



Fig. 12 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 14145)

The following content is a translation from German into English based on my master's thesis written in 1991," Nefertiti and the Discoveries of Tell el-Amarna in Modern Portrait Sculpture," originally including 88 pages and 70 photographs, Marburg 1991.

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Culture and Art of Amarna

In Egyptian history, the 17 year long Amarna Period is directly substantiated by the personality of Amenhotep IV. It has been evaluated as a special case and was constituted on historical, geographical, social and religious conditions.

The reign of Amenhotep IV, a Pharaoh of Dynasty XVIII, who later called himself Akhenaten, probably started during the 16th year of his life (1352 BC).¹ He was already married to his chief wife, Nefertiti, whose beauty is documented by her famous portrait

bust that is in the possession of the Egyptian Museum Berlin.²

At the beginning of his reign, Amenhotep IV erected a new sanctuary in the area of the Amun-Re temple in Karnak and consecrated it to the sun god Re-Herakhty. This temple advanced a future change in the religious view of conventional representations of Re-Herakhty (Horus)—a man with a head of a falcon, crowned with the sun disk encircled by an uraeus—there now appeared a new revolutionary symbol, which was very likely an elaboration of the hieroglyph for "sunshine." Later, in Amarna, representational renderings of Horus were discontinued, and the sun god was worshiped and abstracted in the form of the great sun disk: the Aten. In addition, the sun disk was meant to be a symbol for the location of god, rather than a straightforward depiction. The Aten never appeared in the shape of a human being; he was exclusively represented as a disk frequently emanating rays of light, which often end in human hands.³ (Fig. 12, 13)



Fig. 13 (Egyptian Museum Cairo, RT 30.10.26.12)

The Aten cult was already alive during the reign of Amenhotep III;⁴ but Akhenaten was the first to see, in the worship of the Aten, a possibility of a consistent concentration of the different aspects of the syncretic Re cult on a single deity.⁵

In year 5 of his reign, the Pharaoh transferred the capital of the empire Thebes to a place in central Egypt, exactly between Memphis and Thebes. The new foundation was called Akhetaten (“Horizon” of the Aten), which is near today’s Tell el-Amarna. Thus, Akhetaten became the new royal residence and the center of the Aten cult.⁶

The renaming of Amenhotep IV to Akhenaten is documented by inscriptions and has been dated into year 6.⁷ Probably, at the same time, law had discarded the cult of Amun, and Akhenaten declared the cult of the Aten as the only legitimate religion of the empire.⁸ How aggressively Akhenaten implemented his religious



Fig. 14 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21351)

teachings is documented by a severe destruction of all representations of Amun, an ignoring of traditional deities and the closing of all conservative temples across the Empire.⁹ The new conception of the religion, which included the idea of a divine kingship, went along with the development of a new artistic canon, whose extended possibilities of expression broke with the tradition.¹⁰

Until the New Kingdom and Dynasty XVIII, Egyptian art served solemnly religious-ritual purposes, even when the subject was related to rather secular contents. The New Kingdom allowed, for the first time in Egyptian history, a universal increase of individual identity along with consciousness, and artistic expressions shifted to more secular and private dimensions.¹¹ The artist was no longer an executor of a given idealism, which reached its most perfect form during the early Dynasty XVIII;¹² now the time for original creativity had come.¹³



Fig. 15 (Folkwang Museum Essen)

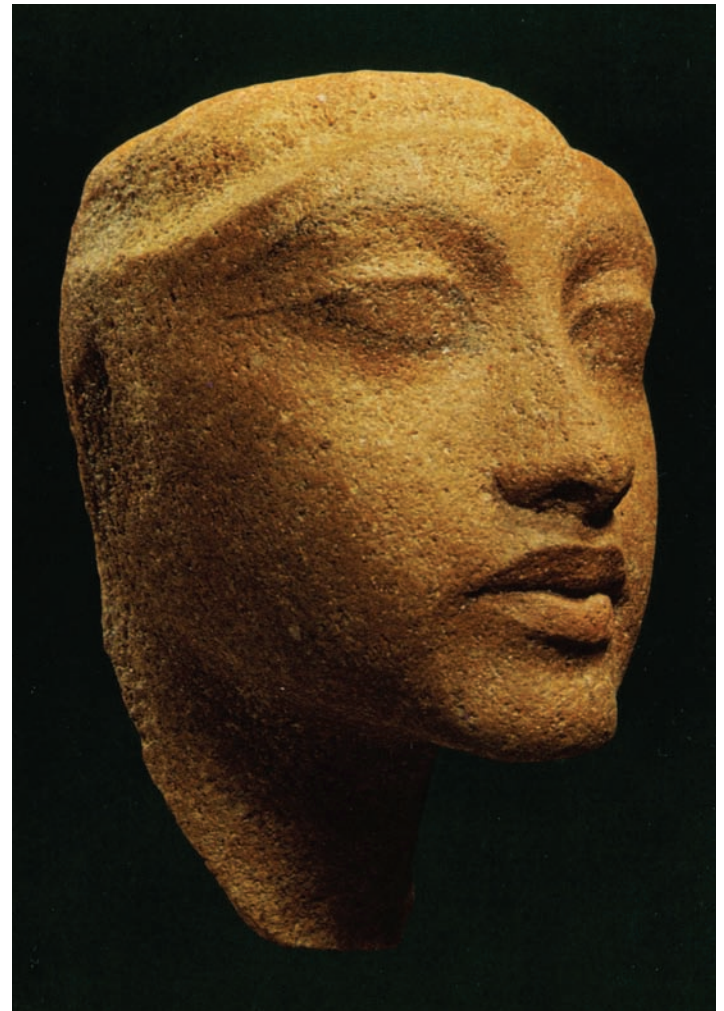


Fig. 16 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21245)

Within the timeline of the political changes from Thutmose IV to Amenhotep III happened a crucial ignition, which led to the conditions for the Amarna Period.¹⁴ Now, singularly artistic trends evolved with an expressive rather than idealistic manifestation.¹⁵

A new life style and a new attitude came to articulation; however, at the same time, art was used as a medium for religious and political propaganda, which was of course based on the intellectualism of Akhenaten.¹⁶

Whereas Egyptian design principles were still in use, the art of Amarna temporarily waived the typical traditional idealization.¹⁷ The Amarna art reached a maximum of realism and “naturalism,” which Egyptians were willing or able to create.¹⁸ The naturalistic imitation of the terrestrial reality was directed towards the living animal and vegetative world, which could be achieved only by a critical study of nature.¹⁹

In general, there are two different styles to be defined.

During the radical early phase of the Amarna art, the physiognomic characteristics of Akhenaten were definitely emphasized, so that some works appear to be even grotesque, or a mannerism. Apparently, Akhenaten’s physiognomy was somewhat deformed and it is surprising that he allowed truthful and even unflattering portraits of himself. (Fig. 13) Akhenaten placed special emphasis on the principle of “Maat,” translated as “truth”, which could provide an explanation for the unconventional style of the Amarna art.²⁰

In comparison, the portraits of the later phase turned out to be much more pleasing, although the physiognomic characteristics of Akhenaten were still rendered.²¹ (Fig. 14)

Akhenaten’s understanding of art allowed a fashion and portrayal style that was far from the ideal of the divine king. No artist of the Egyptian past would have dared to represent the godly Pharaoh with human weakness and imperfection.²²

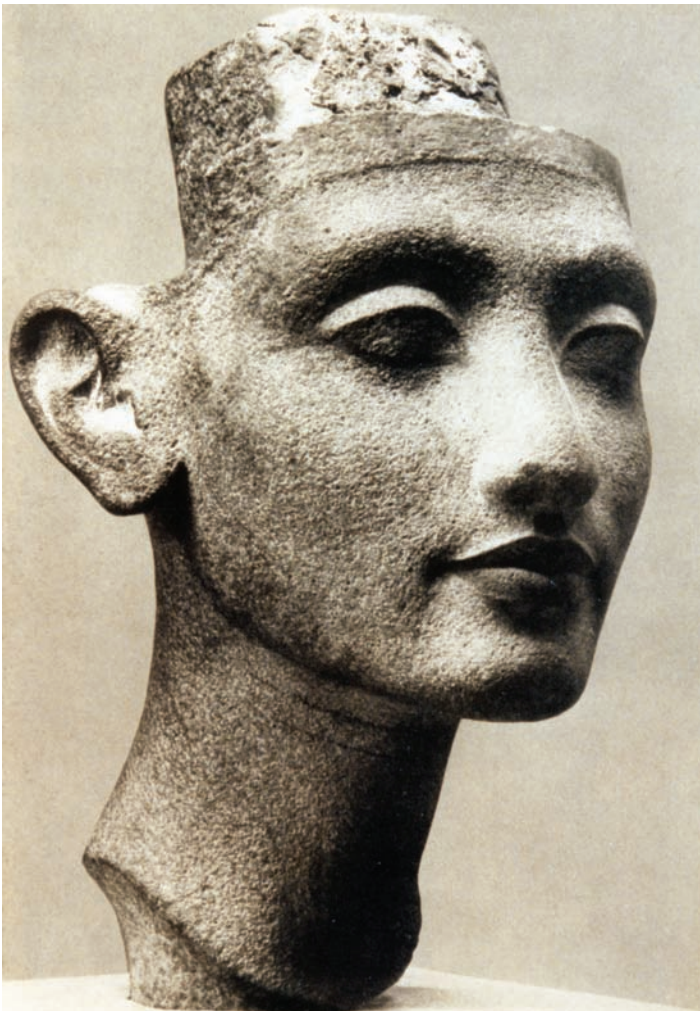


Fig. 17 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21220)



Fig. 18 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21300)

However, the new art movement turned shortly after it's beginning into a schematism because Akhenaten's physical features, such as his oversized legs, became a model for others. In an effort to be pleasing, artists surrounded the Pharaoh in their depictions with men and women, who looked in a way just like the king.

The actual appearance of an individual was occasionally left in the background, and a kind of mannerism shaped the image of humans for a whole period. Considering a rather naturalistic approach, as mentioned above, the portraits of Nefertiti also have to be regarded with some reservations.²³

Nevertheless, no period of Egyptian art history can be characterized as stylistic and homogeneous as the Amarna art, whose nature Walter Wolf noted:

“Die Porträts der Amarnazeit zielen auf die Wiedergabe der individuellen Eigenschaften einer persönlichen Physiognomie und machen den Herrscher zum Menschen

mit allen Mängeln seiner körperlichen Erscheinung. Das sinnlich Erfahrbare, die visuelle Wahrnehmung, ist das Ziel der Amarnakunst, sie will keine Symbole mehr, sondern Abbilder. (...) So liebt sie Motive, die das bisher so sorgfältig vermiedene Intime zur Schau stellen, Genreszenen, Gestaltungen des flüchtigen Augenblickes, Belanglosigkeiten, (...). In diese neue Formenwelt zieht nun der Ausdruck lebendigen Gefühls ein, den die alte Zeit so Ängstlich herauszuhalten bemüht gewesen war.”²⁴

Regarding the term “genre scenes,” it needs to be taken into consideration that those representations were meant to carry religious-political aspects, most likely to convey images of the “sacred family.”²⁵



Fig. 19 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21223)

A group of figures (Fig. 24) shows the king sitting on a padded throne, wearing the crown and a short-sleeved garb. A female figure is sitting on the king's lap facing him. Although the sculpture was not completed, it becomes nevertheless clear, how intimate the relationship between the two humans may have been. Obviously, the sculpture mirrors a private life situation of the royal family, as was typical for the Amarna Period.²⁶ In addition, it is remarkable that even though the motive suggests the idea of an emotional expression, the typical Egyptian conception of a sculpture within a cubic space remains a significant design factor, which gives the representation a rather static aspect.²⁷

Another characteristic of the art of the Amarna Period is its gracefully flowing lines, which can be seen in the rendering of single body parts and the head. Furthermore, the sculptures mirror a special feeling and sensitivity for the rendering of human skin. The fine



Fig. 20 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21364)

and careful sculpting of the forehead, the eye area, and the cheeks, which characterize in particular the portrait of Nefertiti in the Folkwang Museum Essen (Fig. 15) and the portrait of a princess in Berlin (Fig. 16), brings about an autonomous dimension of delicacy, which can be found in Egyptian art works of all times. However, in Amarna we see a grade of intensity that could not be perfected any further.²⁸

The art of Amarna developed a special care for the eyes, which were primarily understood as spiritual organs of the human body, hence as the most important element of expression. The sculpting of the eyeball and the lower eyelid was frequently left off.²⁹ This “sfumato-technique” was not an invention of the Amarna Period, however we now find this stylistic element frequently used.³⁰ The modern viewer may recognize a somewhat devoted but masked expression that could have corresponded to the artistic intentions of Akhenaten. However, it is



Fig. 21 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21349)



Fig. 22 (see 21)

commonly accepted that the eyes were emphasized by paint.³¹ Some portraits show traces of a color treatment, for instance the unfinished head of a queen (Fig. 17). The joints above and below the piece were supposed to connect the head with crown and body. Different materials were commonly used in these times and the sculptures were apparently assembled in a final working phase.³² Nevertheless, the unfinished work gives us an idea of a very sensitive and fine sculpting: (Note the amazing outline of the lips, which render an almost smiling mouth.)

The queen Nefertiti wears a large blue crown in nearly all her portrayals.³³ (Fig. 18) Whenever a queen was portrayed with this crown, it was certainly Nefertiti and Egyptologists cannot point to a single representation of a different woman wearing this crown. To avoid confusion with the queen, it is unlikely that one of the princesses (in particular Meritaten) could have been

portrayed with such a crown.³⁴ The name Nefertiti was often perpetuated in Akhenaten's great monuments, whereby the unusual position of the queen came to expression.³⁵ Nefertiti even had the right to worship the Aten and was therefore, on the same level as Akhenaten. She did not have any further sovereign rights.³⁶ The previously presented painted limestone stela shows king and queen seated on stools of state. "*The disk of the Aten with its rays bringing life to the nostrils of the king and queen shines down upon this scene of domestic bliss.*"³⁷ (Fig. 12)

In an inscription, Nefertiti is called a deity. (The wet nurse of Nefertiti is the one who suckled the goddess.) Probably, Nefertiti, just like Akhenaten, was admired in her divinity and embodied a kind of Egyptian Venus, comparable to the goddess Hathor.³⁸



Fig. 23 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum SMPK, Inv. 21261)

Nefertiti and Akhenaten had six daughters together.³⁹ All princesses were obviously born in the first nine years of reign. The three oldest daughters (Meritaten, Meketaten and the later wife Tutankhamen's Anchesenpaaten) were the most important and, thus, regularly represented in the iconography of the Amarna art. The three youngest daughters were only occasionally portrayed; nothing is known of their fate.⁴⁰ The portraits of the princesses correspond to the typical style of Amarna. The extraordinarily elongated skulls, which were imaged in sculptures as well as in reliefs, were considered to be artificial deformations, degeneration features or a mannerism style.⁴¹

However, one head of a princess (Fig. 19) gives proof of a thorough study of nature by the artist. The surface of the head shows a delicate sculpting of skin, muscles and bone structure. This head corresponds in its execution



Fig. 24 (Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 44866)

perfectly to another portrait of a princess, although this one is a little smaller.⁴² (Fig. 20)

The sculpture workshop of Thutmosis produced—unique to Egyptian art—a series of portrait studies made of poured gypsum stucco. From the 23 heads found in 1912, some show the whole head, some only the face with or without ears and with a longer or shorter part of the neck. The portrait studies can be differentiated accordingly to “nature like,” which appear as realistic as they would have been taken from a living model (there is no proof in a single case⁴³) and “statue like,” which were so strongly artistically revised that they may be castings from statues.⁴⁴

A “statue like” portrait of a queen (Fig. 21, 22) shows a clear cast seam, which runs on both sides of the head behind the ear and along the neck, and from the upper to the lower edge. The mold of the slim, beautifully

sculptured female neck, a special type of Amarna sculpture, was possibly used for other portraits as well.⁴⁵

The “nature like” gypsum portraits belong to a tradition of an Amarna “naturalism” and represent in Egyptian history a unit of its own (Fig. 23). We know of older naturalistic portraits, but none of them reached this expression of a real life person, as is so characteristic for the sculptures of Amarna.⁴⁶

After Akhenaten’s death, Semencharê continued Amarna policy for about one and a half years in his two to three-year reign, before he probably started reconciliation politics with the traditional cults, particularly with the priesthood of Amun in Thebes.⁴⁷

Semencharê died at the age of 19 and was succeeded by his brother Tutankhaten, who, at the beginning of his reign still worshiped the Aten.⁴⁸ Approximately in his second year, Tutankhaten relocated with his wife to Thebes. The most important political act, which the king’s consultants soon decided after leaving Amarna, was a decree that meant irrevocably the end of the Amarna Period.⁴⁹ The suppression of the traditional religious conceptions, in particular the faith in Osiris, whose protective role in the world of the dead could not be replaced, led to strong resistance among the priesthoods and the population. Tutankhaten now worshiped Amun and changed accordingly his name to Tutankhamen. In spite of his position as Pharaoh and his uncompromising policy, Akhenaten did not succeed in implementing the Aten cult as a lasting state’s religion. The religion of the Aten never became a religion of the people. The monuments of Akhenaten, who was finally considered to be a heretic, were then exposed to deliberate destruction.⁵⁰

The artistic styles developed during the Amarna era were still in vogue at least during the reign of Tutankhamen. Then, the play with naturalism and mannerism, which was so significant for the Amarna art, vanished in the progress of later Egypt.⁵¹

Notes

- ¹ See Erik Hornung, *Grundzüge der ägyptischen Geschichte*, Darmstadt 1978, 162. The circumstances, which led to the reign of Akhenaten, were being disputed for a long time, because it is not clearly evident whether Akhenaten was appointed by his father Amenhotep III to be a co-regent, or if Akhenaten became king after the death of his father. Some Egyptologists, such as Cyril Aldred (1973) and Steffen Wenig (1974/75), endorse this hypothesis. Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, New York 1973, 11. Steffen Wenig, *Meisterwerke der Amarnakunst*, Leipzig 1974; idem., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Wiesbaden 1975, I., Sp.211. Others, like Walter Wolf 1957 contradicted the idea of a co-regency. W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens, Gestalt und Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1957, 502. Dr. Marianne Eaton Krauss (Tutanchamun – ein unbekannter König, lecture at the Philipps-University of Marburg, June 18, 1991), as well as Dr. Rolf Krauss, verbally, *Ägyptisches Museum Berlin*, July 1991.
- ² R. Krauss verbally, Nefertiti was most likely the cousin of Akhenaten; St. Wenig, *ibid.*, 45 and C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 18.
- ³ R. Krauss, see n. 2 above; C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 20; Hourig Sourouzian, *Die Hauptwerke aus dem Ägyptischen Museum Kairo*, Mainz 1986, No. 160 and No. 164-167.
- ⁴ C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 17; W. Wolf, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Ägypten*, Stuttgart 1962, 292ff.
- ⁵ It is disputed if the religion was meant to be monotheistic; it is more likely that Akhenaten did not question the existence of other gods, but emphasized his god at the expense of all others, without doubting their existence. The religion of Amarna can be seen as a Henotheism. R. Krauss, see n. 2 above, and idem., *Der Oberbildhauer Bak und sein Denkstein in Berlin*, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, Bd.28, 1986, 10; C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 24.
- ⁶ R. Krauss, *ibid.*; C. Aldred, *ibid.*; 22; H. Sourouzian, *ibid.*; Nr.160.
- ⁷ R. Krauss, see footnote 2; as for the change of the name C. Aldred points at the sixth’s regency year, *ibid.*, 22; Amenhotep means “Amun is content;” Akhenaten means “who is of service to Aten;” the name of the king reflects the political direction of the state.
- ⁸ It is unclear why. Possibly, the priesthood of the Amun-Re had attained a precarious influence, which Akhenaten wanted to suppress. R. Krauss, *Der Oberbildhauer Bak (...)*, *ibid.*; W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, *ibid.*, 398ff.
- ⁹ W. Wolf, *ibid.*; H. Schäfer, *Von ägyptischer Kunst*, 158f.; R. Krauss, *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ W. Wolf, *ibid.*, 507f.; Maya Müller, *Die Kunst Amenophis’ III und Echnatons*, Dissertation, Geneva 1983, Basel 1988, I-63ff.

- 11 C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 22; W. Wolf, *Das Problem des Künstlers in der ägyptischen Kunst*, Hildesheim 1951, 52.
- 12 See C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 20ff.; see H. Sourouzian, *ibid.*, Nr. 159.
- 13 See W. Wolf, *ibid.*; H. Schäfer, *ibid.*, 69f.
- 14 W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 536.
- 15 Catalogue Ägyptisches Museum Berlin, Berlin 1967, 66, Nr. 742.
- 16 W. Wolf, *Das Problem des Künstlers in der ägyptischen Kunst*, 52, *idem*, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 510; St. Wenig, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, I., Sp. 175
- 17 W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 453ff.; St. Wenig, *ibid.*; H. Schäfer, *ibid.*, 18f.
- 18 The term “naturalism” was used by W. Wolf, *Die Stellung der ägyptischen Kunst zur antiken und abendländischen*, 15f.; also James Henry Breasted, *History of Egypt*, translated by Hermann Ranke, Zürich 1936, 225f.
- 19 Günther Roeder, *Lebensgroße Tonmodelle aus einer alten ägyptischen Bildhauerwerkstatt*, in: *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 62, 1941, 145ff.
- 20 C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 12
- 21 R. Krauss, *Der Oberbildhauer Bak (...)*, *ibid.*, I I; C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 48ff. and 94, Nr. 6 and 167, Nr. 95.
- 22 see M. Müller, *ibid.*, I 60-81; C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 53.
- 23 C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 22; M. Müller, *ibid.*, I-82; St. Wenig, *ibid.*
- 24 W. Wolf, *Das Problem des Künstlers in der ägyptischen Kunst*, *ibid.*, 50. “The portraits of the Amarna Period aim to render the individual characteristics of a personal physiognomy and turn the emperor into a human being with all his physical imperfections. The sensual experience and the visual perception, is the goal of the Amarna art. Instead of symbols now true images are wanted. (...) Hence the art exposes thus far carefully avoided intimacy, such as Genre scenes, illustrations of the volatile moment, inconsequential things, (...) this new world of forms is drawn by an expression of vivid emotion, which the old times fearfully withheld.”
- 25 W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 515f.; St. Wenig, *ibid.*, Sp. 176
- 26 This group of figures follows a traditional scheme of Egyptian art, a goddess holds the king on her lap. The identity of the female figure on the king’s lap is being disputed. See H. Sourouzian, Nr. 168; M. Eaton Krauss, in: *Chronique d’Egypte* 56, 1981, Fasz. I 12, 257f.; Nofret—*Die Schöne*, Nr. 36
- 27 See W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 459; H. Schäfer, *ibid.*, 319.
- 28 W. Wolf, *Kopf der Königin Nofretete*, in: *Jahresgabe zum Jahreswechsel 1961/62 Den Mitgliedern des Kunstringes Folkwang überreicht*.
- 29 W. Wolf, *ibid.*; see Alfred Petzold, *Der ägyptische Königinnenkopf im Folkwang Museum Essen*, Kassel 1966, 9f.
- 30 James Romano, *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 5, (1983), 105-109.
- 31 R. Krauss, *ibid.*; W. Wolf, *ibid.*
- 32 See W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 456.
- 33 Note the similarity with the war crown of Akhenaten.
- 34 R. Krauss, see note 2; Alfred Petzold, *ibid.*, 13f. In the sixties, it was unclear whether the Egyptian bust in Essen would show Nefertiti or not. A. Petzold had no doubts that this head must be a depiction of Nefertiti, and until today it’s still called as such. Instead, Prof. Dr. G. Roeder was convinced to see Nefertiti’s daughter Meritaten (as in a letter dated on October 19, 1964, to the director of the Folkwang Museum Dr. P. Vogt).
- 35 See C. Aldred, *ibid.*
- 36 R. Krauss, see note 2.
- 37 C. Aldred, *ibid.*, I I.
- 38 R. Krauss, *ibid.*; see C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 20.
- 39 In addition, today most Egyptologists like M. Eaton Krauss are of the opinion that Akhenaten must have also been the father of Semencharê and Tutankhaten (the later Tutankhamen). The mother of Tutankhaten was probably Akhenaten’s second oldest daughter, Meketaten.
- 40 C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 20.
- 41 St. Wenig, *ibid.*, Sp. 175.
- 42 Kurt Gerhardt, *Waren die Köpfe der Echnaton Töchter künstlich deformiert?* in: *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, Bd. 94., Festschrift Rudolf Anthes zum 70. Geburtstag, Berlin 1967, 50-61; W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens*, 457.
- 43 Günther Roeder, *Lebensgroße Tonmodelle aus einer alten ägyptischen Bildhauerwerkstatt*, in: *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 62, 1941, 145ff.; see M. Müller, *ibid.*, I-42f.; C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 43-46.
- 44 G. Roeder, *ibid.*, 148.
- 45 G. Roeder, *ibid.*, 155.
- 46 G. Roeder, *ibid.*, 166f.; H. Schäfer, *ibid.*, 62f.
- 47 M. Eaton Krauss (Marburg 1991) and R. Krauss, see note 2; The circumstances of Nefertiti’s death are not clear. St. Wenig, *ibid.*, as well as C. Aldred, *ibid.*, 25, believes the year 1364 BC was the year Nefertiti died.
- 48 This becomes evident from the changes on the cartouches on the famous golden throne of Tutankhamen, which represents the last memorial of the symbol of Aton in its iconographic form of the sun.
- 49 M. Eaton Krauss, *ibid.*
- 50 H. Ranke, *ibid.*, 231ff.; W. Wolf, *ibid.*; 399; St. Wenig, *ibid.*, 47.
- 51 G. Roeder, *ibid.*; W. Wolf, *ibid.*, 455.