

# Week 4

# **The Art of the Amarna Period**

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

Dr Katharina Zinn

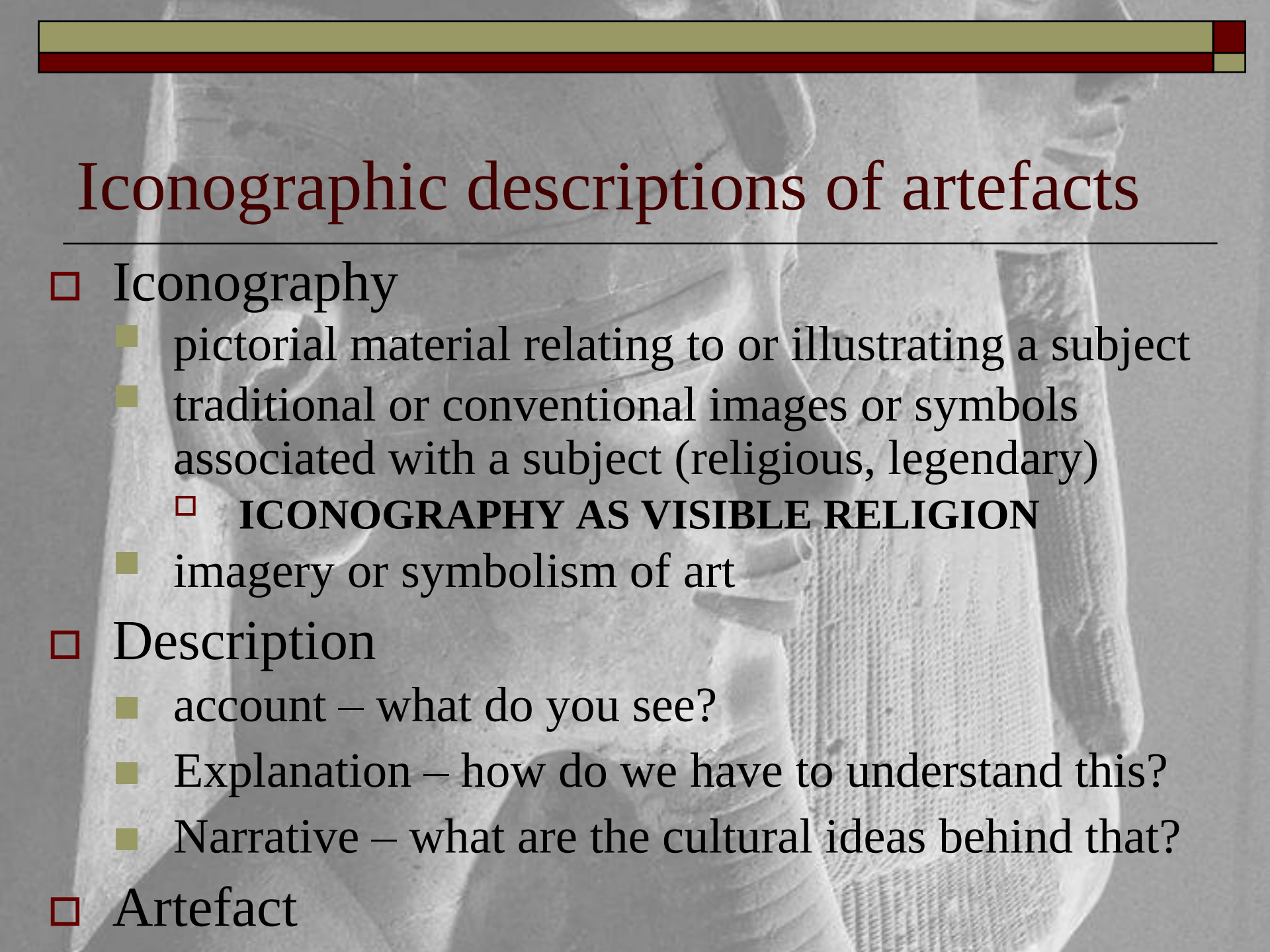
Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology and Heritage



# Art of ancient Egypt

---

- ❑ uniquely stylized and symbolic
- ❑ connected with hieroglyphs as visual language
- ❑ followed specific rules in order to be read and understood
- ❑ artists not concerned with creating highly realistic images but followed a system called the Canon of Proportions to represent an ideal and harmonious version of reality

The background of the slide features a grayscale image of a classical statue, likely a Greek or Roman figure, shown from the waist up. The statue is positioned on the right side of the frame. At the top of the slide, there is a decorative horizontal bar consisting of a light olive-green segment on the left and a dark red segment on the right, separated by a thin white line.

# Iconographic descriptions of artefacts

---

## □ Iconography

- pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject
- traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject (religious, legendary)

### □ **ICONOGRAPHY AS VISIBLE RELIGION**

- imagery or symbolism of art

## □ Description

- account – what do you see?
- Explanation – how do we have to understand this?
- Narrative – what are the cultural ideas behind that?

## □ Artefact



# Egyptian iconography

---

- ❑ principal iconographic sources for Egyptian religion
  - representations of scenes (both ritual and mythological) carved in relief or painted on the walls of Egyptian temples and tombs
  - numerous images and statues of gods and pharaohs
- ❑ objects of ritual or practical function decorated with carved or painted religious motifs
- ❑ hieroglyphic signs belonging to the Egyptian writing system are representations of gods, religious symbols, and ritual objects
- ❑ sources remain constant from the Old Kingdom to the Roman period

# Proportional grid lines (Canon of Proportions)

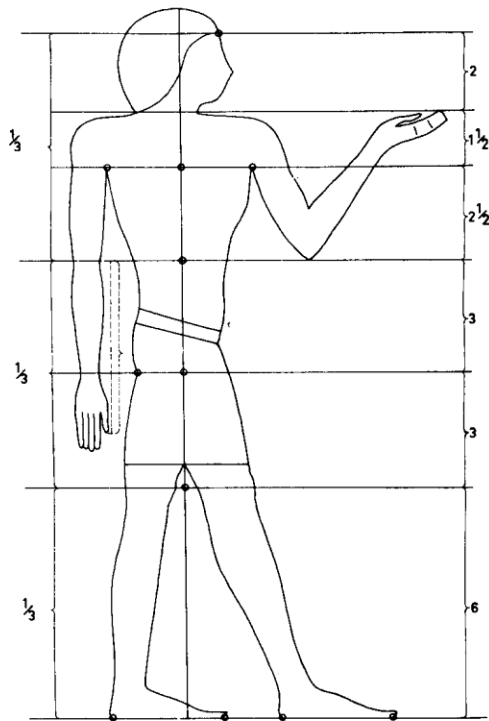


Abb. 16: Der Kanon des Alten Reiches

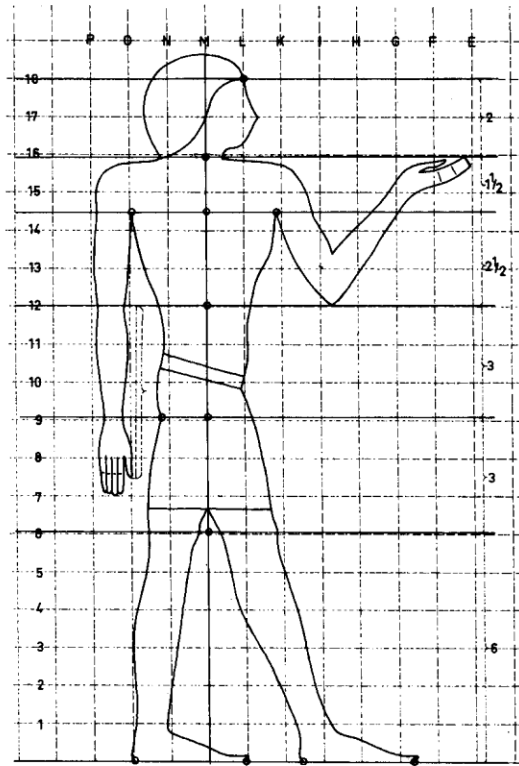


Abb. 17: Der Kanon des Mittleren Reiches, Standfigur

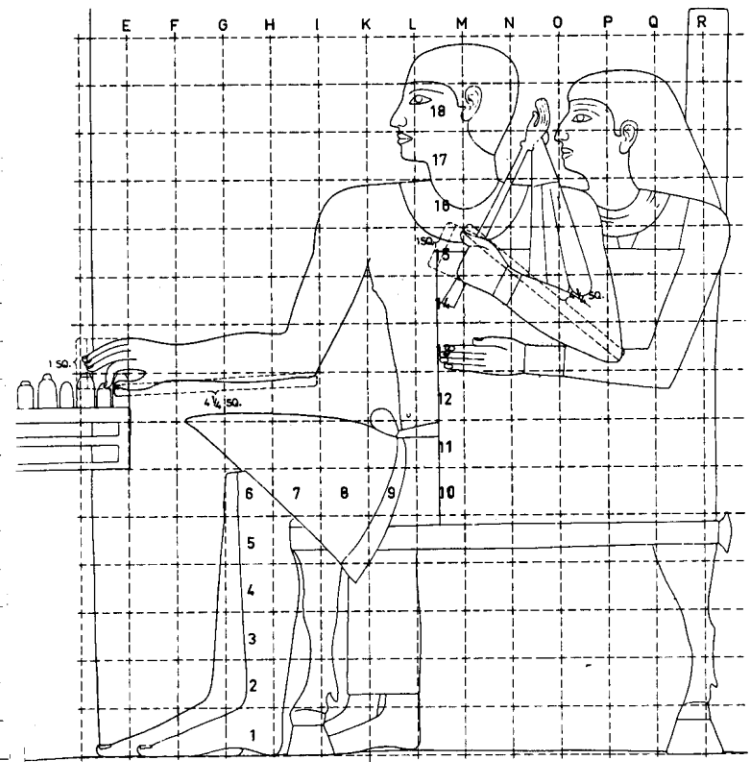


Abb. 18: Der Kanon des Mittleren Reiches, Sitzfigur

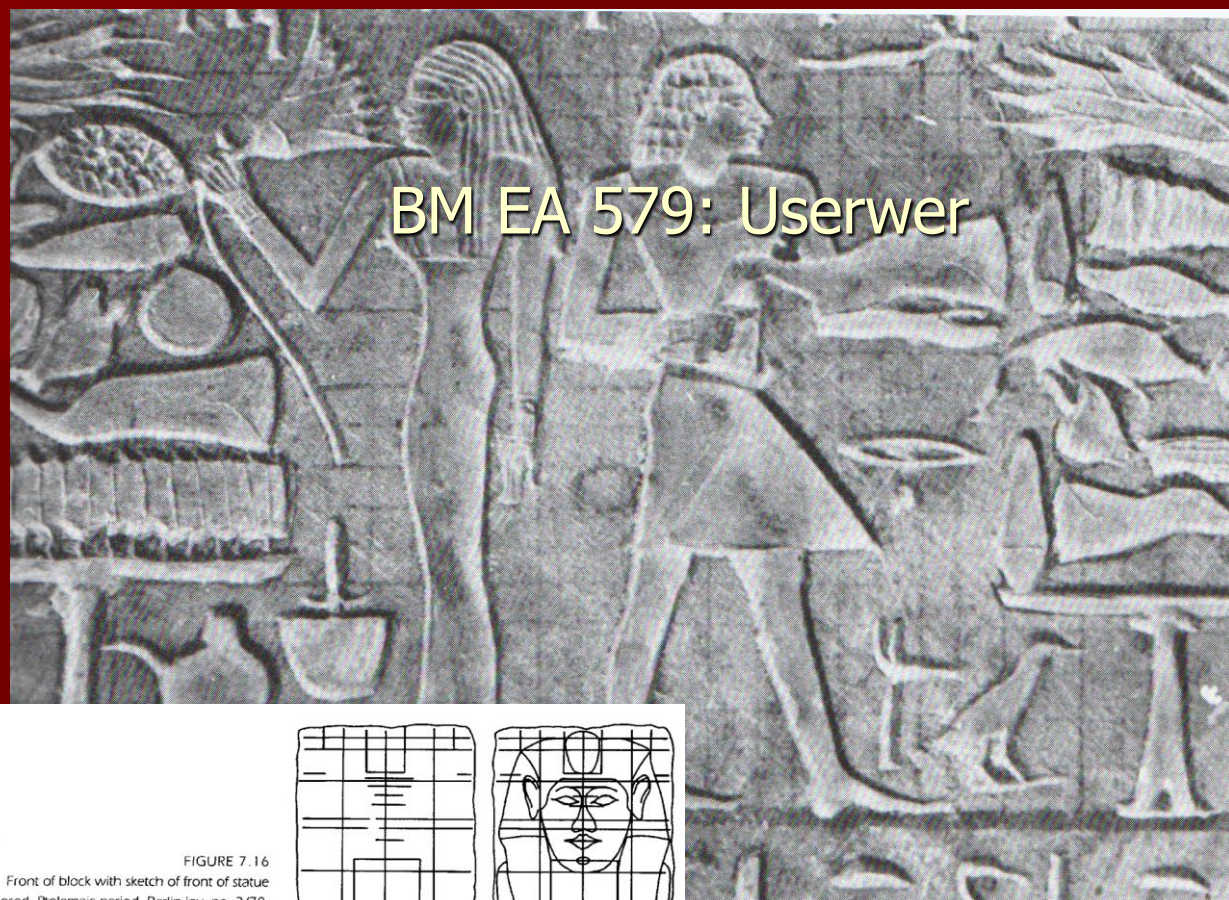
# Canon of Proportions

---

- ❑ system used to depict an idealized version of reality
- ❑ applicable to only the figures within an artwork and not the artwork as a whole (this is following the principle of importance) → key features:
  - figure divided into 18 equal units starting at the soles of the feet to the hairline
  - 1 unit: from the sole of the foot to the ankle
  - navel rests at the 11th unit
  - 19<sup>th</sup> unit = area above hairline (mostly obscured by headdress)
  - The face and the legs are depicted in profile (side view) while the torso is depicted from the front view.



MMA 23.3.4



BM EA 579: Userwer

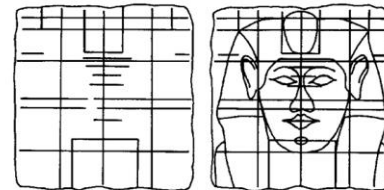


FIGURE 7.16  
Front of block with sketch of front of statue  
imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

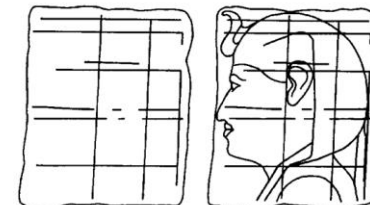


FIGURE 7.17  
Side of block with sketch of side of statue  
imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

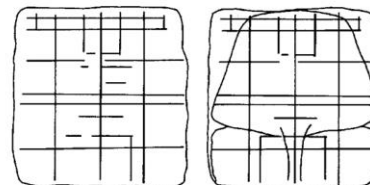


FIGURE 7.18  
Back of block with sketch of back of statue  
imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

# Perspective and „aspective“ view of a box

**Box from the tomb of  
Sennedjem, New Kingdom,  
reign of Ramesses II, ca.  
1279–1213 B.C.**



**Box containing a necklace,  
tomb of Rekhmire (TT100)**

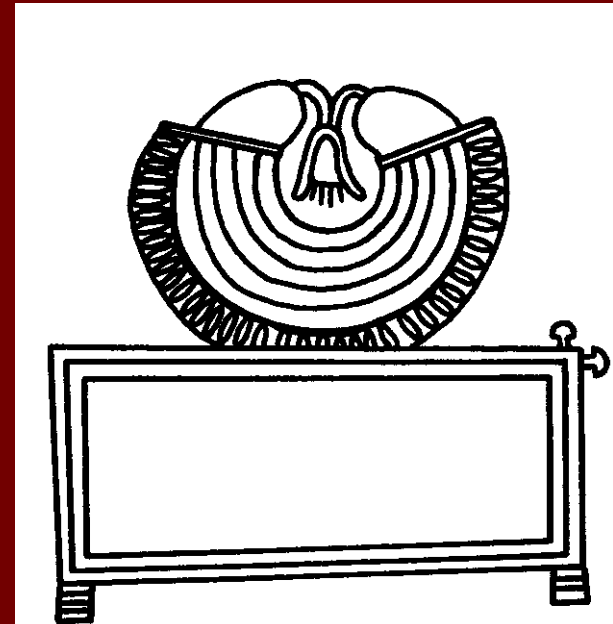
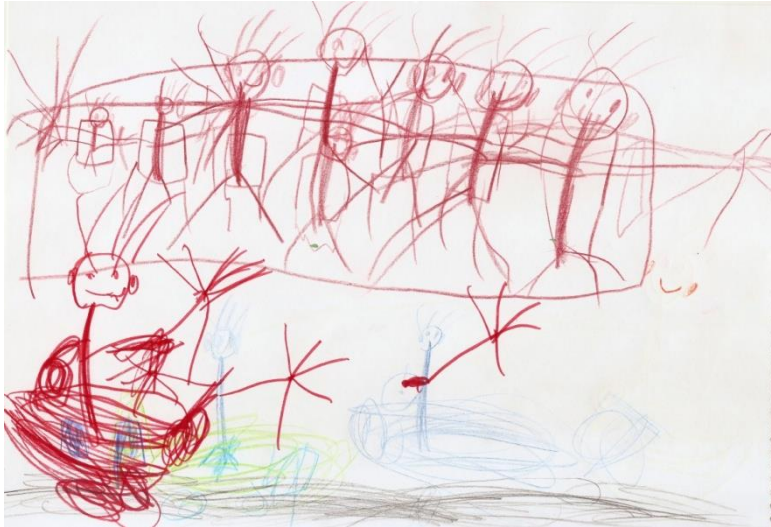


FIGURE 1.1  
Representation of a box containing a necklace, TT 100,  
eighteenth dynasty, after Davies 1943, Plate 90.

# Conventions of Egyptian art:

## Perspective - aspective

- ❑ Egyptian art: non-perspective, spaceless, flat, not realistic → misconception on the nature of Egyptian art
- ❑ Not perspective (today considered a requirement for naturalistic pieces of art)
- ❑ to eye unused to conventions of Egyptian art: looks almost childish

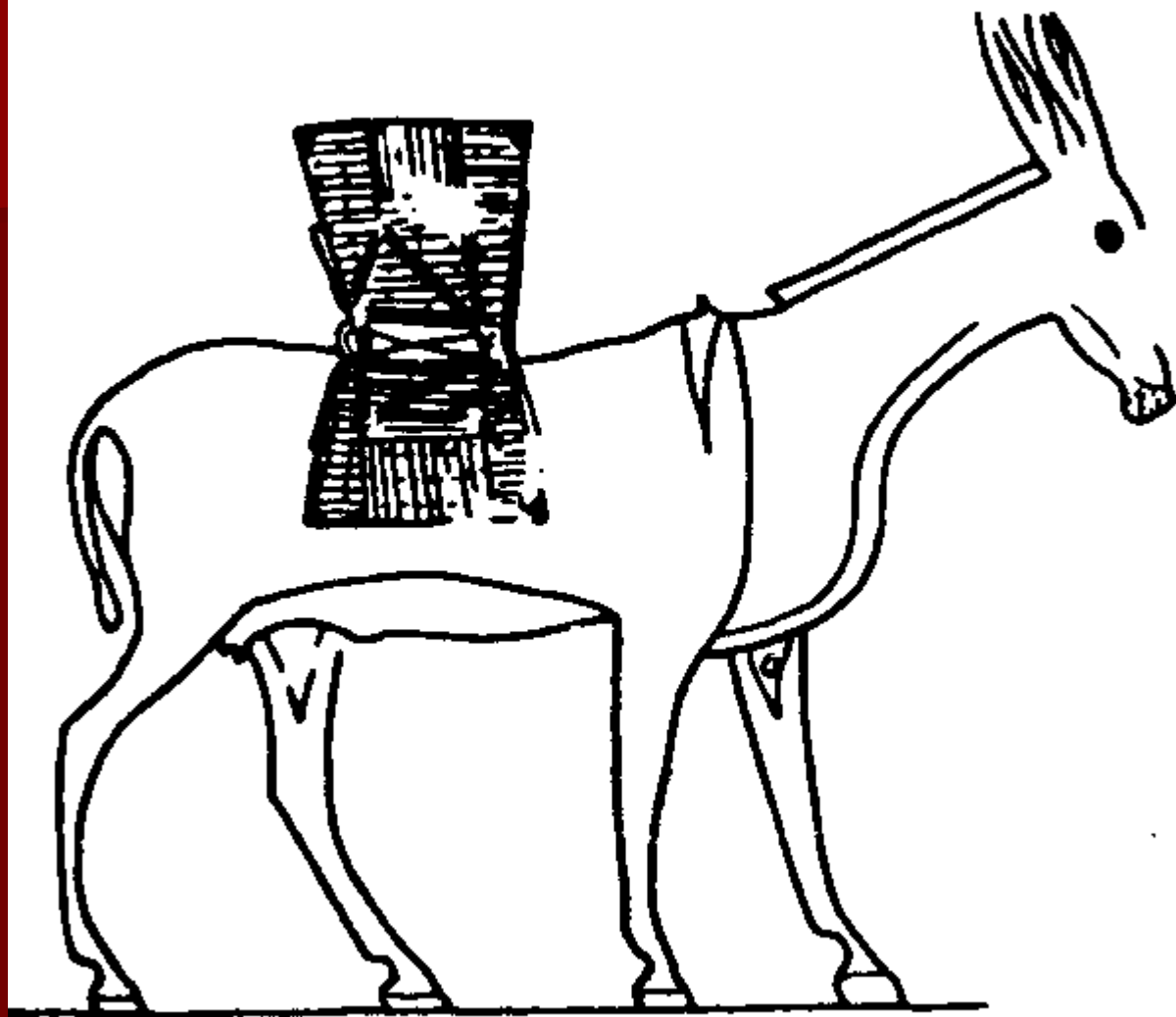


# Conventions of Egyptian art:

## Perspective - aspective

---

- use of baseline upon which all figures stand
- divided into registers of (mostly) equal height and length
- figures are a amalgamation of different views of different body parts
  - a side view of head
  - front view of torso, etcetera
- → combination of views = product of the Egyptian solution to the problem of reproducing a three-dimensional figure on a two-dimensional surface





# TT ?

## Nebamun: Garden pool



# Perspective / aspective of Atef crown



# Egyptian style of statues and reliefs



- The artist who carved the three-dimensional statue on the right could show the human figure from all angles -- front, back, and sides.

# Egyptian style of statues and reliefs

---

**three-dimensional**



**two-dimensional**



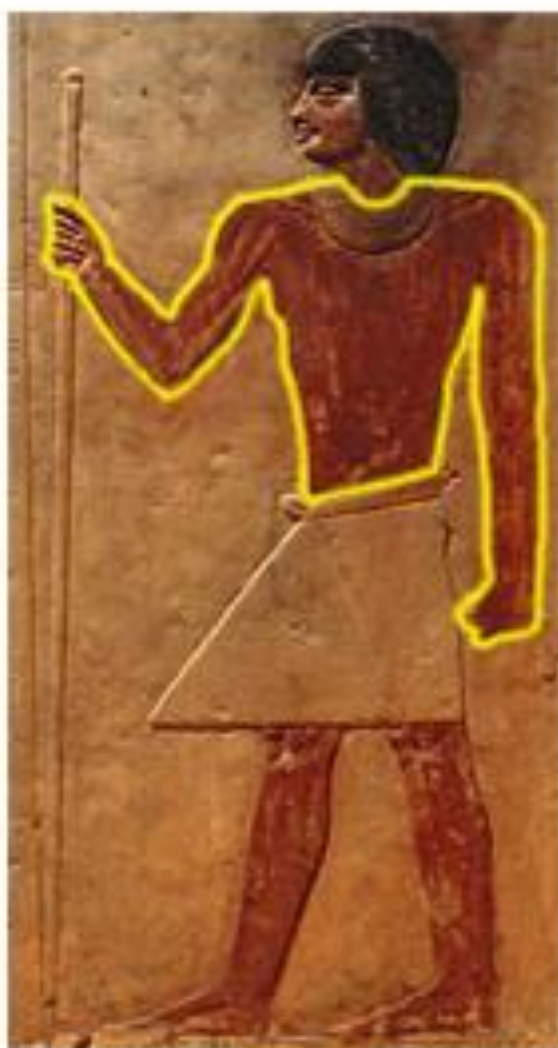
# Egyptian style of statues and reliefs

---

## two-dimensional

- But representing a figure on a flat surface, as in the wall relief at the left, is a more complicated problem.
- Legs in profile demonstrated movement. A head in profile outlined the features clearly.



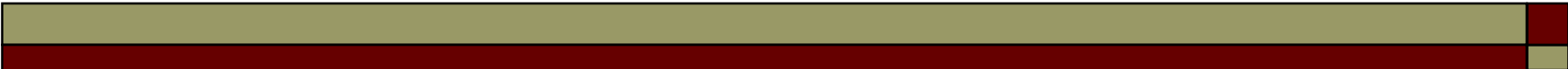


A frontal torso emphasized broad shoulders.

PS: Three-quarter view was not used at all

---





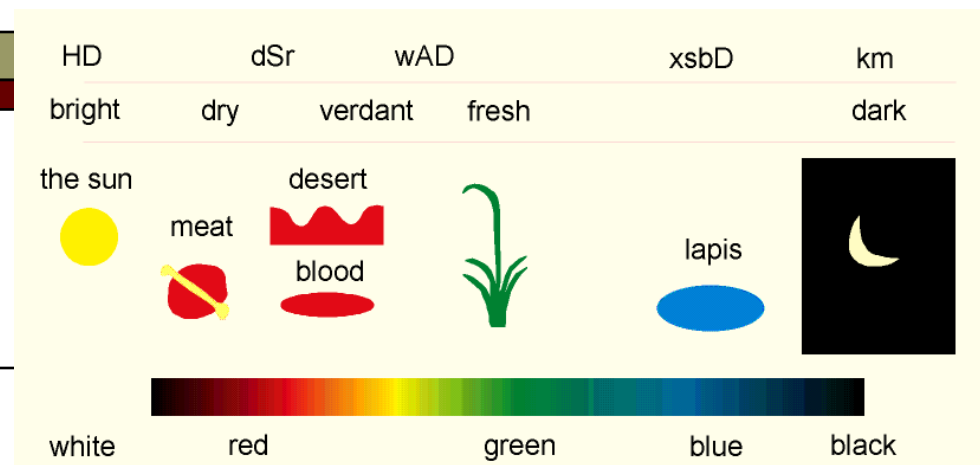
# Other Artistic Rules

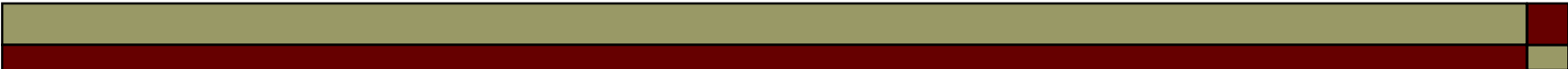
---

- ❑ **Scale:** The larger in scale a figure is, the more important. The proportions of children do not change; they are just shown smaller in scale. Children are depicted as having a finger in their mouth.
- ❑ **Colour:** Ancient Egyptians believed colours had meanings

# Colour

- ❑ **Red** = Life and victory but also anger and fire
- ❑ **Yellow/Gold** = Gold is everlasting and indestructible, a protective colour
- ❑ **Blue** = The sky, water (Nile River) and primeval flood (creation); rebirth and fertility
- ❑ **Black** = Colour of the underworld and night; death but also rebirth (afterlife) like the fertile black soil that rejuvenated the land after the Nile overflowed annually
- ❑ **White** = Associated with omnipotence. The Upper Egypt crown was white
- ❑ **Green** = New growth, good health, life and rejuvenation





# Other Artistic Rules

---

## □ Gender:

- Women – lighter skin tone with both feet together
- Men – darker skin tone with left foot stepped forward

## □ Roles and Gestures: Each figure = specific role

- role determined by what they were wearing, what they were doing, their position and posture, the other figures around them, and specific gestures
  - cross-legged seated figure is a scribe
  - person with an open hand in front of their face is in mourning.

# Remember – Pre-Amarna Period

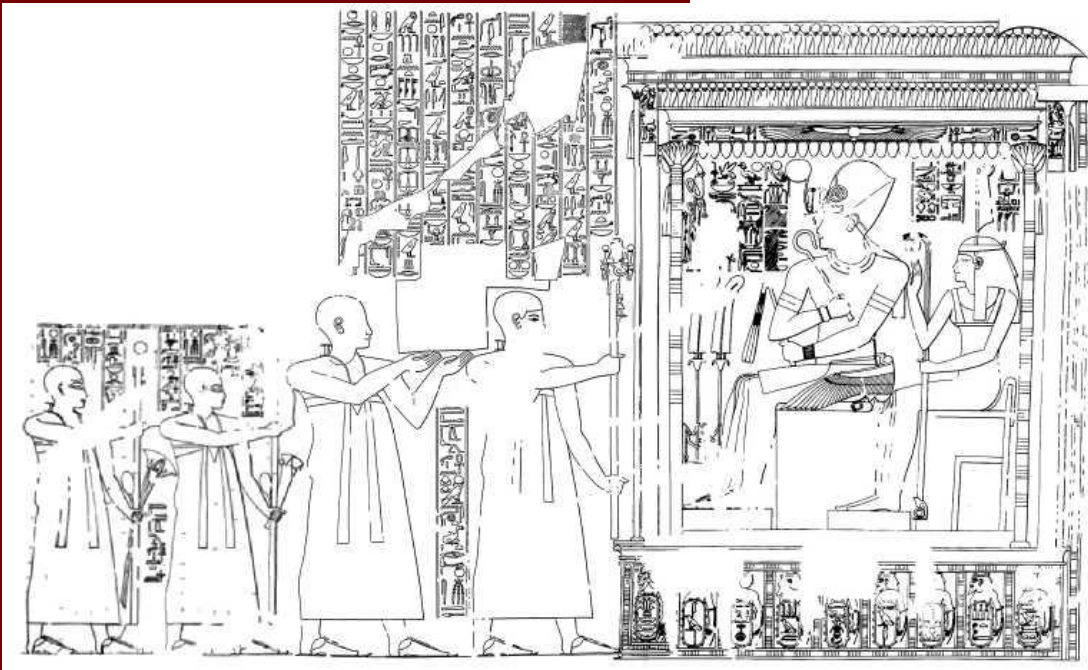
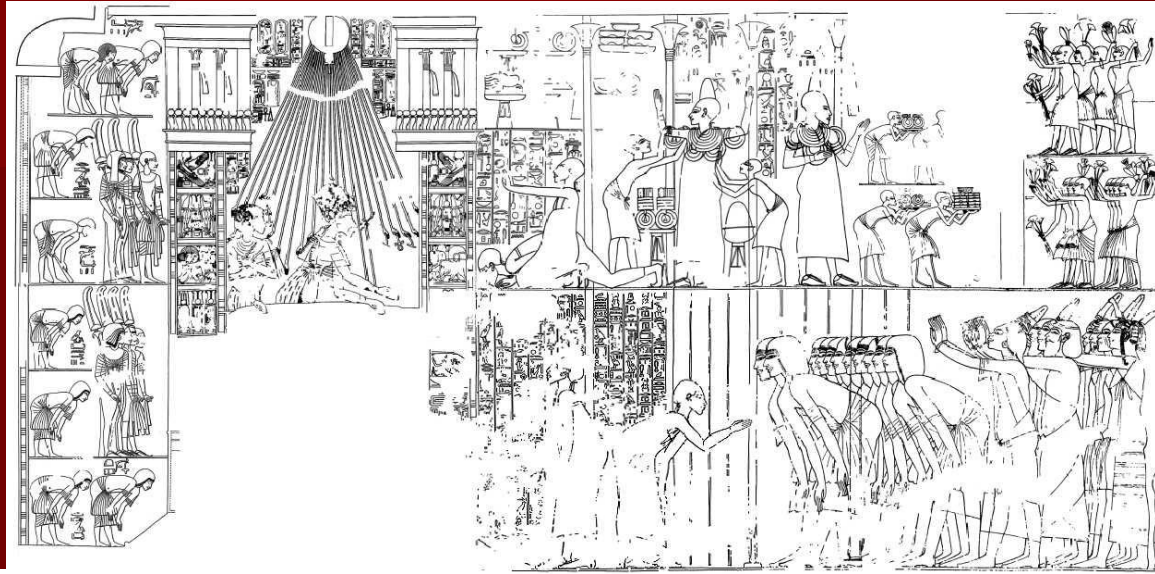
---

- During the reign of Amenhotep III (Akhenaten's father) artists began to depict nature in all its glory in a naturalistic way not common to traditional Egyptian art. This art form was also apparent during the reign of Akhenaten as his worship of the sun disc included a reverence for the natural world. The depictions of nature from this period are amongst the most beautiful works of art recovered from Ancient Egypt.

# TT55: Ramose

King new style

King old style



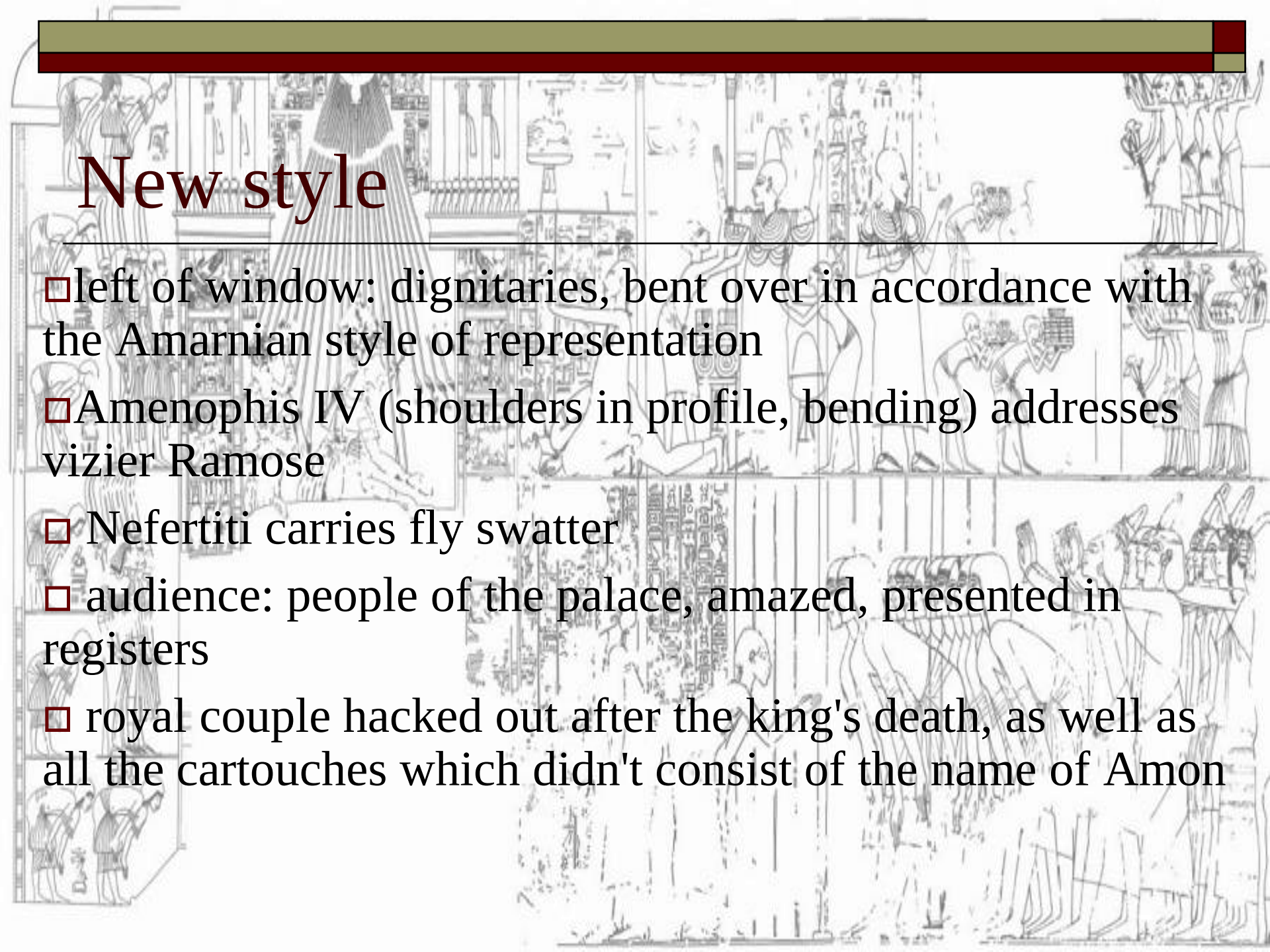
# Old style

---

- ❑ only half achieved, left part staying virgin (clearly incomplete)
- ❑ Ramose carries sceptres (one = dominated by head of ram of Amon) and bouquets to Amenophis IV sitting under a canopy in the company of Ma-at, daughter of Re
- ❑ On pedestal names of "the Nine Bows" = inscribed in battlemented surrounding walls surmounted by the busts of foreign prisoners (shows countries under domination)
- ❑ list = canonical; the concept expresses fundamental principle of domination by the king of Egypt on the neighbouring regions and even on Egypt itself

# New style

- ❑ north side of west wall = incomplete (like south side)
- ❑ Shows Amenophis IV (not yet changed name) but in new style
- ❑ window of appearance
- ❑ lintel open at its middle, so that the royal couple benefits from the rays of the Aton disk ending in hands
- ❑ door posts are richly decorated with classic regal themes : the king's (erased) cartouche is framed by the wings of the falcon, with protective cobras of royalty of South and North; a royal sphinx trampling on the enemy
- ❑ bottom of the window remained smooth and without decoration



# New style

---

- ❑ left of window: dignitaries, bent over in accordance with the Amarnian style of representation
- ❑ Amenophis IV (shoulders in profile, bending) addresses vizier Ramose
- ❑ Nefertiti carries fly swatter
- ❑ audience: people of the palace, amazed, presented in registers
- ❑ royal couple hacked out after the king's death, as well as all the cartouches which didn't consist of the name of Amon

# The human figure

- Initially no difference with the art from Amenhotep III
- To be seen only by cartouche



# The human figure

- Initially no difference with the art from Amenhotep III
- soon significant changes to traditional Egyptian artistic expression
- most radical changes are at the beginning of Akhenaten's reign



# The human figure

- ❑ Amenhotep IV / Akhenaten are depicted with unprepossessing, ugly features in order to express a radically new concept of kingship and queenship
- ❑ “ugliness” is indictive intensity behind new beliefs
- ❑ Egyptian artists were in search for hitherto untried: hollow cheeks, hooded eyes, strong cheek bones, many lines in the face



# Early style (Karnak) and early Amarna (king's third and eighth regnal year)

- Aten temple Karnak
- Colossal sculptures (about 5m) against massive pillars in temple court (at 3 sides)
- Enormous thighs, protruding belly over heavy belt, long arms crossed over thin waist, hands unnaturally close to shoulders, large bony hands
- Huge head, headgear and ceremonial beard
- Gods name like on rectangular plaques like stamp seals



# Cairo museum

- ❑ Enormous ears with large drop shaped lobes
- ❑ Hollow cheeks
- ❑ Long, elongated chin and nose
- ❑ Widely spaced, slanting eyes
- ❑ Bony browes
- ❑ Eyes give shortsided impression



# Iconography of the human figure

- Androgynous/feminine nature
- Religious statement?
- King is the embodiment of the Aten, an androgynous creator deity: Karnak colossi
- compare with representations of Atum & Hapi as “fecundity figures”



# Boston

---



- ❑ clear sense of deliberate changes – early, extreme style
- ❑ deeply carved outline of a unusually long face: extended forehead, large full lips and protruding lower chin
- ❑ eye is still seen frontal, extremely elongated and thin
- ❑ ear resting over the crown, appears stretched and quite large
- ❑ Shadow enhanced by deep carving around the eye, within the eye, inside the ear and on the crown
- ❑ sunken relief

# Queen Nefertiti:

Fragment of a  
limestone relief  
showing Nefertiti  
wearing disk, horns  
and feathers, and  
uraeus. Amarna Period.

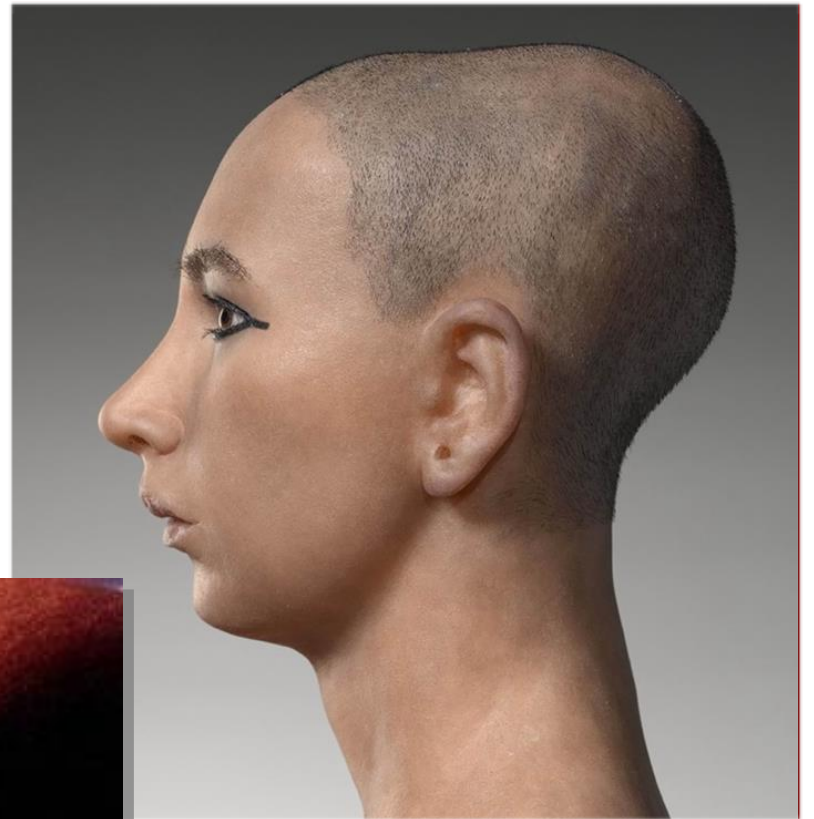
From the Petrie  
Museum in London



# Medical explanations

---

- ❑ Many medical explanations for appearance suggested
- ❑ Fröhlich's syndrome: Cyril Aldred
  - ❑ “Feminine” obesity, sterility, mental retardation
  - ❑ Fathered 6 children!
- ❑ Marfan's syndrome: Alwyn Burrridge
  - ❑ tall; long, thin face; elongated skull; larger pelvis & thighs; thin limbs and digits; vision problems
- ❑ Difficult to account for change to “normal” later in the reign



# Second Style

- ❑ Middle of Amarna period (8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> regnal year)
- ❑ Early harsh features are rejected
- ❑ Style more gentle, subtle
- ❑ Beautiful Amarna style

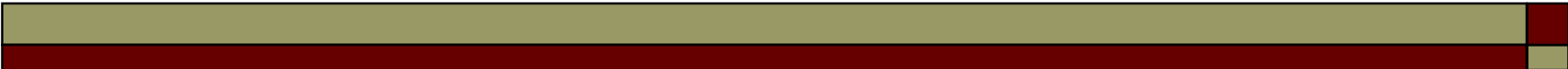
Akhenaton  
sacrificing a duck  
MMA 1985.328.2  
(former Schimmel  
coll.)



# Later Style - naturalistic

---

- ❑ temple relief
- ❑ Akhenaten recognizable by his elongated features, holds a duck up toward Aten, the solar disk
- ❑ With one hand Akhenaten holds the duck firmly by its wings and with the other he wrings its neck before offering it to his god
- ❑ sculptors later in his reign attempted a more naturalistic style
- ❑ emphasizing transitory motion, sense of space and atmosphere
- ❑ Akhenaten's hands here are grasping and straining to hold on to the struggling duck
- ❑ → Such a scene, capturing a moment in a sacrifice being made by a king, would never have been attempted in another period.



# Later Style - naturalistic

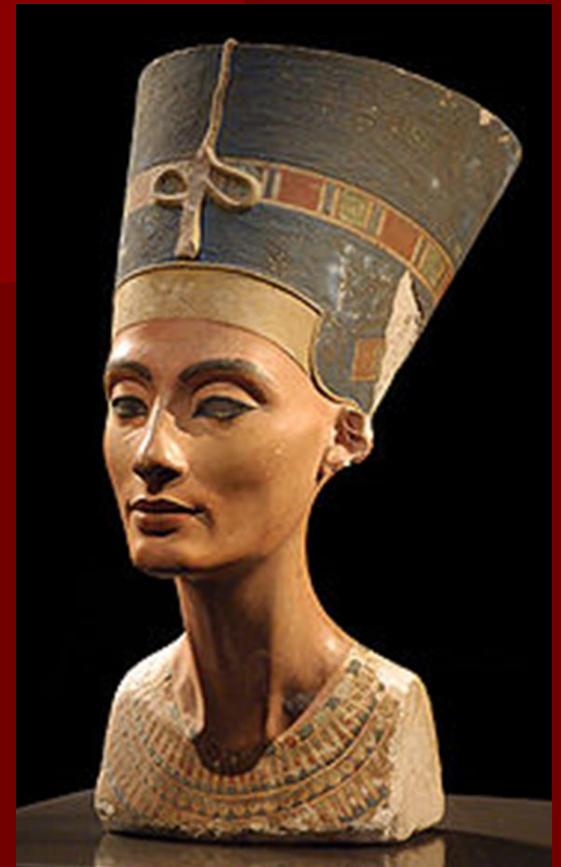
---

- ❑ Akhenaten's right hand twisted, so that all five fingers can be seen
- ❑ → pose conforms to the Egyptian convention of presenting each part of the body as completely as possible.
- ❑ sunk relief
  - artist has cut the outlines of the figures into the surface
  - appears mostly on the outside of buildings, where the outlines are emphasized by shadows cast by Egypt's brilliant sunlight
  - but during the Amarna period almost all relief was executed as sunk

# Amarna Princess, Louvre

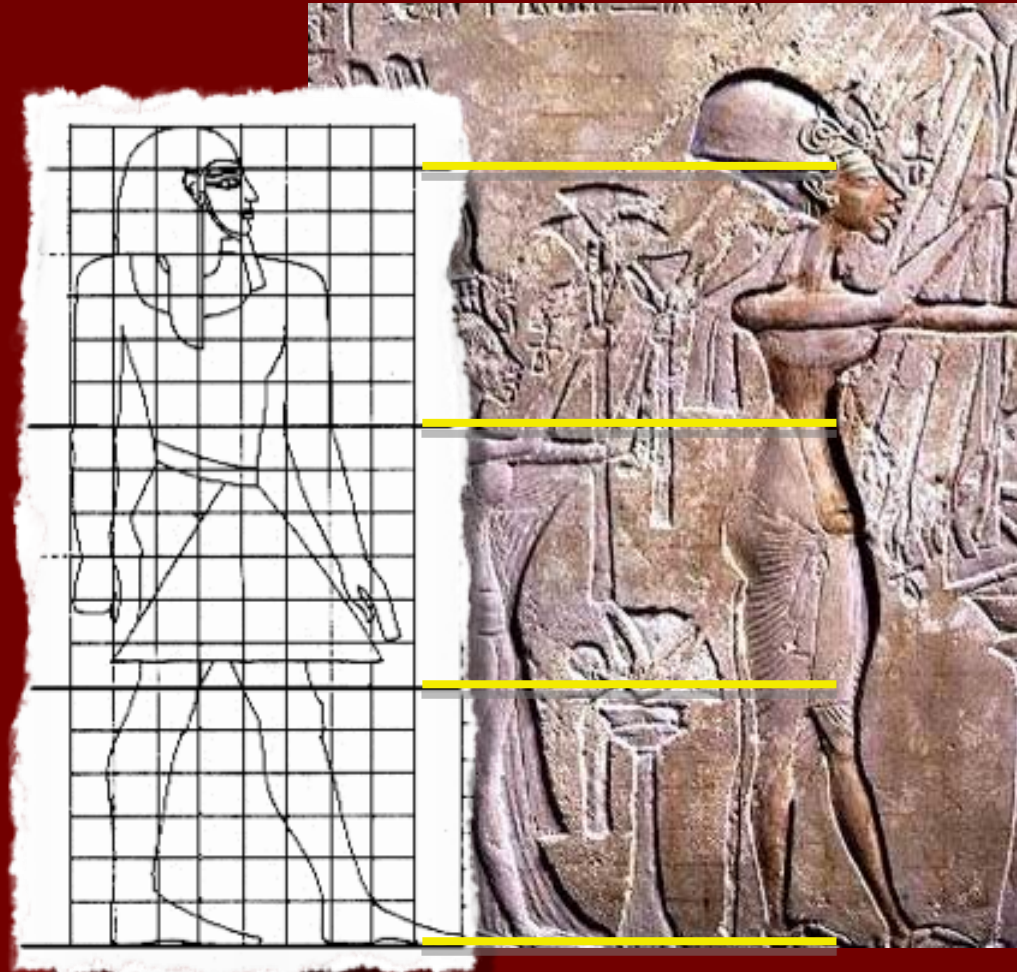


# Nefertiti, Ägyptisches Museum Berlin



# General Aspects of the human figure

- Canon of proportions: 2 units added (grid of 20 units; cf. older 18 units)
- one unit added between junction of neck and shoulders and the hairline
- one added to the torso
- effect: makes the human figure taller



# Proportion of the human body in Amarna art

---

- ❑ After remaining grid of unfinished relief Akhenaten and statuette proncess
  - Knees between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> horizontal line
  - Crotch 10<sup>th</sup>
  - Navel 11<sup>th</sup>
  - Neck and chin between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>
  - Ear and nose at 19<sup>th</sup>
  - Hairline (lower edge of crown) at 20<sup>th</sup>

# General Aspects of the human figure - summary

- Head: large with drooping features, long neck
- Shoulders and waist: narrow ("Feminine")
- Stomach, buttocks, and thighs all swell
- Belly: sags over the kilt
- Arms and short legs: thin and lack muscles



# Non-Royal Personages

- Royal iconography influences private representations
- Narrow shoulders, slender limbs, short lower legs, drooping stomachs, pronounced buttocks
- Not as extreme



# Tomb of Meryra: blind harpeners



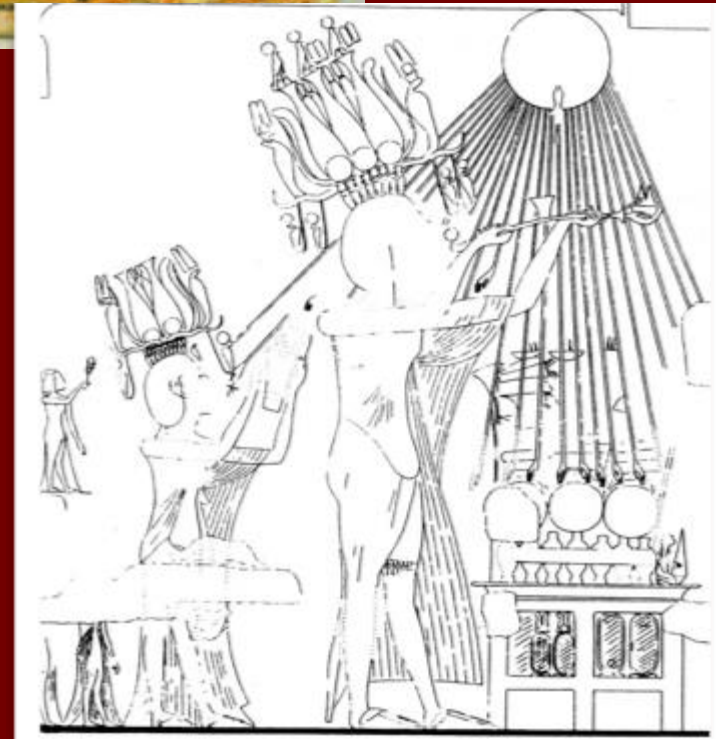
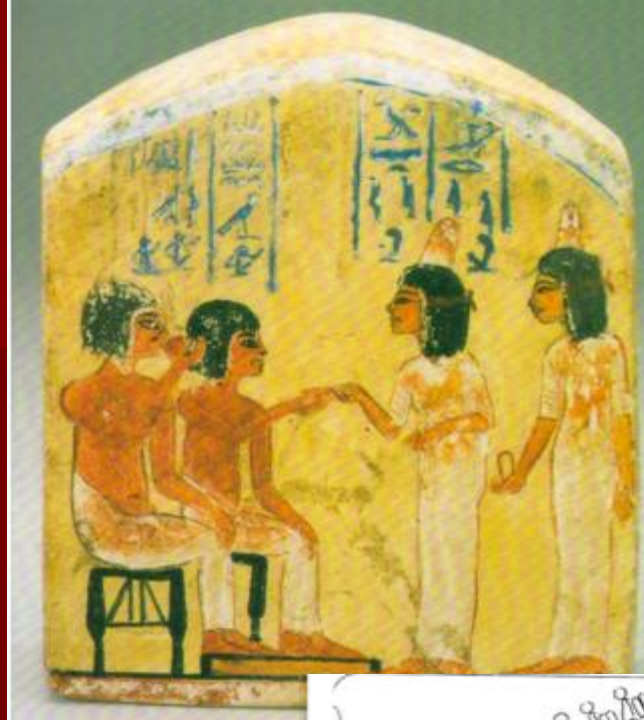
# Non-Royal Personages

- Royal iconography influences private representations
- Narrow shoulders, slender limbs, short lower legs, drooping stomachs, pronounced buttocks
- Not as extreme
- Both feet shown from the inside

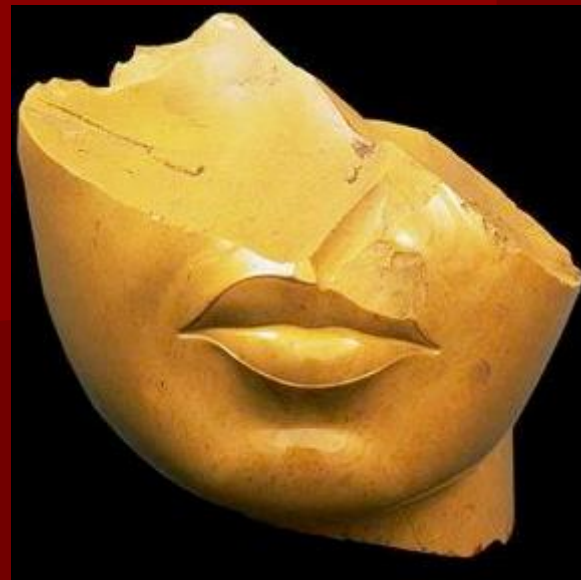


# Focus on the royal family

- General lack of private statuary, stelæ, etc.
- Private individuals mainly known from their tombs
- Royal family supplants older divine triads
- Nefertiti depicted in a politically active role

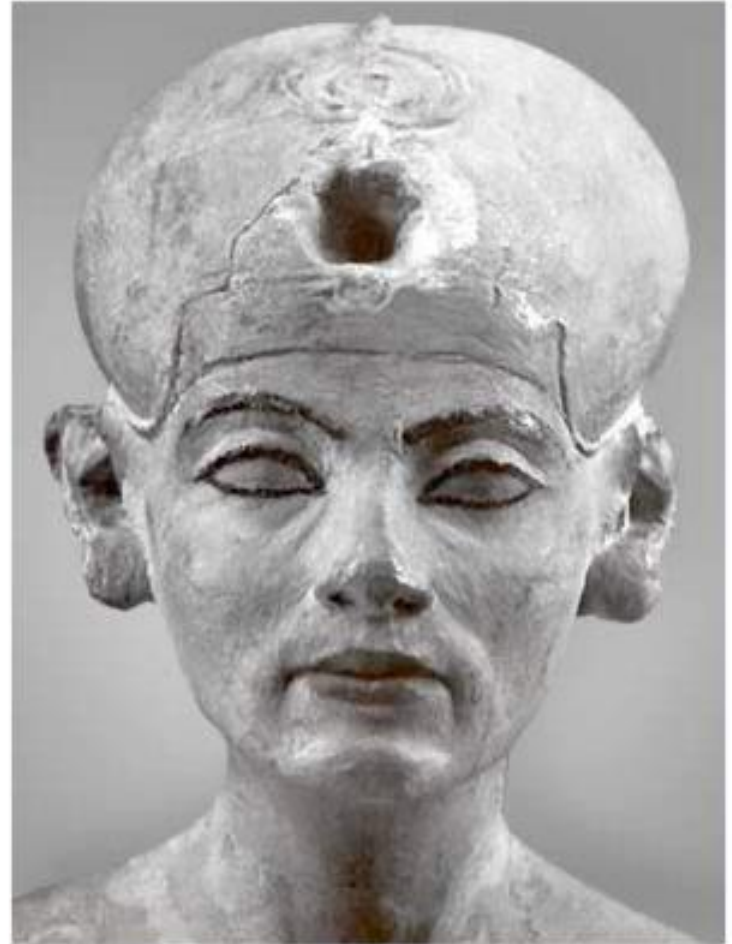


# “Naturalism”



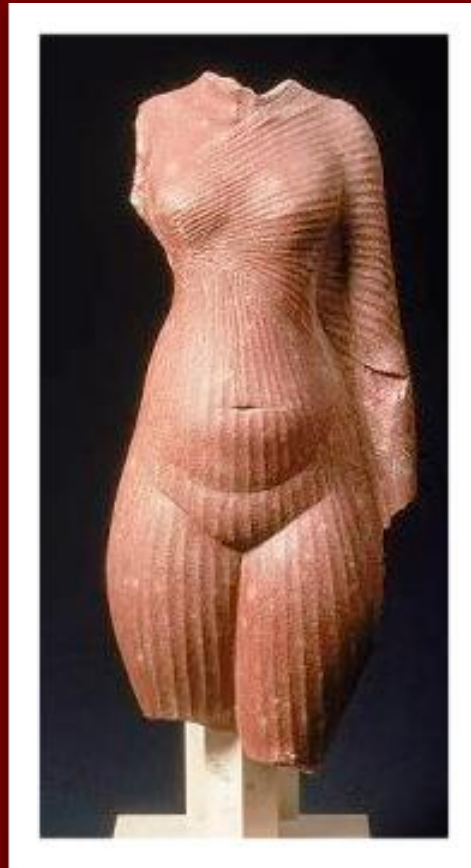
# "Naturalism"

- "things as they are":  
"living in truth"



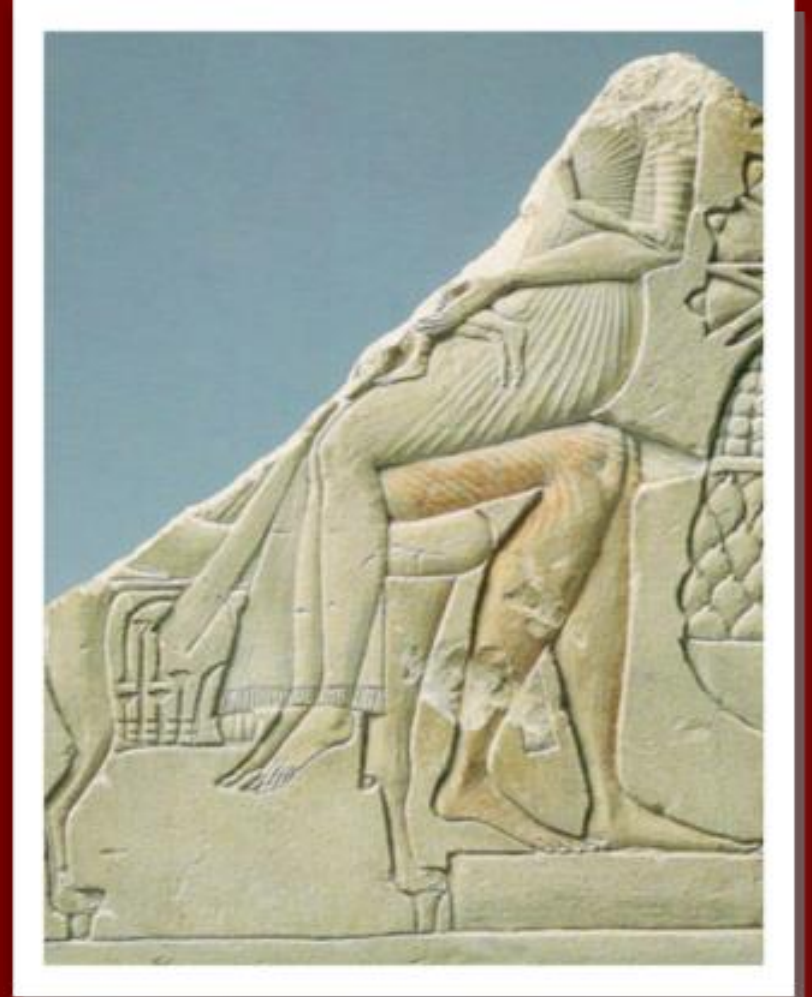
# “Naturalism”

- “things as they are”:  
“living in truth”
- age, weight, etc.
- Fundamental principles remain
- Aspective: most characteristic view
- no true perspective (depth)
- Use of registers



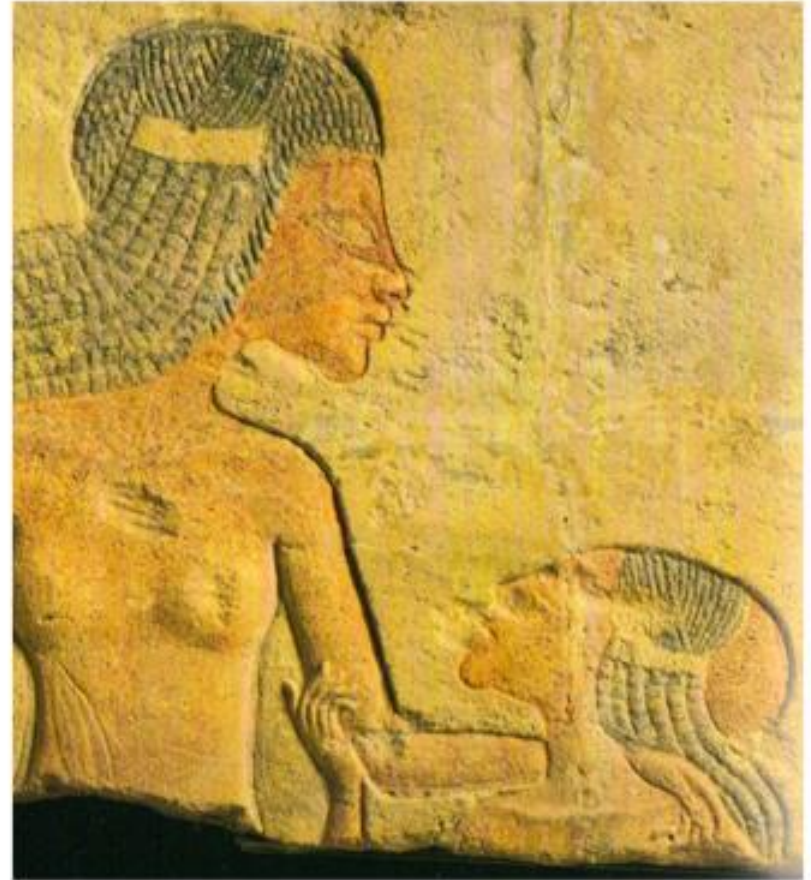
# “Naturalism”: Emotion

- Emotion not generally represented in Egyptian art



# “Naturalism”: Emotion

- Emotion not generally represented in Egyptian art
- Love & Intimacy: limited to royal family



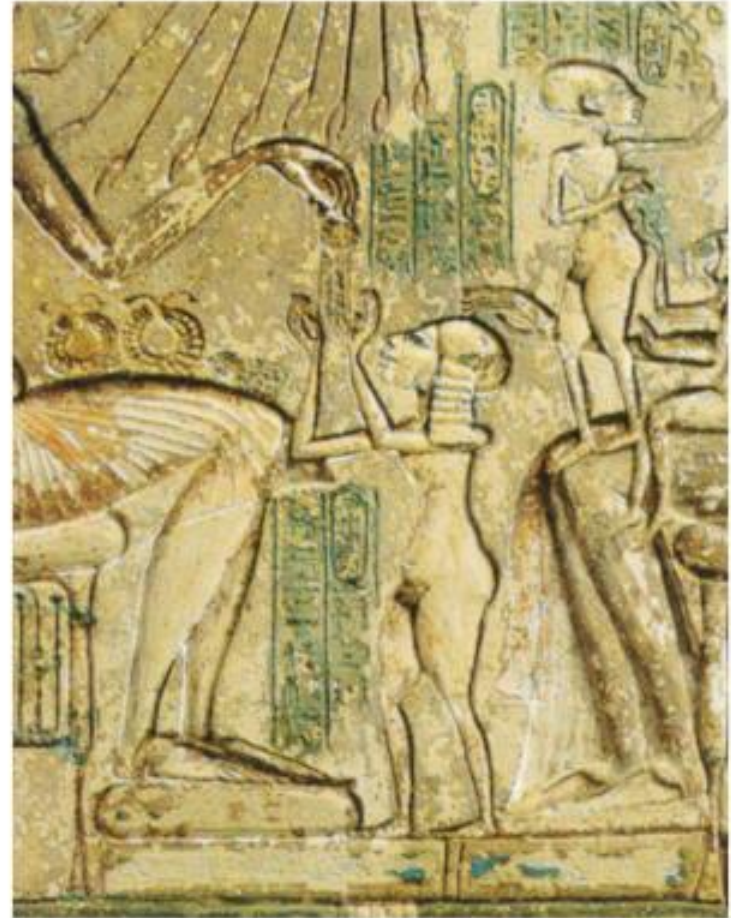
# “Naturalism”: Emotion

- Emotion not generally represented in egyptian art
- Love & Intimacy: limited to royal family
- Grief of royal personages



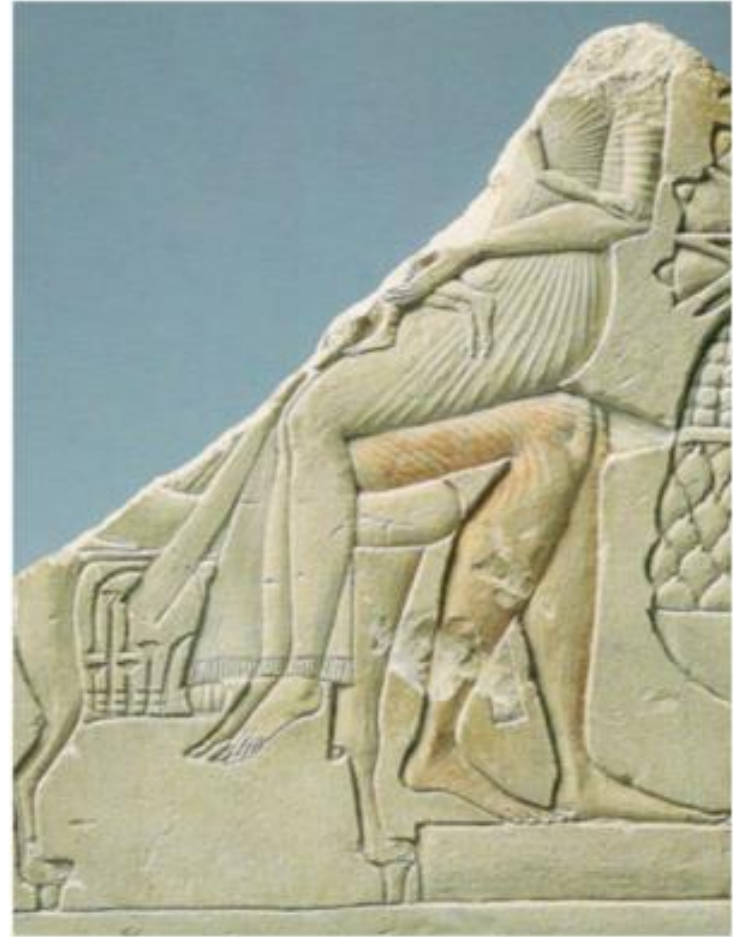
# “Naturalism”: Emotion

- Emotion not generally represented in egyptian art
- Love & Intimacy: limited to royal family
- Grief of royal personages
- Children as children, not small adults



# Other aspects

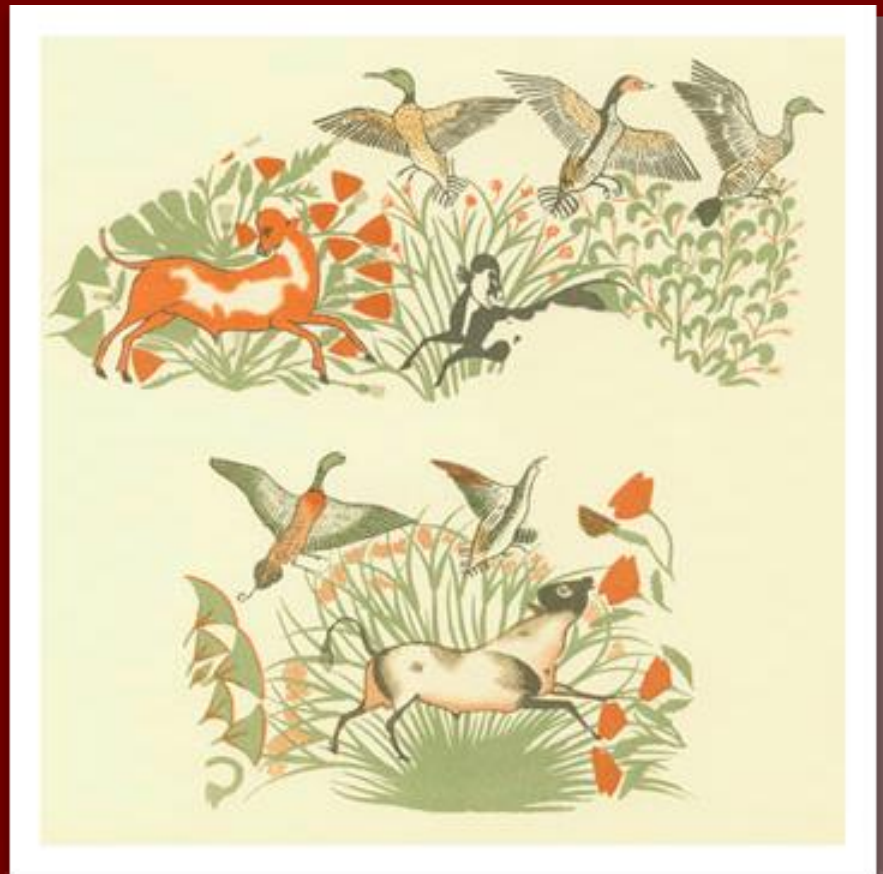
- creation of three-dimensional space through overlapping



# Other aspects

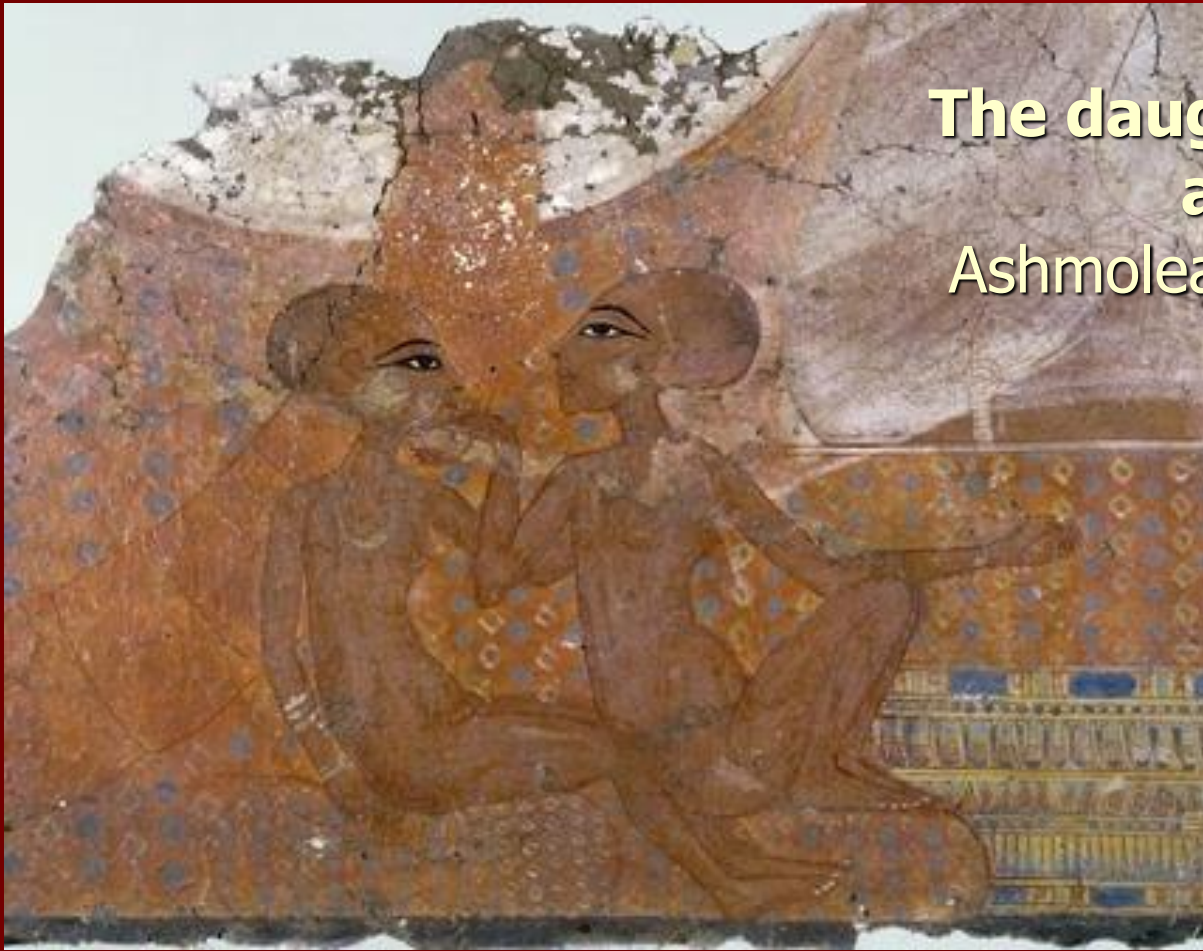
- creation of three-dimensional space through overlapping
- Natural world closely observed and represented
- Great Hymn to the Aten: Aten as the source of all life
- visual art reinforces this central notion

- Palace paintings



# The daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti

Ashmolean AN1893.1-41 (267)

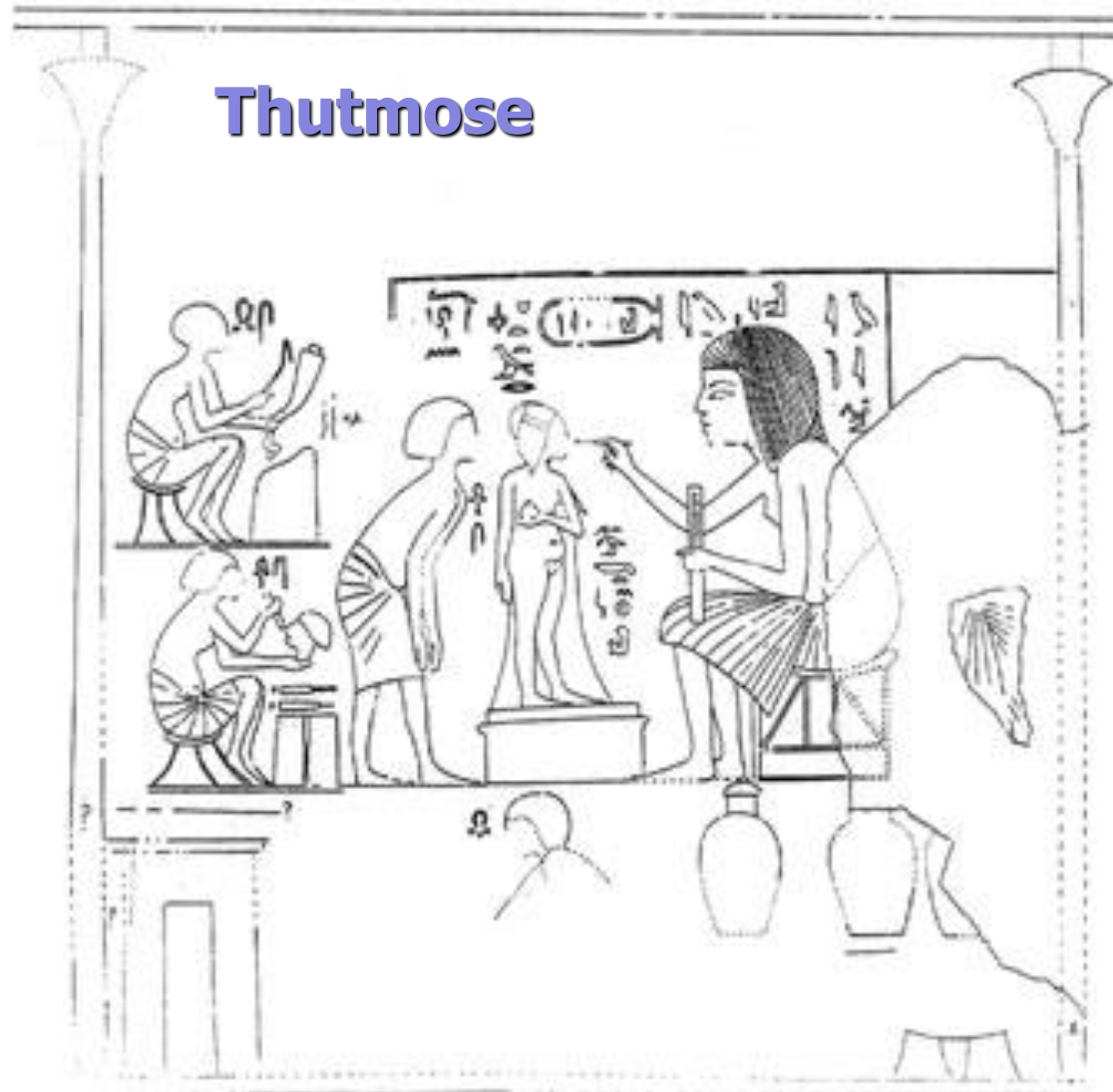


# Artists

**Bak (Bek)**



**Thutmose**



# Artists

---

- ❑ chief sculptor Bek (Son of Chief Sculptor Men, who worked for Amenhotep III) – known from Aswan (stela):
  - developed idiosyncratic form associated with the King,
  - depicted with feminine curves, heavy thighs and belly, half-closed eyes, full lips, and a long face and neck,
  - claims to have been taught by the king himself
- ❑ towards the end of Akhenaten's reign: chief sculptor Thutmose
  - Akhenaten was depicted with a more normal shape, but still with an elongated skull
  - more beautiful representations of the family (incl. Nefertiti bust)
  - distinct and individual features of Nefertiti (new)

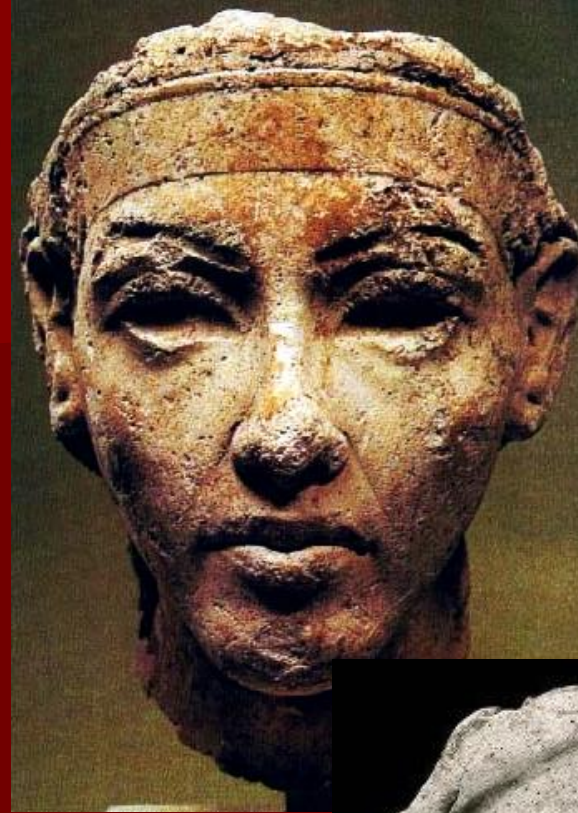
# Sculptor's studies, model heads and trial pieces

- ❑ features of the Amarna period, but second, more “traditional” style (toned down compared with early style)
- ❑ same features found on the profile head
- ❑ sculptor models from the house of Thutmose (intended for other artists to copy, including masks)
- ❑ Trial pieces: numerous details in faces, even in modest dimensions

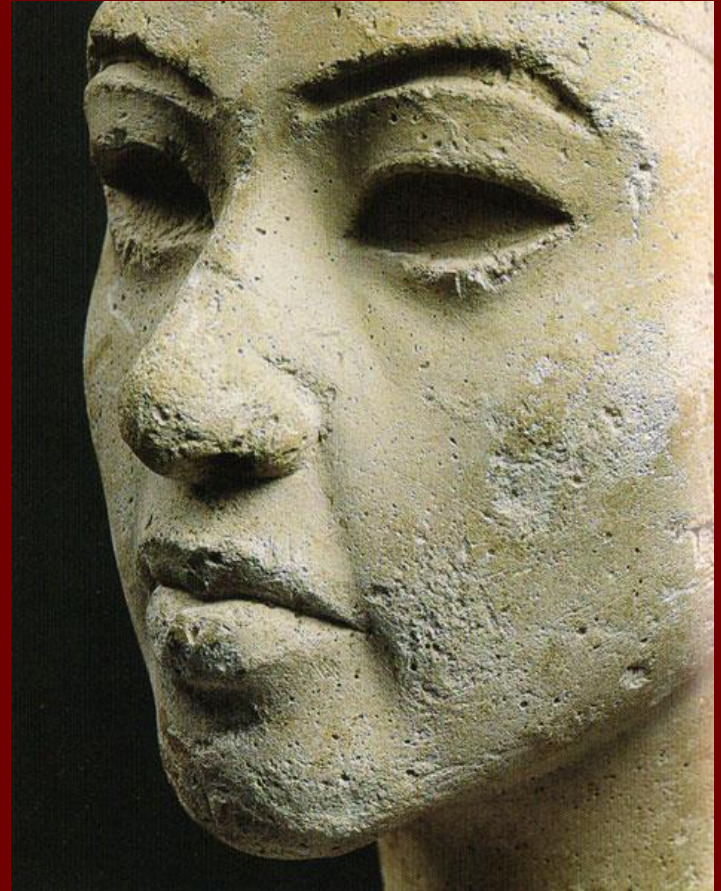
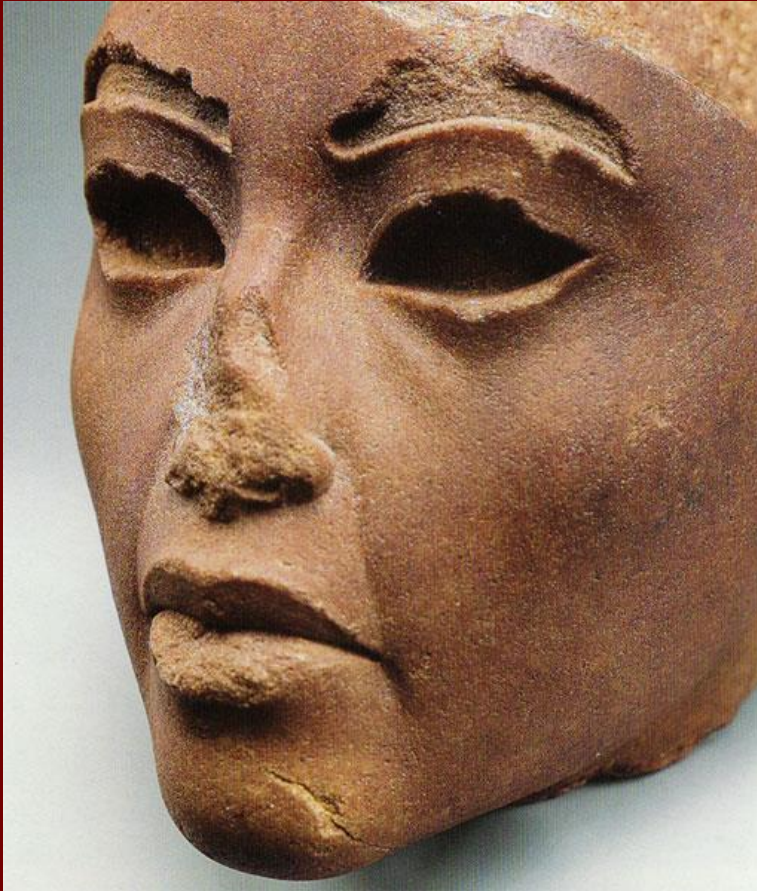


# “Portrait” Heads

- Gypsum Plaster heads
- many less than life-sized
- cast from clay heads, not actual face
- artists’ models?

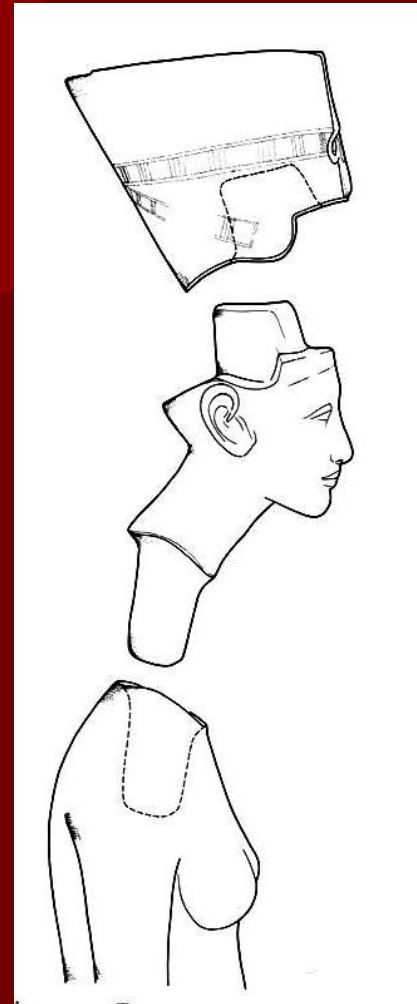


# “Portrait” Heads



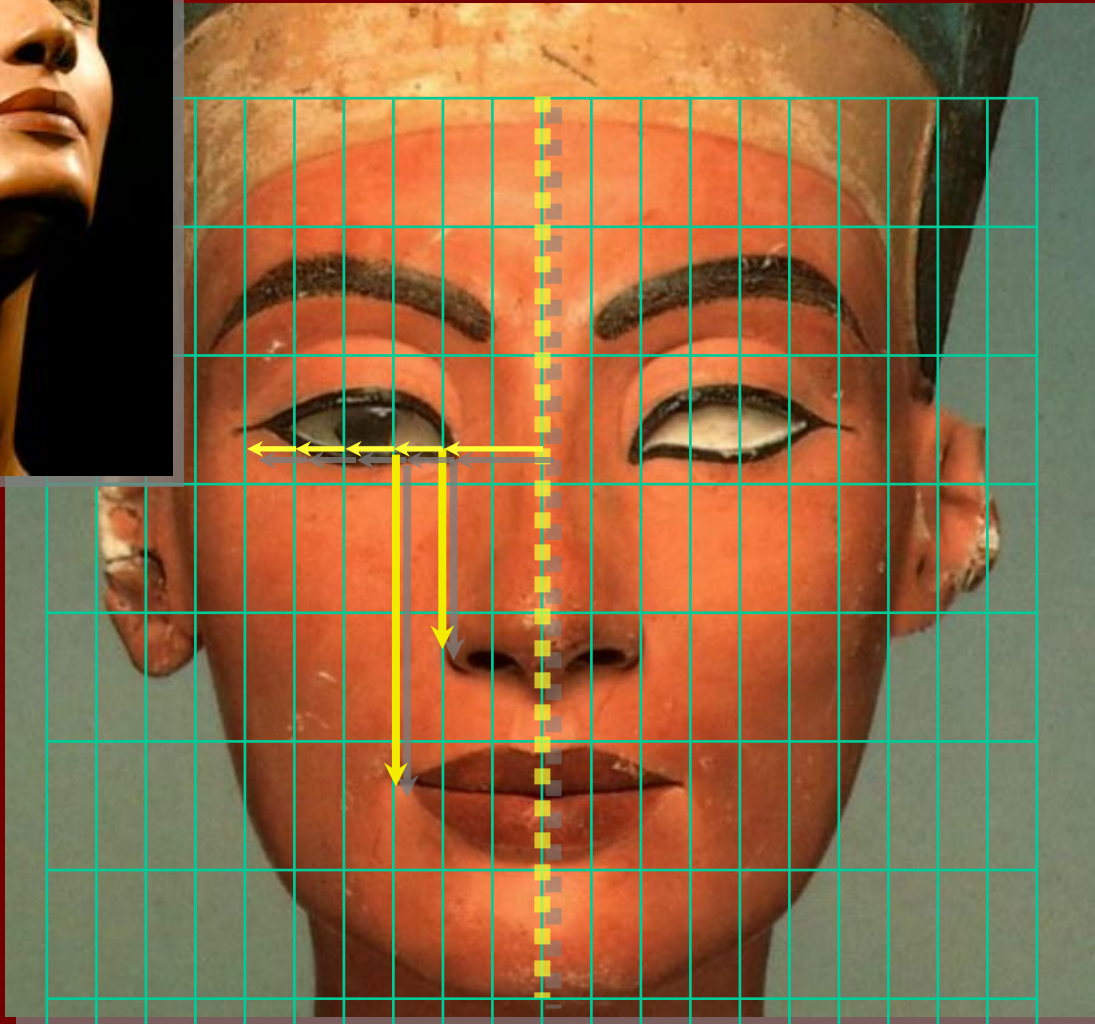
# Composite statues

- Statues composed of different colored stones
- extensive use of glass and stone inlays
- Glass as an artificial precious stone



# Realistic Portraits?

Follow compositional grids; not realistic



# The daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti

Ashmolean AN1893.1-41 (267)



# Mansoor Collection 39



# Researcher of the Mansoor Collection

---

- ❑ in several versions of the famous painting on plaster of two daughters of Akhenaten from the Royal Residence of Tell el Amarna, exhibited at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford
- ❑ One bas-reliefs of the two seated princesses (Mansoor Collection, now private hand), shows no distinction between the left foot and the right foot
- ❑ By logical inference, this bas-relief must have served as a model for the painting of the Ashmolean Museum. After correcting the feet, bracelets were added to the painting, decorations added on the wall in order to conform with the rest of the mural painting
- ❑ other bas-relief (still in the Mansoor collection), shows distinction between the right foot and the left foot
- ❑ So: relief in the private collection, was the first relief made of this representation of the two seated Princesses

# Mansoor Collection

M.A. Mansoor Amarna Gallery

TITLE: No. 1 • BUST OF AKHENATEN

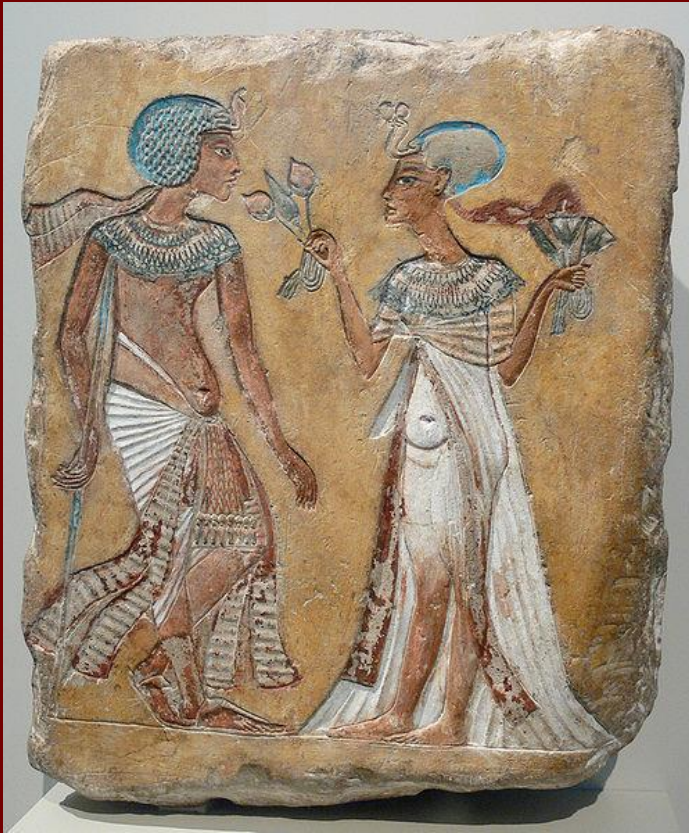
MATERIAL: White Limestone

SIZE: Height 21"



# “Stroll in the Garden”

**Berlin Museum 15000**



**Mansoor collection 37**



**MC 37**



**MC 38**

