

Week 8

A - Solar Religion in AE

**B - A new time? Atenism as
monotheism or personal cult?**

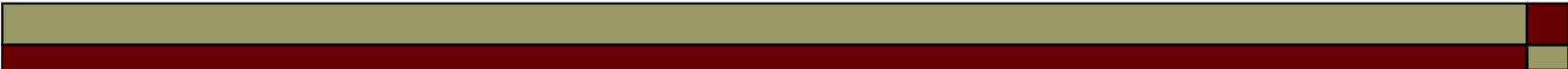
HPAH7015

Ancient Egyptian Religion

Dr Katharina Zinn

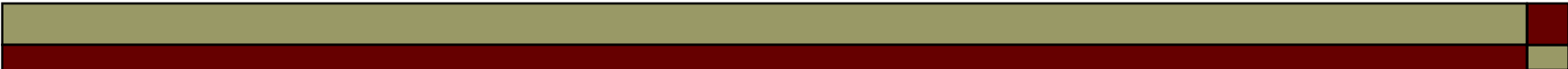
Readings

- ❑ Assmann, J. 1995. *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re. Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*. London: Kegan Paul.
- ❑ Frankfort, Henri. *Kingship and the Gods*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.
<http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/misc/kingship.html>.
- ❑ Assmann, J. 1970. *Der König als Sonnenpriester*. Glückstadt: Augustin.



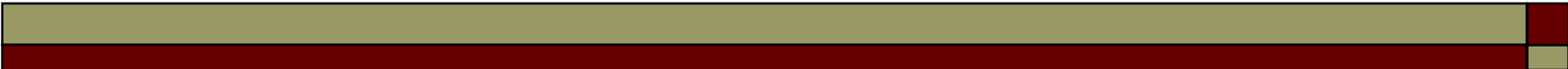
The nature of religion

- ❑ **The myth(odology) (and theology)**
- ❑ **The cult**
- ❑ **Gods and Goddesses**
- ❑ **Temples**
- ❑ Festivals and Processions
- ❑ Kingship
- ❑ Afterlife beliefs



The solar gods

- Sun worship was prevalent in ancient Egyptian religion due to climatic reasons (see introductory session)
- Several deities had a connection to the sun and could represent solar aspects
 - Different or all representing the “one behind the many”?
- gods who personified or represented the sun were the most important and widely-venerated of Egypt’s deities



Ra as the main solar god

- ❑ “Re” means “sun” and “day”
- ❑ considered a demiurge (creator god), brought himself and pantheon into being at the beginning of time
- ❑ central to the ideology of kingship
 - king of the gods
 - divine father of each successive pharaoh (since Djedefre)

Block Deir el Bahari: expressing wish that the king
(whose name is missing) be given "life like Re forever"



Ra as the main solar god

- ❑ complex and multifaceted being with puzzling identity
- ❑ appeared in royal names and epithets
- ❑ travelled underworld at night to battle forces of chaos
- ❑ Appeared in many forms
 - At dawn – Khepri (dung beetle)
 - At sunset – Atum (primordial creator, shown as human)
 - Pyramid Texts: three gods = aspects of one being
 - “Litany of Re” (first in tomb of Th III): 75 different identities

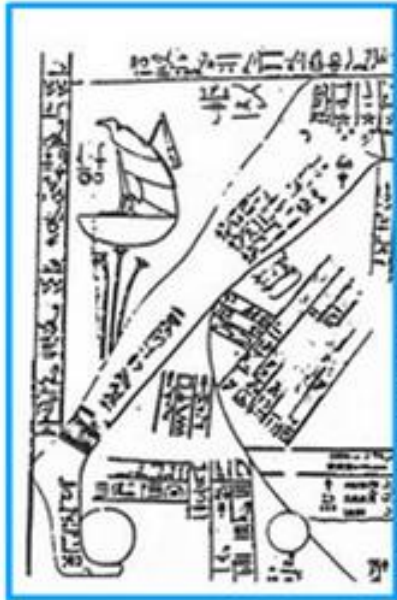
Mythology of Ra

- Khepri as morning sun, Ra as midday sun, Atum as evening sun

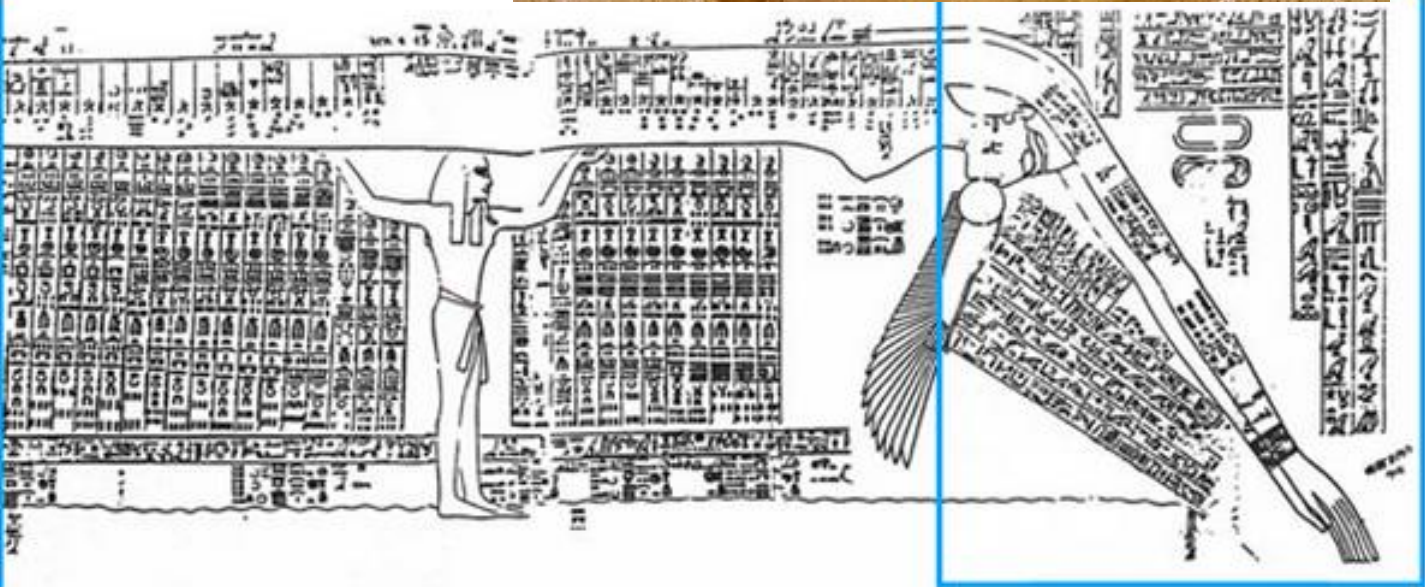


KV15 Seti II

Book of Nut



Texts related to
the rising of the Sun



Texts related to
the setting of the Sun

BoD chapter 17 (taken from CT 335)

- *Mine is All [Atum] in existence alone in Nun,*
- *I am Ra in his rising, first in ruling what he made.*
- *What does it mean?*
- *It means Ra in his rising when first ruling what he made,*
- *It means the first rising of Ra in Henennesut,*
- *when there was the creation of the supports of Nun*
- *when he was on the high ground which is in Khemenu,*
- *when the children of the rebel were destroyed for him on the high ground which is in Khemenu.*

Connection: Ra – his subjects

- → Ra often called
 - Perfect god
 - Great god
 - A god by whose nature people live
- → shows differentiation god – subjects
- S3-Ra: Reflects association of king with sun god AND equally his distance from true parity with the god

Cosmic Kingship – The Bronze Age as the Age of Ra

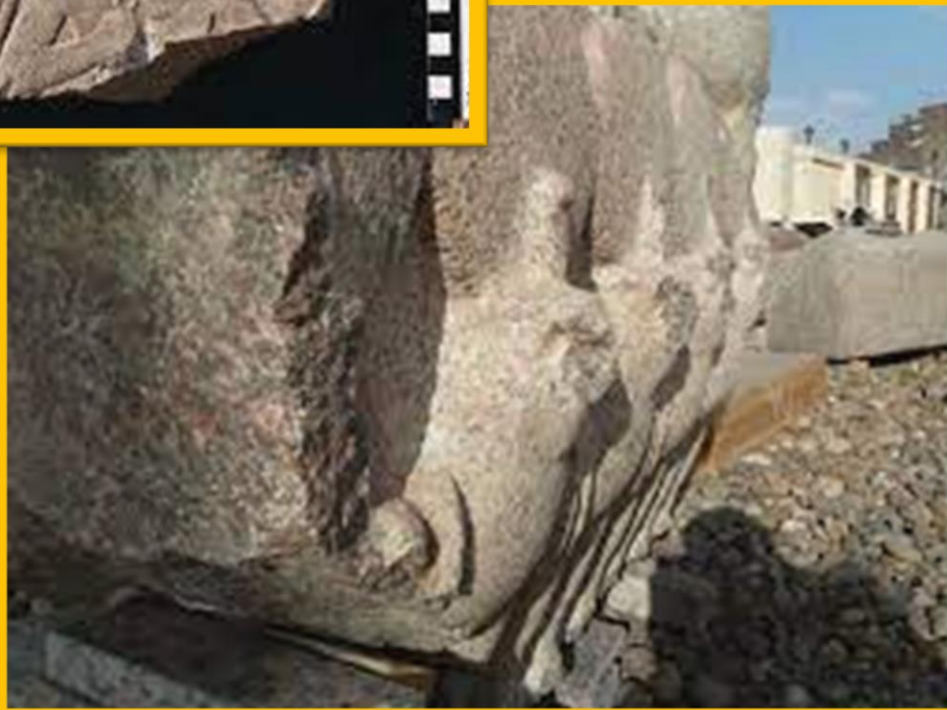
- ❑ Egyptian kingship delivered familiar paternal promises of state for abundance, security, wellbeing
- ❑ Guaranteed cult → main beneficiary: sun as creator god --> Ra
- ❑ Heliopolis (Iunu) as the place of the main solar god Ra



Heliopolis (Iunu)

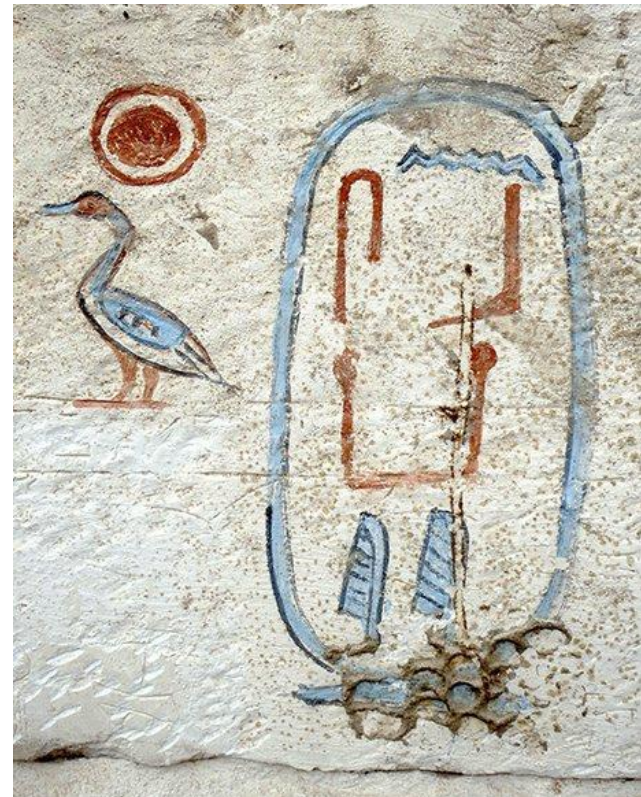
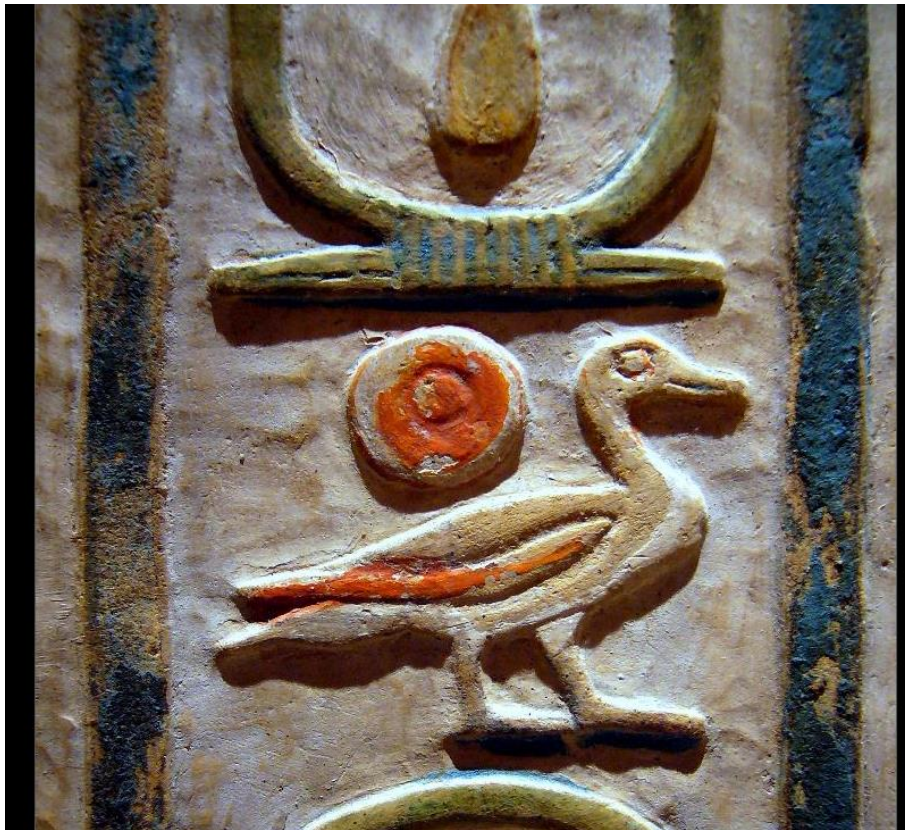


Heliopolis (Iunu)



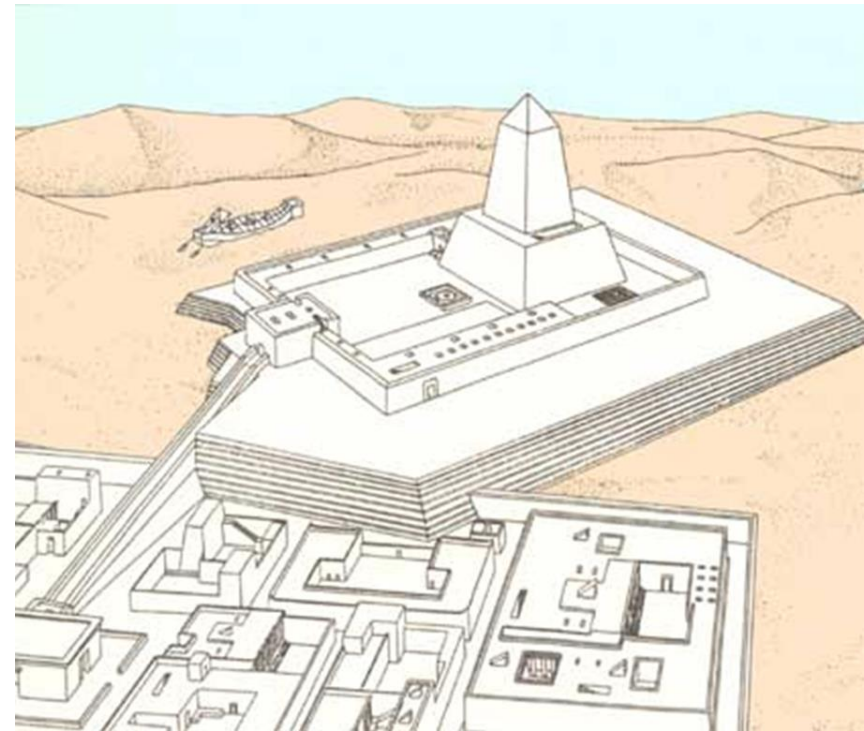
Cosmic Kingship – The Bronze Age as the Age of Ra

- 4th dyn.: title 'son of Re' is first attested under Djedefre written before personal name / forename (in cartouche)

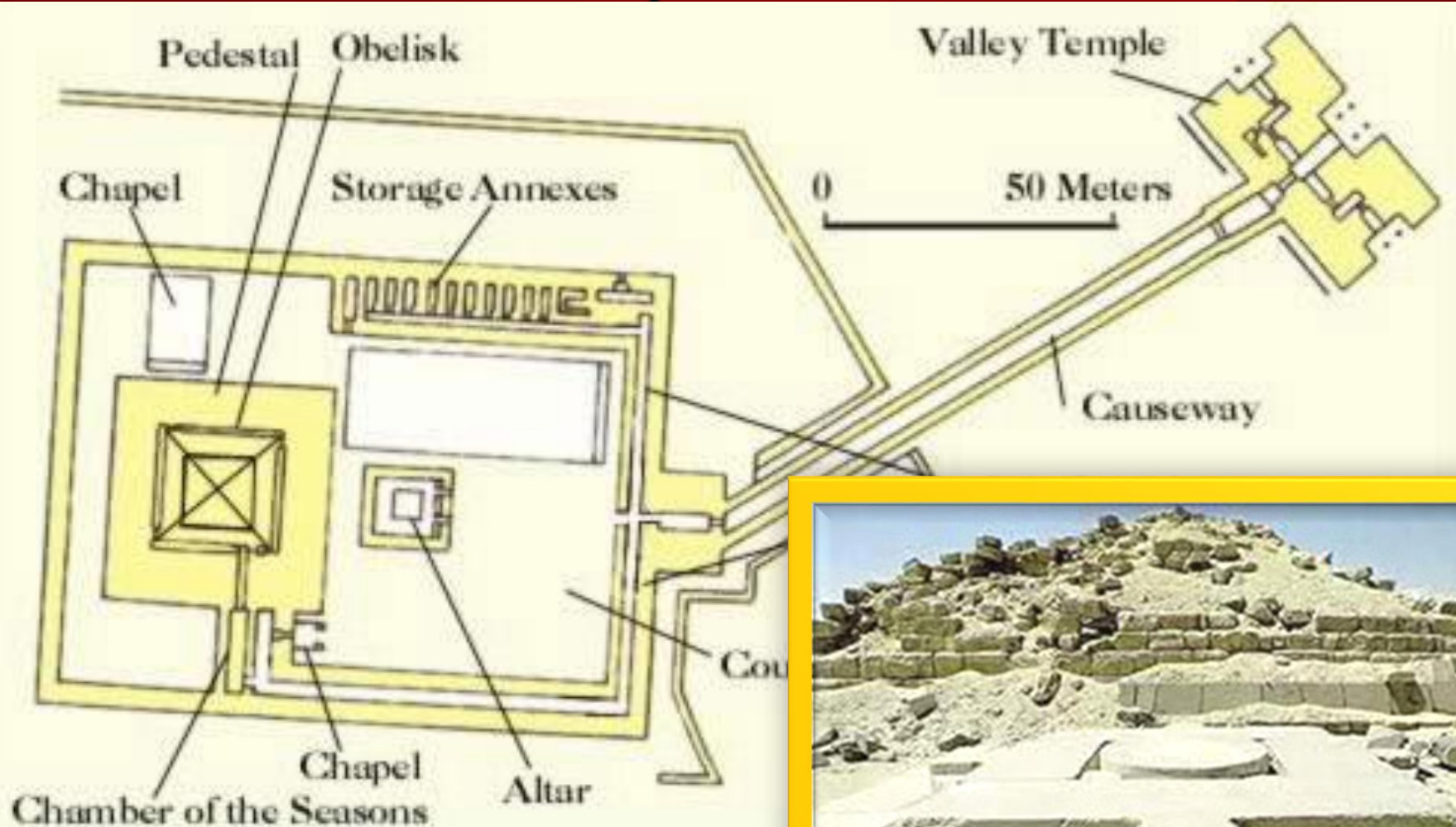


Cosmic Kingship – The Bronze Age as the Age of Ra

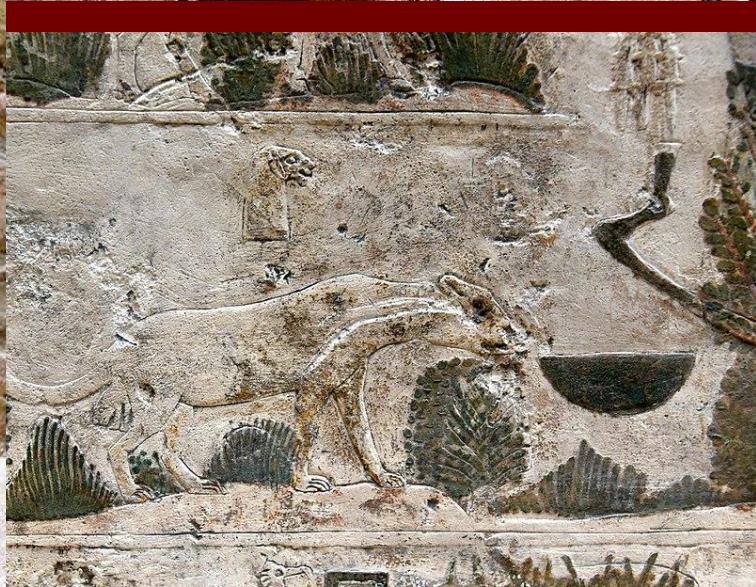
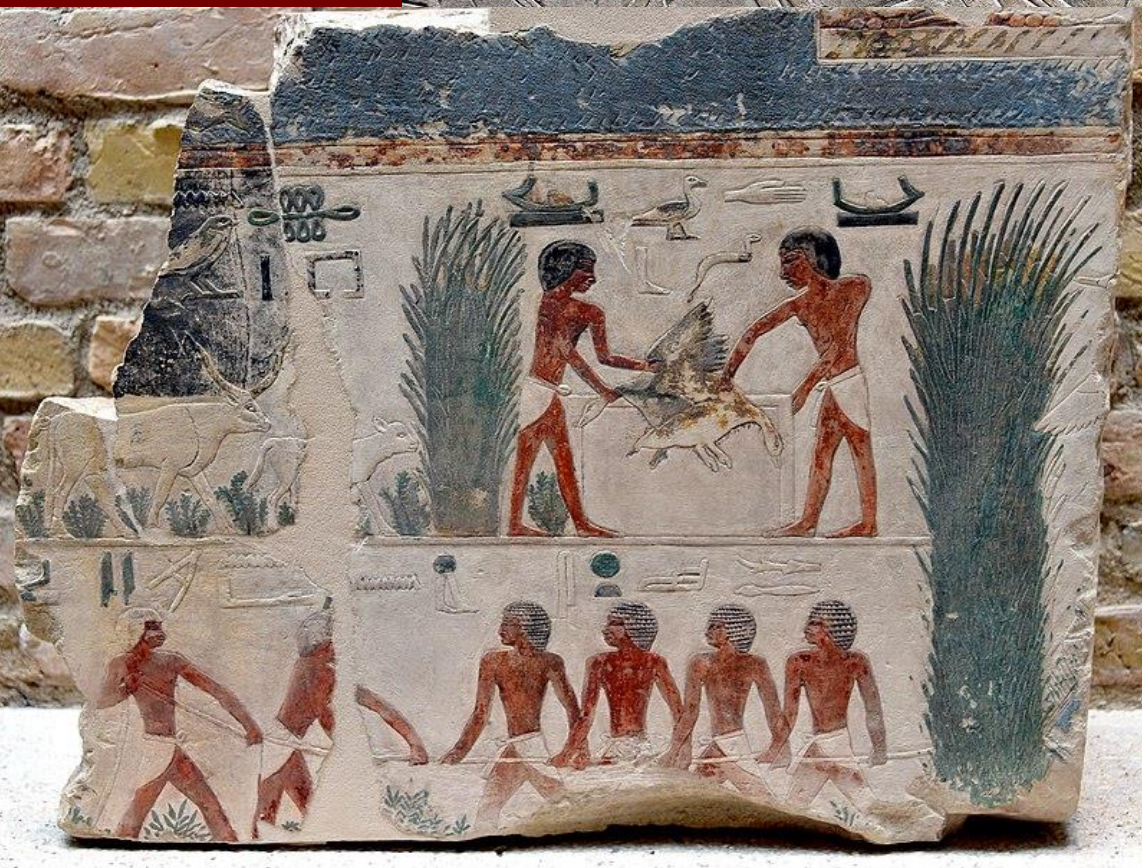
- ❑ 5th dynasty – kings build sun temples in addition to pyramid complexes
- ❑ built in addition to pyramid complexes
- ❑ consisted of an upper temple, a processional ramp and valley temple
- ❑ upper temple = enclosed space with a large obelisk (symbolized benben = rock which received the first rays of the sun when the world was created)



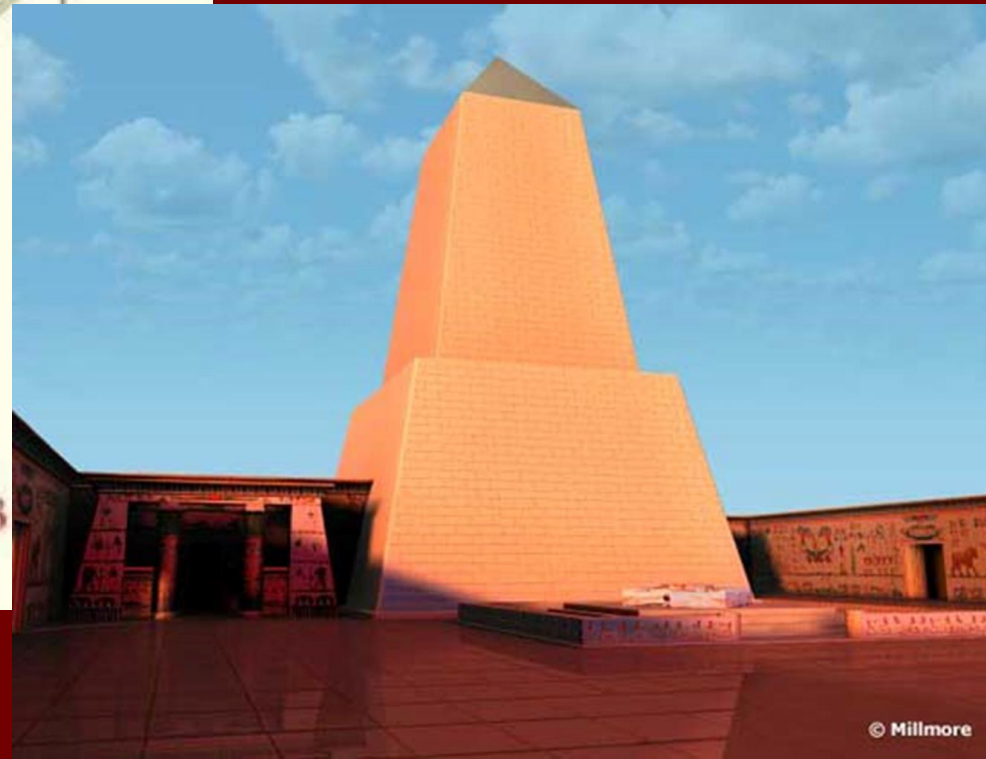
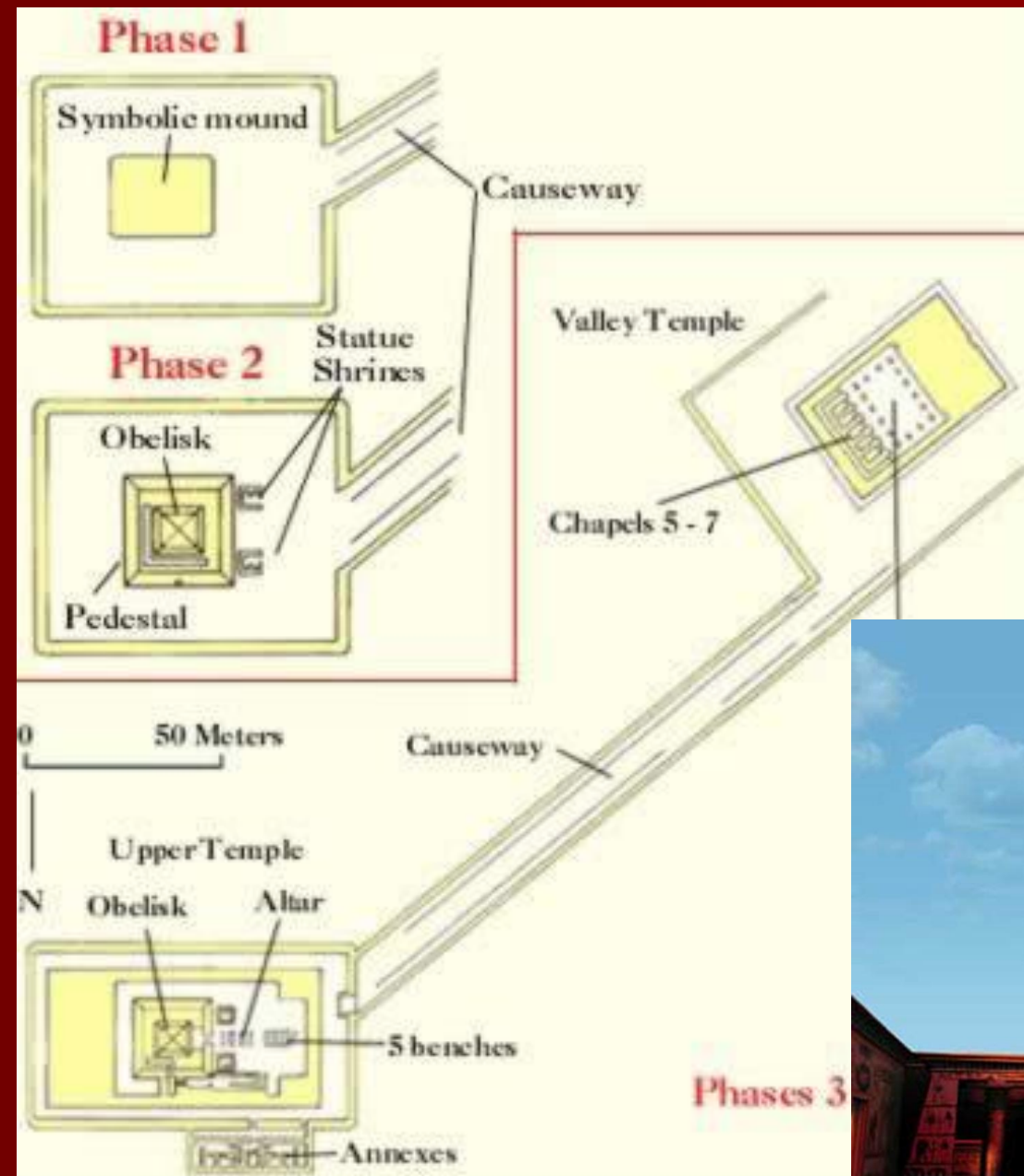
Sun-temple of Niuserre







Sun-temple of Userkaf



Cosmic Kingship – The Bronze Age as the Age of Ra

- 5th dynasty: new personal / birth name in titulary + throne-name as nomen (given as programmatic name at coronation) → both in cartouche – with reference to Ra (if not already in name)
- MK onwards: = normal to use s3 R' (son of the sun god Ra) as title for birth name (pre-nomen) of the king, written outside the cartouche and nswt bjtj (King of Upper and Lower Egypt) spearheading the throne-name, also in cartouche

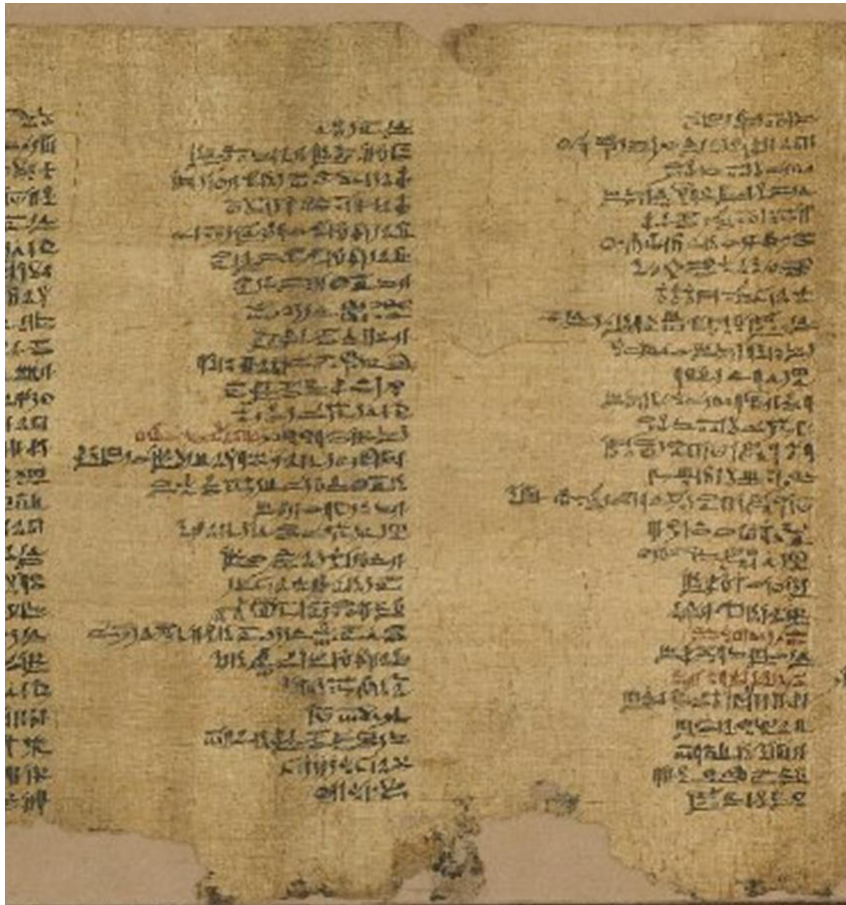
- Here: Ramses II



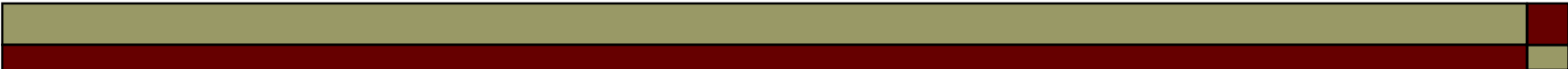
NK solar religion

- ❑ EGYPTIAN SOLAR RELIGION IN THE NEW KINGDOM: RE, AMUN AND THE CRISIS OF POLYTHEISM → Jan Assmann
- ❑ IDEA:
- ❑ Behind multiplicity of deities lay the oneness of a creator god
- ❑ remained a singularity at the same time that he turned himself into all the other gods and the whole of creation
- ❑ Assmann argues that in the early New Kingdom the solar creator god, Re or Amun-Re, was increasingly portrayed as acting alone rather than in conjunction with other deities, as hitherto had been normal

pBremner-Rhind (pBM 10188)



- Spoken by Ra:
- “When I evolved into this world, Shu and Tefnut grew excited in the inert waters in which they were, and brought me my Eye after them. And after I joined together my parts, I wept over them: That is the evolution of people, from the tears that came from my Eye.”
- □ creation of mankind



Special relation to kingship – as presented in texts labelled “The kings as priest of the sun” (Assmann)

*Ra has placed the king on the earth of the living for ever
and eternity,*

In order to judge humankind, to satisfy the gods,

To make Right happen and to annihilate Wrong,

*Such that he gives divine offerings to the gods, funerary
offerings to the blessed dead.*

*The name of the king is in the sky like that of Ra, he lives
in joy like Ra-Horakhty.*

*Nobles rejoyce when they see him; the populace gives him
praise in his role of “the Child”.*

Sety I receiving jubilees from Re-Horakhty and Weret-Hekau (Karnak, Hypostyle)



Syncretism of the sun god Ra

- ❑ **What is syncretism?**
- ❑ Religious Studies: practice of combining different beliefs and various schools of thought
- ❑ Egyptology: merging / assimilation of several originally discrete traditions / ideas / divine biographies – asserting an underlying unity / inclusive approach
- ❑ Syncretism of Egyptian gods: linking of deities by creating a new god which is (often) more / different than composite form
 - Linkage of names – Amun-Re (unified greatest invisible and visible divine power), Atum-Chepri (as two manifestations of same divine idea – here Ra)
 - Combining local/central gods – Sobek-Re
 - Combining foreign / Egyptian deities – Serapis (Osiris, Apis, Zeus, Helios)

Syncretism of the sun god Ra

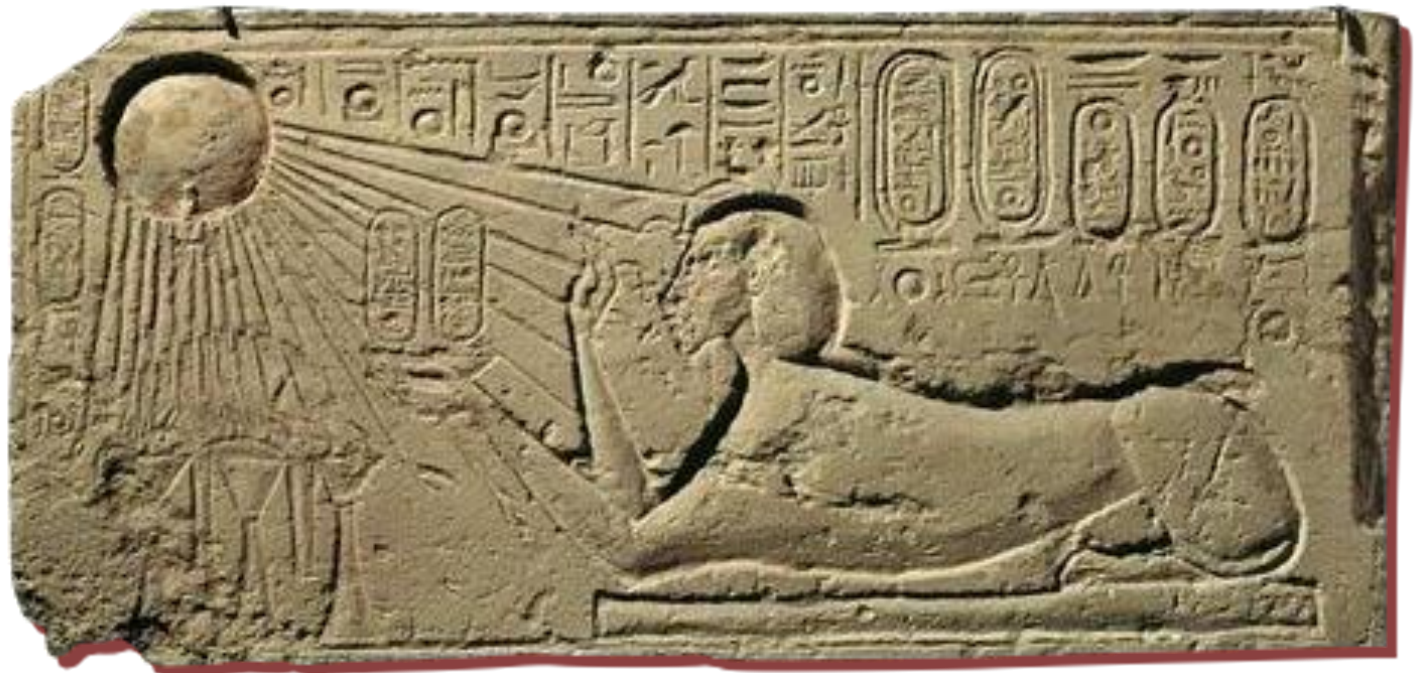
- ❑ first appears 2nd Dynasty
- ❑ thought of as a creator god early on
- ❑ Connected with other creator gods in syncretistic way:
Atum incorporated on aspect of Ra → Ra-Atum
- ❑ From Middle Kingdom onwards: connection expressed
in names: Sobek-Re, Khnum-Re, and of course Amun-
Re, who became a state god in his solar and creator
aspects as Re

A new time? Atenism as
monotheism or personal cult?

A special form of solar religion?

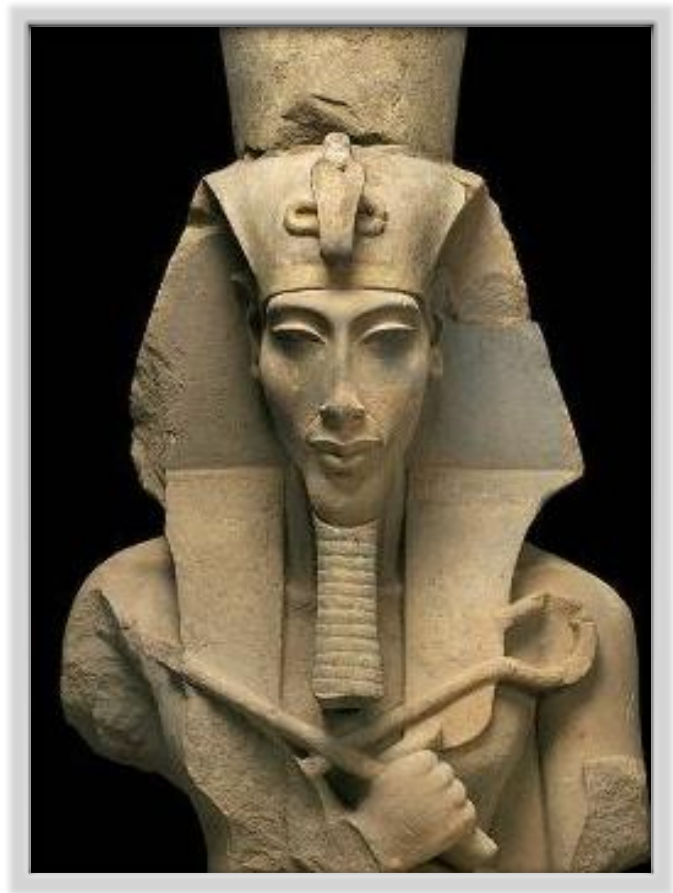
Continued solar religion: Atenism

- ❑ Solar religion of the mid / end 18th dynasty
- ❑ Special form of solar religion dedicated to the Aten (sun disc)



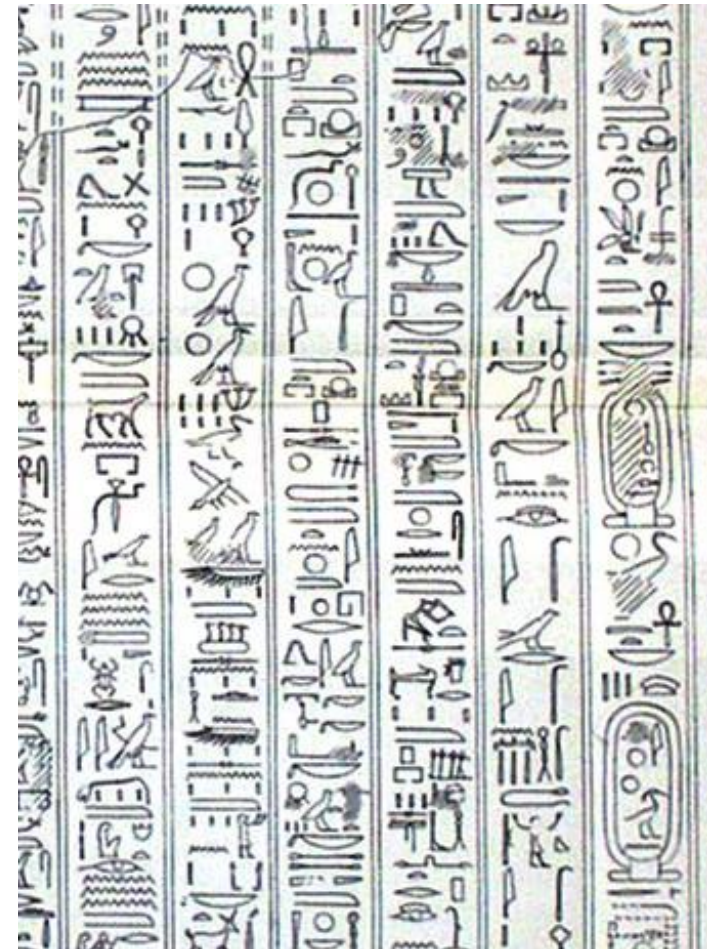
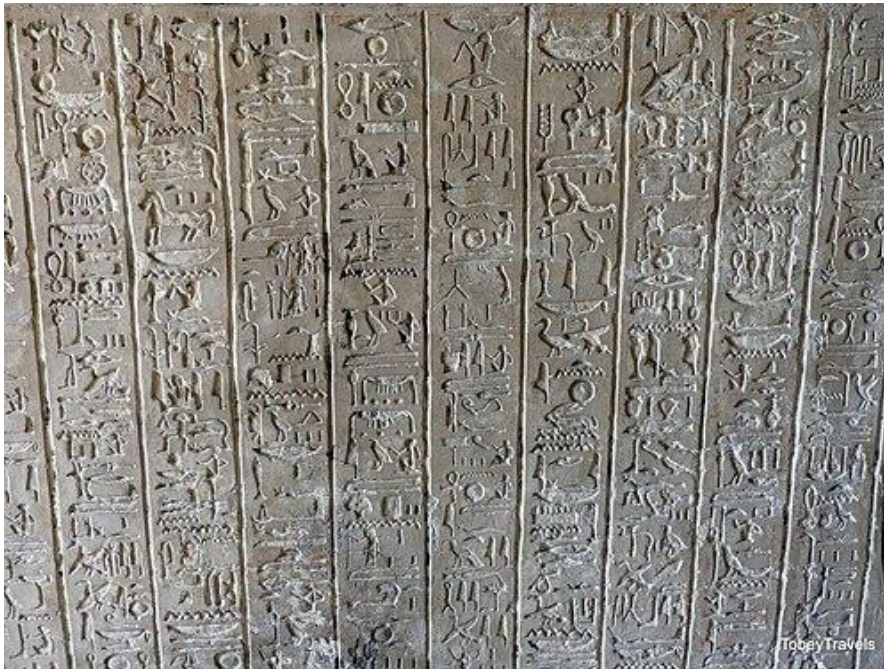
Sources for Atenism

- ❑ Understanding Akhenaten's view of the Aten is crucial for understanding the entire period
- ❑ Difficult to access due to a lack of sources
- ❑ Much speculation!
- ❑ The chief sources are:
 - The Great Hymn to the Aten & related texts
 - The Boundary Stelae
 - Tomb reliefs & other art
 - Architecture [temples, palaces, tombs, etc.]



The Great Hymn to the Aten

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



Names of the Aten

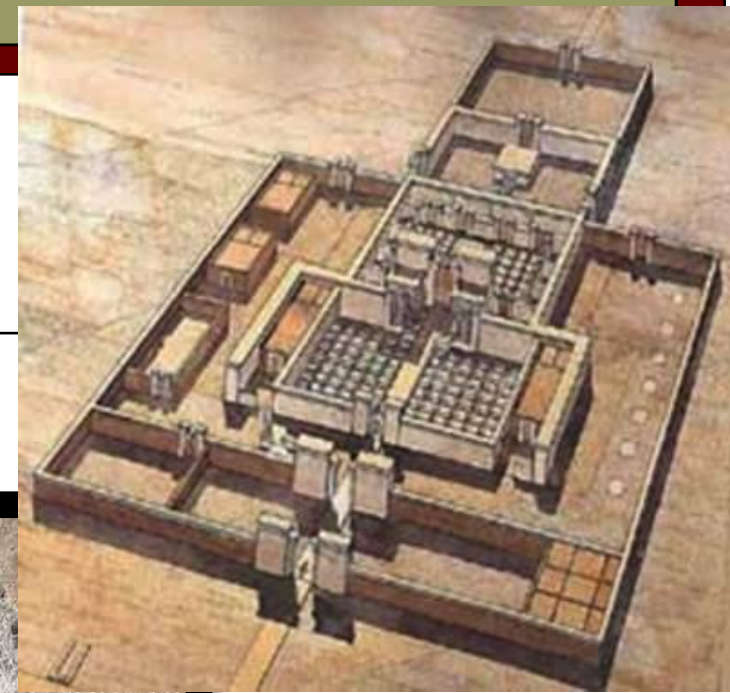
- “Didactic” name: “Living-one, Re-Harakhty, who rejoices in the horizon in his name of Shu [‘light’], who is the Aten”
 - “Akhet” = Horizon can refer to Akhet-aten AMARNA
- “Dogmatic” name: “Living-one, Re, ruler of the two horizons, who rejoices in the horizon in his name as Re, the father who returns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



King as “Shu”, holding up the Sun

Nature of the Aten

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



Nature of the Aten

- Universal rule, incl. foreign:
 - ruler of all, including foreign lands
- All things are accessible, as indicated by its hands
- Genderless creator god, but disinterested



Nature of the Aten

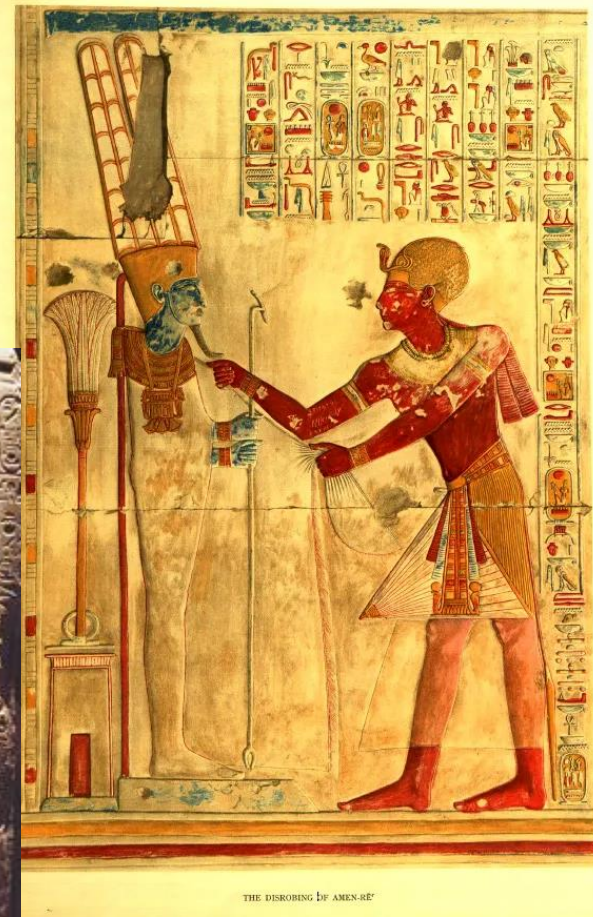
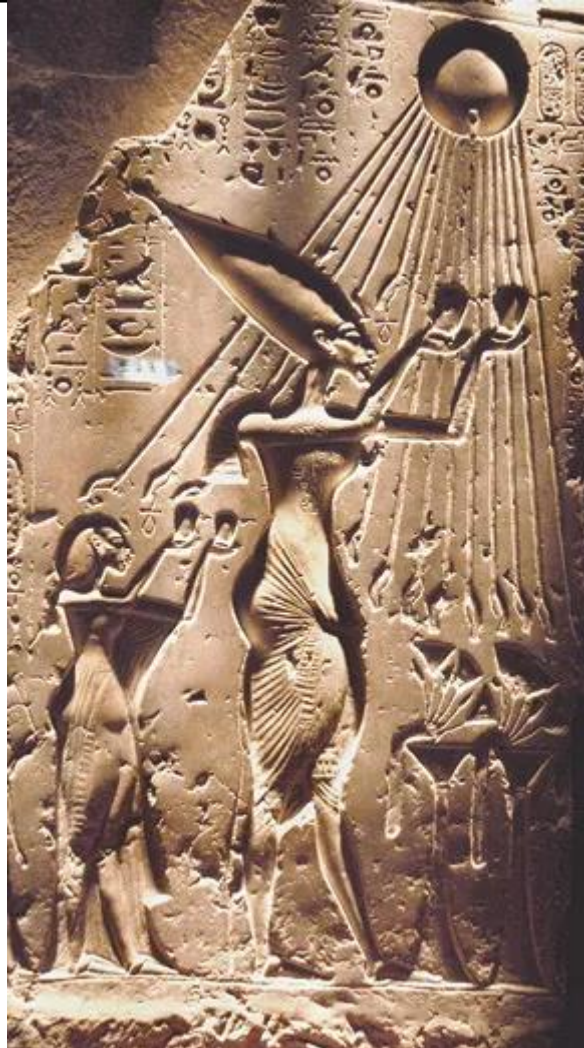
- Universal rule, incl. foreign
- All things are accessible, as indicated by its hands
- Genderless creator god, but disinterested
- Silent: no revelations
- Passive: no actions



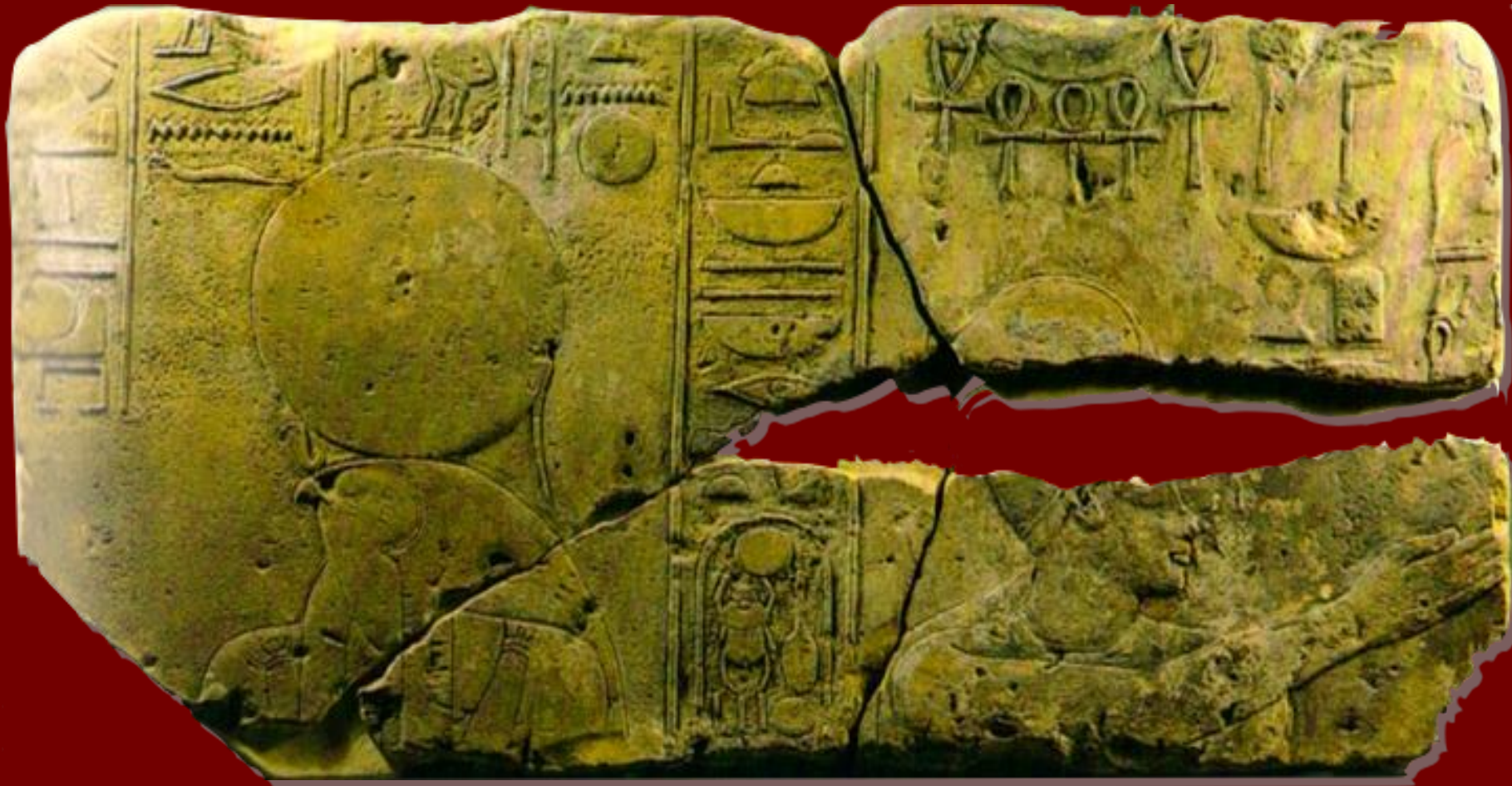
→ Already started by All (here All as Atum)

Contrasted with Amun

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



Atenism as Monotheism? The theology of the Amarna Period?



Monotheism?

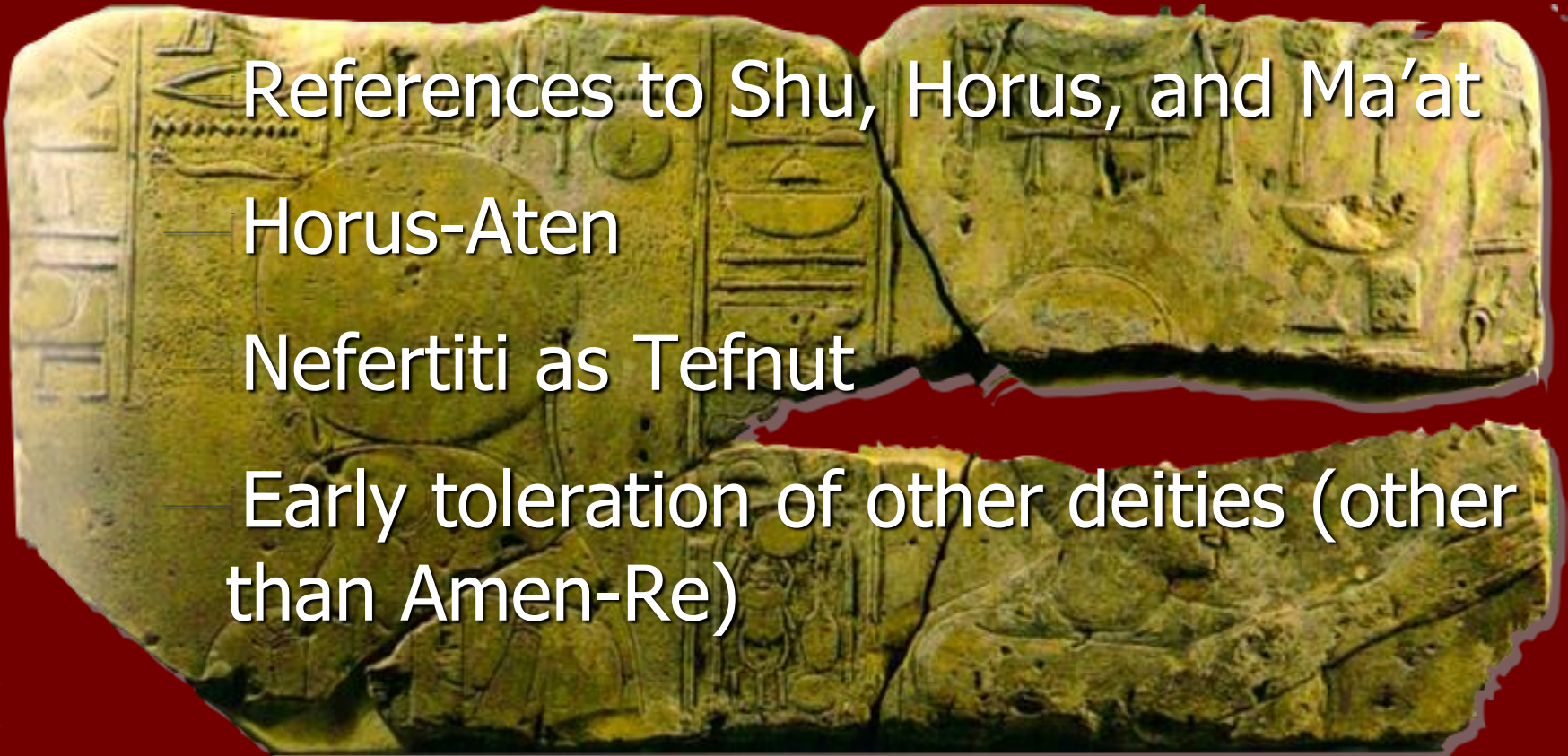
- Aten as Re-Harakhty

- References to Shu, Horus, and Ma'at

- Horus-Aten

- Nefertiti as Tefnut

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



Monotheism? Definitions

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



Petrie
Museum:
Inscribed
limestone
fragment
showing
early form
Aten
name:
Living
Ra-
Horakhty



Akhenaten
offering a
figure of
Maat to the
Sun-disc





Early name	"Re-Horakhti who rejoices in the Horizon" "in his name Shu, which is the Aten"^[17]
Late name	"Re, ruler of the two horizons, who rejoices in the Horizon" "in his name of light, which is the Aten"^[32]

Role of the King

- Akhenaten as the sole mediator

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

- No other intermediary was conceivable

- Personal piety is expressed through loyalty to the king, not worship of gods

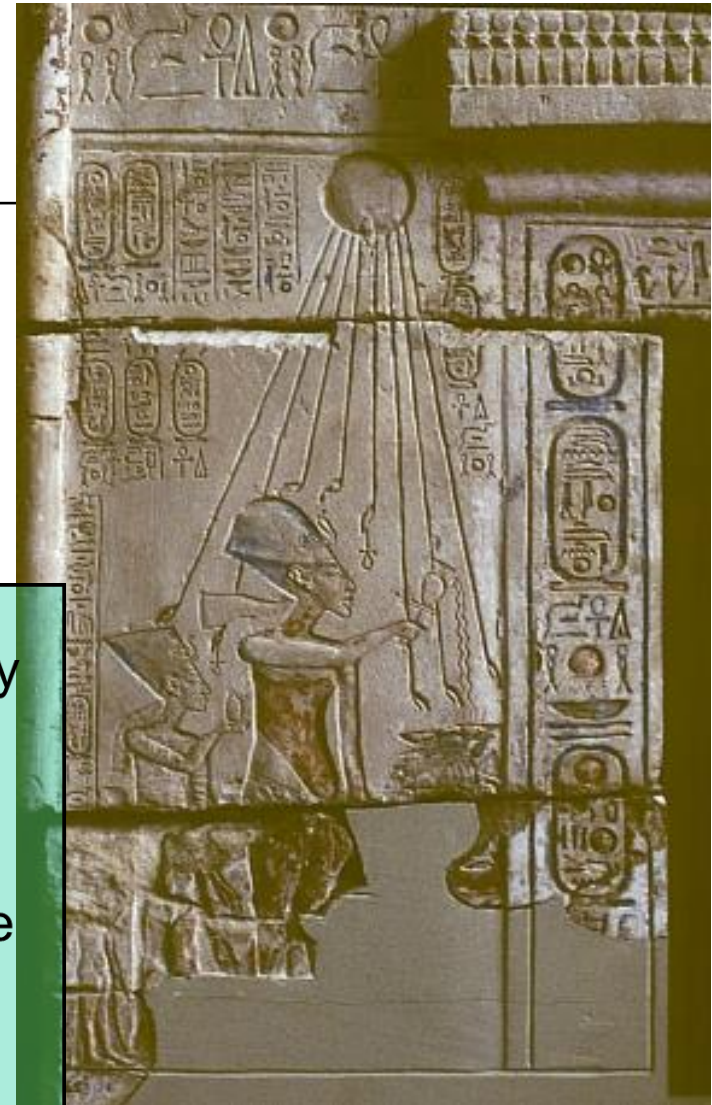


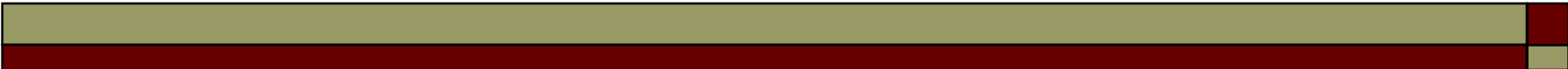
Hymns to the king

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

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

Praise to you, oh my
god, who made me,
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Atenism vs. Orthodoxy

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

Radical nature

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

The role of Nefertiti

- Actively involved in the cult



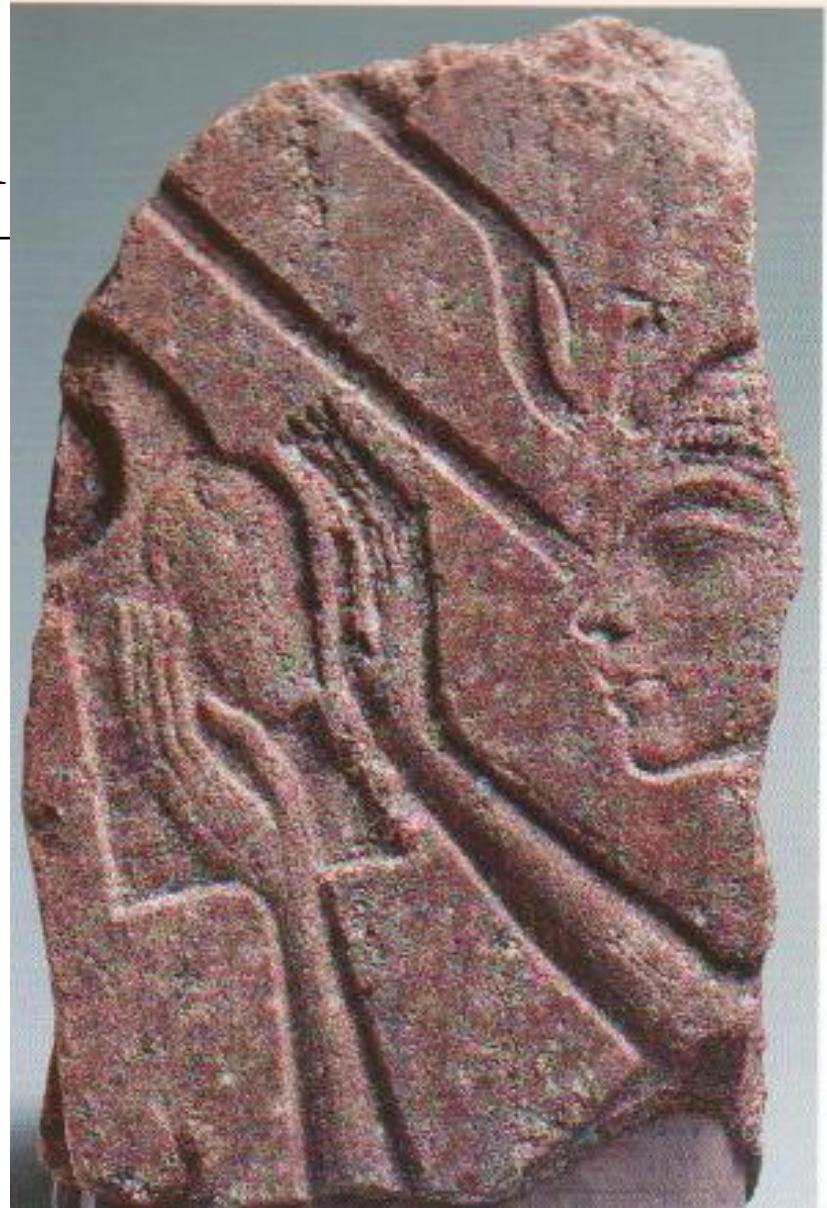
The role of Nefertiti

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



The role of Nefertiti

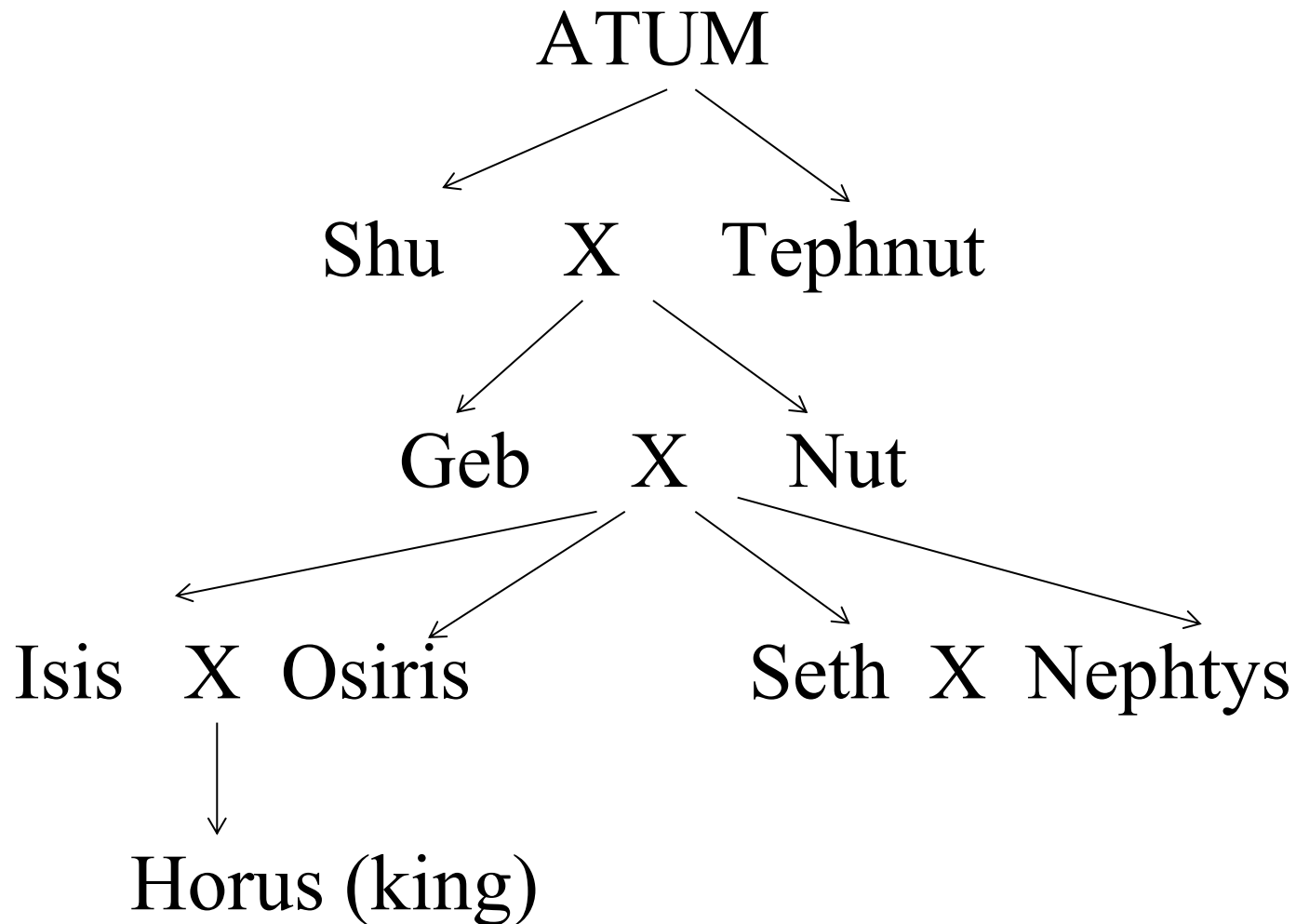
- Nefertiti is equal in divinity and rank as Akhenaten
 - Here seen offering to the Aten
- Represents the female principle in the Amarna religion (i.e., “goddess”)



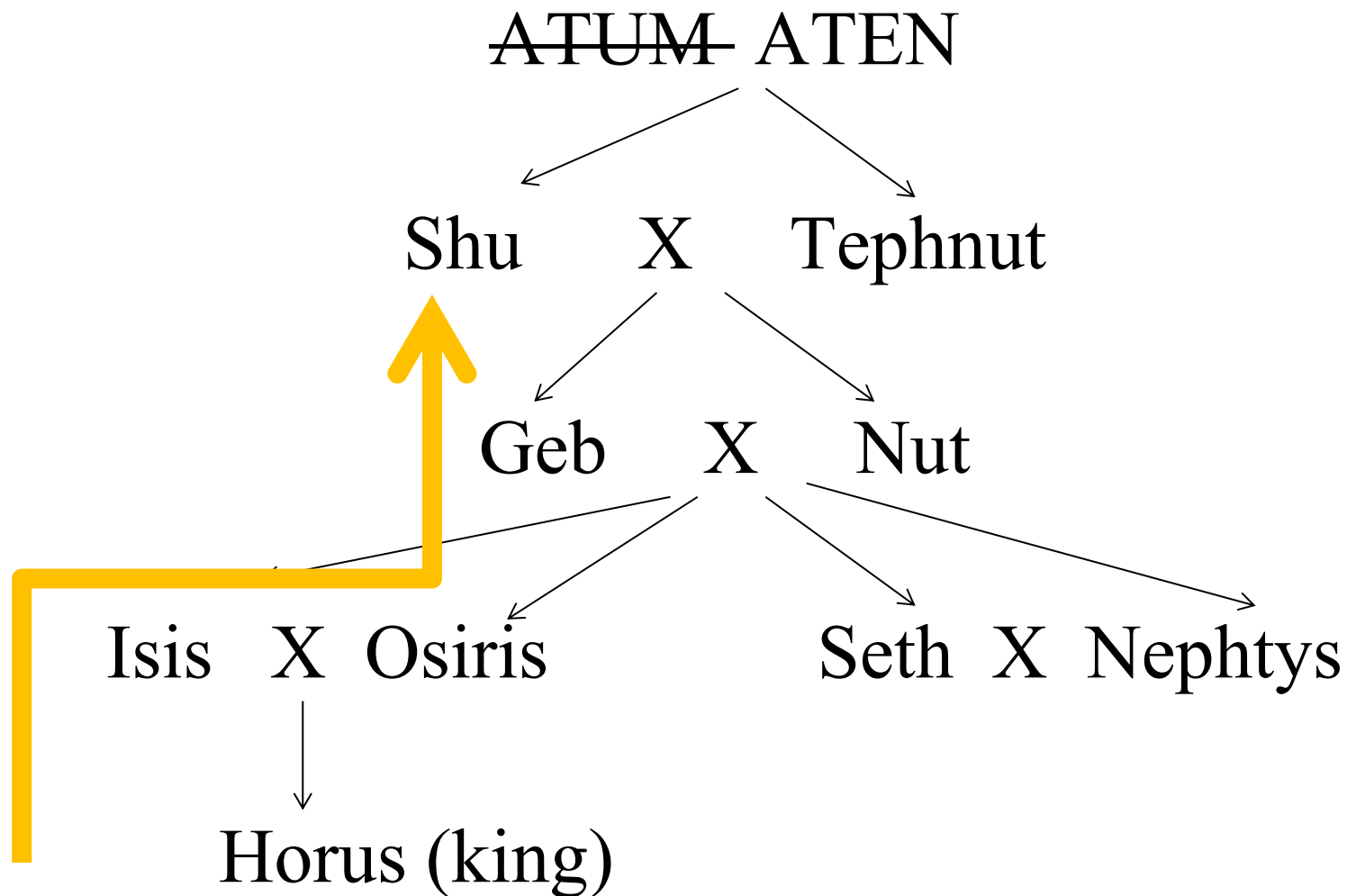
Persecution of other deities

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

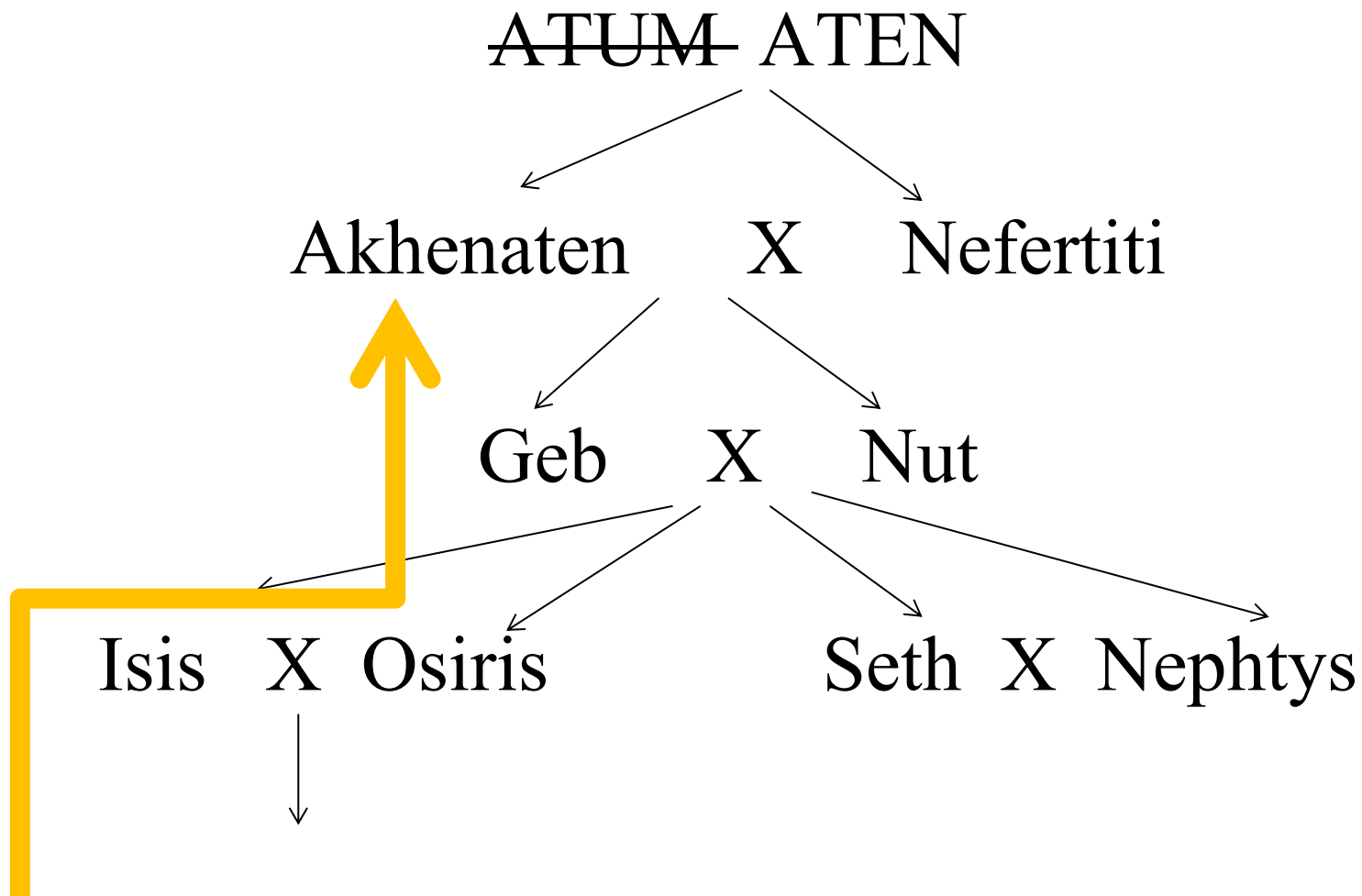
Ennead (Heliopolis – solar aspect!)



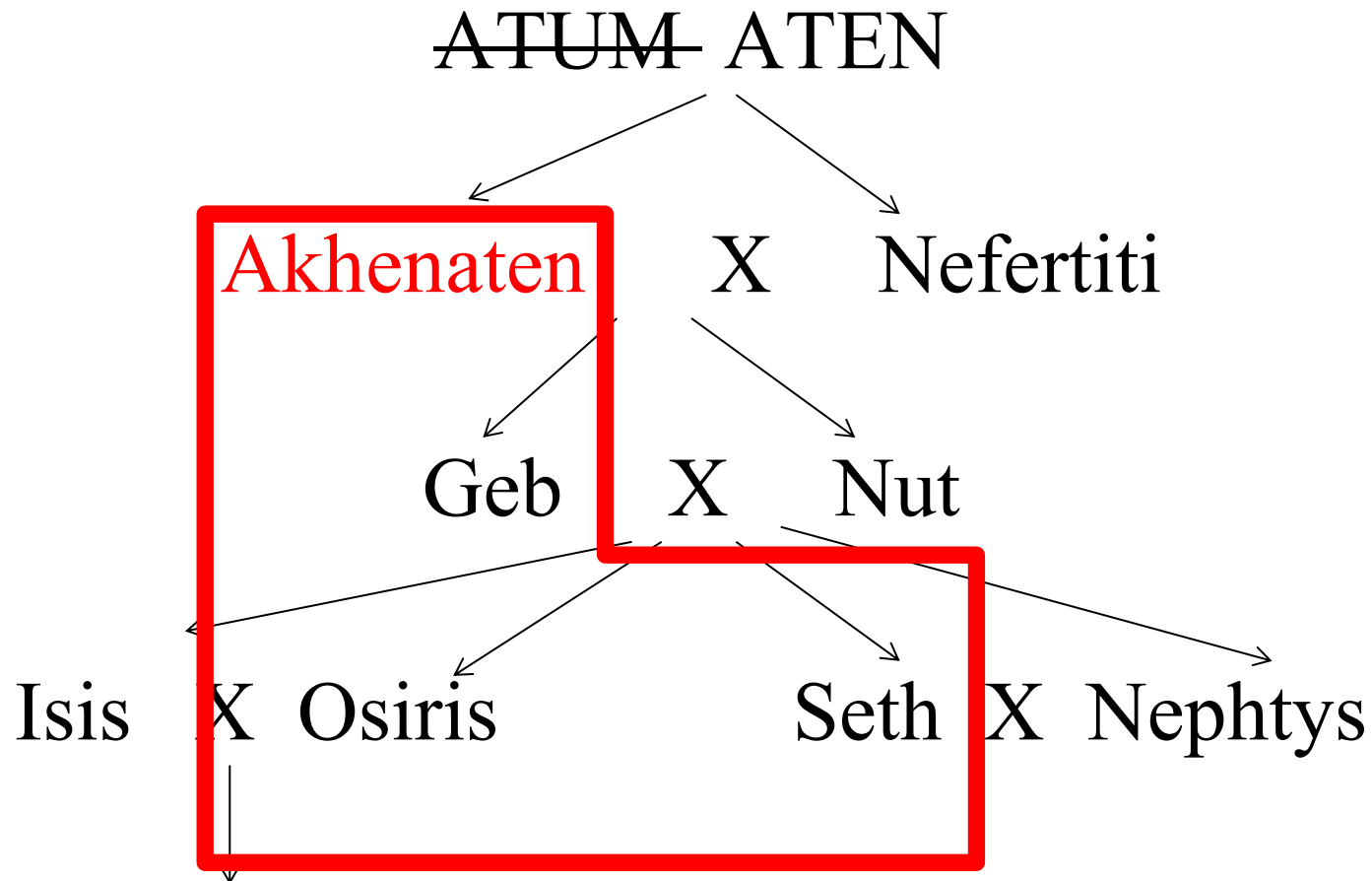
Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



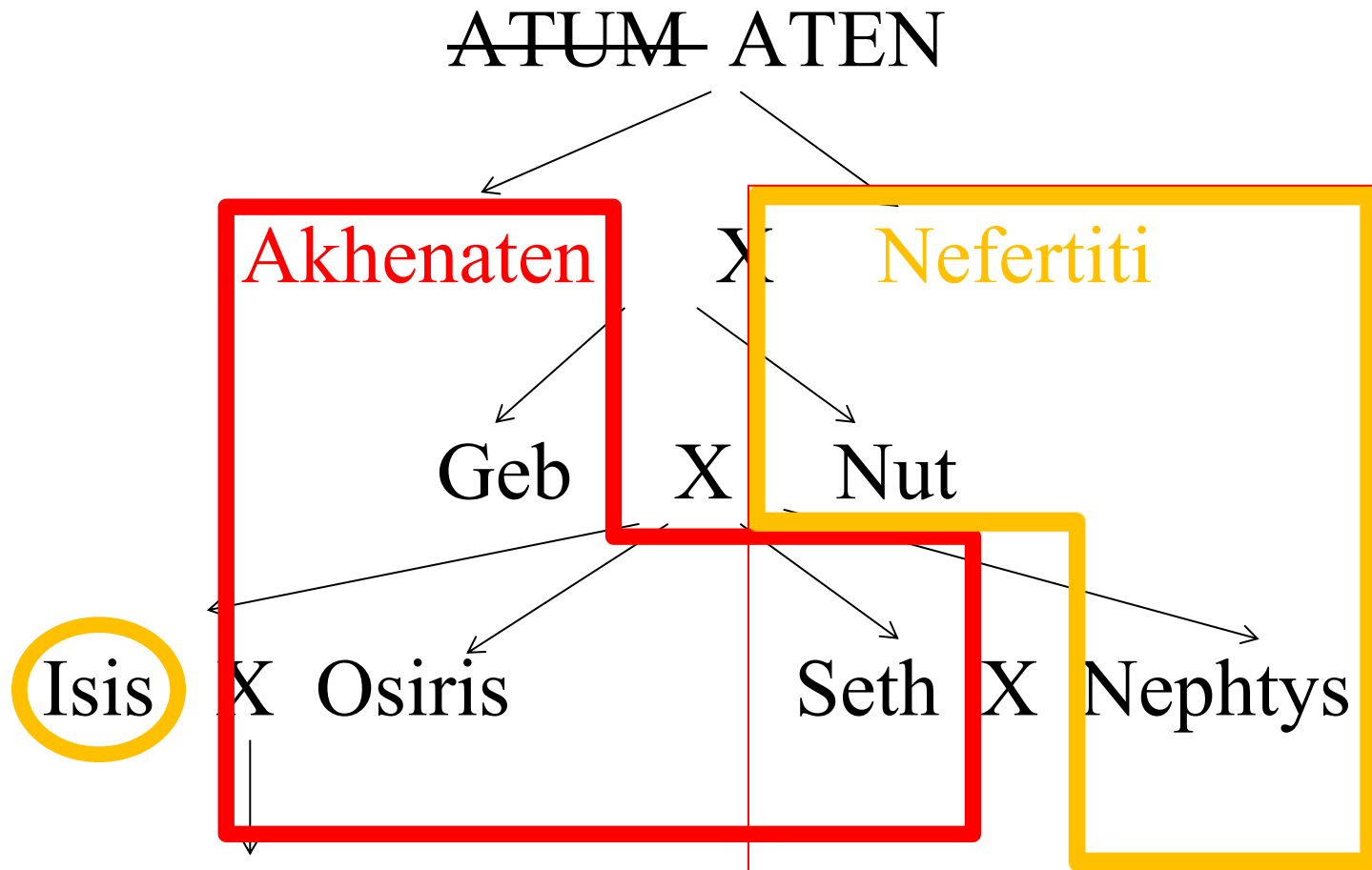
Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



Atenism (Amarna – solar aspect!)



Political Nature of Atenism: room for discussion

- **Personality cult -**
Inherently and purposefully political in nature
- → To counter the political power of the Imperial Amun cult at Thebes
- Comparable to other personality cults where “religion” [i.e., political philosophy] becomes the whole of reality



Political Nature of Atenism: room for discussion

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



Personal Piety

See also session 6 (altars, garden chapel,
“birth beds”)

Readings

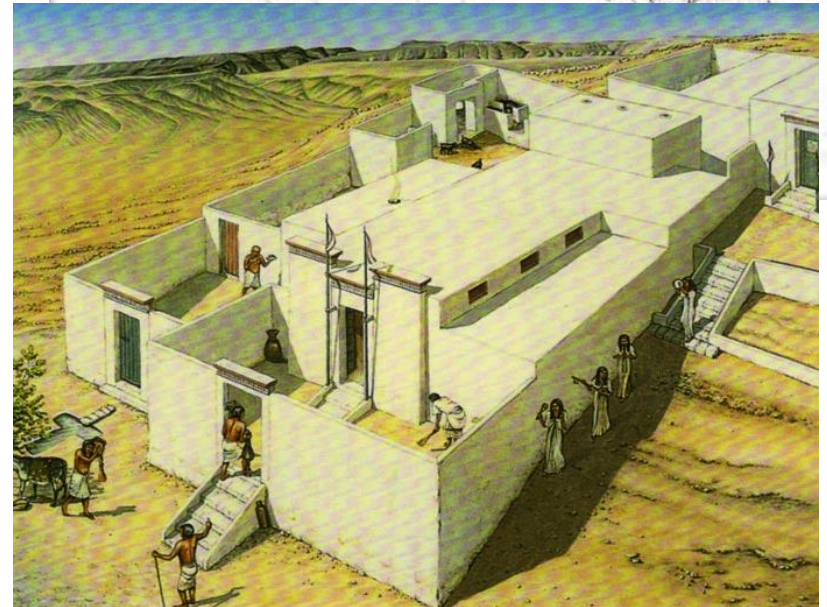
- ❑ Kemp, B.J. 2012. *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and its People*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- ❑ Kemp, B.J. 1979. Wall paintings from the Workmen's Village at el-'Amarna. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 65, 47–53.
- ❑ Kemp, B., 2009. A wall painting of Bes figures from Amarna. *Egyptian Archaeology* 34, 18–19.
- ❑ Stevens, A. 2003. The material evidence for domestic religion at Amarna and preliminary remarks on its interpretation. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 89, 143–68.

Readings

- ❑ Stevens, A. 2004. The Amarna royal women as images of fertility: perspectives on a royal cult. *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 4, 107–27.
- ❑ Stevens, A. 2006. *Private Religion at Amarna: The Material Evidence*. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- ❑ Stevens, A. 2012. Private religion in the Amarna suburbs. In F. Seyfried, ed., *In the Light of Amarna. 100 Years of the Discovery of Amarna*. Berlin: Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 92–7.
- ❑ Koltsina, A. (2006). *Birth-bed, sitting place, erotic corner or domestic altar? A study of the so-called “elevated bed” in Deir el-Medina houses*. SAK 35(2006). pp.165-174.

Religious areas of the Workmen's Village

- Approx. 23 chapels
- Roofed, and sometimes with ovens and food remains
- Decorated with painted scenes



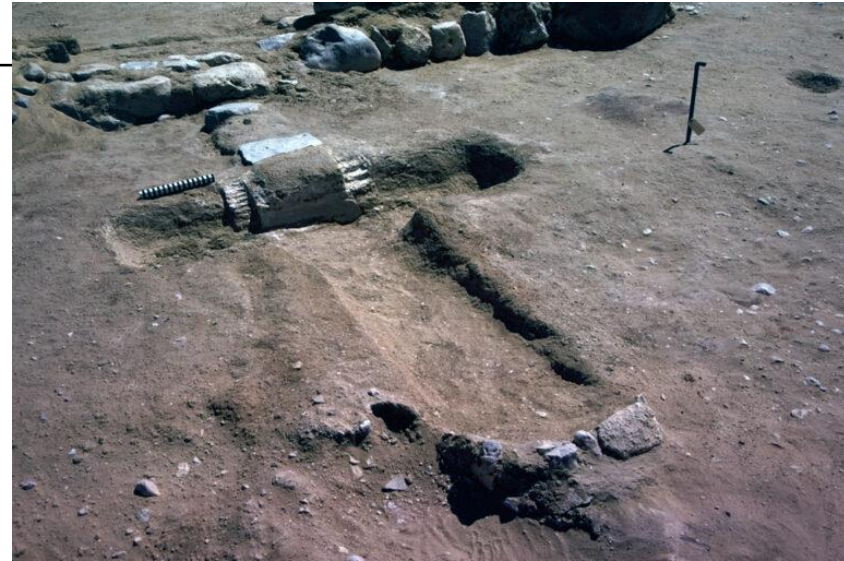
Religious areas

- Aten is absent, but there are references to Wepwawet and other deities
- More than 500 Bes amulets / statuettes found (Stevens 2006)



Objects as representations of personal piety

- Offering tables
 - 18 intact ones from Workmen's village and Main City
 - Ca. 15-25 cm in length
 - Could be spouted and spouteless
- Basins
 - Stone basins or troughs, large stone bowls in domestic context
- Shrines and Naoi
 - → little evidence, maybe made from wood, but uraei found, which might have been attached to naoi



Portable objects as representations of personal piety

- Statues, stela, figurines, ostraca, vessels, jewellery
 - Most jewellery made from faience → includes images of divinities, animals, anthropomorphic figures, various hieroglyphic motifs + royal names; wedjat-eyes; Bes
 - Figurines: anthropomorphic images (fertility figurines); animals (cobras + monkeys); deities (Taweret + Bes)
 - most figurines made of pottery or unfired clay

