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Egypt in microcosm: the city of El-Amarna

In developed societies religion is never stationary for long. The stimulus of creative thought is essential to the human mind. This is true for those religions – principally Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the religions 'of the book' – which are based upon a sacred text. Although appearing to be closed systems of thought all three have a long history and a huge literature of speculation about the significance of their revelations, which has often drawn upon the inheritance of the late 'pagan' Hellenism of Neoplatonic philosophy. Egyptian religion was no exception. Indeed, in being an open system of thought, essentially a theological language for pursuing speculation on the hidden aspects of the world, it was particularly open to change. By the Late Dynastic Period Egyptian religion had grown to be significantly different from that of earlier periods, responding to deep-seated psychological changes in the population at large. If Egypt had remained a more isolated country and had not been swamped by influences from the Hellenistic world the old religion would doubtless have continued to change and might well have survived to the present as a viable system of thought.

The instrument of change lay in the scholarly work of priests who read and copied old texts, sometimes adding explanatory glosses, and who from time to time felt stimulated to compose fresh material which was, however, always couched in the theological language which drew upon a large store of traditional images. For the New Kingdom we have fine examples of the scholarly work of the day preserved in the painted decoration inside the tombs of the Valley of the Kings.[1] This perfectly illustrates the interweaving of old and new material, which aimed partly at ensuring the well-being of the dead king in a cosmic afterlife, and partly at illustrating the forces and processes at work in the cosmos.

The names of those responsible are not known. This was the proper work of the priests and the fruits of their labours probably went over most people's heads. Educated Egyptians were, on the whole, far more impressed with people who offered sensible advice on conduct and morals, or who were particularly noted for practical achievements. The way to fame and to becoming a household name generations later was either to be a great constructor,[2] or to write an 'instruction', which had little to say

on theology but provided a message that people generally could understand, or at least find arresting. Most of the admired teachings spoke straightforwardly. One, by a Middle Kingdom sage called Ipuwer, offered an apocalyptic view of the world in chaos but with such drama and vivid detail that it haunted people's imagination and remained an irresistible read centuries after it was composed.[3] In the New Kingdom the Egyptians still lived in so secure and confident a world that theology was left to priests following a path of free-thinking which always produced acceptable answers because of their enormous innate respect for their own traditions. Respectful evolution was the process by which change occurred. Something might be new, but it was just what the ancestors would have approved of. And, as noted in the Introduction, this opens up a yawning trap for us, in that by the act of explaining Egyptian theology we are almost certainly adding to it.

The founder: Akhenaten, 'the heretic king'

In the history of Egyptian religion there is, in fact, only one name, and that belongs to a king of the late 18th Dynasty: Akhenaten, son of Amenhetep III. Using the great power and wealth at his disposal he made a bold departure from the traditional career of kings in Egypt: he attempted religious reform.[4] How and why Akhenaten came to step outside the mentality of his time remains a mystery that we are unlikely ever to resolve. But he sought to create from the religious traditions of Egypt a new and simpler cult. The nature of Egyptian theology has been commented upon more than once in previous chapters. It was built around a fascination with names and words. One result was a composition which appears on the walls of some of the royal tombs at Thebes. Known as the Litany of Ra it invokes the sun-god Ra under his seventy-five names, which are those of other gods.[5] Thus he is the 'body' (substance?) of Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, and Nut, the deities who are the main elements of nature. In this developed form of theological word-game, involving the handling of the names of gods as entities of logic, a balance and harmony of thought were sought in which the potential incompatibility of the historical multiplicity of divinities on the one hand, and the perceived unity of divine power on the other, was avoided. The idea of many gods was held within a mental shell of ultimate singleness whose essence was the power of the sun.

The inherited complexity of Egyptian theology provided priests with a challenge to be resolved by intellectual means which did not violate respect for the past. Akhenaten seems to have found violation necessary in order to bring about a resolution of a quite different order of simplicity. Much of the inherited system he simply ignored. But the main accretion to the sun cult – the god Amun or Amun-Ra of Thebes, whose form was human – he rejected. The name and image of Amun were methodically defaced in an organized campaign of administered iconoclasm. In the place of everything from the past he put the visible disk of the sun, to which the Egyptians commonly gave the name: the Aten. Its image was a disk from which many rays descended, each one ending in a little hand. Like a king, the Aten was also given two names written in cartouches. Its temples were to be great open courts filled with altars. Traditional temples wrapped the image of god in darkness and secrecy inside windowless halls. The Aten could be seen directly in the sky, without mystery, and needed temples only as settings for the

pageantry of the king's worship. This he performed on the 'Sunshades', the platform-altars already familiar from the Theban mortuary temples.

Akhenaten saw the Aten as the universal creator of all life, and celebrated this in several hymns which have survived amongst the carvings in the rock tombs of some of his courtiers at Amarna.[6] Their sentiments were not themselves new in Egypt. A well-known hymn on a papyrus in the Cairo Musuem dated to before Akhenaten's reign addresses the Theban god Amun in similar terms of universal power and solar imagery.[7] Where Akhenaten's hymn differs is in the absence of references to other gods which, in the older hymns, were seen as complementary aspects of Amun. Akhenaten's originality lay in his perception of the simplicity of solar religion, and thus the irrelevance of much of the traditional theological language-game. The sun's disk, devoid of human features, became the only divine image in Akhenaten's new temples and in the decoration within his own tomb at Amarna. The elaborate depictions of a universe populated by divine beings were wholly banished. The visualization of the king's birth from a union between his mother and the sun-god incarnate in human form became impossible. Religious language-game and its pictorial counterparts were more or less dead.

Since the early days of Egyptology, people have been fascinated by the question: is this monotheism? It is a fascination which in the past has been fuelled by the parochial western view that belief in one god is superior to belief in several. The question is, however, almost impossible to answer sensibly in these terms. Religion is too elaborate a phenomenon to be handled by simple labels. Developed forms of Christianity and Islam have far more subtle and complex approaches to manifestations of divinity and paranormal authority than are implied by the term 'monotheism'. Indeed, as an outsider I find it illogical that Christianity should be classed as a monotheistic religion. If I wander around a major European church, seeing it with the eye of an archaeologist, the number and variety of sacred images in stone, wood, brass and stained glass will lead me to reconstruct a very elaborate and many-centred system of belief which includes a Trinity or Triad of divine entities. The Christian believer escapes from the inconsistency by means of an impressive mental adjustment founded on the notion of 'mystery', a way of thought from which I, as an unbeliever, am excluded. The intelligent ancient Egyptian did the same, converting religious sensation into the linguistic terms of his culture. In this way the term 'polytheism' as applied to the Egyptians falls wide of the mark by suggesting that Egyptian religion was fragmentary and incoherent. In practice the question resolves itself into a comparison between Akhenaten and Old Testament Judaism.

Akhenaten lived well before the establishment of the kingdom of Israel, yet the imagery in the Hymn to the Aten has distinct echoes in one of the biblical Psalms. Furthermore, in both sets of thinking we see the same desperately serious intention: to reach out for concise statements of finite definition on the nature of god. Both mirror a sense of dissatisfaction. But the lack of contemporary background evidence from the region prevents us from knowing if this represented a more widespread intellectual ferment manifesting itself in divergent forms and spread through the ancient Middle East. The results were in any case very different. They could scarcely have been otherwise given the great contrast in cultural milieu. The Aten was a force presiding benignly but remotely over a stable and familiar world; it was not an irascible god

prepared to intervene in the affairs of man and dictate behaviour. Moral teaching was already long established in Egypt, and tended to be separate from theology, where the prime interest was in how the universe functioned. Akhenaten's religion was in this tradition: his concern was not in man's destiny or condition – that was not really a subject which occupied the Egyptians much in normal times – it was in the source of life itself. In the Aten he found a simple, unintellectual answer: the source was nothing but what he could see for himself, the disk of the sun. Mystery – the promise that there was always more to be discovered – vanished from theological writings and from temples. Akhenaten spoke of being the sole knower of the Aten's mysteries, but even in the privacy of his own burial at Amarna we can detect no sign of anything not already widely publicized.

Mosaic Judaism, with its distinctive code of living, was a positive force for the host society, giving the Israelites a sense of identity in a hostile world. It became a means of rejecting the cultures of others. By contrast, the Aten robbed Egyptians of a tradition of explaining the phenomena of the universe through an extraordinarily rich imagery which, to those who studied it, managed to contain the concept that a unity, a oneness, could be found in the multiplicity of divine forms and names. Akhenaten was telling the Egyptians something that they knew already, but in a way that made further serious speculation pointless. It is easy to understand why the Egyptians rejected the king's religion after his death. He had tried to kill intellectual life.

In our own modern perceptions of the world, traditional ancient Egyptian theology and language-game have no place. They form a colourful and interesting example of pre-scientific thought. Akhenaten can appear to us as a remarkable and somewhat tragic figure because he seems to have perceived the irrelevance of much of the thought of his day, yet was unable to put into its place anything that satisfied man's universal desire for complexity in thought. Nor were there people around him who were stimulated by the intellectual vacuum he created to advance beyond the confines of religion in the search for explanations of phenomena.

We know of no later stories or traditions concerning Akhenaten, and after his death his ideas were forcefully rejected and his monuments smashed or demolished. He became a non-person. That we know about him at all arises from the sheer quantity of the sculpture of his reign which later generations reused in foundations for other buildings, and from his creation of a complete city on a desert site which lay abandoned until modern rediscovery. Because Akhenaten had been a prolific builder his existence could not be obliterated. But this points to one question which we can never hope to answer: did Akhenaten represent a small and usually undemonstrative, but nevertheless enduring, tradition of intellectual dissent? Did his uniqueness lie simply in being king and thus able to bring an alternative vision into the public domain?

The lack of background sources cripples the historian. It has proved impossible to write a history of Akhenaten's reign which does not embrace an element of historical fiction. It is as if one has to decide which actor would best play the part: an effete, limp-wristed dreamer, or a fearsome, despotic madman. If the religious idealism points to the former, his approach to his own position and the simple fact that he achieved what he did takes one to the opposite pole. For Akhenaten's escape from the past had its limits. Kingship in Egypt was embedded within theology, and it was not Akhenaten's intention to diminish the power of Pharaoh. Quite the reverse. Between the simple vision of a life-

giving sun on the one hand, and humanity and nature on the other, stood the king and his family as sole intermediaries. Here, too, there was innovation, and it is in the portrayal of the king and his family that a simple interpretation of the king's mind breaks down. The royal family, in which his principal queen, Nefertiti, was pictured as if with a dominant role (though whether this was really her character we cannot tell), was given a new style of presentation. Mysticism was mixed with informality amounting to lethargy in a manner often verging on the grotesque, and alien to the Egyptians' own conceptions of good form.

To claim 'mysticism' is, in itself, to align oneself to a particular interpretation of why the features of the king and his family are portrayed in the way that renders the art of his reign unique. The remains of his temples at Karnak show that this was something developed very early in his reign. The peculiarities amount to a list of distortions: long forward-leaning neck, pendulous jaw, narrowed eyes, and swollen belly and hips. The king always wears a crown, but when the characteristics are transferred to other members of his family they also include a rear elongation of the skull. This strange physique is most impressively seen in colossal statues where the viewer stands below, easily overwhelmed by the sheer weirdness of the overall effect; it is less successfully translated into two-dimensional wall carvings.

Many people have seen in the distortions to his body a faithful attempt to portray the effects of a serious disease from which the king suffered. It is a more plausible alternative, however, that it represents a bold attempt to portray kingship as a force with characteristics that place it outside the normal plane of human experience. There was little tradition in Egypt of using sculpture to convey an intellectual sensation more complex than that the life-force that animated in varying degrees gods, kings, and ordinary humans was materialized in the form of the ideal, youthful human body. What normally distinguished the statue of a god from that of a king or of a high official was the name written somewhere on the statue, and items of dress and insignia. They were to be experienced, however, in the same straightforward and rather innocent way. Akhenaten's self-images were experimental and surreal, made against a particularly unsuitable cultural background. And it is a central point in assessing his intentions that this attempt to portray the mystery of superior force through surreal art rather than through word-game was confined to himself and his family. The shape of the Aten held no mystery. The divine force that passes understanding was revealed to mankind through the Aten's earthly agent: the king. Hence the paired cartouches: large ones for the Aten, small ones for the king – god and the son of god, ruling together.

The colossal statues of the king stood making their statement through their form. In two-dimensional art – wall reliefs and stelae – the royal family group was portrayed in scenes of relaxed informality, but these scenes were themselves the object of devotion by courtiers and officials. This warm family life of the king seems not to have been intended as an example or as an encouragement for greater contact between the royal family and the rest of society. It was used, one might think perversely, to set them apart as a loving group so perfect as to warrant veneration. In the prayers of courtiers Akhenaten and Nefertiti were invoked as gods alongside the Aten.[8] The new cult offered no channel for personal piety amongst the people. For them it was not a democratic cult, only a revised and eccentric focus for loyalty. We can match his place in the history of thought as an early rationalizer with an equally precocious niche in the

history of rule: that of the glorious dictator. More will be said shortly on Akhenaten's rewriting of the mental script for kingship.

The composition of the royal family group is itself noteworthy. Apart from Akhenaten it is entirely female. For in addition to Nefertiti up to six daughters are shown as well. The eldest of these was Meritaten, who was intended as the heiress, and was given, during Akhenaten's reign, increasing prominence, presumably as she came of age. The next in age was Meketaten, who died young and was buried in the Royal Tomb at Amarna, in a separate suite of her own; then came Ankhsenpa-aten who, with the changed name Ankhsenamun, eventually married Tutankhamun, and for a short time became Egypt's principal queen; the last three are only names to us: Nefernefruaten the Younger (Nefernefruaten being Nefertiti's first cartouche name), Nefernefrura, and Setepenra. It is possible that this exclusively female group is a faithful depiction of the full extent of Akhenaten's own family. Good evidence exists, however, for making Tutankhamun a son of Akhenaten, though not necessarily by Nefertiti, since Akhenaten is known to have had more than one wife.[9] If this is so, emphasis on femininity may itself be a facet of Akhenaten's ideology.

One further traditional religious concept was retained by Akhenaten, and even emphasized. This was *maat*, which can be translated 'truth' or 'justice', and really embraced the whole correct order of the universe.[10] In a characteristic transformation of an abstract into something tangible the Egyptians had made Maat into a goddess, daughter of the sun-god Ra. Although the goddess herself received little attention from Akhenaten, the old-established epithet 'who lives on *maat*', which once was a prerogative of the gods, was used by Akhenaten regularly to describe himself. 'Who lives on truth' is one of the set phrases of Akhenaten's inscriptions, the words meaning that 'truth' was a substance which he consumed. Although the Egyptian's normal use of the word did not carry the stark and binding power which the word has in modern usage, it would be perverse, given the nature of Akhenaten's interests, not to recognize that, however the word may have been used previously, the 'Truth' was now the new and superior revelation of the nature of god. 'Truth' was on its way to having the force which it has come to have in modern creeds.

In Chapter 5 it was pointed out that Akhenaten's first major initiative in establishing the new cult was carried out at Karnak, at the centre of the cult of Amun. This took the form of building a series of temples of likely open-plan type more suited to the worship of the visible sun and decorated with statues and wall scenes in the startling new style, the whole operation brought to a climax by a royal *Sed*-festival years before its proper time. Tens of thousands of small loose stone building blocks have been recovered from these early temples, as well as pieces of colossal statues of the king. These are in the most extreme artistic style of his reign, and show that it was developed at the very beginning.[11]

The foundation: Akhetaten, 'Horizon of the sun-disk'

In the fifth year of his reign Akhenaten chose to build an entirely new royal city and centre for his cult: a city built around temples to the Aten and palaces for his family in the novel style which could stand unchallenged by the works of the past. Its name was

Akhetaten, 'The Horizon of the Aten'. The site for this lay roughly half-way between Memphis and Thebes: a complete slice of the Nile Valley, from a broad tract of farmland on the west to a flat and apparently unoccupied stretch of desert on the east where most of the building would be done. His visionary intentions are recorded on a series of tablets (the Boundary Stelae) carved at intervals in the cliffs on both sides of the Nile (Figure 87).[12] They state that the Aten had led him to the site and selected it, and that it had previously belonged to no other god or goddess. Within the limits of the tablets the temples and palaces would be built, and the existing fields and villages on the opposite bank of the river found themselves part of the grand scheme. One year later he paid another state visit to the site, and a second set of tablets was carved into the hills. They contain an oath of the King:

> My oath of truth, which it is my desire to pronounce, and of which I will not say: 'It is false', for ever and ever: Akhetaten extends from the southern tablet as far as the northern tablet, measured between tablet and tablet in the eastern mountain, likewise from the south-west tablet to the north-west tablet in the western mountain of Akhetaten. The area within these four tablets is Akhetaten itself; it belongs to Aten my father: mountains, deserts, meadows, islands, high ground and low ground, water, villages, men, animals and all things which the Aten my father shall bring into existence eternally and forever. I will not neglect this oath which I have made to the Aten my father eternally and forever.

On two of the tablets a second similar oath was repeated after another two years, perhaps at the time that the King came into residence. One passage in the tablets has sometimes created the impression that Akhenaten swore never himself to leave the confines of the city. This, however, is a misunderstanding. The relevant passages, in stating that he will not go beyond the boundaries, mean that he will not extend the limits of Akhetaten beyond them. Another of the passages contains the very clear provision for his death when outside the city: 'If I die in any town of the north, south, west, or east, in the multitude of years, I will be brought, and my burial be made in Akhetaten.'

The ultimate sign of Akhenaten's sincerity and his break with the past was this promise to site tombs for himself and for his family in the eastern hills, a new Valley of the Kings. His courtiers were expected to do the same.

The city was built in great haste, and occupied by a substantial population. Its life was, however, to be brief. The king died in his seventeenth regnal year. What happened immediately afterwards remains obscure, but the eventual successor was Tutankhamun and his wife, the third royal daughter, Ankhsenpa-aten.[13] During his nine-year reign the ideas of his father were rejected, and a complete return to religious orthodoxy took place. This is made very explicit by his decree re-establishing the cult of Amun at Karnak.[14] Interestingly, it was issued from Memphis, a sign of how much Memphis had come to replace Thebes as the main royal city during the New Kingdom. Akhenaten's preparation of a tomb at Amarna shows that he had the faith that the city and his ideas would be lasting. His faith was misplaced. He was rejected by later generations as not having been a legitimate king, and came to be referred to as 'that enemy from Akhetaten' and suchlike.[15] The rapid abandonment of his ideas meant that the city, too, had little future. A sizeable population lingered on for a while, probably well into the

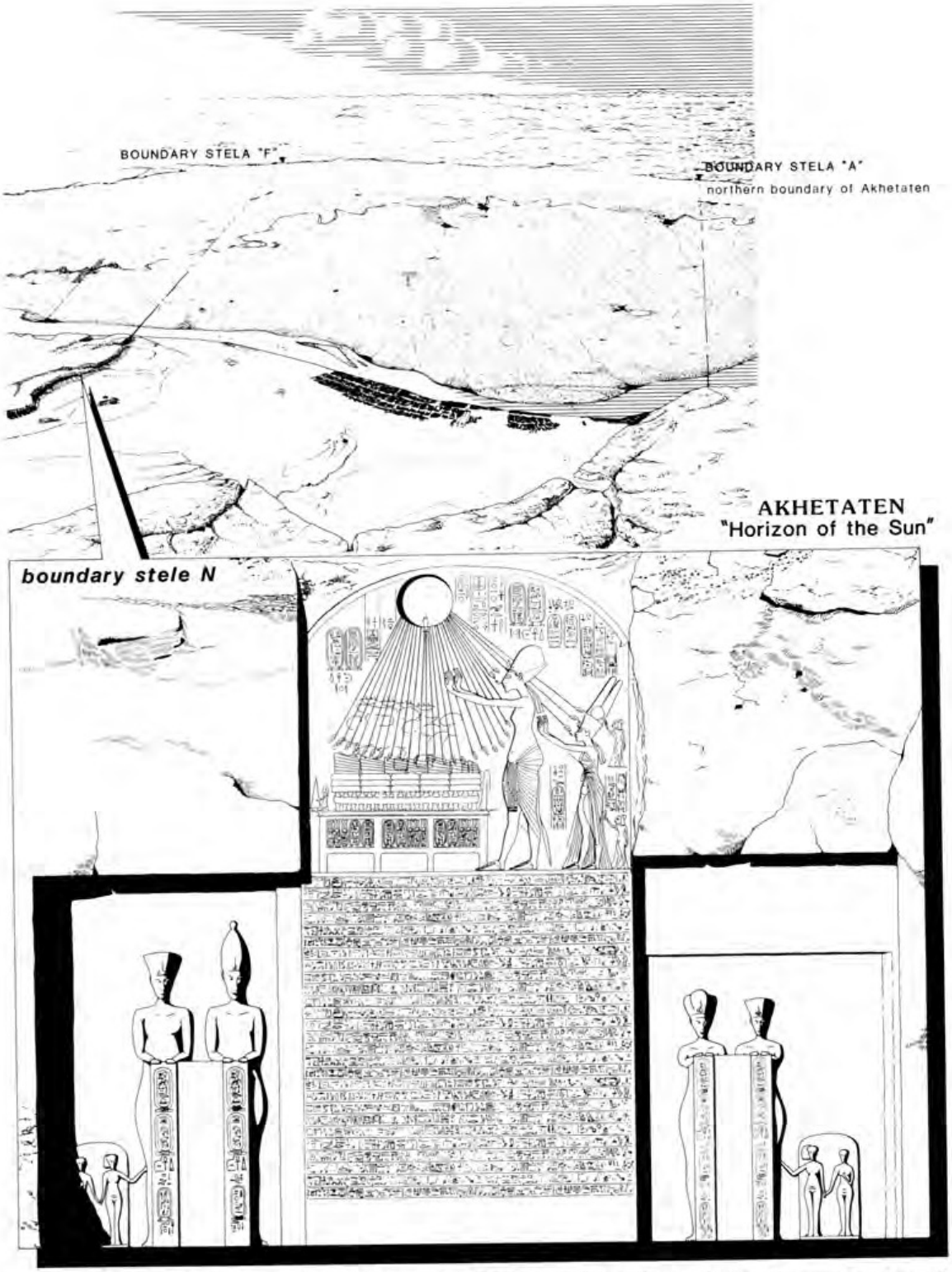


Figure 87 Akhenaten's new city, Akhetaten, 'Horizon of the Sun'. *Above*. Reconstruction of the 18th Dynasty landscape showing the extent of cultivated land on the west side of the river which lay between the boundary stelae. *Below*. Reconstruction of the original appearance of one of the boundary stelae, 'N'. The stele, 3.9 metres high, is flanked by statues. Each set depicts Akhenaten and Nefertiti holding in front of them a narrow vertical tablet inscribed with the names of the Aten and of themselves. They are accompanied by their two eldest daughters, Meritaten and Meketaten. Much of the stele and parts of the statues still survive.

reign of Tutankhamun, but thereafter, apart from an area beside the waterfront, it became a ghost city.

The nature of Amarna has gradually been revealed by excavation and survey which began last century, continued with breaks until 1936, and was resumed in 1977.[16] The city itself, apart from the information it gives us about Akhenaten's concepts, is a major site for the study of ancient urbanism generally. Few archaeological sites of this size exist in the pre-classical world where the ground plan is as clear or as well documented as this. Although the circumstances of its founding are unique, it forms an apt basis for considering certain aspects of ancient Egyptian society, and for illustrating the impact which kingship could have on it.

Amarna is the modern name for the city part of Akhetaten lying on the east bank (Figure 89). The ancient city limits, however, encompassed an area roughly 16 by 13 km, measured between the Boundary Stelae (Figures 87, 88). Clearly a good deal of farmland was present, but we can only guess at how much. It is worth making the attempt, however, because it then becomes possible to consider what the carrying capacity of the land was (i.e. how many people its agricultural produce would support) in terms of the likely population of the city.

We can be reasonably sure of one thing, that the present course of the river as it sweeps past Amarna is not very far from its 18th Dynasty course, since several of the tomb scenes are explicit in giving the central part of the city a waterfront. The floodplain is crossed from north to south not only by the Nile but by a parallel watercourse to the west called the Bahr Yusef which used to diverge from the Nile in the region of Dairut.[17] If we limit the cultivable land of the New Kingdom to that which lay east of the Bahr Yusef – and particularly towards the south this could well produce a very conservative estimate – we have a total of around 162 sq. km, or 59,200 of the ancient land measure called an aroura. People have made estimates as to how large a population an aroura could support: a rural population of perhaps 0.5 per aroura, plus a non-farming population of a rather smaller size, perhaps 0.25.[18] We can estimate that the fields of Akhetaten could have supported a population as large as 45,000. As we shall see, estimates of the actual city population vary between 20,000 and 50,000.

We also have to consider what we mean by farming and non-farming elements in the population. The character of the Amarna houses strongly implies that many of the 'officials' who lived in the city were also receiving a farm income, either from their own more distant lands or from rented land across the river, on the fields of Akhetaten. The village population on the west, made up largely of labourers, may thus have been quite small. It is impossible without more reliable evidence to pursue this line of reasoning any further, but what the exercise does do is to suggest a very rough balance between the carrying capacity of the land and the population within the limits of Akhetaten. It was, however, also a general ideal to build up surplus grain stocks (grain mountains, in today's terms). In pursuit of this, local produce could well have been augmented by the produce of private estates outside the limits, and perhaps also by income for the Aten from other places. The Aten temples at Karnak were supplied by 'offerings' from very diverse sources, including provincial mayors.[19] But this was in the king's early days. The proclamations in the Boundary Stelae might mean that henceforth the Aten at Akhetaten was to be supplied only by the land that was his, the land demarcated by the Stelae. The allocation of a large contiguous block of land to one institution runs so

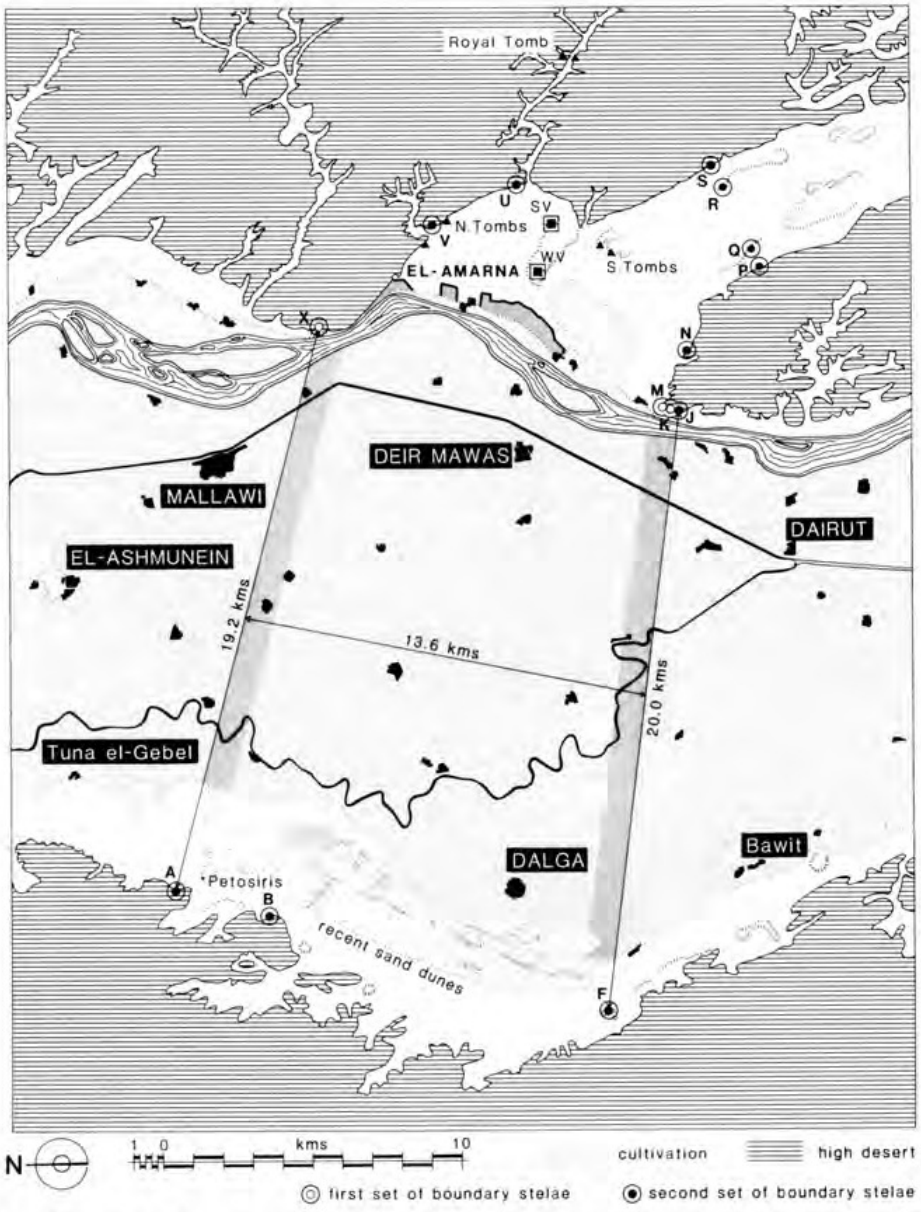


Figure 88 Map of the Nile Valley at el-Amarna showing the extent of Akhetaten, as defined by the Boundary Stelae. Behind el-Amarna are the two sets of rock tombs (the North Tombs and South Tombs), the Royal Tomb, and two outlying sites, the Workmen's Village (WV) and Stone Village (SV).

much counter to the normal pattern of institutional landholding that it might, in itself, mark an application of the novel simplicity that Akhenaten seems to have found attractive.

Excavation by archaeologists lays bare the outlines of ruined buildings, but the results may be a long way from how the city appeared to those who lived there. We are fortunate at Amarna in having pictures of the city as certain artists saw it, recorded in

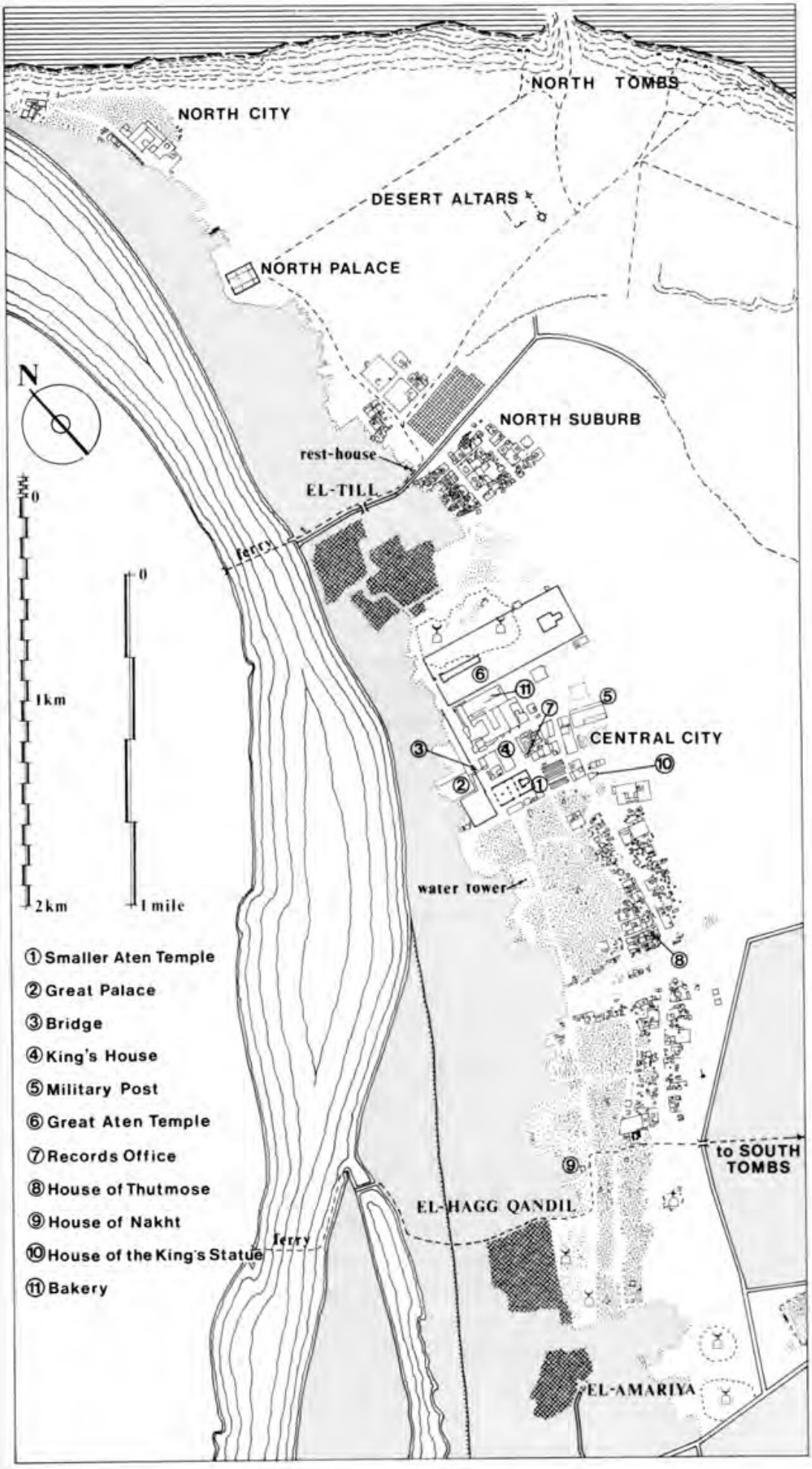


Figure 89 Map of the ancient city of Amarna showing principal excavated buildings and modern features.

several of the rock tombs at the site.[20] Their perspective was very different from ours: their purpose was to record the visual sensations of being in certain important places, rather than to delineate them with topographical accuracy. Consequently they must be used with care. But they do show many important architectural features which would otherwise be unknown, and they show that the ancient Egyptians' love of trees and gardens was well represented in the city. It would have possessed a greenness which the present aridity of the site entirely lacks.

The rock tombs are in two groups, the North and the South, hewn in the cliffs and hills which border the site in a great arc to the east. They belonged to courtiers and officials. It is common at Thebes to find tombs left unfinished, but at Amarna it is the rule. But since it was standard ancient practice to bring in the decorators as soon as enough wall space was ready for them, a good deal of carved wall decoration was finished even when the masons might not have finished hewing out the inner chambers. The scenes are variations on a limited number of themes, most of which centre on the life of the royal family. The tomb owner appears only as a subordinate figure, except at the entrance to the tomb, where he was often allowed to occupy the side walls with figures of himself offering a long prayer, and at the rear of the tomb where, in a few cases, a statue of the owner has been started, and surrounded by little depictions of his family.

There is one further pictorial source of information. The new temples and the Great Palace were partly built of stone, their walls decorated with scenes which sometimes showed the same kinds of pictures of city life around the royal family as occur in the private tombs. In the time of Rameses II, between 50 and 100 years afterwards, Amarna was a largely empty city with its public buildings abandoned but still in good condition. They were too tempting a source for cheap building stone. With great thoroughness they were demolished and the stones taken away by the boatload for use in the king's huge programme of temple construction. Many made a short journey, to the city of Hermopolis (modern el-Ashmunein) across the river. Excavations have brought to light some 1,500 loose blocks, but this is likely to be only a fraction of the original quantity. They cannot be put together to form complete scenes, but singly or in small groups they are a useful source of information.[21]

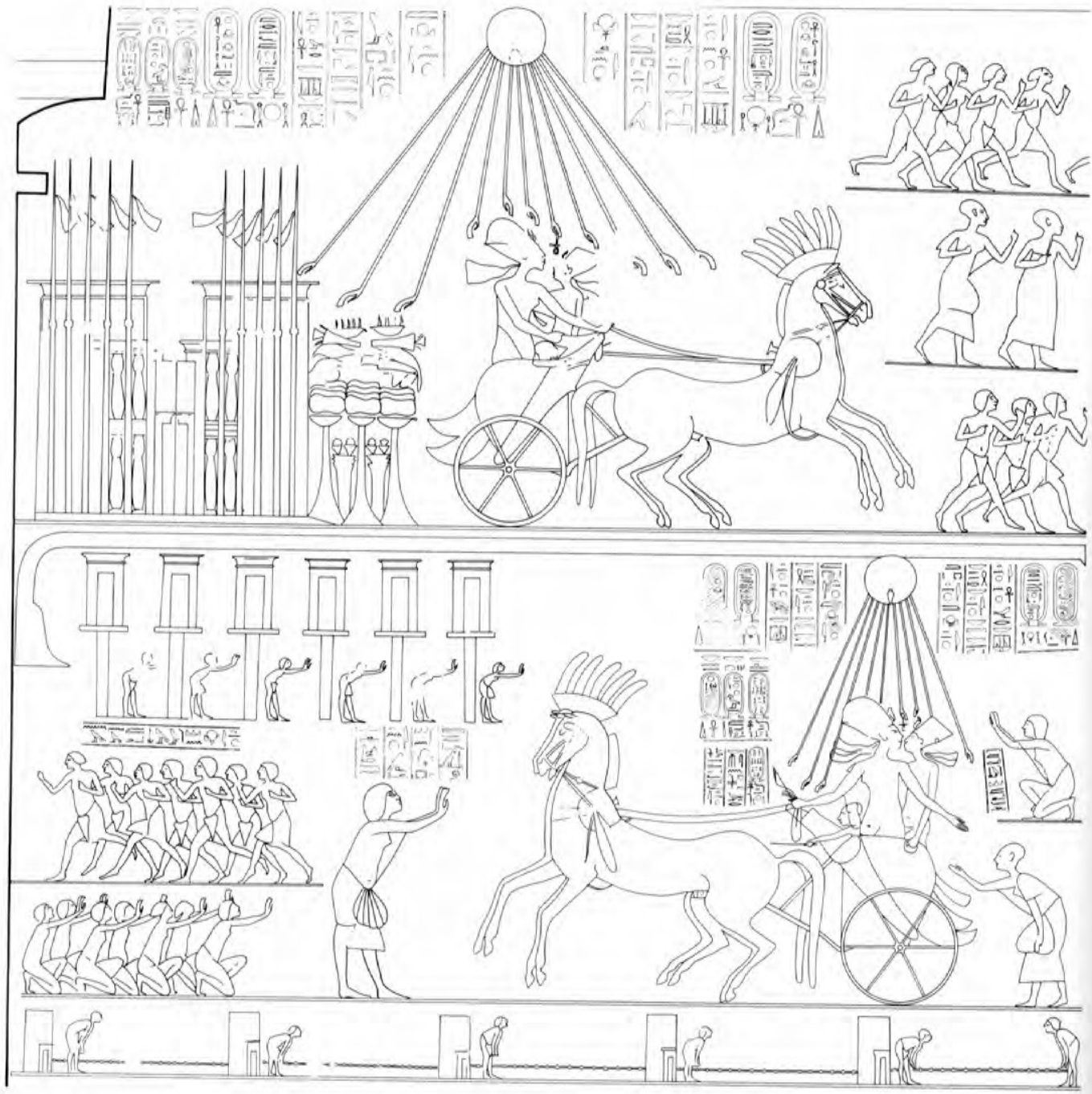
On his Boundary Stelae Akhenaten promised tombs for himself and his family at Akhetaten. The new Valley of the Kings was in a peculiarly remote location to the east. From the city a trek of 3 miles (5 km) takes one to the entrance to the wadi which leads to the Royal Valley, but another 4 miles (6 km) lie ahead before the site of the royal necropolis is reached. Of the various tombs planned, only one was brought anywhere near to completion, and this was Akhenaten's own. It has the dimensions and character of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. Most of the decoration has been lost, but the few fragments surviving show familiar pictures of the royal family and the Aten. The really unusual feature of the design is that it was intended as the nucleus for a family tomb. When the second daughter, Meketaten, died she was buried in a separate series of chambers leading off from the main entrance corridor. Poignant scenes of the distraught royal family occur on the walls. Subsequently a second and much grander side-suite was begun, which shows all the signs of having been intended as a second royal tomb. A tempting suggestion is that this was for Nefertiti.[22]

Security for cemeteries was an age-long Egyptian concern. Tomb robbery was an

ancient occupation, and a few generations after the Amarna Period the authorities at Thebes were busy investigating robberies in the Theban necropolis. At Amarna it would seem that the desert behind the city and around the cliffs was patrolled in an organized manner. This left behind on the desert a network of paths that are still visible.[23] They were made by sweeping desert stones to either side of the path to leave two bordering ridges. In daytime they might seem superfluous in the normally clear air. Their usefulness would have become apparent at night, when the faint light of the moon, or even of the stars, renders slight irregularities of the desert surprisingly visible. The paths cross from north to south, circle around two desert villages, converge on some kind of central point in the southern portion of the desert, and cross other roads running in straight lines directly to important rock tombs. One track followed the brink of the cliffs, being broken into separate sections by the deep valleys.

The creation of Akhetaten must have involved a labour force of workers and artists, but the presence of a large and regimented group of this kind is not obvious from the archaeological record. Perhaps many were simply the city inhabitants whose houses were to be found almost everywhere. An exception to this lies out in the desert behind the main city. A low plateau runs forward from the foot of the cliffs towards the main city, and in a little side valley lay a square walled village containing sixty-eight houses of identical size, plus a larger one, presumably for the official in charge. The village lies not too far from the southern group of rock tombs, and this may be an important clue for the reason for the village: it housed a community of men maintained by the government for cutting and decorating tombs. A similar village existed at Thebes, at the site of Deir el-Medina, although here the workmen's prime responsibility was the current royal tomb. We cannot be sure if this was true also for the people at the Workmen's Village at Amarna, for the Royal Tomb is a long way distant.

The Workmen's Village was the first site of the resumed modern excavations of the Egypt Exploration Society of Great Britain.[24] Much of the excavation was concentrated on the ground immediately outside the village walls, where substantial quantities of rubbish had anciently been dumped, and this, together with changes to buildings, discloses a degree of activity which is surprising when compared to the brevity of occupation. It runs well into the uncertain years following the death of Akhenaten. At this time, when Tutankhamun came to the throne, a new phase of building activity took place just outside the village. The inhabitants began to build chapels on the hillside intended as places for family gatherings. Some inscriptions have been found, and these mention mainly traditional gods, including Amun-Ra, whom Akhenaten regarded as an arch-enemy. At this place people evidently stayed on for a longer period after Akhenaten's death than is often supposed, perhaps looking after the tombs, either until their precious contents were removed, or perhaps just in case a further turn in history brought the court back again. Subsequent excavations in the Main City, at a place which supplied the village with its water and probably also with some of its pottery, have confirmed that the reign of Tutankhamun gave to some parts of Amarna a new lease of life, albeit short-lived.



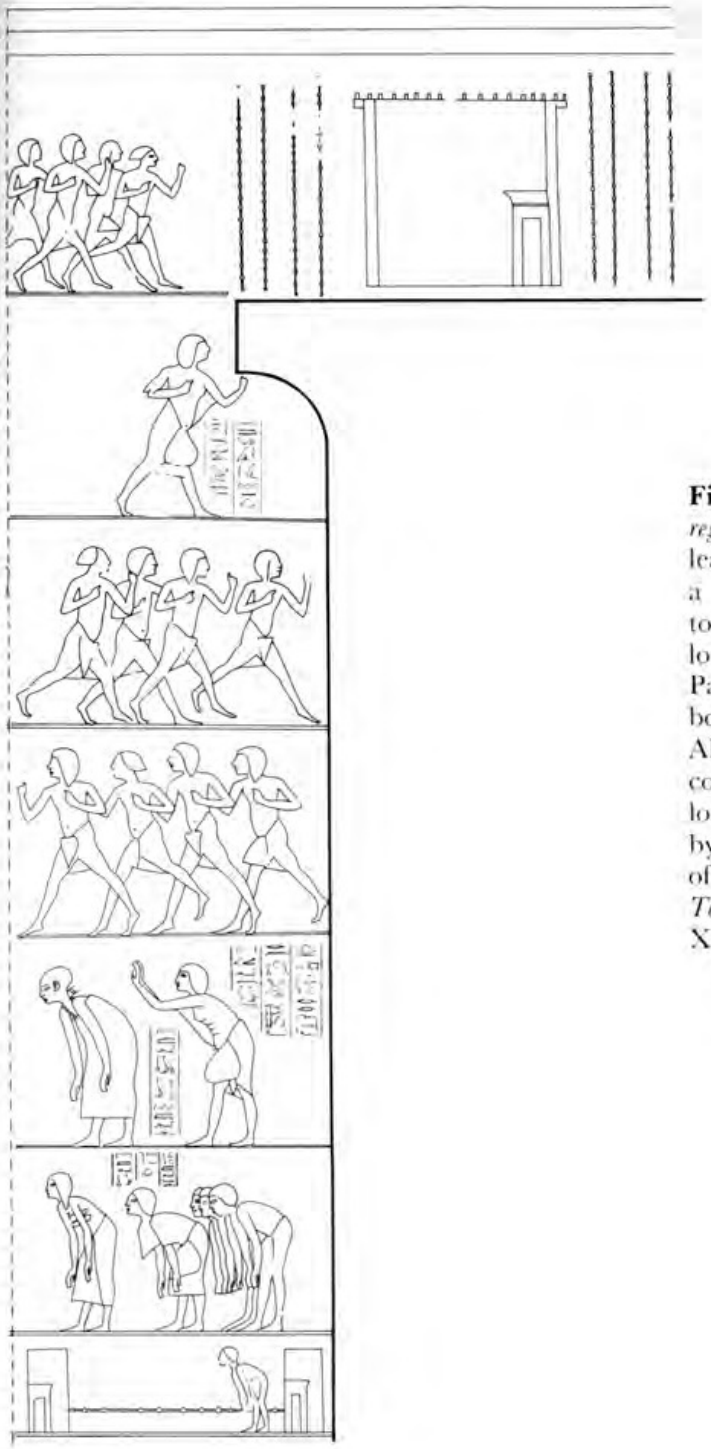


Figure 90 The royal chariot drive. *Upper register*. Akhenaten and Nefertiti in a chariot leave one of the Aten temples (represented as a pylon entrance with flag-poles). They head towards a fortified building set between what look like fences, probably the North Riverside Palace (Figure 91), flanked by a running bodyguard headed by the 'Chief of Police of Akhetaten, Mahu'. *Lower register*. The royal couple drive along a road marked by what looks like the same fence, again accompanied by Mahu and his bodyguard. From the tomb of Mahu, after N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna* IV, London, 1906, Plates XX–XXII.

The arena of royal display

The point was made in Chapter 5 that the sources for Akhenaten's kingship create, quite unintentionally, a caricature of the public role of the charismatic leader as it has survived from the Bronze Age to this day. The elements can be summarized thus:

1. the state procession
2. armed escorts
3. postures of special deference for those allowed to approach
4. the 'Appearance', alone or with family, at a palace balcony
5. the open-air review of troops and representatives of empire
6. public or semi-public acts of worship
7. pictures of the leader, alone or with family, in people's own homes (Figure 94).

Amarna provides us with a unique combination of sources which allows us to reconstruct the public showing of Egyptian kingship. We have the action pictures in the scenes in the rock tombs, and we have from excavation much of the actual physical setting. Samples of the elements 1) to 6) as they occur in tomb scenes will be found in Figures 90, 92, and 93. It remains to describe the layout.

Although the city was laid out on a relatively flat and unencumbered stretch of desert, the degree of forward planning was not great, and was largely confined to the official buildings which created this special setting. These are the elements we need to isolate (Figure 91). The backbone was a long, straight avenue, the so-called Royal Road, which connected the Central City to the North City. The choice of where its end-points were to be was influenced by the site's topography. Although we speak of the 'Amarna plain' it is not, in terms of the scale of human visitors, particularly flat. From north to south it has several broad undulations which make themselves felt to those travelling from one end to the other. The Royal Road linked two of them. The Central City stood on one, its peak the King's House on an eastwards-running ridge on which the police post was also built; at the other end the North City nestled tightly and securely on the foot of the slopes beneath the cliffs where they approach the river.

The North City (Figure 91) contained a substantial building, the North Riverside Palace, with massive fortified wall. This was probably the principal royal residence, private and separate from the rest of the city, and also well protected.[25] Part of this wall, pierced by a huge gateway, is still a prominent feature. Between the wall and the palace proper were magazines and other buildings which could well have been a barracks for the king's bodyguard. Across the road lay a group of houses, some of them the largest in the whole city and presumably for some of the courtiers closest to the king. The North City was closed at the north by a large administrative building terraced up into the lower slopes of the cliff, and containing a huge warehouse block for commodities, part of it perhaps a granary. This implies that the North City and the king's private residence were self-sufficient in food, with a supply independent from the sources which sustained the rest of the city. The whole site, because of the overshadowing cliff, has an atmosphere very different from the rest of the city, and was evidently as attractive a place to Akhenaten as it remains to visitors today.

The Royal Road began here, and then struck southwards across low open ground

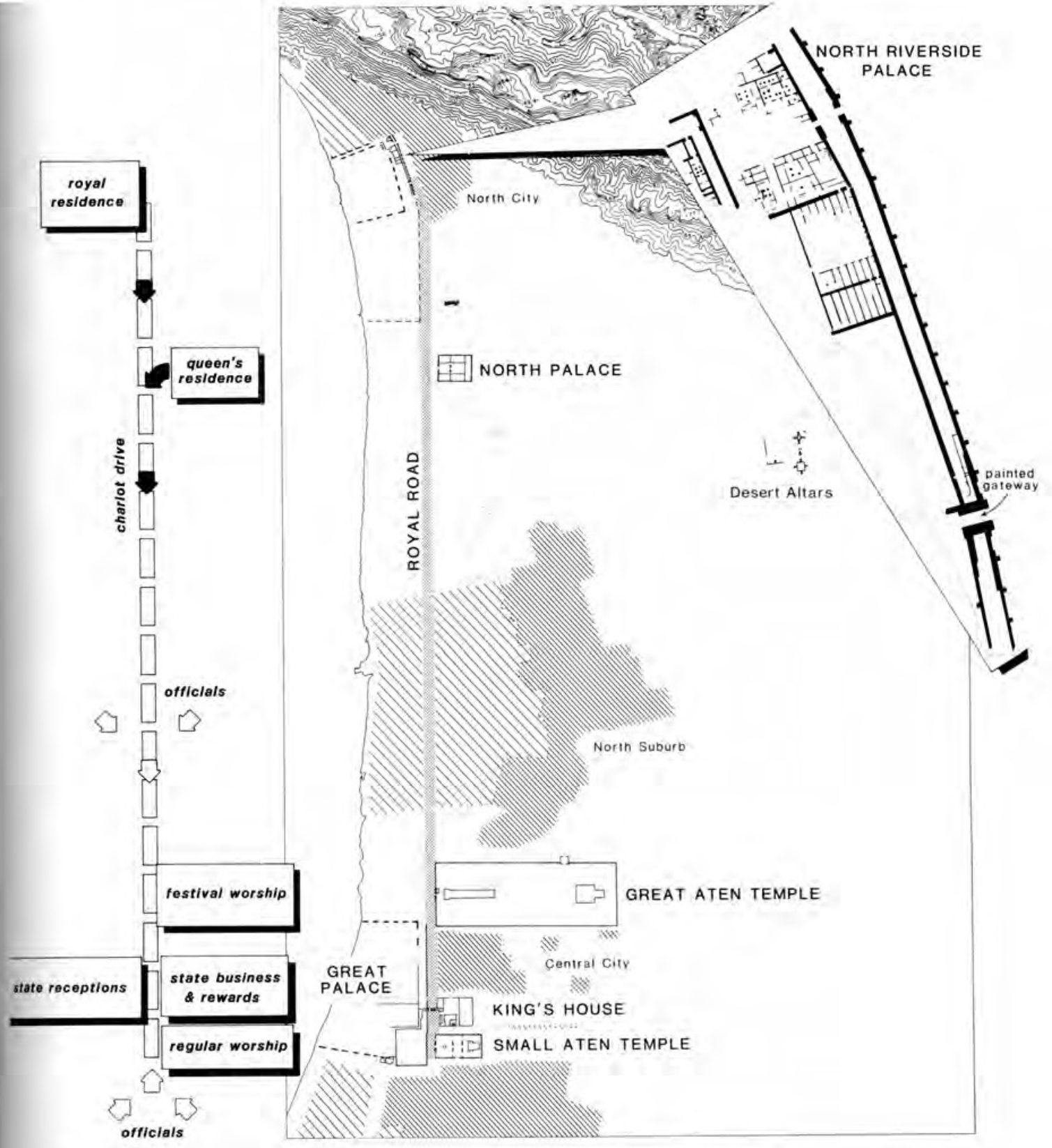


Figure 91 Diagram of the principal structural element at Amarna, the royal processional route.

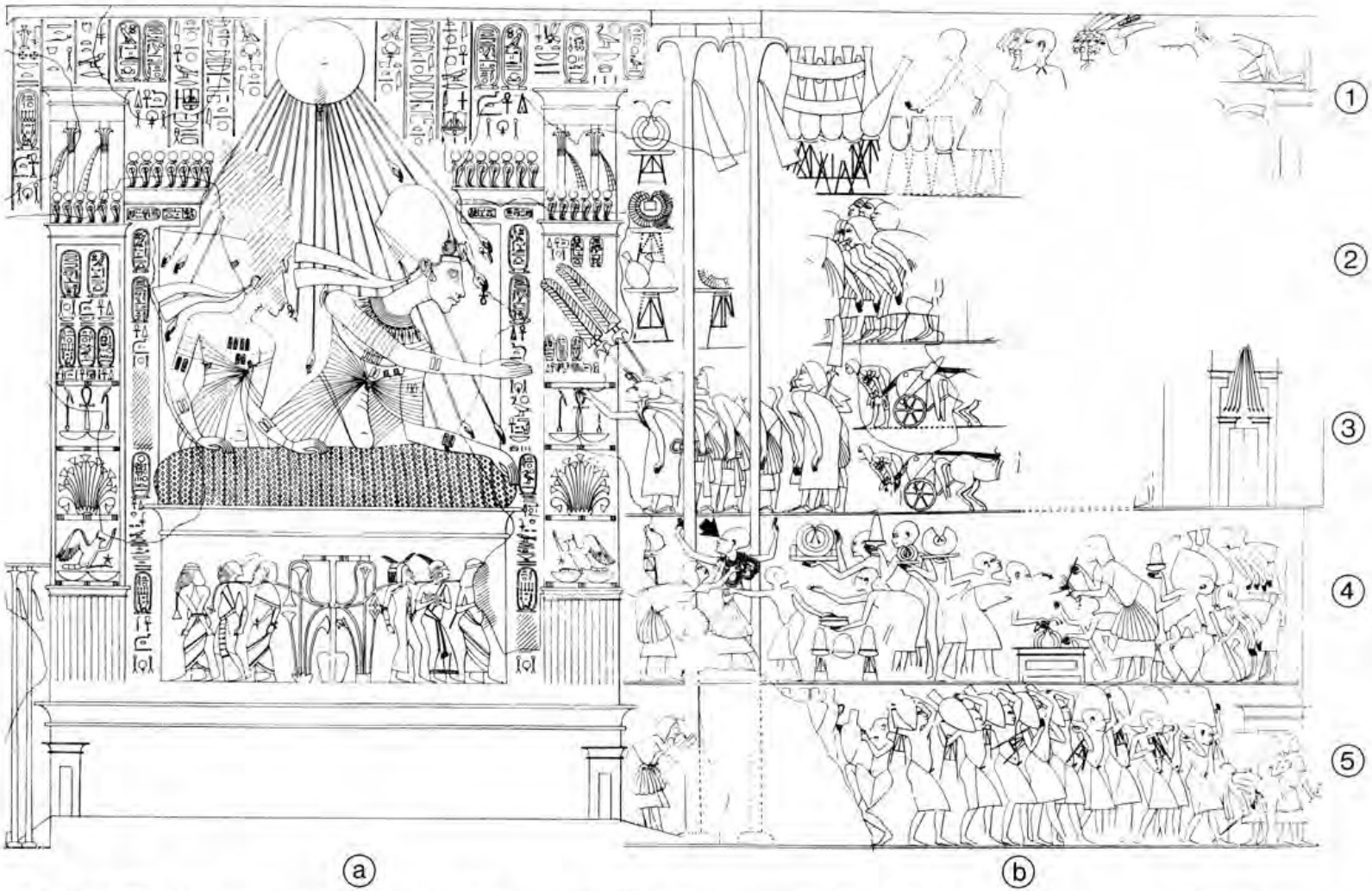
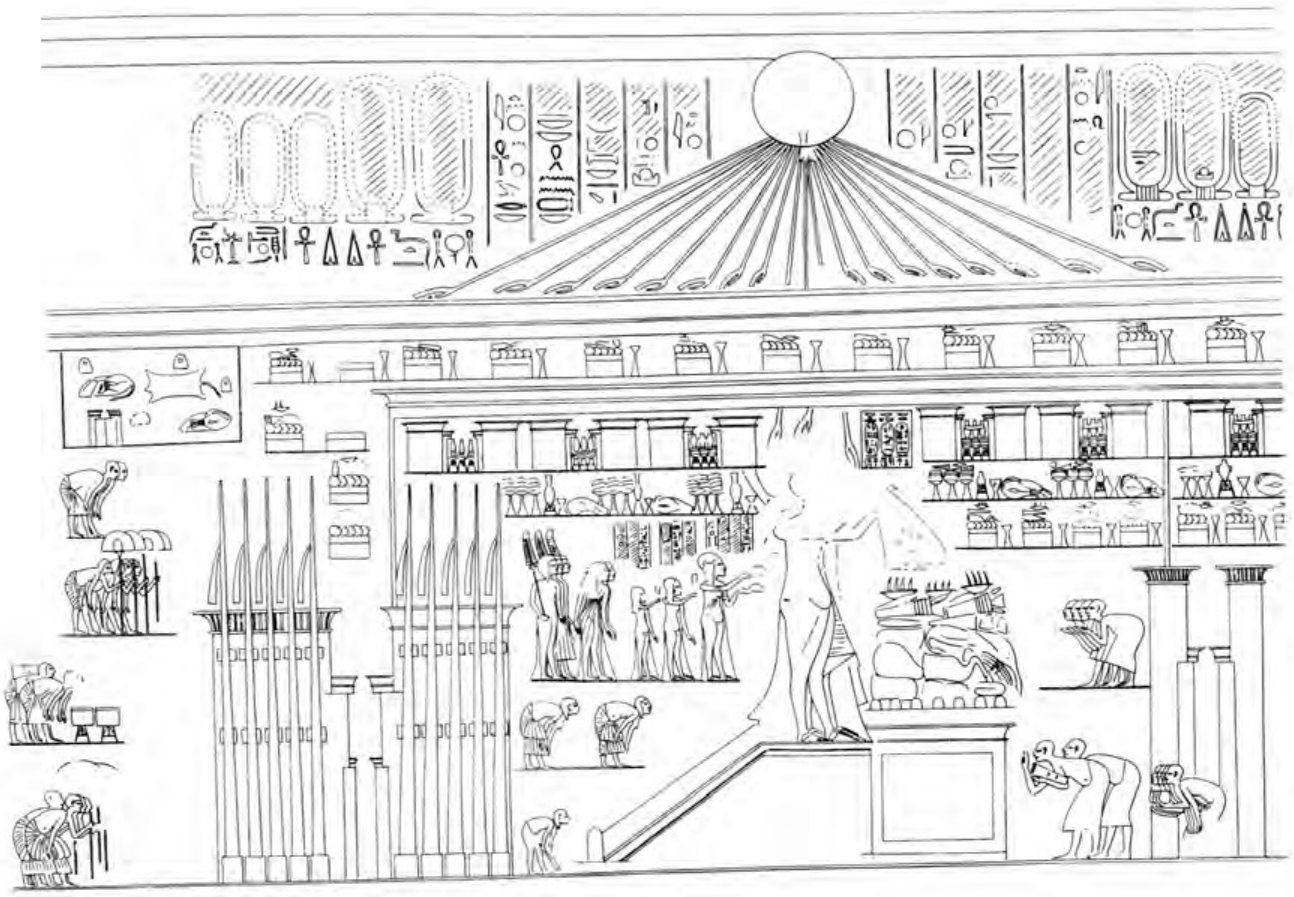


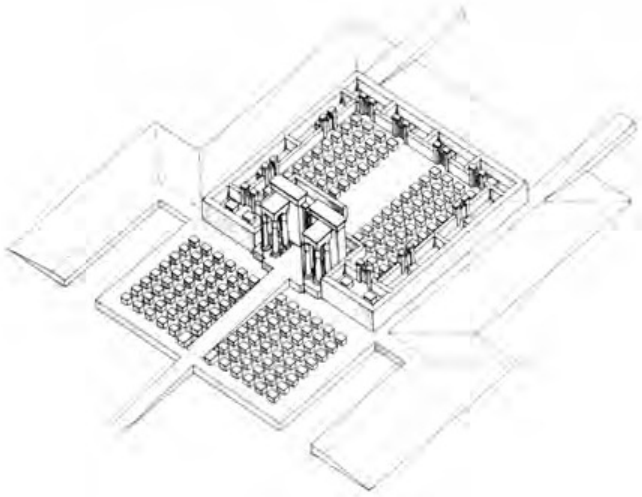
Figure 92 Akhenaten at the Window of Appearance, rewarding one of his loyal officials. Note the 'unification' symbol with bound captives which appears below the window in section (a), cf. Figure 73, p. 212. In register 4 of section (b), at the left end, the official Parennefer receives gold necklaces bestowed by the king, whilst to the right servants and scribes record and pack into a chest other gifts. Of particular interest in this scene is register 5, which shows amphorae and baskets of commodities being carried out, confirming that the Window ceremony involved the distribution of goods of a more basic, ration-like kind as well as the giving of special rewards. The upper registers (1–3) depict other officials and courtiers (awaiting their turn?), and some of their waiting chariots. For Windows of Appearance at Thebes, see Figures 68, p. 192, 73, p. 212. From the tomb of Parennefer, after N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna* VI, London, 1908, Plate IV.

towards the Central City. This was the route for the royal drive, a favourite amongst the tomb scenes. One of them actually shows the North Riverside Palace, drawn as a stylized fortress complete with battlements, as the point of the royal departure, and some kind of fencing along the sides of the great road (Figure 90). In Chapter 5 we saw how important to the city of Thebes were the processional festivals of its gods, how they provided a round-the-year public spectacle and a symbolic claim to the external world by traversing long distances. For the most important of them the king arrived to add and in a way submerge his person. The worship of the Aten stopped all this. There were no sacred boat shrines to carry any more. The Aten's disk made its own way across the sky, permanently in procession. Akhenaten had created another vacuum and tried to fill it with processions of himself as the focus for public adulation, replacing with military dash the stately, colourful, and noisy bearing of the divine images of old. Here again we catch a whiff of the world to come. King, queen, daughters, retainers in their chariots, the bodyguards running along in stooping posture (Figure 90): we can recognize the basis of the scene re-enacted today in capital cities and on state occasions the world over. The presidential limousine, the royal landau, motorcycle outriders, presidential advisers, and security guards, all are parts of a public performance acted out over the subsequent millennia as rulers and leaders have responded to the urge for public acclaim.

On its way south, the Royal Road passed an isolated building facing the river, the North Palace.[26] When excavated in the 1920s it was found to be a self-contained royal residence, with formal reception halls, a domestic suite with bedroom and bathroom, an open-air solar temple, and gardens and courts where the walls were painted with bright scenes from nature, and animals and birds were kept. The many fragments of inscriptions recovered show that the person for whom the North Palace was finally intended was the eldest princess and heiress, Meritaten. It may have become, when she came of age during her father's reign, her main residence. In its basic purpose – providing a quite separate palace for a major queen and her household – it conforms to the type of harem-palace documented both from texts and from the site of Medinet el-Ghurab (see Chapter 5), and in its formality it can be compared with, for example, the surviving fragment of the Palace of Merenptah at Memphis.

Beyond the North Palace, the Royal Road eventually ran through the first of the densely built-up areas of private houses, the North Suburb, and began the slight climb to the low plateau on which the Central City stood. The Central City was arranged around the terminus of the main stretch of the Royal Road (Figures 89, p. 271, 91, p. 277).[27] Along the entire western side and probably covering all the ground to the waterfront lay the Great Palace.[28] This included an intimate area of pleasant courts and halls, brightly painted (see Figure 77, p. 224, for a fragment of painted pavement). But the core of the building was an enormous courtyard surrounded by colossal statues of Akhenaten, and a complex of halls and smaller courts and monuments. These parts were constructed of stone, and since, after the city was abandoned, the stonework was systematically removed, it is now difficult to be sure how these parts appeared. Whatever the details were, however, the whole served to provide the king with a sumptuous, semi-religious setting which advertised his new religion and art and in which formal receptions and ceremonies could be held, including those, perhaps, for the most important envoys from foreign courts who would return to their masters with tales of





wonder at the extravagance and innovation of the new ruler. At the southern end of the Great Palace was an extraordinary addition, a hall built for Akhenaten's immediate successor, Smenkhkara, containing 544 brick columns, and with walls encrusted with glazed tiles. A bridge of brick across the Royal Road linked the Great Palace with a small residence, the King's House. This is a representative of the smaller palaces – the mooring-places of Pharaoh – discussed in Chapter 5. It served as the king's working premises, and as such contained the Window of Appearance, where the king and his family appeared in order to reward loyal officials and to announce their promotions to higher offices. More will be said about this window in the next section.

One state building in the centre has already been described: the Great Palace. Two more lay on the other side of the road, closing either end of the Central City. Both were temples, but, of the key elements built of stone, only their foundations survive. The more northerly was the Great Temple to the Aten.[29] This occupied a huge enclosure 229 metres wide and running back from the Royal Road for 730 metres. Much of the interior seems to have been open space, but we must suspect that this is simply because Akhenaten never completed his grand designs. At both temples there is evidence that the first constructions were in brick, just to create quickly the necessary settings for worship. A programme of replacement and enhancement in stone then followed. The Great Aten Temple enclosure gives the distinct impression of being a huge ceremonial site still waiting for most of its complement of sacred buildings to be added. In the end only two were built, lying along the main east-west axis.

The temple enclosure was entered between two brick towers (or pylons) at the front, which led immediately to the first of the two stone buildings, called 'The House of Rejoicing'. Unlike normal Egyptian temples which began with an open court followed by roofed chambers, this building reversed the sequence by beginning with a columned hall which gave access to a series of open courts filled with stone offering-tables. At the rear of the building was an area separately designated: 'Gem-Aten', or 'The Aten is found'. This differed little from the rest of the temple except that some of the altars around the sides of the courts were protected by walls. The provision of many altars is a feature of Akhenaten's cult. Contemporary tomb scenes which depict the temples show the altars piled with food- and drink-offerings. This was the traditional way of serving the gods, but Akhenaten seems to have used it to demonstrate an excessive piety. It reached its height beside the 'House of Rejoicing', where several hundred offering-tables were laid out over a veritable field on the south side. In the rear part of the Great Temple lay the second stone building, where again the main feature was open courts filled with rows of offering-tables. We must remember in looking at plans and reconstruction drawings of these buildings that all that survives are the foundations, together with ancient depictions in the rock tombs at Amarna. They allow considerable scope for differing interpretations. For example, whereas the excavators visualized them

Figure 93 Semi-public worship of the Aten in one of the temples in the Central City. *Above*. The king stands on a platform within the temple making offerings. Within the temple are numerous small offering-tables. He is observed by some of his daughters, and by groups of obsequious onlookers. Note the animal slaughterhouse in the top left corner, with its tethering-stones. From the tomb of Panehsy, after N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna* II, London, 1905, Plate XVIII. *Below*. One reconstruction of the Sanctuary of the Great Aten Temple, after B.J. Kemp, *Amarna Reports* IV, London, 1987, p. 112, Fig. 8.7. Other reconstructions from available evidence are possible.



Figure 94 An official portrait of the royal family relaxing at home. The portrait was itself, however, an object of private veneration for it came probably from a chapel in the grounds of a private house. Limestone, height 32 cm. Akhenaten sits on the left, holding the eldest daughter and heiress Meritaten; Nefertiti sits opposite, with the second daughter Meketaten (soon to die) on her lap, and cradling the third daughter Ankhsenpa-aten (later the wife of Tutankhamun) in her arms. Berlin Museum 14145.

built more or less at ground level and surrounded by high walls it is possible to argue that they were, for the most part, constructed on platforms of gypsum concrete with their front parts open so that the king's initial acts of worship would be more widely visible, as is suggested in the tomb pictures (Figure 93).[30]

Another finished sacred structure within the enclosure was a free-standing monument, a *benben*-stone. Again we are indebted to ancient tomb scenes for giving us its shape (Figure 30(5), p. 87). It stood on a pedestal, and was a single piece of stone given a rounded top. As noted in Chapter 2, from early times this was the shape of a sacred sun symbol, the original possibly standing at Heliopolis, just outside modern Cairo. The origin of the shape and reason for its connection with the sun are not really

known, but its retention by Akhenaten is one of many signs that in the form and presentation of his cult he relied heavily upon traditional ideas.

The Central City possessed a second, smaller temple to the Aten, called 'The Mansion of the Aten.' It lay immediately beside the King's House. It is essentially a compressed version of the Great Temple. Its enclosure was much smaller, and surrounded by a wall with towers at intervals on the outside face. This is something known from other temples of the New Kingdom, where the evidence shows that the towers were finished off at the top with battlements, to give the outside world the impression that the temple stood within a fortress (see Chapter 5). The entrance was between two pylon towers which are still a prominent feature of the landscape. Their outside faces were provided with grooves in which tall flag-poles were erected, streamers fluttering from their tops. A large 'Sunshade' platform stood in the centre of the first courtyard, beyond the entrance pylons. Behind two more sets of pylons came the stone sanctuary, which was almost a copy of that in the Great Temple. Recent re-examination of parts of this temple has illustrated very clearly how it was subject to a process of improvement during the Amarna Period. The 'Sunshade' came first, perhaps as the very first place at Amarna where the king could properly worship the Aten. Later it was demolished to its foundations, presumably to be replaced by the stone sanctuary further back. Only at this time were the pylons built, and they had to await the reign of Smenkhkara before stonemasons could be found to start the process of stone embellishment of the main entrance.[31]

This smaller temple, from its position in the heart of the city, was evidently the place where many of the king's acts of semi-public worship took place, and was thus essentially a chapel royal. Whether by coincidence or not, if one stands at the front of the temple pylons and looks directly along the temple axis to the distant cliffs, it will be found that the temple axis points roughly towards the entrance to the wadi which led to the Royal Tomb. One can argue from this that the temple was the equivalent to a mortuary temple, where statues of Akhenaten would receive a more concentrated degree of cultic attention than they might have done in other royal buildings. The presence in the second court of a small building which probably consisted of a robing-room and Window of Appearance adds some weight to this, for this feature was an essential element of the royal mortuary temples at Thebes.[32] So, too, does the use of the term 'Mansion', which was commonly, though not exclusively, used for funerary temples and shrines in the New Kingdom.

The cult of the royal image was an ancient part of the ideology of the Egyptian state, but in normal circumstances our evidence is limited to temples. The unique spread of excavated evidence from Amarna for once allows us to see how much further it could extend. The most important evidence comes from a building (R43.2) which lay where the official zone of the city met the southern residential area (Figure 95).[33] It was built of mud brick and possesses certain elements of traditional temple design: an open forecourt (with trees) and a larger and smaller columned hall, all elements arranged symmetrically round a central axis. In the centre of the inner hall had stood a wooden shrine carved and painted with scenes of the Aten and the royal family. An inscription mentions 'the great statue which the King caused to be made', which presumably stood inside the shrine. Parts of wooden statues and a small wooden sphinx were also found here, as well as numerous beads and pendants. One odd aspect of the building is the

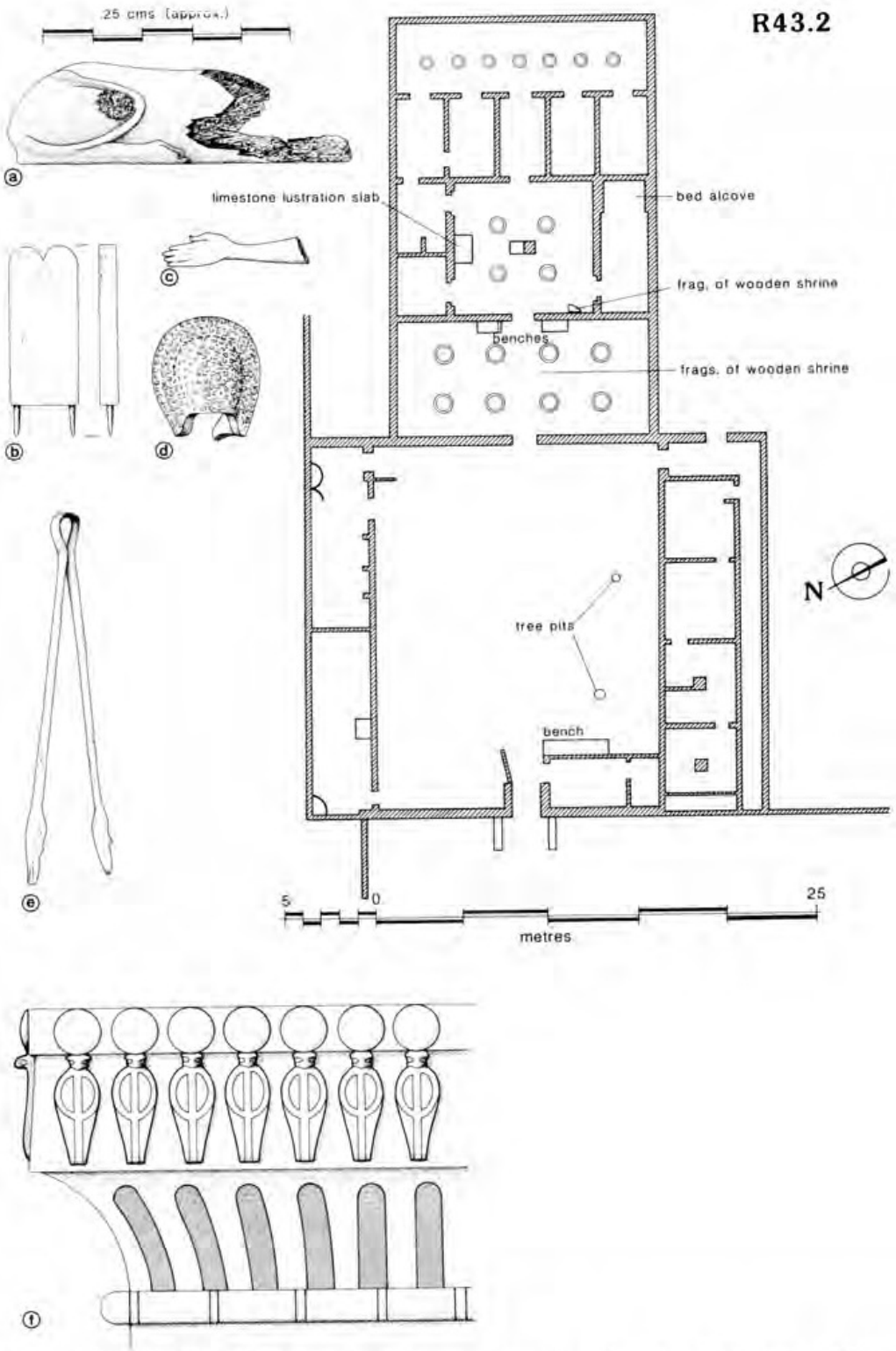


Figure 95 Chapel of the King's Statue at el-Amarna, showing the plan and some of the principal finds. After J.D.S. Pendlebury, *The City of Akhenaten* III, London, 1951, p. 141, Fig. 20, Plates XXII, LXXIX, and original record cards. (a) wooden sphinx; (b) wooden plumes from statue; (c) wooden hand from statue; (d) faience helmet from statue of Akhenaten; (e) bronze tongs; (f) reconstruction of cornice from wooden shrine.

apparent bedroom adjoining the statue chamber. We can only speculate as to the nature of the cult, although from the location of the building and its unpretentiousness it could have been a focus of private patronage.

Although this statue is lost, excavation in the residential parts of the city has brought to light other pieces of royal statuary which must have stood in small shrines which graced the gardens of a small number of the wealthier, or, in a few cases, stood actually inside the house itself. In place of a statue a stele carved with a picture of the royal family could suffice (see Figure 94, p. 282), and their picture was painted on shrine walls as well. These shrines are a striking feature of some (but by no means all) better-class houses. This suggests that it was in good taste, but not obligatory, to display and to pay respect to what was, in essence, a portrait of the king or the royal family. Such reinforcement of rulers' presence is still an esteemed practice in states which favour the cult of the great leader.

It is an obvious point to make that at Amarna we may be seeing a far more extreme manifestation of the cult of ruler than was normal in the New Kingdom, given Akhenaten's own preferences in this direction. But it was, all the same, only a matter of degree. A papyrus of the time of Amenhetep II refers to 'the statue of the lord (life, prosperity, health!) which is in the shrine in the house of the chief treasurer' at Memphis,[34] whilst the chief priest at Amarna, Panehsy, had brought with him to the city a stele of Amenhetep III and Queen Tiy to set up in a domestic shrine.[35]

The city proper ended by the modern village of el-Hagg Qandil, but this was still only about half-way along the line connecting the end boundary tablets in the cliffs. This left space for isolated buildings. The best-known was called Maru-Aten.[36] It consisted of two large, walled enclosures where the central features were shallow lakes. Carefully planted gardens surrounded them, and set within the gardens were pavilions and a group of shrines, including a group of 'Sunshade' platforms standing on an island surrounded by a shallow moat. A large number of wine jars was found stored in one building. The whole complex seems to exemplify the spirit of sun worship, providing an idyllic garden landscape of greenery and water presided over by the sun. It also exemplifies the wish for retreat, mentioned in the treatment of palaces in Chapter 5, and is symptomatic of the age in that a crucial part of it, the 'Sunshade' itself (and possibly the whole building), belonged to a leading royal lady. By the end of the Amarna Period the formal owner was the king's eldest daughter, Meritaten.

The most recent excavations at Amarna have led to the discovery of a second isolated temple complex to the south of the city, at the site now known as Kom el-Nana. Unlike Maru-Aten its central feature was a large stone temple, but this had been partly surrounded by a formal garden of small trees. Its principal distinguishing feature so far revealed, however, is a range of service buildings inside the extensive walled enclosure. These included a large bakery and probably workshops where other commodities were manufactured, which perhaps made it a self-supporting institution. It says much for our ignorance of the Amarna Period that the existence of this major building, still without its original name and ownership being known, should have remained unknown until so recently.

Prior to Akhenaten the Egyptian year was punctuated by religious festivals, some great (like the Theban festivals of Opet and the Valley) and many small. Regular periodic festivals were so fundamental an expectation that we are bound to frame the

question: what did Akhenaten put in their place? We know from texts from his Karnak temples that generous provision was made for daily offerings, and a tantalizing fragment of a similar inscription is known from Amarna.[37] But these texts have so far failed to document periodic festivals. Here again we encounter a surprising vacuum. The worship of the sun provides a ready-made set of calendrical feasts, the solstices and equinoxes, the celebration of which can be built into temple architecture. Yet Akhenaten's conception of the sun seems to have been so simplistic (or pure, depending on one's point of view) that no attributes of the sun's annual behaviour were incorporated into theology. Even more surprising is the alignment of the temples and altars at Amarna. They are clearly dictated by the topography of the city, and not by celestial factors. This was true of New Kingdom temples generally (though not of the far earlier pyramids and their associated temples). The failure to set up a programme of celebration and feasting with popular appeal built around the Aten, as distinct from around the king, could well have been a most important reason for Akhenaten's failure.[38]

Only two great celebrations are documented at Amarna, and both focused on the king. One of these was a second *Sed*-festival,[39] the other a huge reception of foreign envoys and their diplomatic gifts and tribute held at Amarna in the king's twelfth year of reign.[40] For the former we have no expansive sources at all, and it remains entirely guesswork as to where we wish to locate the main ceremonial. For the latter, two private tombs record in great detail the contingents of foreigners as they are led before the royal family in order to render formal homage and offer exotic gifts. Egyptian soldiers are present as well, but whether in numbers greater than formed the normal royal bodyguard we cannot tell. The setting is depicted as an open space containing a number of small buildings: principally a platform reached by stairs and shaded by a roof supported on columns. This is where the royal couple sat to wave recognition to the advancing and retreating representatives. Not far away stood a standard group of three 'Sunshade' platforms, the largest one walled around and containing an offering-table. On either side of them are shown what look like two enclosures containing supplies of food and drink. It is very difficult to identify this place on the ground, for we cannot necessarily assume that the architectural setting is shown in full. If it is we can point to an isolated set of buildings in the desert between the North Palace and the North Tombs. It is known as the 'Desert Altars' (Figures 89, 91, pp. 271, 277).[41] In its final phase an area of desert approximately 250 by 300 metres was cleared of stones. A set of three buildings (I–III) was constructed inside, along a single axis. No. III is the brick foundation for a pavilion consisting of a platform reached by ramps. The intricate internal plan represents a pattern of foundations for lines of columns erected on top of the platform, showing that the building was roofed, and may well have contained an inner nucleus of walled or columned rooms as well. Building II is the group of three 'Sunshades'. The central one had been rebuilt at some stage, so that a single central offering-table was replaced by a pair. Building I was another platform reached by ramps but this time the platform was left open to the sky. In the centre a square, brick-lined depression may mark the original position of a standing stone (a *benben*-stone?) anciently removed.

Buildings II and III within their setting of something resembling a parade-ground look very much like the scene in the tomb of Huya. It is true that there is nothing to match the enclosures for food supplies and Building I does not appear. But it is possible

that the site saw more use, in which, as the excavators thought, Building III was demolished. Thus Building I could have been built for some purpose after the reception of year 12, a purpose which saw the remodelling of the central 'Sunshade'. The whole site would then have been like Malkata on a small scale, an arena for celebratory architecture of short duration.

For the assembled emissaries from abroad the long wait in the sun was an ordeal. From one such occasion the representatives of the king of Assyria, Ashuruballit I, later complained of this to their master, who subsequently and with sarcasm passed their complaint back to Akhenaten:

> Why are my envoys kept standing out in the open sun? They will die out in the open sun. If it does the king good to stand in the open sun, then let him stand out in the open sun himself, and let him die himself. Then will there be profit for the king![42]

But, as the tomb scenes clearly show, by means of sunshades and canopies Akhenaten took good care to protect himself from long exposure to the rays of his god.

We are still left, however, with an important gap between daily ritual largess and occasional great ceremonies. If there were periodic festivals through the year we can scarcely doubt that they focused on events in the life of the king and his family.

The archaeology of institutions at Amarna

Akhenaten's interests were directed towards intellectual and ideological goals. Although political consequences came in their wake, and one set of institutions – the temples – must have been badly disrupted, there is no sign that he attempted to change the nature of the state itself, or of Egyptian society. We have many sources for the workings of the state in the New Kingdom. At Amarna we possess a physical profile, a kind of giant theatre, of what this might mean on the ground.

Behind the evidence for palaces and chariot drives lies an important general point on the tenor of royal government: the physical as well as symbolic separation of the king and his family from the outside world. They lived away north in the great fortified palace in the North City, emerging – how frequently and regularly we cannot tell – to descend in splendour on the King's House in the Central City. This was their base for worship in the temples, meeting and rewarding their senior officials and holding reviews. The King's House provided for the routine face-to-face contact with working ministers. Many of these lived almost as far away in the opposite direction. The vizier Nakht, for example, resided nearly 2 km away in the south, and some other houses of the very largest size lay even further beyond. It is interesting in this connection to observe that even those officials closest to the king – those with the decorated rock tombs – still depicted their main contact with him as taking place in the King's House.

The King's House lay at the heart of a complex of buildings which catered for the worldly business which the king was obliged to conduct (see Figure 89, p. 271). Administrative linkage tied these buildings to the King's House so that they formed parts of a greater 'palace', although no architectural recognition was given to this essential unity of purpose. There was no wall to surround them and bind them together.

An unpretentious spread of little offices intended to house the archives and officials of those departments which worked directly beneath the king lay immediately behind the King's House. Except in two cases, little in detail is known of which departments occupied which offices. One exception is the 'Bureau for the Correspondence of Pharaoh'. Late in the 19th century AD, the local villagers discovered inside it the hoard of little clay tablets now known as the Amarna Letters, the archive of diplomatic correspondence briefly discussed in Chapter 5. The other building in this group the purpose of which we know from labels stamped into the bricks was called 'The House of Life'. By this term the ancient Egyptians referred to an institution where scrolls on religious and other serious topics (medicine, astronomy, etc.) were studied and copied. Its copies of old texts would have made it into a library, and it is noteworthy that Akhenaten did not dispense with this traditional centre of learning.

This technical apparatus of government was housed very modestly. Much more space was given over to servicing the patrimonial side of kingship: the distribution of goods and rations. The King's House consisted of three principal parts: a small palace, a courtyard with a formal avenue of trees, and a large set of storerooms or magazines. There were several entrances, but the principal ones were on the west either from the Royal Road or from the Great Palace via a bridge, and on the north between a pair of pylon towers. The small palace may have been of more than one storey, in which case we have lost all information about the upper parts which are likely to have been more private. The ground floor seems to have consisted of several small robing rooms (distinguished by their brick screens), storerooms, and a large columned hall. In a side hall a platform had been built against the north wall. On the outside of the wall at the very same point the surface had been decorated with a painted panel, depicting bound foreign captives. This is a key piece of evidence, for it serves to locate the Window of Appearance which so often appears in the private rock tombs at Amarna, with just such a decorated panel beneath it.[43] The window must have been an opening in the wall immediately above, furnished with a balcony, the royal family standing partly within the opening and partly on the platform immediately behind. The reward ceremony took place in the great courtyard, the recipient entering between the pylons and making his way towards the window down the avenue of trees. The depictions of the ceremony concentrate on special occasions: gifts of gold and other precious things, or the formal announcement of a promotion to higher office (see Figure 92, p. 278). However, we know from the Horemheb Edict cited several times in previous chapters that the reward ceremony at the window could also be used for regular distribution of rations. This served as a repeated ceremonial reinforcement and reminder of the dependence of high officials on the king. The proximity of the large storehouse block is thus explained. It was used to store the commodities issued as rations to the king's officials. Part of it, perhaps much of it, must have been a granary. We can tell this from the brick compartments for the storing of grain, exactly reproduced in one of the Amarna tombs.

The floor space of this granary is about 2,000 sq. metres, thus about one quarter of that at the Ramesseum considered in Chapter 5, but capable of storing grain for the support of several thousand people, though still only a fraction of the city's likely total population. The order of magnitude belongs with that suggested by the Memphite palace bakery records of Seti I also mentioned in Chapter 5. An interesting little problem enters here. In the best-documented community of the period, the village of

Deir el-Medina, the workmen were paid in grain, and used grain as one medium of barter-exchange. But records of large-scale ration distribution, some from palaces and major temples under the heading of 'offerings', list bread and beer as the form in which cereals were distributed. On what grounds the decision was made to prefer loaves over sacks is not known. Perhaps the former were reserved for a supplementary or short-term ration rather than a permanent and total sustenance paid throughout the year. But the preference of temples for bread and beer points to an interesting gap in the evidence. Even where temple layouts are well preserved (as at the Ramesseum), no bakery is present, despite the very distinctive traces that ancient bakeries leave: numerous ovens, deposits of ash, and large amounts of broken pottery bread-moulds. The nature of such deposits probably explains their absence. Bakeries were smoky places, producing soot, ash, and sherds, and better kept outside sacred precincts. Somewhere in the vicinity of the Ramesseum, therefore, but outside the walled enclosure, a large bakery and brewery must have lain that have so far escaped detection.

At Amarna, however, where the ground outside temple enclosures is as accessible as the ground inside, two large institutional bakeries have been excavated. They occupied long ranges of narrow parallel chambers, running close beside the southern enclosure walls of the two Aten temples (Figure 96).[44] Each chamber was a single baking unit, containing one or more circular ovens of standard domestic design at the back. Various brick bins lined the walls. The total number of baking chambers in the bakery beside the great Aten temple amounted to more than a hundred. Details of what went on inside are illustrated on one of the Hermopolis blocks (Figure 96), depicting part of a bakery. From one side of a courtyard two chambers open. The curvature across the top of each one probably depicts a vaulted roof. In each chamber a man tends an oven. Behind the one on the left, flat round loaves are stacked on a table; behind the other, the table bears instead long cylindrical bread moulds. This reflects the two basic Egyptian baking methods: flat loaves baked on round mud trays, and tall narrow loaves baked inside cylindrical pottery moulds. Fragments from tens of thousands of such moulds are not only heaped on the desert behind the central Amarna bakery, they seem largely to bury the baking chambers as well.

The pottery moulds are a distinctive type, easily recognizable amidst a collection of ancient sherds. A study of the pottery recovered from the huge excavations at Amarna reveals, however, that their distribution was very uneven. They were rare in the residential areas, and common around the central bakeries. What was so special about mould-baked loaves? By the New Kingdom they seem to have denoted a sense of occasion, in particular of religious occasion. It may not be coincidence that in both cases these bakery blocks adjoin not only the king's particular domain but also the Aten temples. These were nominally the owners of the tract of land which supplied the nucleus of the city's food. Yet unlike normal New Kingdom temples, no granary was built within their precincts. The only large granary that can be definitely identified in the Central City is that belonging to the King's House. This suggests a very direct royal control of temple wealth, something consistent with the general tenor of Akhenaten's reign. The Aten temples were his very personal creations, and evidently, to judge from the Central City layout, an extension of the domain of the palace.

The form of these bakeries is very revealing of the Egyptian approach to organization. Here was a major challenge: how to bake bread in industrial quantities? A modern

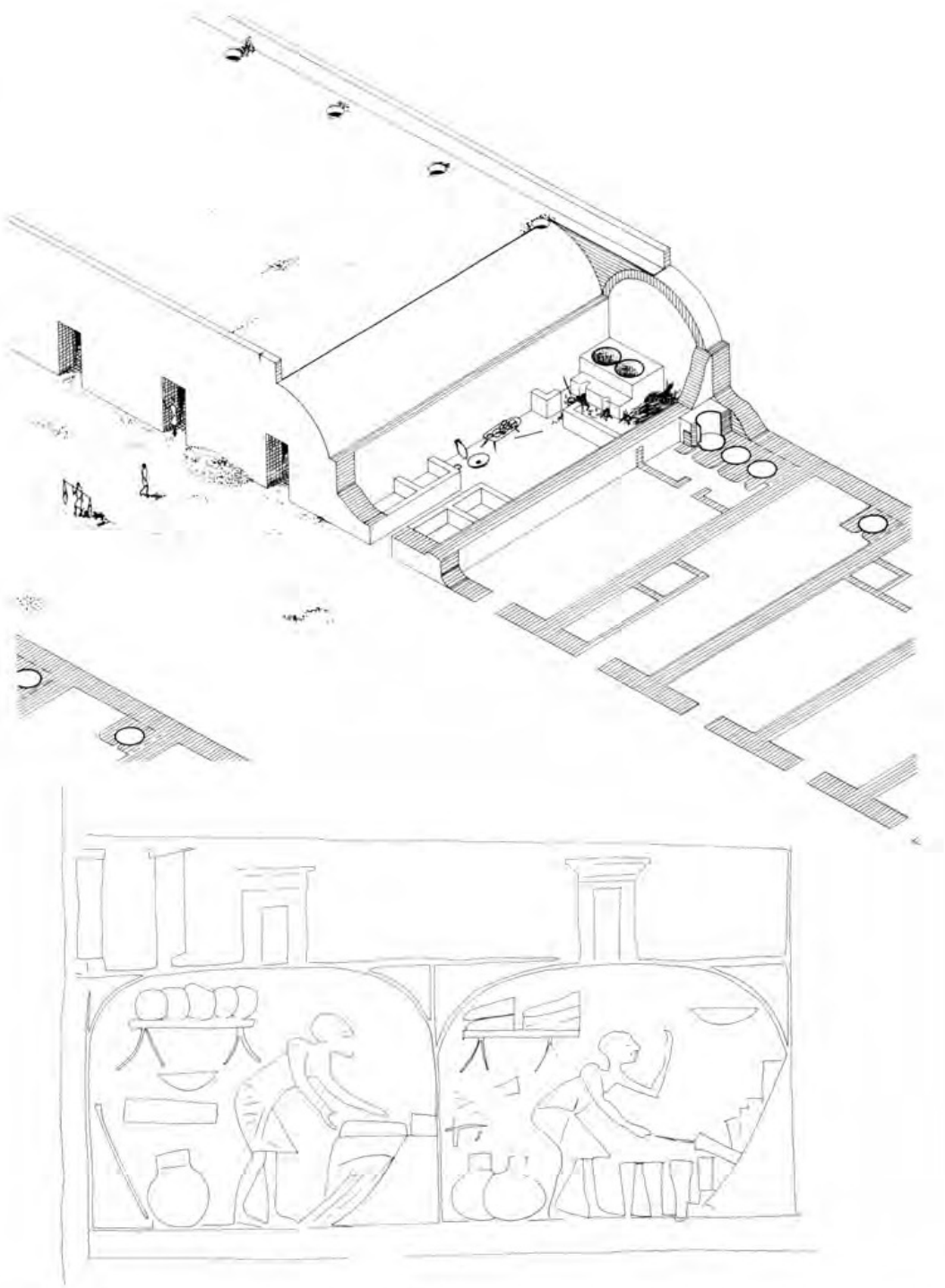


Figure 96 The temple bakeries in the Central City, a rare example of large-scale factory production though characteristically arranged in the form of repeated cellular units. The scene below, from an Amarna block found reused at Hermopolis, is after J.D. Cooney, *Amarna Reliefs from Hermopolis in American Collections*, Brooklyn and Mainz, 1965, p. 73.

approach might be to rethink the whole organization of the process and to redesign the ovens, giving them larger capacity, so that the ratio of loaves to manpower would be improved. This is the mentality of 'productivity' and 'efficiency'. The Egyptian solution was very different. It was simply a repetition, over and over again, of the basic domestic kitchen until the necessary capacity was obtained. This presumably involved a simple multiplication of the necessary number of people as well, subdivided into as many teams as there were chambers, each chamber under its overseer, and all working under the responsibility of an official. This seems also to be the system behind the bakery records from Memphis from the reign of Seti I, less than fifty years afterwards, discussed in Chapter 5.[45] There the responsibility for baking rested with the mayor of Memphis. It is worth noting that Amarna had its own mayor, too, although the location of his house is not known, only that of his tomb (no. 13).[46] This cellular approach to a large-scale operation offers a paradigm for the whole ancient system. It was a system based on a ready supply of cheap labour. This is why we can say that in organization the ancient Egyptians could be very effective, but we cannot say that they were at all efficient.

The city's water supply illustrates the same phenomenon. The demand for water was substantial, for it had to serve not only the inhabitants and their livestock, but also the trees and other vegetation that grew in the gardens of the larger houses. Although the city lay alongside the Nile, many houses were more than 1 km distant, and so it was given an independent water supply through the provision of numerous wells, although some of them lay only 350 metres from the likely line of the ancient river bank. Our general lack of excavated town and city sites from Egypt makes comparison difficult, but such evidence as there is does not parallel Amarna in the number of its wells. The whole large town of Kahun, for example, must have been supplied with water carried in from a source outside the town walls. Malkata, Deir el-Ballas, and Medinet el-Ghurab seem to tell the same story. Deir el-Medina similarly had to rely on water brought in by donkey, although attempts were made in the 20th Dynasty to remedy this by sinking a rectangular shaft provided with a continuous staircase in the vicinity of the village, which reached the astonishing depth of 52 metres.[47] The unique density of wells at Amarna could represent another of Akhenaten's novel schemes, in this case to provide his new city with a supply of water independent of the Nile.

The design of the wells – the large ones at administrative centres, the small ones in private estates or for public use amongst the houses of the poor – had one notable feature in common: they relied on the human carriage of water for part of their depth. They seem to have been regarded as deeply sunk water-holes: the vertical distance for water to be lifted by means of a rope and vessel or, in the case of the large administrative wells, use of the *shaduf*, was kept as low as possible by sinking the mouth of the shaft itself into the ground, so that it had to be reached by a spiral staircase in a large circular pit. Some restored examples can be seen in Figure 98, p. 295.

The excavation of one large administrative well in 1987 also revealed a serious technical problem which faced the well diggers, at least in this instance.[48] Dig down into the desert at Amarna and the thin layer of surface sand and gravel is found to cover hard marl bedrock. Continue cutting down through this, and eventually one breaks into a thick stratum of soft pale grey sand. This is the aquifer which contains the fresh water. At this particular point it began about 7 metres beneath the surface. The sand is so soft, however, that on exposure it rapidly collapses. A modern solution would be to aim for a

narrow well shaft lined with a good solid material, such as stone or fired brick, and to raise the water with ropes and perhaps a labour-saving lifting device. The ancient solution was, as just noted, quite careless of labour. The water was to be raised by porters who carried it up in pottery vessels on their shoulders. Thus for most of its depth the well was a large open pit, 9 metres square, provided with sloping ramps. Just above the soft sand aquifer the pit narrowed to a shaft, and the only means used to inhibit its collapse was to plaster around the sides an irregular layer of sand and clay. It was not particularly effective, and must have been seen as such. The difference between the width of the shaft and of the upper part allowed some leeway for the gradual collapse of the former, and thus its gradual widening until it began to undermine the rock walls of the latter. At this point the well would have become progressively more unsafe and would eventually have had to be abandoned. By the end of the Amarna Period this one sample well was approaching this point.

The King's House was the centre of conspicuous consumption for many officials. Most of what they received here they took home with them, but still a residue of richer-than-usual rubbish accumulated. The principal place for disposal was a tract of waste ground on the edge of the Central City, beside the main police post.[49] When examined by Flinders Petrie in 1892 it was found to be rich in broken glazed finger-rings bearing the cartouches of kings and fragments of little bottles made of coloured glass, and also to contain large numbers of broken pottery jars imported from the Aegean or east Mediterranean, the prototype design coming from Mycenae. As imports they may well have contained oil.

The scenes of the king's public life which dominate the decoration of the rock tombs give a conspicuous place to soldiery. Wherever the king goes we see contingents of Egyptian and foreign units from the army. This is in keeping with the strong military element in New Kingdom society, and fits some of the statements in the Horemheb Edict, where a constantly changing royal bodyguard is referred to. Yet in the city layout military architecture is notably absent. The North Riverside Palace looked from the outside like a great fortress, and in its outer parts we can perhaps detect the outlines of a barracks for the king's own bodyguard. But there is nothing like this in the Central City or in the housing areas. What we do find on the far eastern edge of the Central City is a set of buildings evidently for a force of men and chariots, the horses kept in a set of stables with cobbled floors, mangers, and tethering-stones. Outwardly, however, the buildings remained plain and unfortified. We know from the rock tomb of the chief of Medjay-police, Mahu, that order was kept in the city by a force of police equipped with chariots who were separate from the normal army.[50] There has to be a strong presumption that these buildings were the Medjay-headquarters. A smaller police post, again without the architectural trappings of fortification, lay in the desert a short way behind the South Suburb.[51]

We can deduce from the spread of evidence at Amarna that although the army formed part of the barrier between the king and the outside world, and although the king generally travelled as part of a military contingent and saw the world framed as much by soldiers' spears as by the rays of the Aten, militarism and contact with the army were not part of the normal experience of city life in the New Kingdom. One might have a military officer as a neighbour, but in his house he would have led a civilian-style life (cf. the neighbourhood plan, Figure 97).

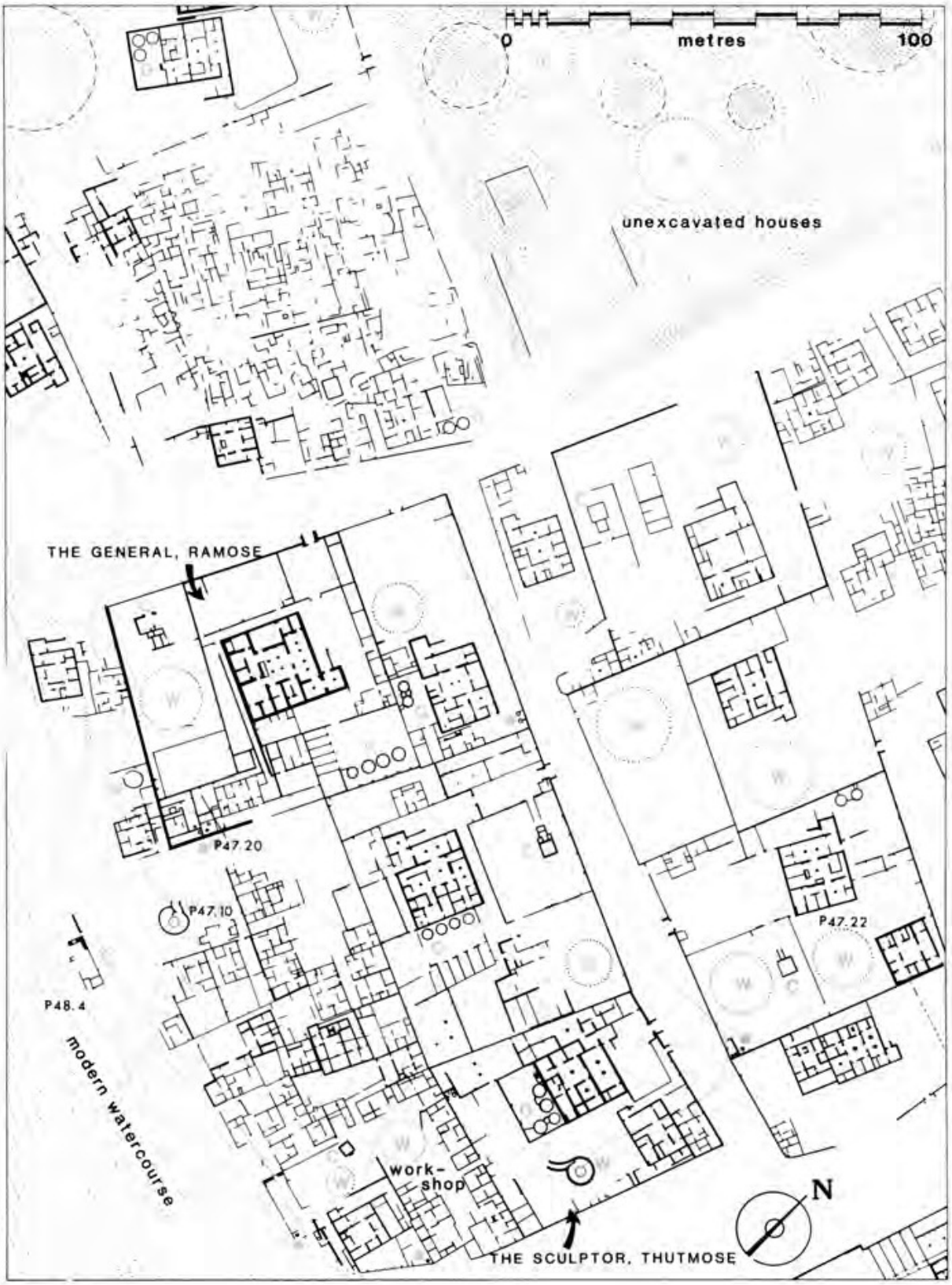


Figure 97 Plan of a characteristic part of a residential area at Amarna, in the Main City. The famous painted bust of Queen Nefertiti was found in the house of a sculptor, whose name may have been Thutmose. The letters on the plan are: W: (well); C: (chapel; the two in a circle were public chapels); G: (granary). The asterisk indicates the probable presence of a pottery kiln. Figure 98 is based on part of this map.

Our picture of the Central City depends largely on excavations carried out in the 1930s, but although conducted on a large scale they by no means exhausted the ground covered by 'official' buildings. These continued for a considerable distance along the sides of the southward prolongation of the Royal Road. Although never excavated in modern times their outlines are visible on old maps, aerial photographs, and to the discerning eye today. They appear to be primarily storehouses and perhaps granaries.[52] Whereas those around the King's House can be fitted within the important redistributive function of kingship in Egyptian society, the context and therefore the meaning of this range of buildings are largely unknown, and to this extent our picture of the city is incomplete.

Suburban life

Most of the resident population of Amarna lived in two large housing areas north and south of the Central City: the North Suburb and Main City. The Middle Kingdom had seen the growth of a tradition in Egypt of simple grid planning, applied to the streets and houses of settlements up to the scale of full-size towns. But in the New Kingdom the idea of total planning lost its attraction. We have already seen this, in effect, at Thebes, in the contrast between the rigid symmetrical planning of individual temples, and their casual interrelationships which were disguised by linking processional routes. In Amarna, outside the corridor of royal buildings, planning petered out altogether. Instead of a grand unitary design we find a few broad but far from straight streets running more or less parallel to the Nile to join the suburbs to the centre, while narrower streets cross at right-angles. The overwhelming impression is of a series of joined villages. The individual house plots interlock in complex patterns, creating distinctive neighbourhoods (Figures 97, 98). Sometimes groups of larger or smaller houses occur, but the two types are often intimately mixed. Within them rich and poor lived side by side. There was little concept of prime location, other than frontage to one of the main north-south thoroughfares. Exceptionally in the North City a group of unusually large houses lay adjacent to the main palace (the North Riverside Palace), and from this we can guess that they housed people with a particularly close relationship to the king. But otherwise proximity to the Central City or to the Royal Road seems to have held little if any attraction. It has already been pointed out that one of the king's most senior officials, the vizier Nakht, lived almost as far away from the king as he could. The house of the High Priest Panehsy (one of the favoured few with a large tomb in the northern group as well as an official residence beside the Great Aten Temple) lay in the Main City well back from the Royal Road; another priest, Pawah, lived in a large house in the middle of the Main City. Business in the Central City and with the king meant commuting, by chariot. This is also faithfully recorded in the tomb scenes.

The plans of individual Amarna houses are remarkably uniform, irrespective of size.[53] Although it is rare to find two identical houses, the same elements are constantly repeated in slightly different combinations (Figure 97). The main feature is a square, central living-room. At one end stood a low brick dais, where the owner and his wife would sit to receive guests. Against another wall was sometimes a plastered stone

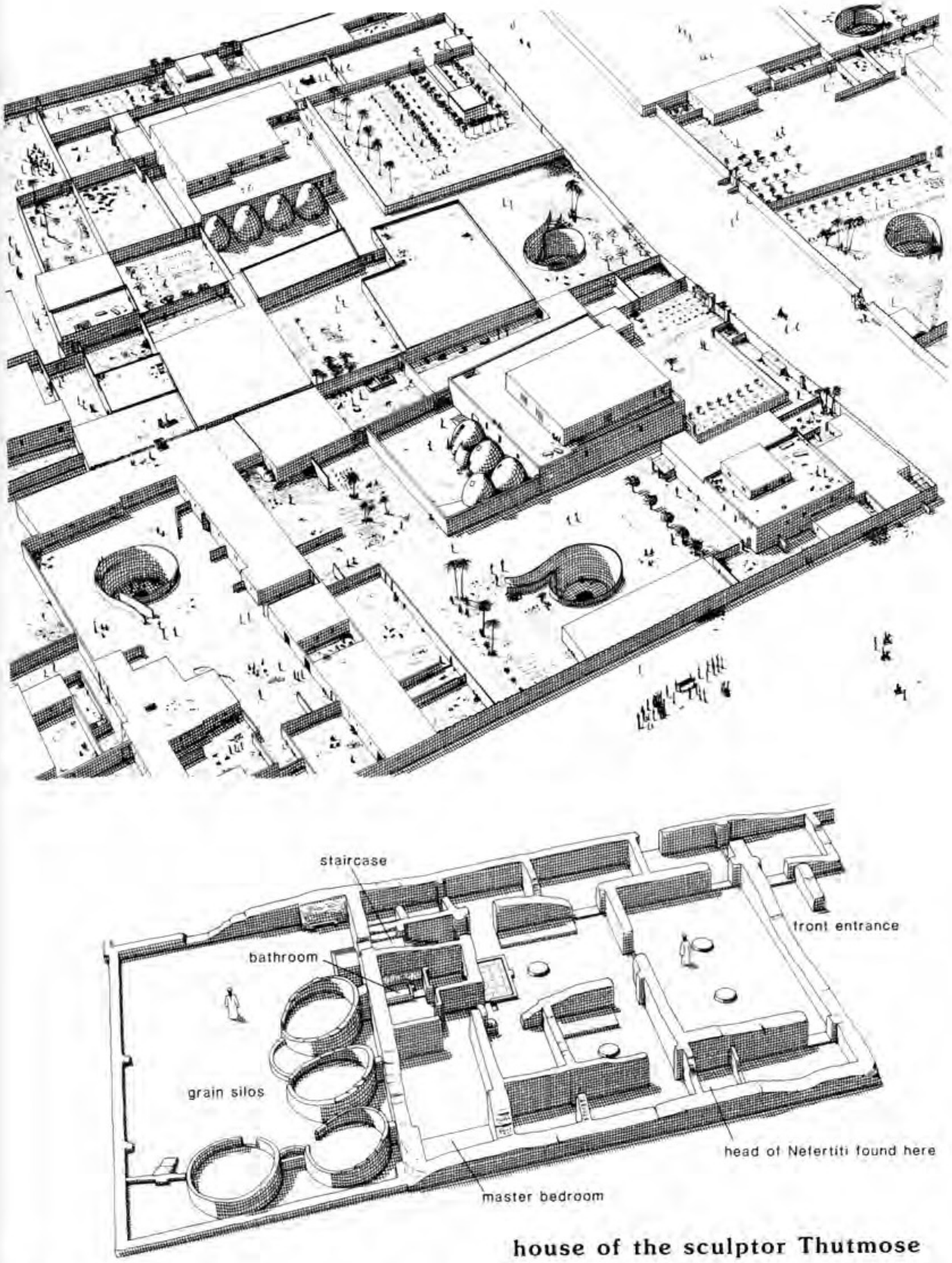


Figure 98 Perspective reconstruction of part of the area of Figure 97. The house of Thutmose is shown in the condition in which it was found when excavated in 1914.

washing-place. One or more wooden columns would have raised the ceiling sufficiently to allow windows to be inserted high up in the walls. In large houses such windows took the form of stone grilles. Around the central room were grouped others: an outer reception room, storage rooms, and the more personal domestic quarters. One principal bedroom served the owner, in which a wooden single bed stood at the back in a raised alcove. Beside it, ideally, was a bathroom and lavatory. Liquid waste disposal, however, was of the simplest kind. There is no trace at all of a public drainage system within the city.

As far as we can tell, the houses bore little decoration. Outside and inside walls might be plastered and whitewashed with gypsum, but beyond this the richer houses contained only very limited areas of conventional paintings, mostly geometric designs. And as for the lifestyle and activities of the people who lived in these houses, archaeology is helped out by other sources, including a few ancient pictures (Figures 99, 100).

One problem faces archaeologists everywhere. If we find only the ruins of a building, how can we tell if it had more than one storey? It is generally accepted that in Amarna the houses were of one storey only. The windows beneath the raised ceilings of the central room guarantee this for the central part. Many houses, however, also possessed an internal staircase. It is commonly assumed that this led just to the roof, a useful area for storage and summer sleeping, except in the case of large houses where an upper room may have lain over the front part of the house. This offered a greater degree of privacy suitable for the important behavioural sphere of womanhood. Recent excavations at the Workmen's Village, however, have shown that this upper room may have been far more widespread.[54] It is a point which future excavations should clarify.

The ideal house stood within its own grounds, surrounded by a wall which could reach at least 3 metres in height, its main entrance marked by a pair of low projecting walls which guided chariots in at right-angles and so prevented the projecting ends of the axles from catching the door posts. The loose arrangement of elements in the compounds stands in marked contrast to their carefully prearranged place in the formal Middle Kingdom layouts discussed in Chapter 4 and exemplified at Kahun. Many details of usage are still not clear but the general outline is tolerably so. The list of basic elements is:

1. granaries: up to a certain individual capacity they were tall, circular constructions of brick, in diameter about 2.5 metres on average, and with domed tops (Plate 11). The principal grains were wheat and barley, and they were poured in at the top and withdrawn through a trap-door at the bottom. However, over a certain size they were replaced by long vaulted rooms of the kind that form the basis of 'magazines'. Then, since other commodities were stored in them as well, it becomes much more hazardous to estimate stored grain capacity;
2. animal byres: generally identified as sheds with roof supported on several square brick pillars;
3. a well;
4. a garden with trees, presumably for both vegetables and flowers;
5. kitchens: they often lay at the southern end, downwind of the prevailing north wind, which reduced nuisance from smoke (except to neighbours). They were simple

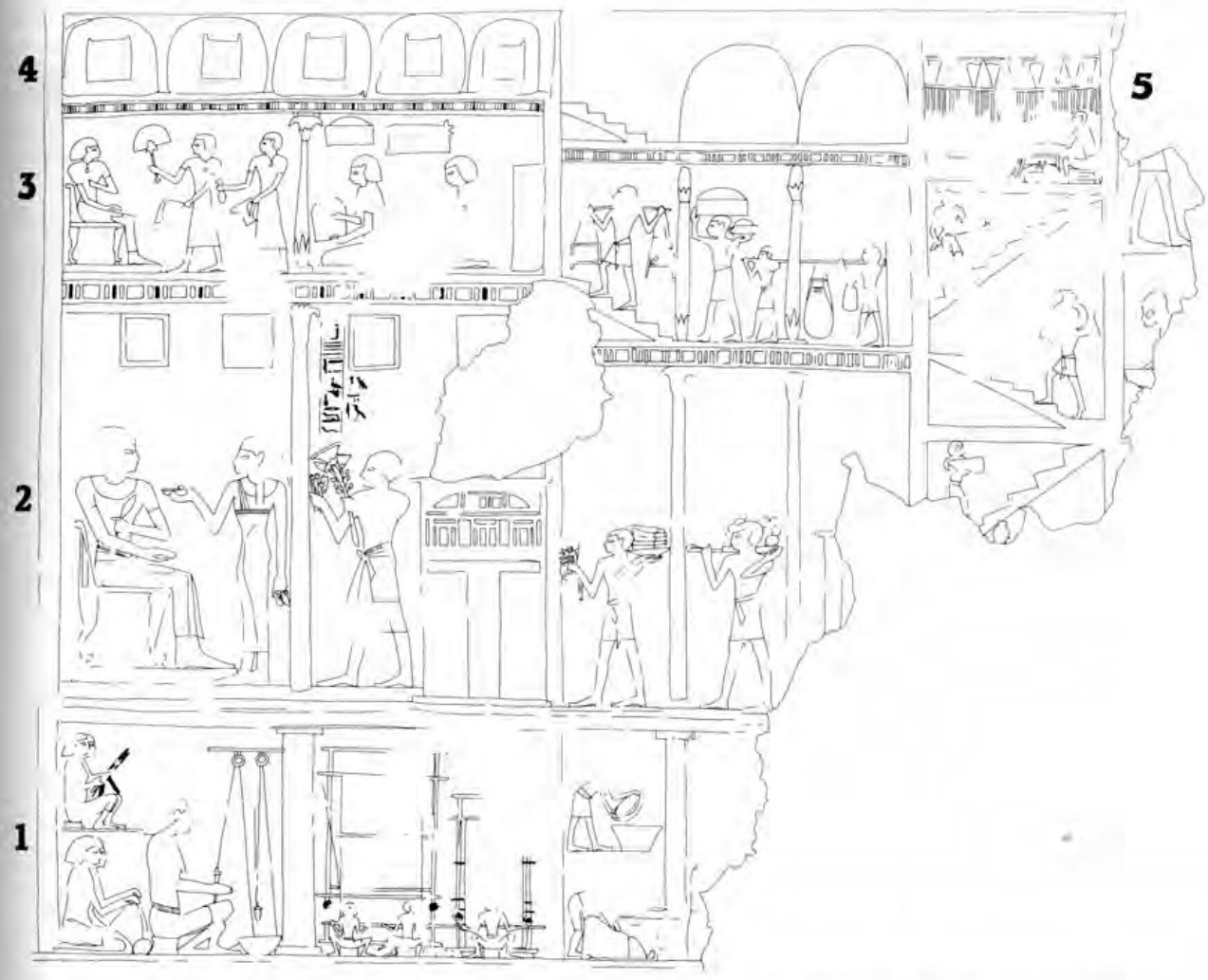


Figure 99 The activities of a large house, as seen by an Egyptian artist at Thebes. At first sight the picture portrays a multi-storey house, but it is also possible that the main parts on the left follow one another laterally at the same level. The principal scenes show: (1) spinning linen thread and weaving linen at an upright loom, whilst at the right-hand edge a figure leans over a quern grinding flour; (2) the main reception room, where the house-owner sits on a chair on a low dais and is waited on; the rectangles running along the top of the wall are likely to be windows; (3) an inner room where the house-owner is evidently conducting business with two scribes who squat on the floor; (4) a row of grain bins; (5) a butcher at work cutting meat on a table and hanging joints on a line to cure. After N. de G. Davies, 'The town house in ancient Egypt', *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 1, 1929, pp. 234–5, Figs. 1A, 1B.

affairs: small groups of circular clay ovens used primarily for baking bread. When cooked meals were prepared an open fireplace was used, again outside the house, with cooking probably done in bronze or copper basins;

6. sheds and enclosures of uncertain purpose, though in some cases they could have been used for craft activities. Sculptors, whose debris archaeologists can easily identify, are one group whose workshops were in and beside their house compounds;

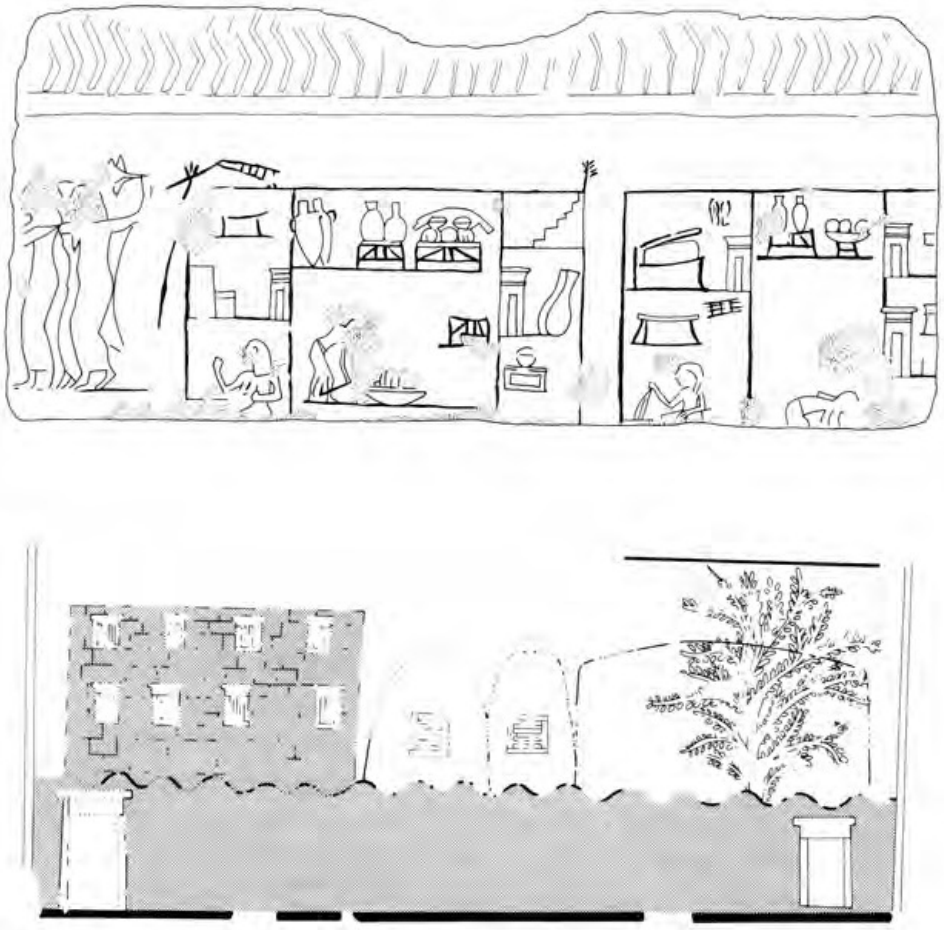


Figure 100 Two ancient views of houses. *Below*. A house in its grounds, surrounded by an enclosure wall with a wavy finish to the top. Two grain silos and the roof of another building are visible above. From the tomb of Anena at Thebes, after N. de G. Davies, *Scenes from Some Theban Tombs (Private Tombs at Thebes, IV)*, Oxford, 1963, Plate XXIII. *Above*. Outline of an Amarna house from a limestone block reused at Hermopolis. After J.D. Cooney, *Amarna Reliefs from Hermopolis in American Collections*, Brooklyn and Mainz, 1965, p. 74.

7. a shrine, which in the houses of the richest stood in its own formal grounds with ornamental lake and separate pylon entrance to the street;
8. separate accommodation, including a porter's lodge at the gate, but most importantly a completely separate house. It remains a mystery who occupied this house: a steward, a married son, servants?

Houses of rich and poor are distinguished more by size than by design, although larger houses did possess features, such as an entrance porch, which denoted status in themselves. If we take the size of a person's house as even a rough-and-ready measure of his status in society, the spread of house sizes provides a general profile of the kind of society we are dealing with.[55] An easy way to view the whole mass of data is in tabular form (Figure 101). Although there are some jumps and gaps the overall pattern of the data fits a single curve in which, beyond a point of very basic housing, ever-larger houses grow steadily rarer. There are no obvious breaks or plateaux. If we remember that this was a time of great national prosperity, the gulf between rich and



Plate 11 Private wealth: the bases of circular brick granaries in a private estate at el-Amarna, house U24.1, looking north-east. The diameter of each silo is about 3.5 metres. By courtesy the Egypt Exploration Society.

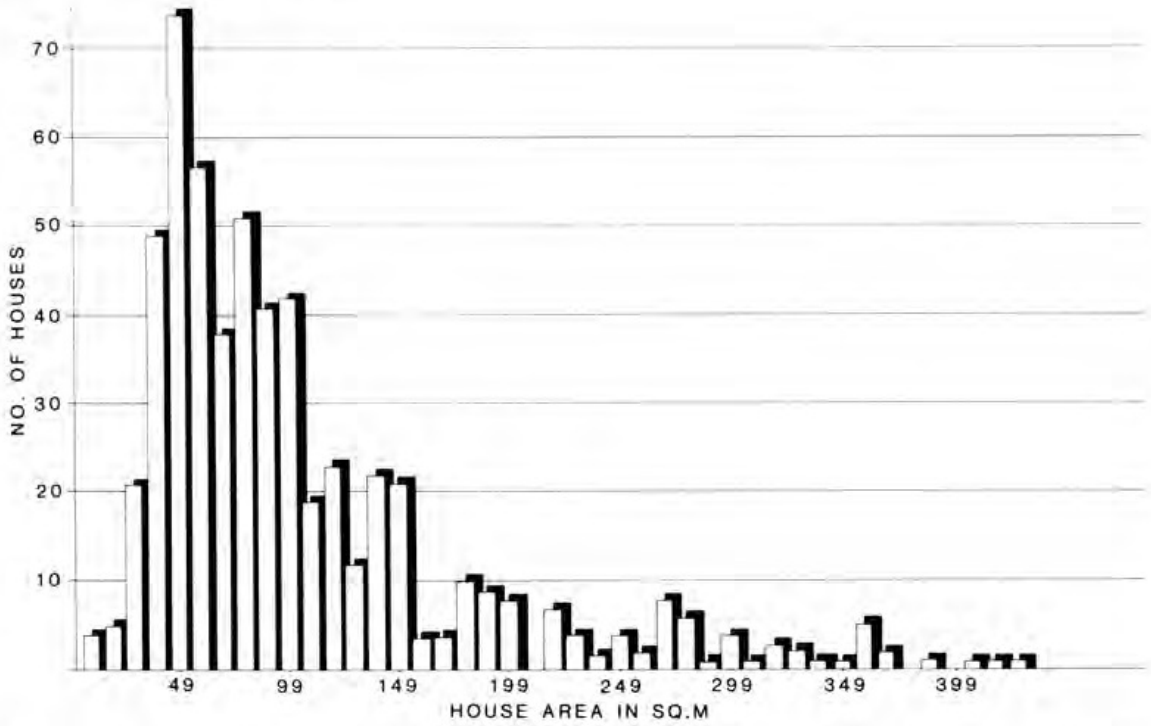


Figure 101 Bar-chart showing the frequencies of houses of varying sizes within the Main City at Amarna. House sizes are given in steps of 10 sq. metres. The regularity of the curve of distribution is striking. After Piers Crocker, unpublished dissertation, University of Cambridge, and cf. 'Status symbols in the architecture of El-'Amarna', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 71 (1985), 52–65.

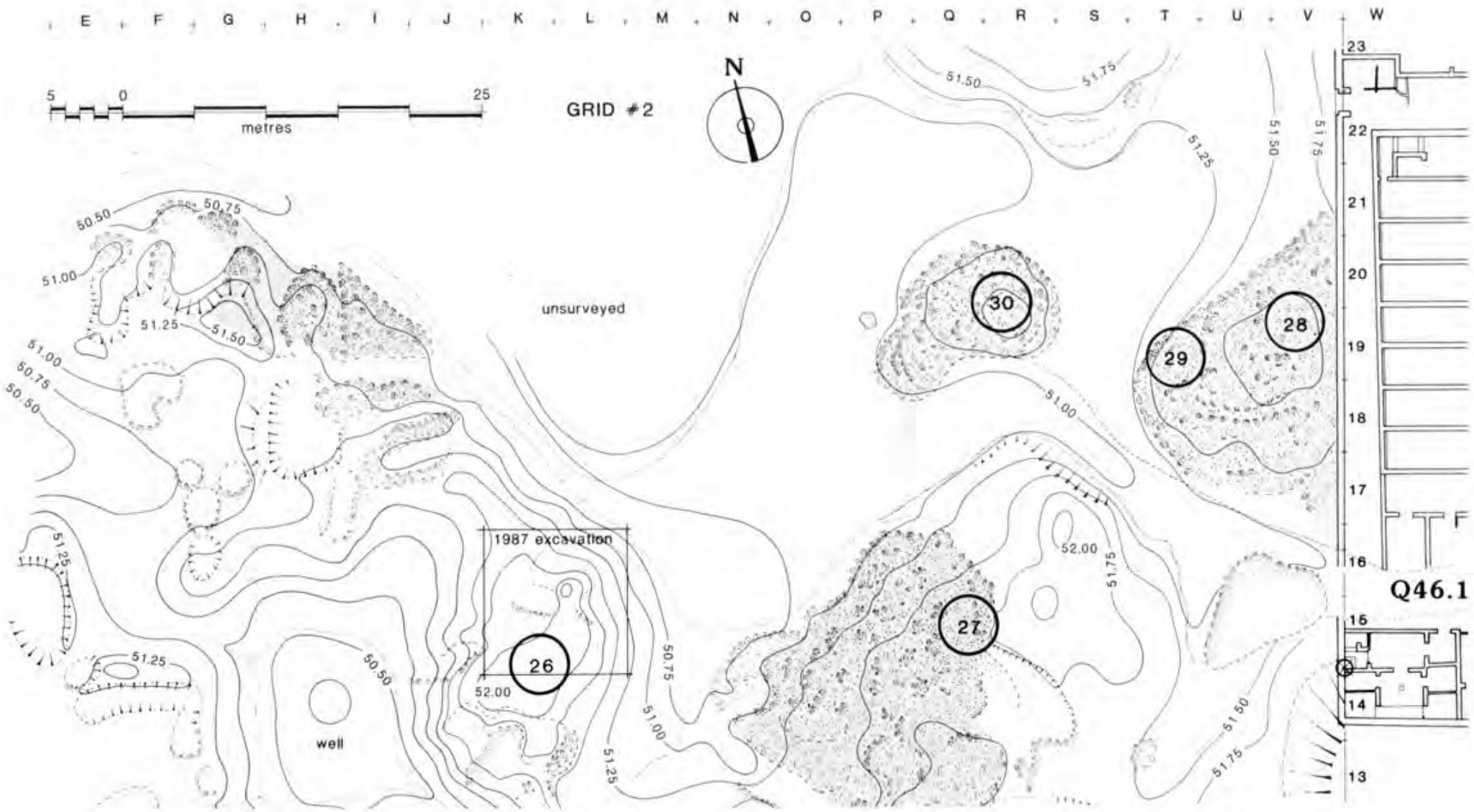
poor in this respect was not as great as we might expect. The rich and powerful lived in large houses, not in palaces. The great gulf was between the king and everyone else.

Maps of the city which mark walls and spaces as black lines and white background create a clinical effect which can be misleading. So do reconstruction drawings which turn Amarna into a pleasant garden suburb. To gain a true impression of what it was like to be there we need to begin by making a record of the total debris of human occupation. Figure 102 is a small section of a modern plan which aims to do just this. It shows a section of the city before excavation, although some parts have been disturbed by the probings of treasure hunters in the last century. The surface undulates, forming a very complex pattern of mounds and depressions, here portrayed by contours. On first walking over the ground the effect is very confusing. Greater familiarity, however, leads to some understanding, particularly from subtle variations in the composition of the surface. These enable one to distinguish between mounds of rubble and sand which cover unexcavated houses, and those which are the remains of ancient rubbish heaps. The latter are shaded in Figure 102. We must allow for them having spread out in the three millennia that have passed since they were formed, and also for some loss of volume as sand and dust have been blown away. We are then left with a picture in which, away from the broad north-south thoroughfares, prominent heaps of domestic refuse had formed in more or less every available open space outside the walled compounds of the better-off. They loomed close to public wells, and must have reduced access to the smaller houses down to narrow paths winding amongst them. They may

spoil the image we have of Akhenaten's city but we should not mind them. The original occupants accepted them (they could, after all, have carried their rubbish further away) and for the archaeologist they are now of great importance. In earlier days of archaeology at Amarna people excavated houses in the hopes of finding the things that the original occupants had left behind. The results were often disappointing, for two reasons. The city was not abandoned in a great rush: people seem to have had plenty of time to pack up their belongings; and, in any case, Egyptians were given to sweeping their houses out regularly. But what they swept up they didn't carry far. Figure 102 includes part of the large house and compound of one of the senior officials at Amarna (Q46.1). The front gate lay on the east, opening on to the main road; the back gate looked out on to a small area of waste ground. Just to one side is a large rubbish heap, originally banked against the compound wall. It is strongly tempting to identify this as the main rubbish heap from the big house. The big house was excavated in 1914, the rubbish heap is still undug. If we want to complete our record of what the occupants left behind we must dig here as well.

Akhenaten stripped away the cloak of institutionalized religion, and in so doing exposed for a short while the raw bedrock of general belief. In these unique circumstances we can examine how people responded, both during Akhenaten's reign, and later, when, for a while in the reign of Tutankhamun, large parts of the city continued to be lived in and the threats to the old order had been lifted. As we have seen, the cult of the king fared well, even in back gardens. Those who could afford a walled garden frequently included within it a little shrine to the royal family. But how it was used by the inhabitants and what it represented emotionally to them we do not know. It may have been more than lip service or an empty gesture of expediency, for in the ensuing Ramesside Period the cult of royal statues patronized by officials reached its peak.[56] Furthermore, statues of Akhenaten in the private garden shrines appear not to have been in the grotesque style favoured by the royal buildings. Akhenaten was manipulating a real and strong source of power. Pharaoh had always been a god, and the cult of the new royal image may have found a real emotional target. So, too, with the Aten. For lack of evidence and from the eventual failure of Akhenaten's ideas to survive his death it is easy to conclude that the cult of the Aten had little popular following. Yet in the midst of this negative picture stand two unique papyrus letters written by a minor official from Amarna to his relatives on entirely private matters. In them the Aten is freely used as a bestower of blessings, just as Amun and other deities were in the letters of other periods.[57] If history had run a different course, and subsequent kings had maintained the cult of the Aten, it is possible to imagine from evidence such as this that the Aten would have developed a truly popular aspect.

As we saw in Chapter 5, the big traditional temples had little peripheral shrines on the outside of the walls where people who were not priests could make contact with a great deity and leave a votive offering. This satisfied the urgings of piety, and at the same time, if the donation were a statue or something similar, it became a statement of one's ability to command such a thing and thus enhanced one's prestige in the community. It is impossible to identify equivalents at the Aten temples, but certainly the opportunity for private temple donations remained. This is well illustrated by a group of bronze vessels discovered in the Sanctuary of the Great Aten Temple. One of them had been dedicated by a military officer, a 'standard-bearer' named Ramose.[58]


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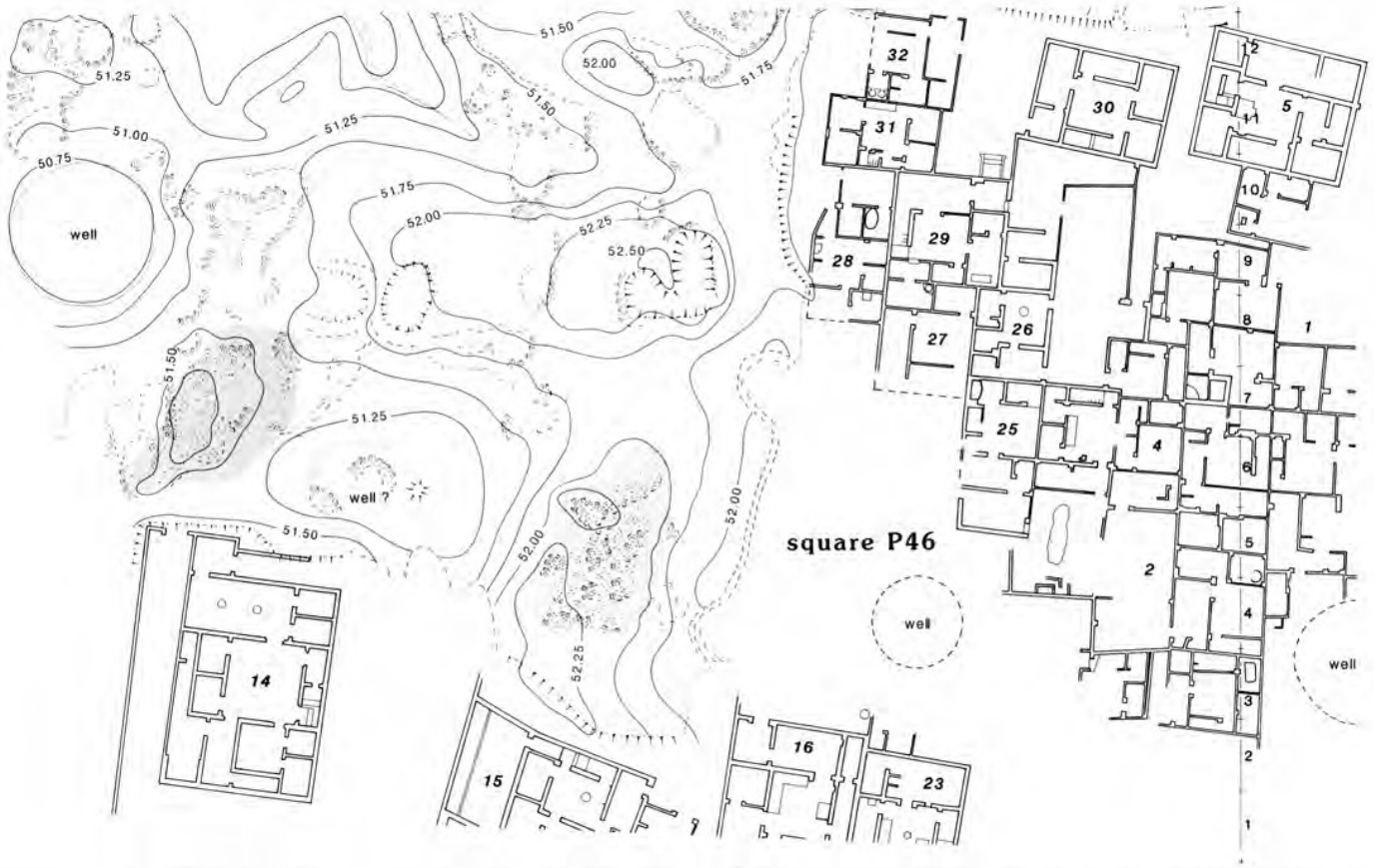


Figure 102 The residential part of Amarna as archaeological site. The plans of houses excavated in the 2nd and 3rd decades of this century are shown in outline. The remainder of the area must continue in the same way, with some of the mounds marking the positions of unexcavated houses. Other areas, however, can be distinguished as ancient rubbish mounds, and these are shaded. Heavily drawn numbered circles are sherd samples. Unpublished plan.

The general tenor of Akhenaten's religion was that the king would serve as the focus for prayer, and in the temple to the king's statue (R43.2) on the edge of the Central City, we have a likely venue for this level of cult (see Figure 95, p. 284). There were, however, other centres of spiritual interest in Egyptian lives largely independent of institutionalized religion.

At the Workmen's Village, a community tied particularly closely to the state, the families built their own chapels just outside the village walls.[59] In time they would have become places of burial and memorial for deceased members of the family and we would have called them tomb chapels. But their first function was to serve as centres where family meals could be eaten on certain occasions in a calm and sanctified atmosphere. This was close to an abiding ideal for Egyptians generally. As we shall see in the next section, a great many of the citizens of Amarna probably retained very close links with other towns and cities. This was where most family tombs were and we are entitled to imagine that in the course of a year a pilgrimage home for a special meal at the ancestral tomb was an event anticipated with much relish. But this is not the end of the story. Many of the Workmen's Village chapels were built after Akhenaten's death. The villagers felt free to choose to commemorate the gods they favoured. Whom did they choose? The evidence is small, but does consist of a few references to Amun and Amun-Ra in short prayers painted on the walls, and limestone stelae to the goddess Isis and Shed 'the Saviour', who offered protection against accidents, such as scorpion sting. But the Aten is present, too, demoted from his unique status but certainly not ignored.

One way generally of defining the area of non-priestly, i.e. non-professional, belief in ancient Egypt is to look at private votive material, which is the result of personal choice involving some effort or expenditure. Amarna does provide some, although not in the quantities and concentrations that accumulated in the old cities around the temples. One little group of stelae comes from the porch around one of the southern rock tombs, which belonged to a scribe called Any.[60] The donors were evidently friends of his and his brother, and the subject of their dedication was the deceased Any himself. They reflect an ancient custom of honouring on the fuzzy borderline between respect and worship the spirit of a man who had achieved great eminence in the community (the antecedents of modern sheikhs), and who could in a few rare cases, e.g. Amenhetep son of Hapu, go on to become minor gods.

The remaining votive material from Amarna mostly consists of a thin scatter of flakes and small slabs of limestone bearing designs in ink or in rough carving.[61] The subject matter includes figures of divinities: the baboon-god Thoth (patron of writing), Ptah (particularly associated with Memphis), a sacred ram, and Thöeris (goddess of childbirth); and representations of the process of gaining attention: a figure of a man making offerings before an altar, and a set of crudely painted ears by which the god's hearing was aided. If we look for concentrations of this kind of material hoping to identify actual shrines in the city the results are largely negative. A stele showing a man before an altar came from a collection of rooms beside one of the public wells in the North Suburb (T36.67), but the plan of the walls tells us little: they have neither the character of a house nor of a shrine. Evidence from the Main City is a little better. Again beside a public well a little building was excavated (P47.10) which looks from its plan like a shrine, although no votive material accompanied it (see Figure 97, p. 293).[62] Not far away, apparently in the same open space although the context had been largely

destroyed by denudation, the same excavation uncovered a small building which is the strongest candidate of all for a shrine in a public place (P48.4, see Figure 97, p. 293). Apart from its shrine-like plan, a well-made limestone stele was discovered depicting a man adoring before a table of offerings, and above him a group of three deities, the holy family of Elephantine: Khnum, Satis, and Anukis.[63]

Most of the votive material, however, and it is not numerous, comes from houses, small and large, and raises the question as to whether it was intended for some special little place in the house itself. A few of the larger houses had small platform altars inside, but the one collection of votive material found in position (house N49.21) came from the tiny room beneath the stairs.[64] It consisted of a stele showing a woman and girl before Thöeris, parts of two female figurines and two model pottery beds. The last items represent a much more numerous category of evidence for an area of domestic cult that centred on the ambience of womanhood and the danger and mystery of childbirth.[65] It embraced the goddess Thöeris and the dwarf and demonic god Bes, a popular subject for tiny glazed pendants strung on necklaces. At the Workmen's Village Bes and Thöeris appear on wall paintings, and there is some evidence that an upstairs room with special wall paintings supplied the focus for domestic femininity.[66] Domestic cults included a cobra deity, probably the goddess Renenutet, to whom little statuettes and figurines moulded into the bottom of pottery bowls were made.[67]

A pattern emerges at Amarna which has probably a general validity for New Kingdom religious practice. We can discern four basic directions of attention: towards images of the king (and in normal circumstances statues of major gods in extra-mural shrines at large temples) as a source of great but remote authority which can sometimes be beneficially tapped; towards the family chapel which contained the family tomb and which gave status and sanctity to the concept of family-with-ancestors; towards cults centred in the household and especially that of domestic femininity; towards a varied collection of deities and occasional revered humans who drew out feelings of respect and could offer that general sense of hopeful well-being that is contained in the English word 'blessing'.

Profiling Amarna's population: direct and indirect evidence

How large a population lived in the city, and perhaps of more real interest, what kind of people were they? The first question has to be disposed of briefly because of inherent technical difficulties. Enough of the city has been excavated, and enough of the remainder can be traced in outline on the desert, to form the basis for an estimate of how many houses were originally present altogether. From this we can proceed to a further estimate of how many people they housed. This is the real point of difficulty. There is surprisingly little direct evidence for average household size in ancient Egypt,[68] and the best we can do is to use figures both from recent village communities in the Middle East, and turn-of-the-century census returns from Egypt, which themselves show wide variations from place to place. Furthermore we have to consider the possibility that ancient Egyptian households embraced not only a nuclear family but also an assortment of dependants. The best that we can attempt, therefore, is a general order of magnitude for Amarna. Two such exercises in estimation have been carried

out, producing figures of between 20,000 and 30,000 in one case (and using an average household figure that is perhaps too modest), and upwards from 50,000 in the other.[69]

In considering the composition of this sizeable population we are focusing our attention on the basic profile of ancient Egyptian society in general, and at the same time exposing the serious limitations of our evidence. In a tiny proportion of cases a house will have a direct element of personal identity. Usually this is because we know the name of the owner. It was the custom for leading citizens to frame their front doors in stone or wood on which their names and official titles were carved. Unfortunately, when the city was abandoned it would seem either that most people took such expensive fittings with them, or that termites have thoroughly consumed the wood, so that only rarely do we know who lived where. The most important person in this category was the vizier, or chief minister, named Nakht, already noticed, with a particularly large house with extra columned halls but which was still tiny compared to the royal palaces. We have also noted the houses of two priests, Panehsy and Pawah. Military officers had houses scattered through the city: Ra-nefer, a chief charioteer, owned a quite modest house on a corner in a neighbourhood of small houses or workshops; a commander of troops, Ramose, had a somewhat larger house a few streets away (see Figure 97, p. 293). The owners of two more houses must have been involved in Akhenaten's construction works. One, an overseer of builders, Maa-nakhtutef, had an unpretentious house in the Main City. Away in the north, in the North Suburb, an overseer of works, Hatiay, was close to completing a new house for himself on the outskirts of the city when the call came to abandon everything and leave. The handsome painted door lintel was left lying in front of its intended destination, the front door. The most famous occupant from the point of view of modern public interest, however, was one Thutmose, a sculptor (see Figure 97, p. 293).[70] His studio, close to his house, lay in a part of the Main City where other sculptors lived and had their workshops. The workshops were simple courtyards with little huts built against the walls. When the city was abandoned, unfinished sculptures and pieces used as models were left lying about or were packed away in the sculptor's house. One such piece was the famous painted head of Queen Nefertiti.

Such examples of individuality are, however, exceptional. The city remains for us generally an anonymous place, but this simply means that we must work harder with such evidence as we can muster. And this means casting our net over written and other evidence from a broader background than the Amarna Period alone, always remembering that Egyptian society changed over time and from one province to another.

We can begin by setting up an expectation – or a model – of what kind of population we would find in a New Kingdom town. One of the Ramesside robbery papyri used in the last chapter to illustrate the movement of sudden wealth contains a list of the households to be found in western Thebes (excluding Deir el-Medina).[71] In all, 179 are listed, and of these 155 belonged to a single settlement called Maiunehes. There can be no reasonable doubt that Maiunehes was the name of a town which had grown up in and over the ruins of the buildings which surrounded the inner enclosure of Rameses III's mortuary temple, Medinet Habu. A fragment of this settlement survived into the early years of this century and was excavated. Each household is defined by the name and occupation of the male head. The absence of women (in, for example, the

category of widow) could well be a coincidental aspect of this one community since women had a property-owning role which was overtly recognized. Each 'house' would have had its own population, consisting of the nuclear family and probably its servants, too, since servants and slaves are not listed separately. We must therefore multiply the number of households by a suitable factor (around 6), to arrive at an estimate of the population of this town, which would then have been of around 1,000 persons. We can group the occupations of the householders into eight categories. They comprise: 7 senior civil officials, 32 priests, 12 scribes, 12 'military' (policemen and stablemasters), 13 junior officials, 31 urban craftsmen, 47 with rural occupations, and 1 with no occupation specified. This provides the first observation: all except one of the householders had a title or defined occupation. As just noted, there are no 'houses' of servants or slaves, which leads one to suspect that such people (probably not numerous in medium to small households) were accommodated within or beside the owner's building or buildings. There is one case of servitude, a small farmer who belongs to a scribe, but the scribe himself (who is named) did not live in the town.

We can look at this information in two ways: grouping occupations together to create an outline sociological profile, and considering whether the list has a topographic aspect. For the first, we have to remember that any divisions or groupings that we make will inevitably be arbitrary, a reflection of the relative social fluidity of ancient Egypt. The list itself illustrates this perfectly: two priests were also coppersmiths, and two of their colleagues had other civil jobs, one as an inspector and one as a chief guard. If, nevertheless, we make a rough division into two broad groups: 'officials' (including priests) who were paid to do a non-productive job, and those engaged in manufacture and agriculture, the result is a surprising fifty-fifty split (76:78).[72] This is to some extent accounted for by the presence of no less that thirty-two priests of various ranks. We can use the presence of the Medinet Habu temples to argue that this was a peculiar community, but other data (including the Wilbour lists of landholders, see p. 311) imply that in the later New Kingdom priest was a common occupation generally. This is not, of course, a sign of unusual spirituality, for being a priest was a job rather than a vocation.

Nearly a third of the householders of Maiuneh̲es were engaged in agriculture and related tasks, but the proportions of the various subdivisions at first sight show that herding was more important than cereal crop-growing (represented by only six small farmers or 'cultivators' or possibly 'agricultural agents'[73]). This, however, could be misleading. There is abundant evidence (including the Wilbour Papyrus) to show that people of all occupational categories owned or rented farmland, both cereal fields and vegetable plots. This does not answer the question of who actually worked the land, the choice being between paid labourers and children, and less fortunate relatives who were members of the landholder's family. Maiuneh̲es itself does not seem to have contained a significant labouring population divided into its own households. We might argue that such people lived dispersed in the adjacent lands and therefore did not find a place in the list, were it not for the fact that no less than twelve householders were fishermen. Even if they were fishing in back-swamps near the desert (drained and vanished in modern times)[74] rather than in the Nile, they are people whom one might have expected equally to have been living outside the town. Since children and poor relatives were cheaper than paid labourers, the families of Maiuneh̲es could have resembled that of

Hekanakht who had lived in the area nine centuries before (Chapter 6). On his lands the agricultural work was done by the five men who were part of his household, and who were also probably his sons. Belonging to a household, either as a relative or as a receiver of patronage, seems to have been an important Egyptian wish, and if this were significantly the case at Maiunehes then the number of people that we put into the 155 households would rise well beyond the 1,000 mentioned earlier, and some of the households, as officially recognized, could have been represented on the ground by several houses in a contiguous group, as can frequently be picked out in the Amarna suburbs.[75] This also points to a major question in the social history of the ancient world which we are unable to answer: when did cities begin to acquire a significant urban proletariat, a population of men, women, and children who were simply workers, and who looked for their employment to a source outside their own household? The rise of this group would have been at the expense of the 'households' which seem to have been of great importance to the Egyptians, but we cannot be sure even if there was any change at all on this front during Pharaonic times.

The scribe who compiled the household list of Maiunehes did so without an obvious system of ordering. We can see this, for example, by looking where the Medjay-police occur. The seven members of this distinctive group are distributed singly throughout the list. This makes it at least plausible that the list was compiled on a street and neighbourhood basis.[76] If we look at the list in this light it makes very good sense. The scribe started from the group of perhaps five large houses of the leading men of the town: an army scribe, the mayor himself, and three others. We cannot know how he then proceeded along the tortuously winding streets, quite likely unintentionally separating households which were in fact neighbours of each other. Nevertheless several other groups survive (two groups of five priests, one of four sandal-makers, one of five and one of four herdsmen and goatherds), as well as pairs (e.g. of brewers, two of washermen, fishermen, coppersmiths, and scribes of the divine records). The list suggests a tendency towards occupational clustering, perhaps involving families who were also related by blood, yet no rigid segregation since most occupations are also found adjacent on either side to others, often of very different status.

This very generalized impression of Maiunehes fits the Amarna suburbs very well. There is a tendency towards clustering of larger as against smaller houses, but no more than that, certainly no rigid separations. It is also possible to distinguish amongst the smaller houses contiguous groups, as if belonging to a family network. If such a group of small houses containing several related poor families were treated administratively as a single household it would explain the lack of a labouring and menial class in the Maiunehes list.

Occupational clusterings at Amarna are harder to locate. A conspicuous occuption in terms of its debris was that of sculptor. Several workshops have been found, and these seem by and large to have been confined to one zone withing the Main City, though with insufficient density to merit the term 'sculptors' quarter'. Another workshop of apparently similar form (and not far away) but with a very different output was partially excavated in 1987.[77] In plan it consisted of a rectangular enclosure surrounded by a buttressed wall lying adjacent to the large well described earlier. A series of rooms had been built against the inner face, surrounding an open central space. Amidst the ash and rubbish in which the building had been progressively buried as it was used was

evidence for manufacturing of various kinds, including glazing and pottery making. The excavated area also actually included the factory where the pottery had been made. The evidence that had been left behind was of four kinds: one or possibly two puddling pits where the potters' clay was first prepared; an actual potter's wheel found thrown into a pit; several hundred mud sherds from unfired vessels, many of them cast away by the potter after faulty manufacture; and pottery kilns. The surviving kilns number two: one abandoned after much use and filled with later rubbish; the other one replacing it and never actually used. The mud sherds are particularly interesting for they show the range of vessel types being manufactured, which was surprisingly wide, and included cobra bowls and also female figurines. Furthermore, whilst most of the sherds had been made from Nile silt, some seem to have been made from desert marl clays. Red and yellow colouring was also found on some.

This discovery not only clarifies the manufacturing processes of New Kingdom pottery, it has wider implications for the city as a whole. In knowing what one set of kilns and its associated debris look like, it has become profitable to search for further examples in the plans and descriptions of previous excavations. Several likely kilns have been identified amidst the houses, and some of them actually re-excavated. This has confirmed that simple pottery kilns lay within the grounds of some of the larger private houses, P47.20 and P47.22 (see Figure 97, p. 293). Surprising to our point of view is that the latter one lay quite close to where a private chapel stood. We can also add to this evidence the observation that pieces of vitrified kiln occur widely over the main suburban area, creating a strong presumption that pottery-making was quite common and widespread at Amarna, and not only within special factories that we can suspect were run by the state, but also within the grounds of private houses. The same was also probably true for the making of little glazed rings and other ornaments widely worn at this time, whilst it has long been established both by actual finds and by ancient tomb pictures (see Figure 99, p. 297) and models that the spinning and weaving of cloth was another standard domestic industry.

Amarna was not a city of quiet garden suburbs. Quite apart from the rubbish that filled every open space in the main suburb, the houses were busy centres of private manufacture as well as of the storage and handling of farm produce. They were generators of part of the city's economic substance.

The farm-centre aspect is well documented, for the larger Amarna houses look like little farms, and in so doing both reflect the commodity-based nature of the Egyptian economy, and at the same time make an important contribution to the debate about private economics in New Kingdom Egypt. We can estimate that the capacity of an average silo not filled to its entire capacity was about 9,500 litres, equivalent in ancient terms to about 125 *khar* of emmer-wheat.[78] At the Theban necropolis Workmen's Village of Deir el-Medina a skilled artisan's annual wage for his family included a maximum of 48 *khar* of emmer, whilst the foreman received 66. For guards and porters the annual rate was 24 and 12. The payments in barley seem to have been about a third. Thus two or three of these silos, a not uncommon number in the Amarna house compounds, would appear to suffice a family with a purchasing power somewhat larger than a Deir el-Medina foreman's. However, the Deir el-Medina householders did not have large silos to store their grain in. They were paid monthly and evidently consumed most of it, either as food or as a medium of exchange. They did not, in other

words, accumulate grain balances. To be able to do that was a significant mark of status. The groups of silos at Amarna thus indicate two possibilities (as alternatives or present together): either storage of an annual harvest, or a monthly receipt of ration payments far in excess of basic needs.

To form a better judgement of what lies behind the silos we must turn again to outside data, and consider certain aspects of the agrarian economy and landscape of the New Kingdom, beginning with the extent and nature of private landholding in the New Kingdom. Hereditary possession of land was possible. A text known as the Inscription of Mes introduces us to a parcel of land granted by King Ahmose at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty to an 'officer of ships' as a reward for military service.[79] About three centuries later, in the reign of Rameses II, we find the same land still in the hands of the same family, descendants of the original hero, now squabbling over its division into lots, and appealing to a duplicate set of government land records, kept by the treasury and by the department of the granary, wherein was recorded the history of ownership. A papyrus of the time of Rameses IX (Papyrus Valençay I) is even more explicit in drawing a distinction between *khato*-lands of the Pharaoh and privately-owned land whose taxes were paid independently to the treasury.[80] We must add to this the evidence (particularly from the Wilbour Papyrus, discussed on p. 311) for the widespread leasing of temple lands, with hints that this might have been a hereditary practice. Put the evidence together, and we have the outline for the private sector of a highly complex pattern of landholding in which a 'farm' was not a single discrete parcel of agricultural land, but a whole series of scattered plots held in more than one way: either owned outright or rented from a temple or from some other landowner.

And the 'farmers'? They were none other than people with official titles who, for a position of respect and comfortable living, needed the income of a small estate. The school exercise texts make this very clear. In addition to the model letters they contain pieces which dwell on the benefits accruing to the successful literate man. They cast his lot not as a constant round of important duties in official surroundings but as a life of bucolic ease in one's villa, surrounded by the produce of a well-stocked and well-managed farm.

> You go down to your ship of fir-wood manned from bow to stern. You reach your beautiful villa, the one you have built for yourself. Your mouth is full of wine and beer, of bread, meat and cakes. Oxen are slaughtered and wine is opened, and melodious singing is before you. Your chief anointer anoints (you) with ointment of gum. Your manager of cultivated lands bears garlands. Your chief fowler brings ducks, your fisherman brings fish. Your ship has returned from Syria laden with all manner of good things. Your byre is full of calves, your weavers flourish. You are established whilst (your) enemy is fallen, and the one who spoke against you is no more.[81]

The emphasis on the self-made aspect of the official is notable. No hint here of the good life being handed down from the king in return for loyal service. This is also, of course, the ideal portrayed in many tomb pictures of the New Kingdom and earlier periods. Officials of whatever kind looked forward to an eternal life which featured prominently the pleasures of watching with serenity happy peasants working the fields of the estate.[82]

Our need to sharpen the focus of generalized pictures of this kind is again served by

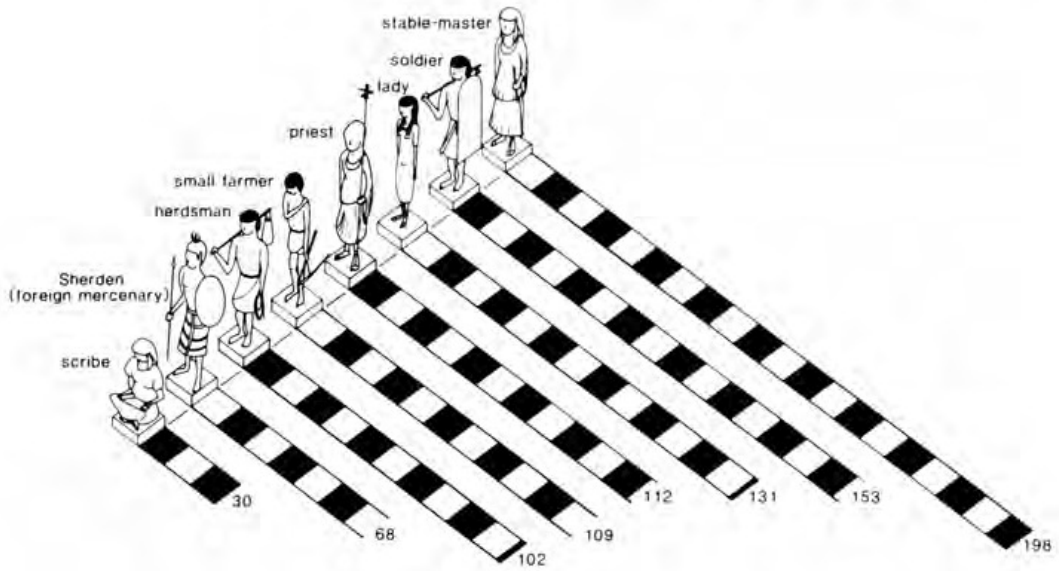


Figure 103 A social profile: categories of persons renting land in Middle Egypt in the 20th Dynasty (after Wilbour Papyrus). Each square represents ten persons.

occasional written statistical data. Thus the Wilbour Papyrus (see p. 191) offers a little profile of the categories of person who rented fields from temples in an area of Middle Egypt late in the New Kingdom (Figure 103). This has some surprising features, the high proportion of women being one. The numbers of soldiers (including Sherden mercenaries) is probably a local peculiarity, though it well reflects the practice of settling army veterans on the land.[83]

The appearance of the rural landscape in ancient Egypt has to be left very much to the imagination. Archaeology gives us direct evidence for towns, and the continuity of landscape and farming practices from ancient to recent times provides a good basis for picturing the rural scene in a very general way. But as to how much settlement there was outside the towns, and of what kind, we have only a hazy outline. As noted early in this chapter, the Amarna Boundary Stelae refer to 'villages' across the river, but we lack any evidence as to how many and who lived in them. Perhaps the closest we can come to a New Kingdom source for rural landscape and settlement is the Wilbour Papyrus.

This huge document is a register of measurement and revenue assessment for certain categories of agricultural land in a stretch of some 150 km in Middle Egypt in year 4 of Rameses V (1142 BC), thus towards the very end of the New Kingdom.[84] It is not a list of places, but in referring to plots of land it makes frequent reference to places large and small. It is almost certainly not a complete account of the area, and how the places lay in relation to one another is something that is extremely difficult to decide. But there is still no other source which approaches it for detail. About 416 settlement names are given, and these can be assigned to each of four zones. With the most important places, judged by the amount of land they owned or controlled, we can go some way towards locating them on a map. For the rest, all we can do is to assign them as blocks to a particular zone. The nature of the place names is very much like that of modern Egypt. Some are 'proper' names, but a large number are compounds in which the first element is descriptive. In modern Egypt the commonest are *Kôm* (mound), *Bet* (house), *Ezbet*

(originally a settlement for a landowner's peasants), *Naga* (properly an originally Arab Bedouin settlement), *Zawiyet* (a hamlet), and *Deir* (a Coptic Christian monastery). Amenhetep III's palace at Malkata, for example, stands today beside a modern village called Ezbet Basili, named after a prominent landowner of former times with the Coptic-Greek name of Vasili, who actually lived in Luxor, across the river. Wilbour gives us *Iat* (mound), *At* (house), *Wehit* (hamlet), *Bekhen* (an official's villa), and *Sega* (tower). Altogether there are 141 of these places, subdivided as follows: 51 mounds, 37 houses, 29 hamlets, 17 villas, and 7 towers. They are not, however, spread evenly through the four zones. 'Houses' tend to be more numerous in zones where there were fewer larger towns, whilst 'villas' and 'towers' cluster in zones marked by larger towns. For our enquiry the most interesting of the groups is the villas (*bekhen*). This is the very term used in the scribal exercises for the official's residence so abundantly stocked with farm produce. The same texts say of the ideal villa that it is 'upon the ground of your city' in one case, and 'in your city' in another. Wilbour territory saw a concentration of these in zones of larger towns, specifically near the provincial capital of Herakleopolis.

Wilbour territory has another contribution to make to our understanding of who lived in a 'capital' city. The place names just discussed have as their second element a personal name, 'The villa of so-and-so'. They are thus the ancient equivalents of Ezbet Basili. These names are common Egyptian names without titles so that, lacking the local knowledge which the people of the day had, we can learn nothing more from them, except in one case. One of the villas was 'of the vizier'. We can insert here one further small source for one of the zones: the cemetery for Herakleopolis itself, which lay on the nearest piece of desert in an area now known as Sidmant el-Gebel. Several New Kingdom tombs excavated early this century bore evidence of who their owners were.[85] Some were people prominent in local society, which in practice meant the priesthood of the local temple. We have an Amenhetep, who was a priest of the local god Heryshef, and an Amenemhat, who was a divine father in the same cult. There is also a record of a mayor called Menena. The remainder, however, are officials of court or army: Nebenkemt (chief of bowmen and fanbearer on the royal boat Khaem-maat), Sety (general, overseer of attendants of the Lord of the Two Lands, ambassador in all lands), Pahemneter (deputy commander of chariotry, chief of bowmen), and Rahetep and Parahetep (viziers), and possibly an earlier vizier called Tuthmosis. These are just the ranks of officials whom we find at Amarna and could probably have been found at Thebes, Memphis, and Per-Rameses.

Amarna itself provides a classic instance, in the person no less of the man who was to become king after Tutankhamun, Ay. A strong case can be made out for regarding Ay as a member of a prominent family whose home was the city Akhmim, in Upper Egypt. His parents would have been a couple, Yuya and Tuyu, whose tomb in the Valley of the Kings was discovered early in this century. They had earned this honour because their daughter had married Amenhetep III and had become his principal wife, the queen Tiy. Typically for this as for other periods, the family had leading positions in the local Akhmim priesthood and in the army. Ay himself took over the army titles. When he finally became king he was able to make an impressive gesture towards Akhmim, having a small rock-cut temple hewn in the cliffs behind the city.[86] This is symptomatic of another aspect of New Kingdom Egypt. As pointed out in Chapter 5 this was the first time for many provincial towns or cities to possess a prestigious stone-built temple.

Embellishing it or adding to its lands provided important people with a fine opportunity for munificence to their home town, recorded in a dignified way for posterity.

In the New Kingdom the key mode of entry for a young person to high position was to be brought up at court. For a man this brought the honorary title 'child of the Nursery', and for a woman, 'king's ornament'. As far as we can tell entry was by personal contact and recommendation. But it is clear that whilst there were doubtless families whose main base and permanent home was a royal city, many officials must have come from families based in the provinces. One member at court opened up a channel for others. The degree of attachment to home must have varied, but the Herakleopolis cemetery shows that even viziers could feel it so strongly as to arrange to be taken home to be buried. Now it becomes clear why in Wilbour territory so many officials from all ranks all the way up to the vizier leased land. Even if their rank linked them closely to the court or to campaigning army units many of them had strong home ties extending to a villa with its agricultural lands. The Herakleopolis viziers were among those who maintained a villa in the nearby countryside.

We can now better understand the social and economic basis to Amarna. For some of the officials the houses that we see must represent all that they had in terms of property, and when this included silos and stockyards they were to store the produce of the lands which they managed, which were probably not too far away. Akhetaten included the large tract of agricultural land on the west bank. It would have been typical of the Egyptian way of doing things for this land, although presumably expropriated by Akhenaten for the Aten, to have been leased out to officials with a house in the city. For others, and how large a proportion we cannot tell, the city villa was not everything. They retained the provincial links of their origin and this inevitably included property rights and hopes of further inheritance. In view of the sudden changes of fortune that could occur when a new king came to power it was probably very prudent to maintain these links and to look forward to an eventual retirement and burial in the place of one's birth. Indeed, there may well have been a sense of exile in setting up home in a royal city.

Links with a provincial and semi-rural base were easy to maintain. Egyptians were inveterate letter-writers, and regular Nile travellers. Two letters written by an 'oil-boiler' called Ramose from Amarna have actually survived, intended for his brother, a treasury scribe at Thebes, and for his sister.[87] We can tell from their contents that they were part of a regular correspondence. A boat was amongst the range of desirable personal possessions. Visits – vacations – were also formalized in two ways. One was the sporting expedition, for fishing and fowling, which was a full family outing, as tomb pictures frequently show. The other was the pilgrimage to the family tomb: to inspect it, arrange for further work, and to sit down to a special meal in the spiritual company of ancestors. We have already seen that at Thebes the 'Beautiful Festival of the Valley' was used as a general occasion for a pilgrimage and night vigil at tombs. We can hardly doubt that provincial towns and their cemeteries had their equivalents (there is a well-attested Middle Kingdom case at Asyut).[88]

When we examine Amarna houses we find not only a great variety in individual capacities to store grain, but also that this variety does not particularly match the size of the attached house.[89] The two signs of status and wealth – house size and silo/magazine size – are to some extent independent. We can explain this by saying that villa

economies reflected both the income of the owner and the extent of provincial ties. The full property list of the vizier Nakht, for example, may have included not only the house in the Main City at Amarna but properties at his home town, wherever that was. One of the school texts makes just such a distinction between the urban context of the ideal villa and agricultural holdings at one's village:

> I will build for you a new villa upon the ground of your city, surrounded with trees. Its stalls are inside, and its granaries are full of barley and emmer-wheat. . . . I will tend for you five *arouras* of cucumber-beds to the south of your village, and the cucumbers, carobs and [translation uncertain] will be as abundant as the sand. Let ships come to load them up.[90]

Continuing provincial connection also explains a much more flagrant anomaly at Amarna. Akhenaten's Boundary Stelae declare that amongst the works to be done at Akhetaten is the making of tombs for officials, to be located in the eastern desert. From this declaration two groups of rock tombs emerged, the North Tombs and the South Tombs. Their numbers, however, fall far below the number of officials who, so we can estimate, lived in the city. For this estimate we can take the smallest house known to have been occupied by an official, which is actually N49.18 (the chariotry officer Ranefer). We can then assume that all houses of this size and above are likely to have belonged to such people. They actually number sixty-five. The excavated housing zones represent something like 50 per cent of the total likely residential area, so that we must think in terms of around 130 as at least an order of magnitude for officials of more than modest rank. This may well be too exclusive, however. As already noted, there are no jumps in house sizes as one moves up the social scale. But certain features do appear with houses of increasing size. One of these is an entrance porch. If we take this as a sign of ownership by people of some status, i.e. of officials of more than the most minor rank, the excavated total rises considerably. One study has shown that of the 120 largest houses only 15 lack this feature.[91] If we take the figure 120 as a base for houses of 'officials', and still this is only 15 per cent of the total number of houses excavated (and a small proportion compared to the households of Maiunehes), and allow for the excavated sample being only about half of the original, the number of those who might have been expected to provide a decorated tomb for themselves and their family rises to 240.

Nearly all the tombs at Amarna remained unfinished when the city was abandoned. Starts had, however, been made on forty-three. They varied a good deal in size and elaboration, reflecting the varying status and resources of their owners. Despite their unfinished condition we can still make one subdivision: between those intended to have an internal columned hall (or more than one), and those which were not. We have sixteen of the former, twenty of the latter, and seven where we just cannot tell at all. The pattern of ownership of the two groups reflects what we might expect. People who, by their position, we would expect to be important have tombs in the former category, with the columned hall. They include the vizier Nakht(pa-aten), the mayor of Akhetaten Neferkheperu-her-sekheper, the chief priest Merira, the personal stewards of Nefertiti (Merira II) and of the queen mother Tiy (Huya), the chamberlain Tutu who may well have been in charge of correspondence with foreign powers and client rulers in western Asia, and the chariotry officer Ay, subsequently to become king.

The total of forty-three rock tombs is obviously a lot smaller than the total number of officials who had houses at Amarna. Furthermore, the number of those who were established early enough to see much progress made on their tombs was a good deal less, around twenty-five at the most, although the same must have been true to some extent in the city: it continued to grow until the end as more people moved in to start a career there. But the imbalance remains. An explanation which fits the known pattern of New Kingdom society is not hard to find.

When a king came to the throne he brought with him a circle of people who had shared his upbringing. This must have signalled a change in several key posts of power, the ousted holders perhaps retiring to their place of origin if they came from the provinces. This change of faces must have extended some way downwards into the ranks of officialdom before petering out. At Amarna the rock tombs were a sign of closeness to the king or to his favoured officials, and a statement of commitment to the new order. That there were relatively so few we can perhaps take as a sign that even in the extreme circumstances surrounding this particular accession the change of faces was very restricted in numbers, although not necessarily in influence. We are talking about an exclusive royal coterie of between twenty to thirty men at any one time. Most of those who moved to Amarna and who did not belong to this exclusive circle left behind roots either in a royal city or in the provinces, roots which included a family zone within a cemetery, and, for a wealthy minority, a rural estate to enjoy in retirement. Indeed, the move to Amarna probably encouraged burial plans to be made around the old family tomb. The tombs that were made at Amarna carried in their decoration the stamp of the new king's preferences. The tomb owner, instead of basking in the attentions of his family, whiling away the hours on his estate, and making sure that he was familiar with some of the gods of the underworld, now looked on in humility and adoration whilst the royal family worshipped the Aten and paraded themselves around the capital. In the privacy of your tomb Akhenaten's new scheme threatened to be with you for ever.

A royal city was populated in part by families whose permanent home it was, in part by people from the provinces there for a career, hoping that their foothold would provide future access for sons and other relatives. In Akhenaten's time the main royal cities were Memphis and Thebes. Where did most of the Amarna population come from? In the first four years of his reign Akhenaten must have spent much time at Thebes, both to supervise the construction of the new temples and for the celebration of his *Sed*-festival, held uncharacteristically early in his reign. His reliefs show a palace in the city of Thebes proper. His father, Amenhetep III, had likewise spent much time at Thebes in the later years of his life. To this end he built the Malkata palace which was large enough to accommodate the court for the periods of weeks, perhaps even months, that they spent there. But Malkata was nowhere near the scale of a royal city, and apart from a token presence of caretakers was probably not used much after Amenhetep III's death. The Theban evidence does not really support the idea that the 18th Dynasty kings lived there for long enough to warrant the permanent establishment of houses for the full range of officials and their dependants who ran the king's business. The nearest thing to a 'home base' for the kings was Memphis, and much of the officialdom which served the king's interests lived there permanently. Akhenaten's interests must have been partly identical to his predecessors' and, in the staffing of the Aten temples, partly

new. Where the latter personnel were drawn from we do not know, although there can scarcely have been a suitable group available who lay outside the stratum of society which normally filled official posts. But for many, their most likely previous place of residence was Memphis, even if their family roots were in the provinces, including at Thebes itself. (The two unique private letters written from Amarna which were mentioned earlier were destined for relatives living at Thebes, where the letters were found, one to a brother, a 'scribe of the treasury'. They were, incidentally, found in a tomb. Would the writer also have hoped to be buried amongst his Theban relatives?). And when the experiment was over and Tutankhamun left Amarna and issued a decree of restoration for the temples, it was issued from the royal residence in Memphis even though the temple of Amun at Thebes was the main beneficiary.[92]

In Chapter 6 it was pointed out that the ancient Egyptian economy is regarded by many scholars as a two-tier edifice: an administered collection and redistribution of commodities as rations at the top, overlying the closed domestic economies of villages lying outside the state's various institutions, leaving no room for the existence of a free market for goods, not even a restricted one. For New Kingdom society in general, and for Amarna in particular, we have to ask ourselves: could such a system account for all that we see?

We have already had occasion, in Chapter 4, to draw attention to one of the physical consequences of an ancient structured view of society, one consisting of a small number of top bureaucrats and a large number of others, the latter economically dependent upon the former: the town of Kahun (and probably many others of the Middle Kingdom). This offers a physical counterpart to the two-tier economic system outlined above. This kind of model community was also, in Chapter 4, contrasted with Amarna. As we have now seen in more detail at Amarna the more or less continuous gradient of house size and other status indicators (see Figure 101, p. 300), as well as the interlocking horizontal pattern of houses of different sizes, suggests a pattern of economic relationships of some complexity. The residential parts of the city look for all the world like an aggregate of villages and neighbourhoods, each with its many layers of dependence, economic and otherwise. Yet if the city plan implies the existence of a great variety of individual household demands and circumstances, it follows that the two-tier economic model would have to offer an equally flexible and finely tuned means of supply, primarily from the overwhelming state sector. This defies common sense, as well as such evidence as we have for the New Kingdom. For, if anything, the New Kingdom seems to have been somewhat less orientated towards extended bureaucracy than the Middle Kingdom.

We can be in no doubt that the private means existed to satisfy a demand side to the economy. It is all too evident in the substantial though varying provisions for the storage of grain and other commodities at private residences. The surpluses could have come from the owner's harvest (on owned or rented lands), and/or from ration handouts from the state. We must also accept that a proportion of officials at Amarna had links with more distant estates and houses in their home provinces. The more successful officials were, therefore, institutions in miniature. Their households also, to varying degrees, engaged in manufacture. In foodstuffs and goods, private estates had surpluses to dispose of, through gifts and also through sales, the latter sometimes delegated to the 'traders'. This mixed economic system was effective, for it spread

resources in a fairly even gradient throughout this large city.

Amarna was not a typical Egyptian city. No royal city ever could be. Memphis, Thebes, Per-Rameses in the delta must each have had its individuality from the initiatives of ambitious kings. Yet the remains at Amarna still manage to illuminate New Kingdom society at all levels, from top to bottom. Two aspects need particularly to be stressed. One is the great coherence of Egyptian society, through the intimate ties which linked urban populations to the country and so made even a great capital city an aggregate of villages. The wealthy had prestige and patronage, but they were not remote from ordinary life. Nor can we identify, or even suspect, the existence of an urban proletariat living and working outside this tightly knit neighbourhood pattern. The city in ancient Egypt was not an alien place, although internal mobility brought many encounters and juxtapositions between strangers. It was firmly embedded within Egyptian society as a whole. The second aspect is the separation, almost the removal, of the king and royal family from real life. They lived physically isolated in a corridor of buildings which in their size and style frequently bore little relation to the domestic surroundings of even their high officials. They lived psychologically isolated in a charged atmosphere of sycophancy, religious ritual, and militaristic pageant. Contact there had to be with officials, but this was institutionalized at the King's House, which stood at the centre of a web of economic and political ties, well represented on the ground by a range of different buildings.

Outside the royal areas, in the teeming city neighbourhoods, the king and his entourage recede into the background, and icons are the main reminders of his presence. In the larger houses we see the officials living, or struggling to achieve, the good life of private income and state donation promised by the school texts, dividing their time and loyalty between their city house and their family home in the provinces, writing letters and making visits to keep in contact. In the small houses crowd a range of people of lower status, some servants, some holders of minor office, many making things for sale: sandals, linen, beds, baskets, beads; perhaps near the river bank fishermen and boatmen ferrying into Amarna sellers of vegetables, fodder, pigeons, honey. More boats bring in the grain, livestock, wine, and other produce from the estates of establishments: the larger private households and the palace and temples. And all the time exchange: the haggling of lesser folk buying their heart's desire with a basket or sack of trinkets, the deals of traders at institutional magazines buying with gold and silver, or in the grounds of their employer's home selling grain or meat.

Busy people, idle people, doubtless some desperate and many harassed people: much of the city their world, independent even of an eccentric monomaniac king. This was to be the long-term reward for rulers seeking a life of sublime separation, surrendering their realm to economic man.