps weakening the image any current or future pharaoh could project. Similarly, to have evidence that the official religion practised by pharaoh contrasted with that having been practised in the past would be problematic in Egypt. Moving the capital from Thebes helped to avoid such problems. Hacking out the name of Amun perhaps fulfilled a similar function, as the subsequent hacking out of Akhenaten's name may have.

The hacking out of the name of Amun by Akhenaten and the subsequent treatment of Akhenaten's name and reputation have been portrayed as part of his struggle with the Amun priesthood. On the face of it, it is the best evidence for the existence of such a conflict, for surely the Amun priesthood would react violently to the name of their god being hacked out. This is to assume several things which are unnecessary, perhaps incorrect: firstly, that the priests of Amun had a genuine belief in the religion surrounding that god or that their position of power was dependent on their connection to that god specifically; secondly, that this genuine belief or dependence created a sense of unity within this group; thirdly, that royal appointees such as these priests would be in a position to oppose pharaoh. Most of these assumptions are unlikely at best, and are certainly unproven. Given Egypt's approach to portraying official history, religion and kingship, it is quite possible that the hacking out of the name of Amun was, as Montserrat has suggested for the subsequent hacking out of Akhenaten's name: "partly intended to create an ideologically correct view of history".[152] Within a historiography which, apart from some brief moments surrounding the first intermediate period, does not admit of any military losses, things going wrong, weaknesses in pharaoh, mistakes by previous pharaohs, religious change, etc. this is quite a plausible argument. It may be that such a possibility is worth pursuing with regard to the treatment of another pharaoh whose inscriptions left evidence of tradition being swept aside; Hatshepsut. Some subsequent references to Akhenaten do seem to necessitate the existence of some animosity towards his rule[153] but there is

[151] This is an image many Egyptologists have accepted over the years.

[152] Montserrat 2000: 49.

[153] See the reference to "the enemy from Akhet-Aten" in the legal text in the Tomb-Chapel of Mose, S14, in Gaballa 1977, p. 25 and plates. For a more recent English translation see Murnane 1995: text 109. See also the reference to "the rebellion" or "the rebel", in Papyrus Inv. 3040 A, rev. line 7 in Gardiner 1937: 124. For a more recent English translation see Murnane 1995, text 110. Both texts are from the Ramesside period.

no reason to suppose that this originated from the Amun priesthood, or that it was in any way connected to them. Both Tutankhamun and Horemheb's protestations about repairing temples and re-instituting religious practices can be seen as traditional rhetoric coming at the beginning of a pharaoh's reign rather than as specific reference to or criticism of Akhenaten.[154] Though some veiled reference to past abuse is possible in both of these texts, it has been recognised by numerous scholars, even some who hold to the wicked priest theory to some extent, that the end of the Amarna period was not a victory for the Amun priesthood.[155] The religion followed after Amarna was a return to what Assmann has termed the "New Solar Theology" that came to prominence just before the period,[156] and the capital moved to Memphis, not Thebes. Amun's name was also not the only name hacked out by Akhenaten. Apart from this, the hacking out of Akhenaten's name probably dates to the nineteenth dynasty rather than to his immediate successors' reigns.[157] The treatment of his name, some possible veiled references to his rule in a negative tone and his excision from the king lists does not necessarily imply a popular reaction to his religious changes, nor the reaction of an embittered priesthood. To be frank, there is not enough evidence to know the grounds for these reactions. The erasure of his name and his excision from the king lists fit with our argument that this was part of Egypt's approach to the portrayal of official history and religion. The animosity felt towards Akhenaten in texts referring to his rule as "the time of the enemy of Akhet-Aten" or "the rebellion",[158] may be due to a dislike of the sweeping away of what had become traditional religious beliefs. It may also be due to the trouble caused by Akhenaten to those following him who wished to present a unilinear view of Egypt's history, including her religious history. It may owe its existence in part to the economic instability which followed his rule.[159] Whatever it was due to, it is highly unlikely that it was carried out at the behest of a disgruntled Amun priesthood, though of course, if this was the case, we would not expect it to turn up in the Egyptian official records.

[154] See Tutankhamun's restoration inscription, Helck 1955-58: text 772, pp. 2025-32 and Horemheb's edict, Kruchten 1981. Texts 99 and 108 respectively in Murnane 1995. For a differing interpretation of these texts see Leprohon 1985: 98-101.

[155] e.g. Giles 1970: 113.

[156] Assmann 1995.

[157] Giles 2001: 23. Though Horemheb did dismantle some of Akhenaten's building structures and re-use the materials. See Spencer 1989, as cited by Eaton-Krauss 2002: 98, fn. 34.

[158] See footnote 153.

[159] See Leprohon 1985: 96.

Conclusions

There is no solid evidence in Egypt's history, and certainly not during the Amarna period of any priestly conspiracy. The notion of Egyptian wicked priests and in particular, the Amun priesthood of the eighteenth dynasty, has developed from certain assumptions about Egyptian religion and her priesthood which have grown and changed since Classical times. The notion of Egyptian priests as the holders of secret wisdom grew in the Classical period and was revived during the Renaissance. After the religious wars arising out of the Reformation, a more sinister depiction of the Egyptian priesthood arose. While the increase of knowledge about ancient Egypt destroyed many pre-Napoleonic ideas about her and her religion, the notion of wicked scheming priests has continued on. Upon the discovery of Amarna and Akhenaten, the notion was applied to the history of this period. Under the influence of Erman, Breasted popularised a version of this application, depicting Akhenaten's lofty nature religion as designed to work against the traditional religion of Egypt and to destroy the power of the Amun priesthood. In differing versions, the concept of conflict between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood has been repeated *ad infinitum* despite the absence of any evidence for such conflict. There are good reasons to question the existence of such a conflict based on an understanding of Egypt's political and religious structure as well as her official historiography. It is quite possible to explain Akhenaten's religious changes, his move of capital, the hacking out of names surrounding the Amarna period, and the reaction to Akhenaten's rule more generally, without recourse to the theory of a conflict between Akhenaten and the Amun priesthood though the evidence for any particular theory is such as to make it somewhat tentative if not speculative.

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