

Week 3

Amarna and Religion

The Aten, the King and the
People

HPAH7022 - Religious Change and
Resilience: The case study of Amarna

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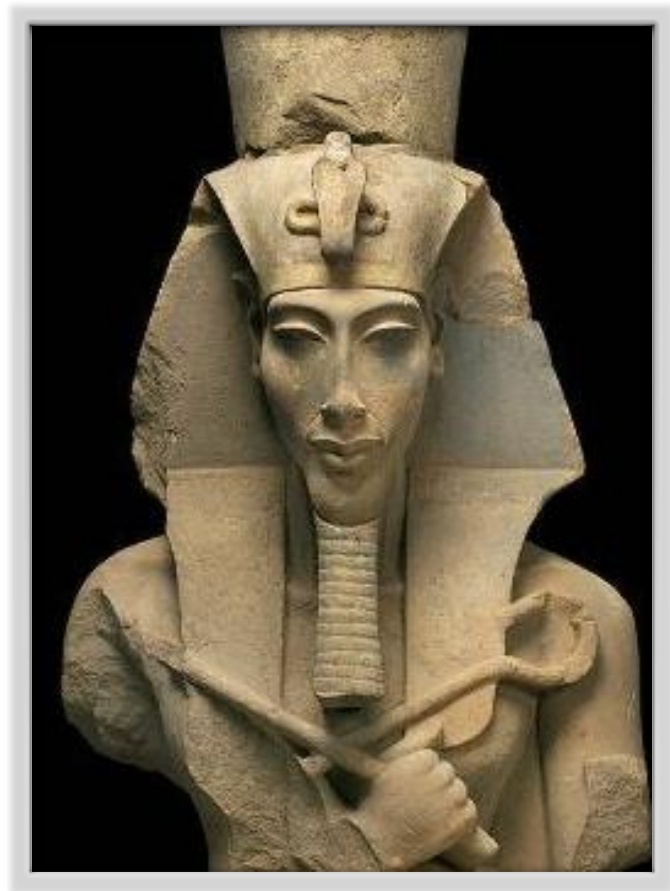
Atenism

The Religion of Akhenaten and the Aten



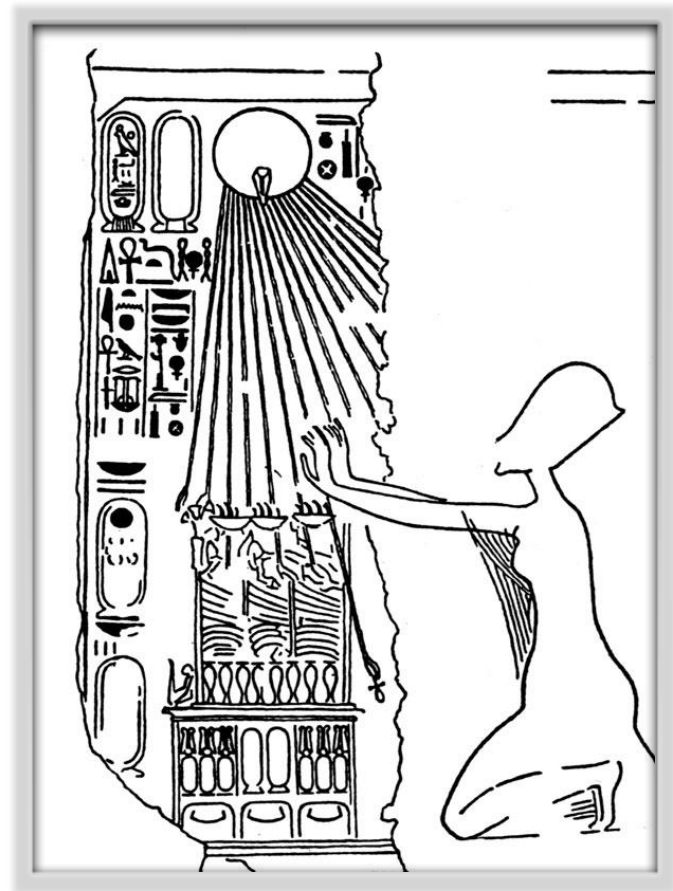
Atenism

- ❑ BEWARE:
- ❑ Understanding Akhenaten's view of the Aten is crucial for understanding the entire period
- ❑ Difficult to access due to a lack of sources
- ❑ Much speculation!



Primary sources for Atenism

- ❑ The chief sources are:
 - The Great Hymn to the Aten & related texts
 - The Boundary Stelae
 - Tomb reliefs & other art
 - Architecture [temples, palaces, tombs, etc.]



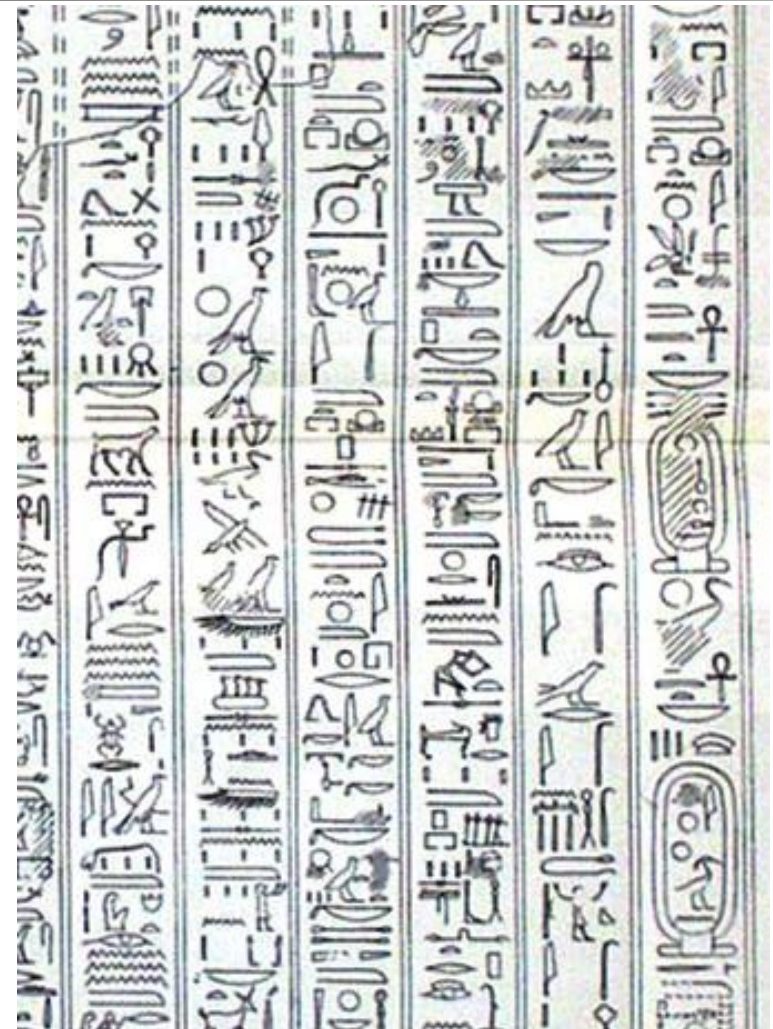
Origins of Atenism

- ❑ The Aten develops out of solar tradition, especially that of the sun god, Re (literally, “sun”)
- ❑ Particularly more evident when Re and the creator god, Atum, are synchronized with one another



The Great Hymn to the Aten

- ❑ The chief document concerning Atenism
- ❑ King “teaches” it to his “followers”
- ❑ Most complete example known from the tomb of Aye
- ❑ Victory Stela in Nubia



Names of the Aten

- “Didactic” name: “Living-one, Re-Harakhty, who rejoices in the horizon in his name of Shu [‘light’], who is the Aten”
 - “Akhet” = Horizon can refer to Akhet-aten AMARNA
- “Dogmatic” name: “Living-one, Re, ruler of the two horizons, who rejoices in the horizon in his name as Re, the father who returns as Aten”



King as “Shu”, holding up the Sun

Nature of the Aten

- ❑ “Father”
(Amenhotep III?)
- ❑ Solar disk and light [“shu”]
- ❑ No divine presence other than light
- ❑ Temples are open courts
- ❑ Myth discarded; replaced with theology of light



Nature of the Aten

- Universal rule/reign, incl. foreign:
 - ruler of all, including foreign lands
- All things are accessible, as indicated by its hands
- Genderless creator god, but disinterested
- Silent: no revelations
- Passive: no actions



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→ Already started by All (here All as Atum)

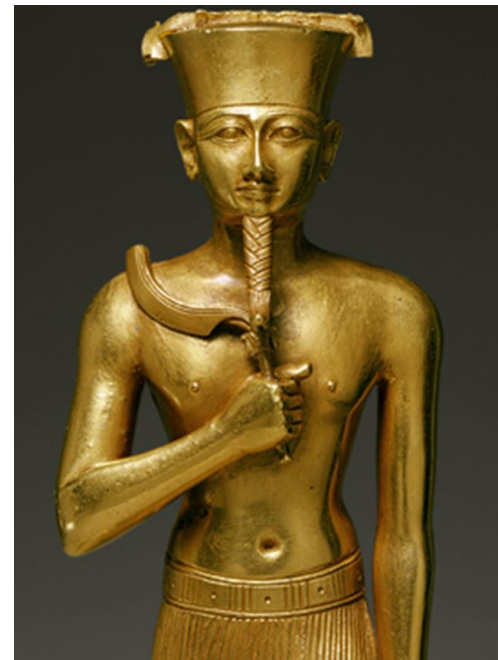
Contrasted with Amun

- ❑ Amun “accessible” through cult processions, etc.
- ❑ Amun speaks through oracles and texts; impossible at Amarna

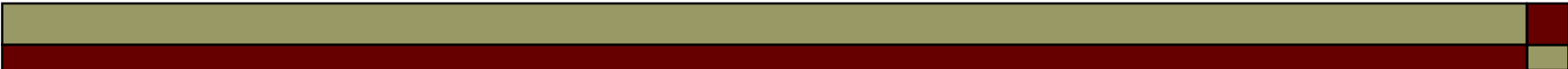


Contrasted with Amun

- ❑ Amun “accessible” through cult processions, etc.
- ❑ Amun speaks through oracles and texts; impossible at Amarna
- ❑ Cult of Amun is inherently political (“king of the gods”; imperial god, etc.)



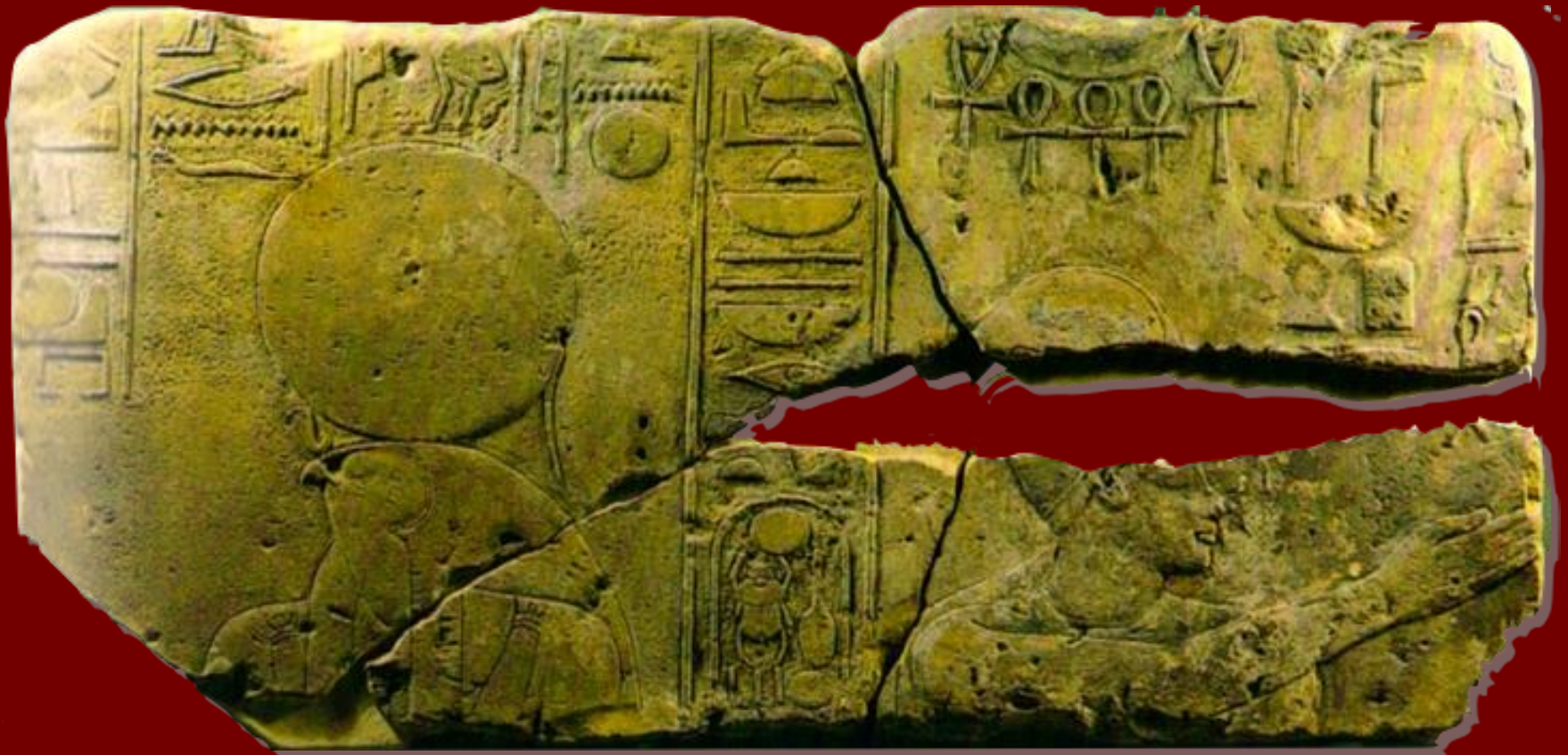
Theology



Monotheism? Definitions

- ❑ Henotheism: devotion to a single deity while accepting the existence—and worship—of others
- ❑ Monolatry: recognition of other deities, but only one is worthy of worship
- ❑ Monotheism: absolute belief in the existence of only one deity; all possibility of other deities is excluded
- ❑ Amarna period: change of emphasis over time

Monotheism?



Monotheism?

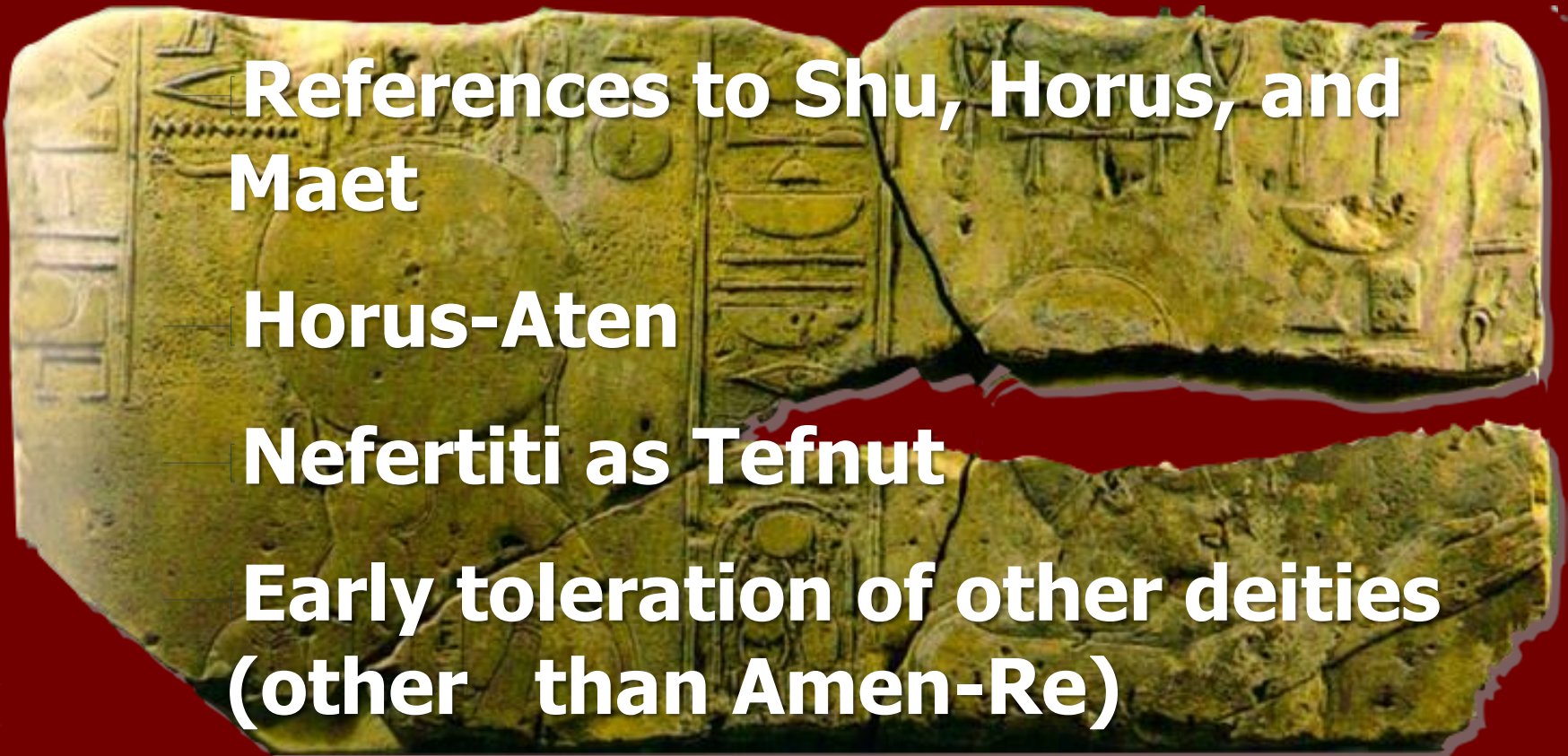
— **Aten as Re-Harakhty**

— **References to Shu, Horus, and Maet**

— **Horus-Aten**

— **Nefertiti as Tefnut**

— **Early toleration of other deities
(other than Amen-Re)**



Role of the King

- Akhenaten as the sole mediator



You are in my heart, there
is none other who knows
you beside your son,
Neferkheperura-sole-one-
of-Re [Akhenaten].
You instruct him in your
plans, in your strength.

Role of the King

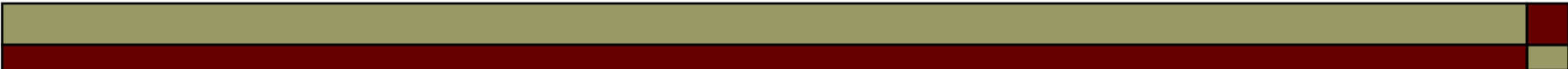
- ❑ Akhenaten as the sole mediator
- ❑ No other intermediary was conceivable
- ❑ Personal piety is expressed through loyalty to the king, not worship of gods



Hymns to the king

- Because only the king could act as an intermediary, for others, he essentially became a deity
- Officials record tomb inscriptions that are virtual hymns to the king





Hymns to the king

Praise to you, oh my
god, who made me,
who determined
good for me,
who made me come
into being and gave
me bread,
who cared for me
with his ka!

I give praise to the
heights of the
heavens,
I adore the Lord of
the Two Lands,
Akhenaten,
God of fate, giver of
life, lord of command,
light of every land
on whose gaze one
lives

The role of Nefertiti

- Actively involved in the cult



The role of Nefertiti

- Actively involved in the cult
- Formed a divine triad with Akhenaten & the Aten
- Atum as creator god [Amenhotep III?], Shu (air, light), Tefnut (daughter of sun god)
- Amun, Mut, Khonsu



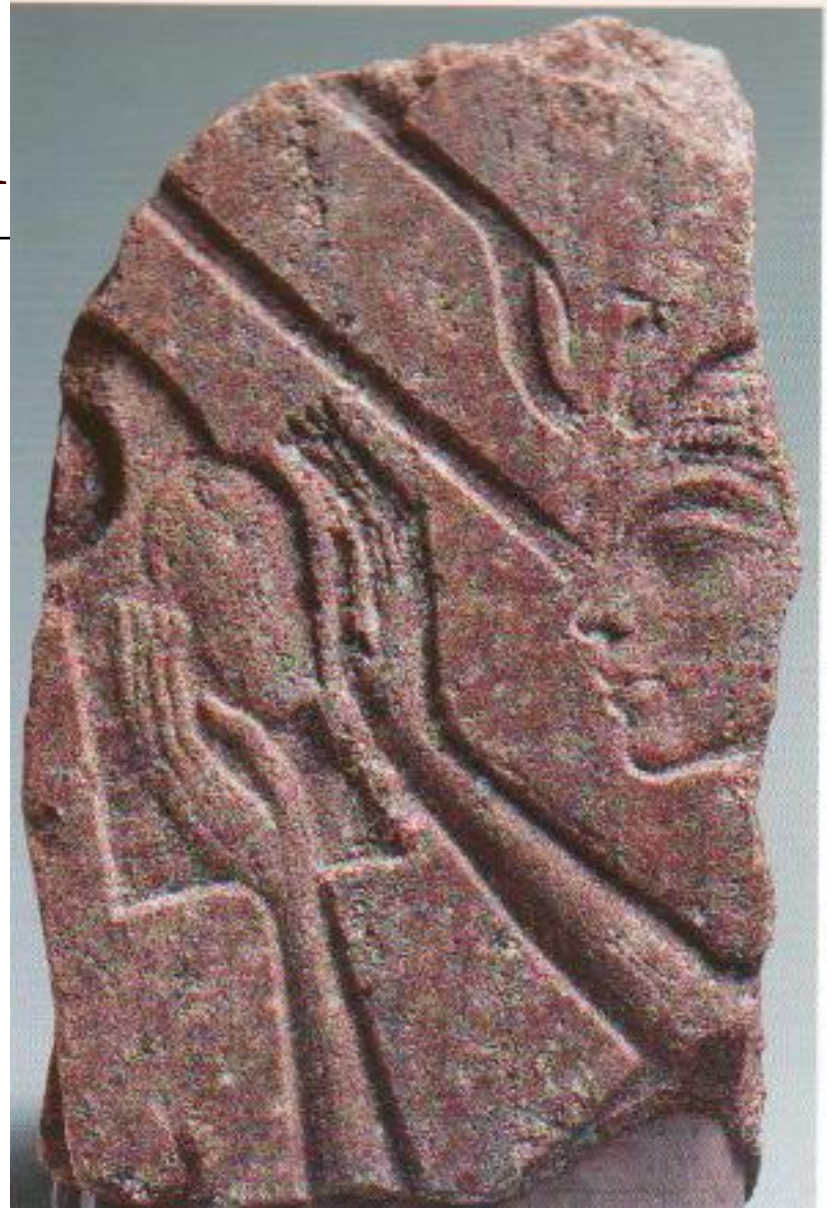
The role of Nefertiti

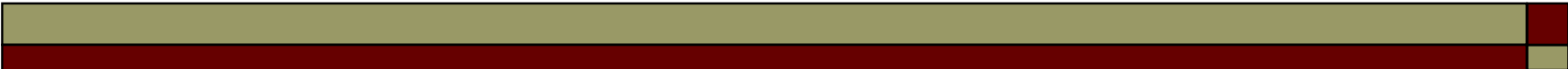
- Actively involved in the cult
- Formed a divine triad with Akhenaten & the Aten
 - Atum [Amenhotep III?], Shu, Tefnut
 - Amun, Mut, Khonsu
- Private household cults



The role of Nefertiti

- Nefertiti is equal in divinity and rank as Akhenaten
 - Here seen offering to the Aten
- Represents the female principle in the Amarna religion (i.e., “goddess”)





Atenism vs. Orthodoxy

- ❑ Atenism did not evolve naturally but rather was founded
- ❑ Was not a competing doctrine of religious salvation that “won” adherents (i.e., there is no “prophet”)
- ❑ Consciously opposed to established traditions
- ❑ Negation of polytheism in a polytheistic society



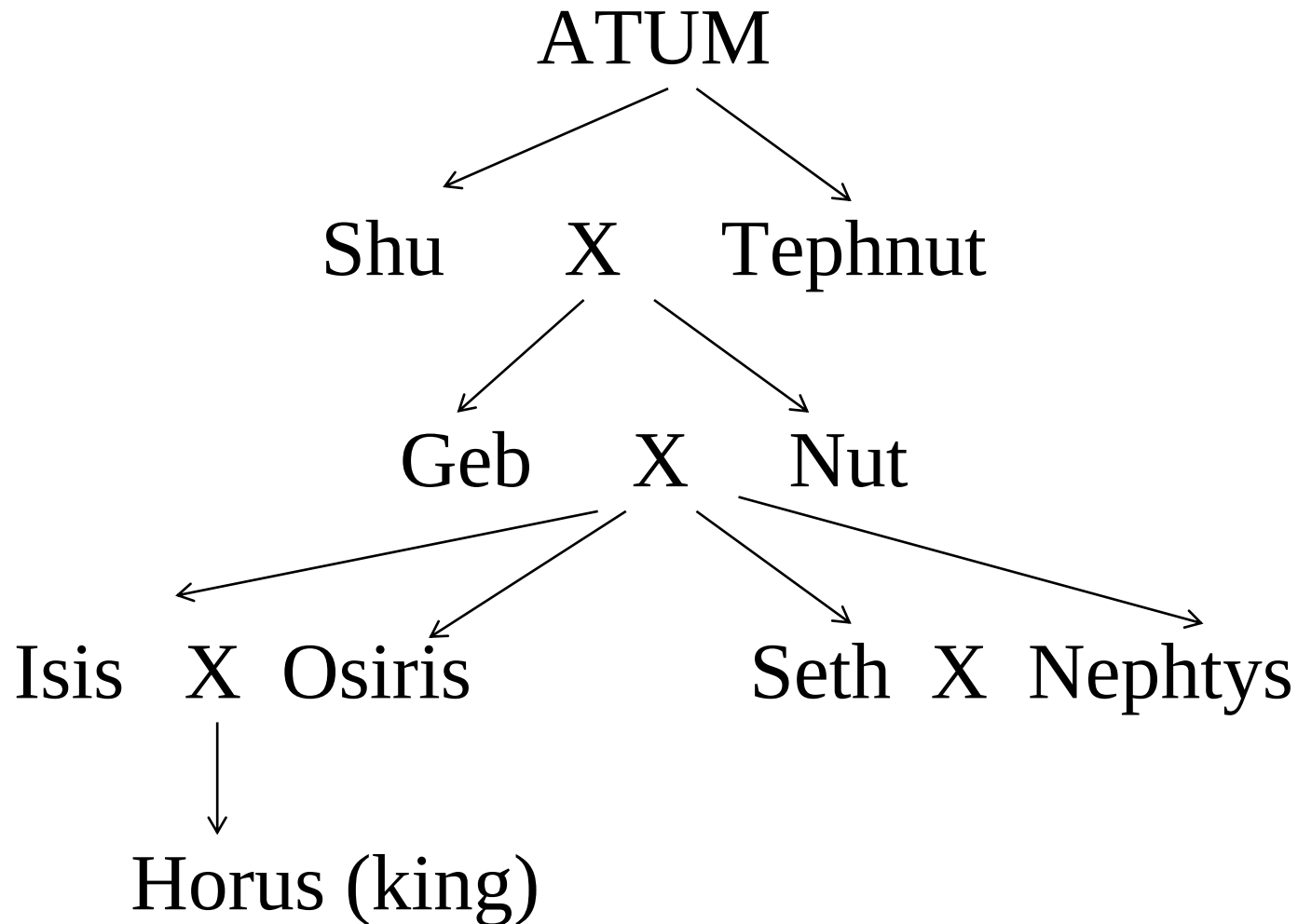
Radical nature

- ❑ Atenism was imposed in a world that was solidly and unquestionably polytheistic
- ❑ Negation and abolition of polytheism must have been shockingly radical and psychologically devastating
- ❑ Polytheistic life, evolved over 1000s of years, was the only reality, but now was forcibly set aside
- ❑ Had been woven into daily life and daily experience

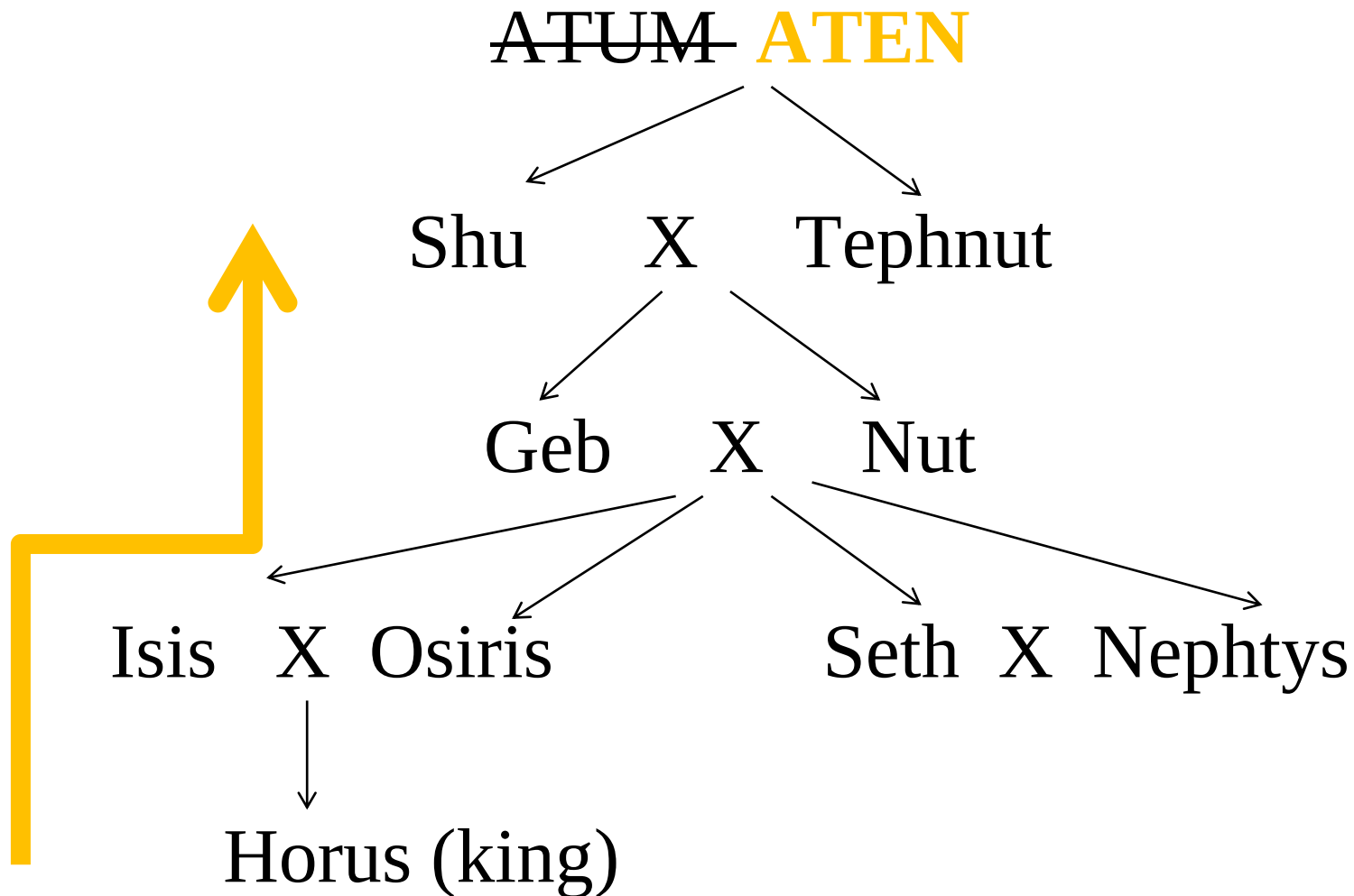
Persecution of other deities

- ❑ Other deities completely banned by regnal Year 12
- ❑ Police action against Amun and other deities
- ❑ “Tradition was not questioned; it was persecuted and forbidden” [Jan Assmann]
- ❑ Archaeology only shows the visible evidence, not eventual psychological damage
- ❑ Must remember that the new religion was not something that arose naturally
- ❑ Was set directly against the prevailing reality and experience of the time
- ❑ Reality became a forbidden and excluded alternative

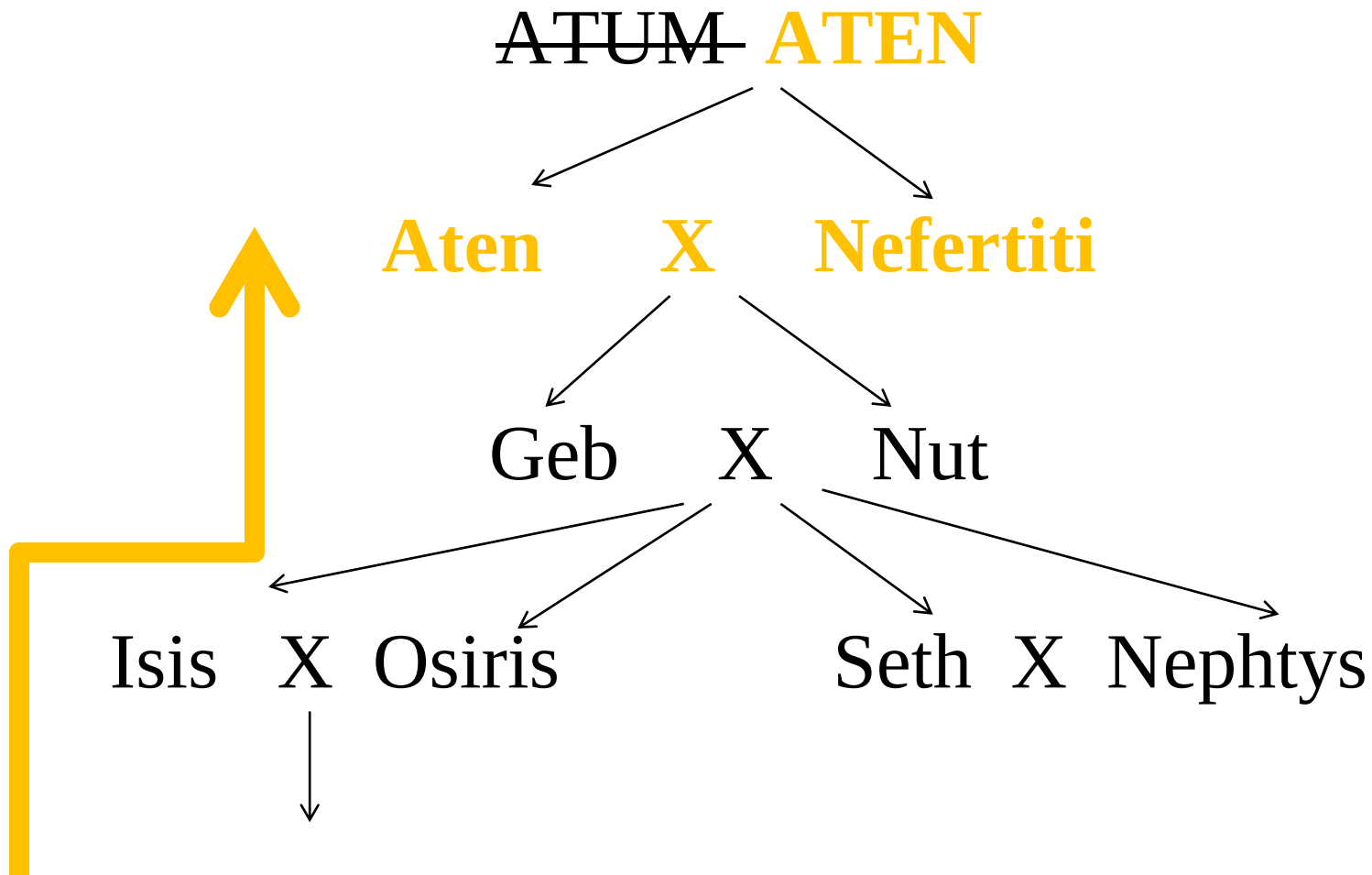
Ennead (Heliopolis – solar aspect!)



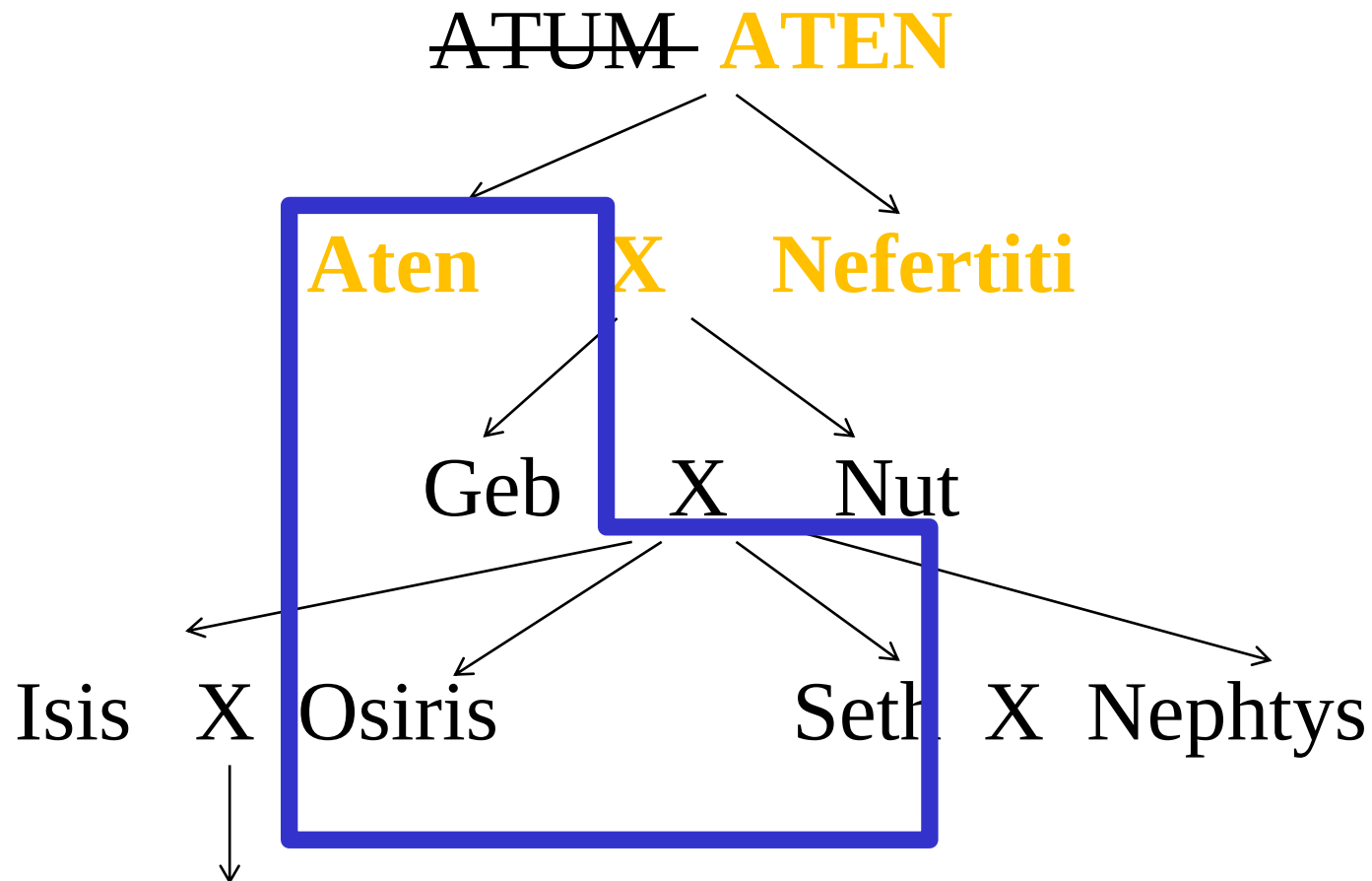
Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



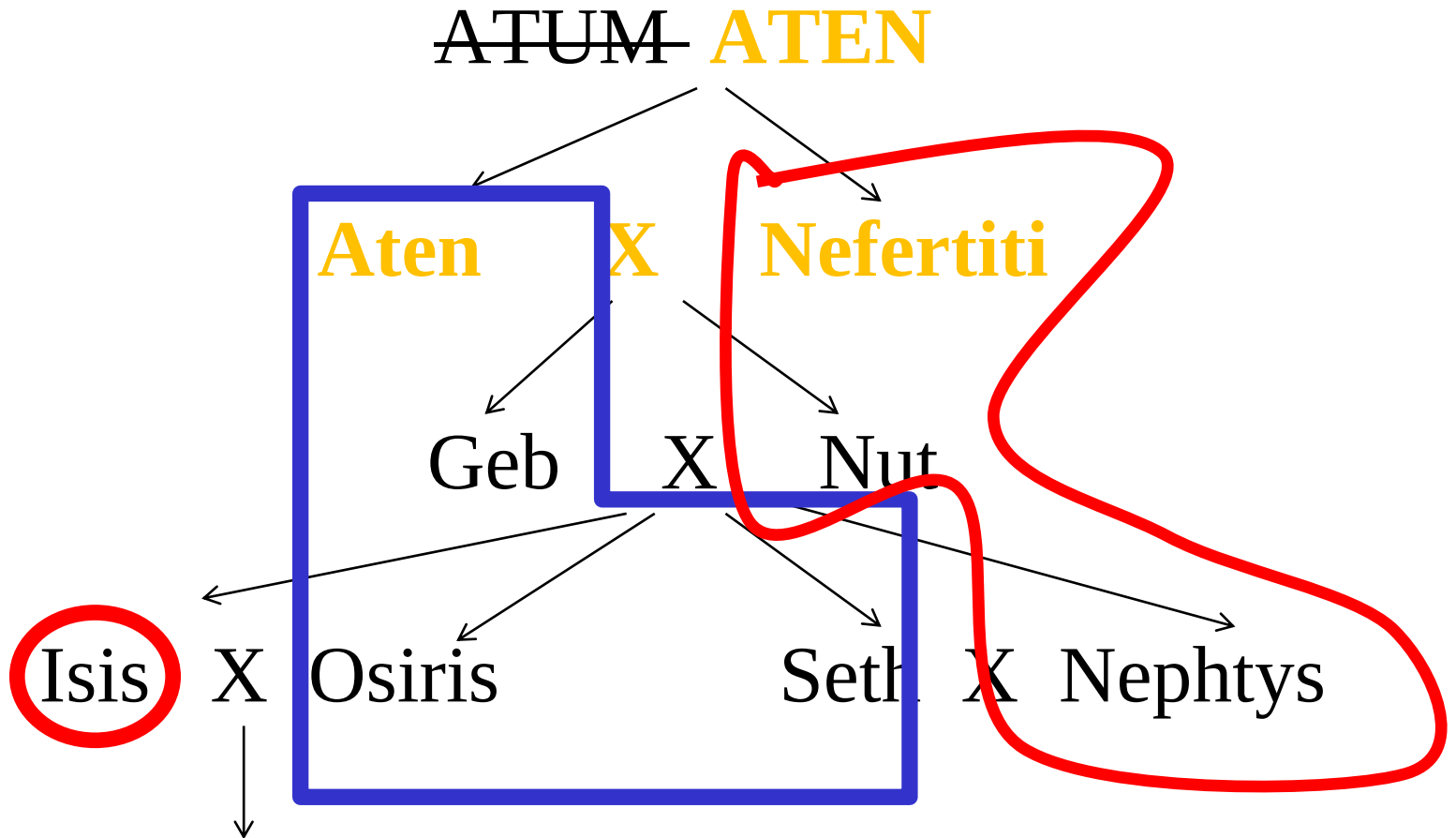
Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



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Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



Political Nature of Atenism: room for discussion

- **Personality cult** -
Inherently and purposefully political in nature
- → To counter the political power of the Imperial Amun cult at Thebes



Political Nature of Atenism: room for discussion

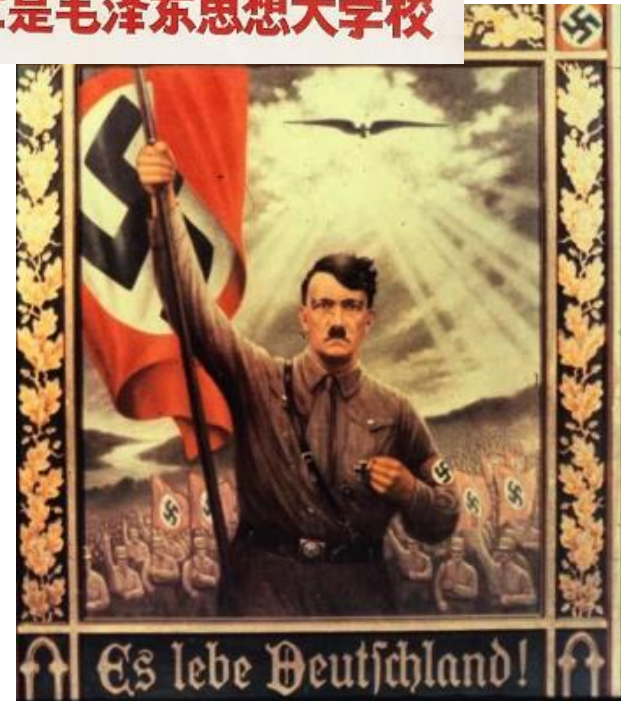
- ❑ **Personality cult -**
Inherently and purposefully political in nature
- ❑ Comparable to other personality cults where “religion” [i.e., political philosophy] becomes the whole of reality

We do not live in an ivory tower...

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Political Nature of Atenism: room for discussion

- **Personality cult -**
Inherently and purposefully political in nature
- Comparable to other personality cults where “religion” [i.e., political philosophy] becomes the whole of reality
 - Maoist China
 - Nazi Germany





Amarna in Nazi ideology

- Unveiled in Berlin Museum in 1924
- Egypt repeatedly campaigned for return – Germany maintains that it acquired bust legally, repeatedly refused
- During the Nazi regime: Hermann Goering proposed return, but Hitler declared: “I will never relinquish the head of the queen.”

Amarna as pillar of neo-Nazism

- ❑ Savitri Devi (French, born Maximine Julia Portaz) - Hitler's most powerful advocates by postulating a creative and esoteric Hitlerism, mystical fascism
- ❑ Deeply impressed by India's racial heritage and caste-system, she developed racial ideology in the early 1930s
- ❑ Currently still reissued and distributed through various neo-Nazi networks



A SON OF GOD

THE LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY OF AKHNATON, KING OF EGYPT

By Savitri Devi [1946]



Akhnaton's Eternal Message:

A Scientific Religion 3300 Years Old

SAVITRI DEVI