

The Great Hymn of the Aten: The Ultimate Expression of Atenism?¹

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Abstract: The Great Hymn to the Aten recorded only in the tomb of Ay at Tell el-Amarna is widely recognized to be the most important theological affirmation of Akhenaten's religion. R.J. Williams called the Great Hymn "a major document of the new faith," while Miriam Lichtheim considered this hymn to be "an eloquent and beautiful statement of the doctrine of the one god." The Great Hymn is without question of immense value to modern scholars attempting to reconstruct Akhenaten's religion. Surprisingly, however, the text's date has of yet received relatively little consideration. The hymn's length and eloquence might seem to suggest a relatively late date, making the Great Hymn the ultimate theological development of Atenism. However, it will be argued here that the Great Hymn and its shorter counterpart were composed as early as the Theban stage of Akhenaten's reign, or early in the Amarna stage, and therefore, even as theologically profound as the doctrines within these hymns are, they do not represent the final expression of Akhenaten's brand of monotheism.

Résumé: Le Grand Hymne à Aton attesté uniquement dans la tombe d'Ay à Tell el-Amarna est largement reconnu comme l'affirmation théologique la plus importante de la religion d'Akhénaton. R.J. Williams affirme au sujet de l'hymne qu'il s'agit d'un document essentiel de la nouvelle croyance alors que Miriam Lichtheim considère qu'il s'agit d'une affirmation à la fois belle et éloquente de la doctrine du dieu unique. Le Grand Hymne est, à n'en pas douter, d'une valeur immense pour les chercheurs modernes qui tentent de reconstruire la religion d'Akhénaton. Cependant, et de manière étonnante, la datation du texte n'a jusqu'à présent pas été considérée avec grande attention. L'étendue du texte ainsi que son éloquence semble suggérer une date de rédaction relativement tardive, faisant de l'Hymne le développement théologique ultime de l'atonisme. Il sera néanmoins soutenu que le Grand Hymne et sa plus courte version ont été composés aussi tôt qu'à la période thébaine du règne d'Akhénaton voire plus tôt durant la période amarnienne. Ce faisant, et bien que les doctrines exprimées dans les hymnes montrent une profondeur théologique, elles ne représentent pas l'expression finale du monothéisme d'Akhénaton.

Keywords: Akhenaten, Aten, Atenism, Great Hymn to Aten, monotheism, benben, Amarna

Mots-clés: Akhénaton, Aton, Atonisme, Grand Hymne à Aton, monothéisme, benben, Amarna

Akhenaten's "Great Hymn to Aten" is one of the most celebrated literary and religious documents from ancient Egypt, and was translated and studied by the late John (Jack) Foster in considerable detail over the years.² For Foster, who invested

¹ Earlier versions of this article were presented at the ARCE Annual Meeting in Portland, OR in April, 2014 and at the 11th International Congress of Egyptologists in Florence, Italy in August 2015. I benefitted greatly from comments and suggestions offered by various colleagues on these occasions.

² John L. Foster, *Echoes of Egyptian Voices: An Anthology of Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 5-10; idem., *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs: An Anthology of Ancient Egyptian Lyric Poetry* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 102-107; idem., "The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Vol. III (ed. J. Sasson; New York: Charles Scribner, 1995), 1751-1761; idem., "The New Religion," *Pharaohs of*

most of his academic research on Egyptian poetic texts, the Great Hymn was "one of the most remarkable documents in all of ancient Egyptian history—and, indeed, in all of the ancient world."³ Clearly he held Akhenaten's literary masterpiece in high esteem, as others did before him. Because of his mastery of Egyptian poetry, his assessment is to be taken seriously.

Egyptologists have long recognized the literary and religious significance of this great hymn. James Henry Breasted believed that the hymns to Aten were "by far the most remarkable" of the monuments left by Akhenaten.⁴ Furthermore he saw the doctrine of "universalism" promoted therein as "a new spirit ... breathed upon the dry bones of traditionalism in Egypt."⁵ Ronald J. Williams described the hymn as "a fine example of the Egyptian poetic genius."⁶ As for its religious profundity, Miriam Lichtheim is representative of the thoughts of many scholars in seeing the Great Hymn as "an eloquent and beautiful statement of the doctrine of the one god."⁷ Indeed, based on the theology in the Great Hymn, Foster maintains that Akhenaten "was the first known monotheist in history."⁸

Scholars generally have considered the contents of the Great Hymn to be the ultimate expression of Akhenaten's theological program, his dogma. Jan Assmann has labeled it as "the acme" of the solar hymn tradition.⁹ "The fullest statement of Akhenaten's faith" is how Barbara Watterson has described it.¹⁰ Given the length and elegance of the hymn in the tomb of Ay at Amarna, it is obvious why it remains the most salient source on Akhenaten's religion.

What has been surprisingly missing from the scholarly treatments of the Great Hymn and shorter ones is a discussion of their date of the composition. Indeed, none of the scholars cited here specifically address this issue. After reviewing a broad range of studies on the Aten Hymns, however, I am left with the impression that scholars see in the paeans a more advanced and nuanced theological stage of Atenism. If so, the hymns must then have originated during the later years of Akhenaten's reign, though no one has explicitly stated this in print as far as I have been able to determine. Until recently, I had assumed myself that the Great Hymn represented the pinnacle of Akhenaten's theological program and that logically it

the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamun (eds. R. Freed, et. al.; Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1999), 97-109.

³ John L. Foster, "The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God," 1754.

⁴ James Henry Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), 371.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁶ Ronald J. Williams, "The Hymn to Aten," in *Documents from Old Testament Times* (ed. D. W. Thomas; New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 145.

⁷ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 89.

⁸ Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs*, 102.

⁹ Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 58

¹⁰ Barbara Watterson, *Amarna: Ancient Egypt's Age of Revolution* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999), 64.

came from late in the Amarna years. In the course of doing research for my recent book, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism* (New York: Oxford University Press 2015), however, several factors forced me to rethink its date. I am now inclined to believe that this hymn was composed earlier in Akhenaten's reign, possibly towards the end of the Theban sojourn or early in the "Amarna" period, certainly prior to the 9th year of his nearly 17 year reign.

It is manifestly evident that Akhenaten's religion went through several developmental phases over the course of the king's first ten years before reaching its final, orthodox form. Donald Redford's analysis of the development of the iconography and onomastics of Aten over the Theban period is most instructive.¹¹ Let me sketch out these well-known developments.¹² Likely in his first regnal year Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) is shown worshiping Atum, Lord of Heliopolis, and Re-Harakhty in their traditional iconography in the tomb of Kheruef (Fig. 1).¹³ Both gods have strong solar and Heliopolitan associations.¹⁴ Possibly as early as year 1 or 2, Re-Harakahty and Aten were associated with each other. The former is portrayed anthropomorphically with the head of a falcon surmounted with a sun-disc, and a new, didactic name was introduced at this time: "Re-Harakhty who Rejoices in the Horizon in his name of Shu who is in the Aten." This iconography and name appear together on the large pre-talatat block (72 x 151 x 27 cm) in Berlin where the name Amenhotep is still employed (Fig. 2). In the next phase, possibly around year 3-4, the image of the Horus-falcon disappears entirely and is replaced with the iconic Aten-disc with its downward pouring rays that end in hands offering life and other beneficences (Fig. 3).¹⁵ Around the same time or shortly thereafter, possibly in conjunction with his Sed festival, the king exchanged his birth name Amenhotep in favor of Akhenaten, and among the Karnak talatat the latter name in some instances was inscribed over the earlier Amenhotep.¹⁶ Furthermore, Aten's didactic name now appeared in a pair of cartouches (Fig. 4). The change in the king's name apparently occurred during the Heb Sed early in his reign, which in turn coincides with the

¹¹ Donald Redford, "The Sun-disc in Akhenaten's Program: Its Worship and Antecedents, I," *JARCE* 13 (1976): 47-61.

¹² For documentation of this development, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapters 3-7.

¹³ Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef, Theban Tomb no. 192* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980), plates 8-9.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Re-Harakhty's role in Egyptian religion prior to Akhenaten, see Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism*, 82-87.

¹⁵ Donald Redford, "Akhenaten: New Theories and Old Facts," *BASOR* 369 (2013): 19-20. Among the *talatat* from Thebes, Re-Harakhty appears a few times, but only as a minor player and shown in diminutive form (see Ray W. Smith & Donald Redford, *The Akhenaten Temple Project*, Vol. 1 (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1976), pl. 86, 8-9).

¹⁶ Smith & Redford, *The Akhenaten Temple Project*, Vol. 1, pl. 90, n.8; Donald Redford, *The Akhenaten Temple Project*, Vol. 2 (Toronto: Akhenaten Temple Project/University of Toronto Press, 1988), fig. 15-19, pl. 35 & 40.

Aten's name appearing in a pair of cartouches like the pharaoh. Norman de Garis Davies thought that placement of the deity's name in cartouches was "a new departure" for "emphasizing the personality of the sun-god."¹⁷ Given the anathematizing of Amun, could it be that the use of the cartouches was intended to elevate Aten and displace Amun as "king of the gods" (*nsw ntrw*) by using this new royal signature?¹⁸

Some time after the move to Amarna around year 6, possibly in Akhenaten's 9th year, the didactic name attained its final form (Fig. 5).¹⁹ Stripped were the divine names *Hr* and *Šw*, probably to rid the name of any associations with the other deities in keeping with a move towards exclusive monotheism. The ultimate form was: (Living Re,²⁰ Ruler of the Horizon, Rejoicing in the two Horizons²¹) (in His Name of 'Re,' the Father, who has come [or appears] as the Sun-disc). With this brief outline in view, let us turn to the Aten Hymns.

The "Great Hymn" to Aten is found exclusively in the tomb of Ay at Amarna, and uses the earlier form of the didactic name, written in cartouches.²² Of the five versions of the Short Aten Hymn, those in the tombs of Apy and Tutu use the pre-year 9 form of the didactic name,²³ whereas the texts in the tombs of Any, Meryre, and Mahu show the later didactic name (Fig. 6).

The use of the early form of the didactic name in the Great Hymn and two versions of the "Short" hymns seemingly points to their composition prior the final change was made to the name around year 9. It stands to reason that work began on the tombs of senior officials like Ay, Apy, and Tutu almost immediately upon settling at Akhet-Aten. Tombs inscribed a few years later (after year 9) employed the final form of the Aten's name. A careful reading of the various hymns in the five tombs shows no other signs of later insertions or redactions that reflect the last theological phase.

There is another element in the Short Hymns that points to an earlier composition date. The cultic nature of the Hymns is evident from lines 10-11, which

¹⁷ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 1 (London: EEF, 1903), 9.

¹⁸ J. R. Harris has noted the royal status of this writing, cf. "Aten min fader," *Papyrus* 25, no. 1 (2005), 22-23. I am grateful to Dr. Lise Manniche for drawing this article to my attention and for sending me a pdf of it. On the other hand, David Silverman suggests that the use of the cartouche by a deity "lower[ed] the level of divinity" (in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. B. Shafer [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991], 83). I rather see this writing as an elevation of Aten.

¹⁹ Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten & the Origins of Monotheism*, 204.

²⁰ One could render *ʿnh* as a prospective *sdm.f*, "Long live Re" or "May Re live." Alternatively, *ʿnh* could be treated as an adjective. Translators offer both readings. I prefer the latter.

²¹ For a discussion of the translation issues surrounding this name, see Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism*, 204-206.

²² Maj Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten* (Brussels: Queen Elizabeth Foundation of Egyptology, 1938), 90.15; 93.9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.13 & 17.

read: “Singing, chanting and joyful shouting are in the open court of the Mansion of the Benben (*Hwt bnb*) and in every temple in Akhet-Aten ... food and offerings are presented within it.”²⁴ No doubt the hymns themselves were chanted in the Aten temples during cultic activity and when daily offerings were being made.²⁵

A close examination of the orthography in the various occurrences of *Hwt bnb* in texts from Amarna private tombs reveals an instructive range of writings. *Hwt bnb* was the name of one of the east Karnak temples of Akhenaten prior to the move to Amarna.²⁶ Its name, and perhaps its design, followed the prototype and its namesake at Heliopolis where the *bnb* stone served as the cultic symbol of the sun-god Re/Atum.²⁷ The evidence, primarily the determinatives used in writing the name *Hwt bnb* on the Karnak talatat,²⁸ suggests that such an obelisk or *bnb*-stone stood in this temple at Thebes.

The Nubian sandstone quarry at Gebel el-Silsileh contains an inscription from the outset of Akhenaten’s reign that coincides with the beginning of building projects at Karnak. The text specifies that the purpose of the quarrying mission was “in order to make the great benben (*p3 bnb* 𐎃𐎛) of (or for) ‘Re-Harakhty in his name of light which is in the disc (Aten) in Karnak’.”²⁹ Legrain was quite emphatic that *p3 bnb* 𐎃𐎛 in the Silseleh inscription was written with a pyramid determinative ()

and not an obelisk () as Lepsius’s earlier copy of the inscription had recorded it.³⁰ No trace of this sandstone *bnb*-stone has been uncovered at Karnak; however, fragments of two granite obelisks belonging to Amenhotep IV, possibly an original pair, have been found in a secondary context at Karnak. One was published by Legrain in 1901 and the texts are only partially preserved; one surface contains the cartouche of Akhenaten, along with the line: *//// m 3ht n itn m iwnw smw* – “//// in Akhet-en-Aten in Southern Heliopolis.” Regrettably the name of the obelisk or the temple where it stood is in the lacunae.³¹ To judge from the dimensions of the

²⁴ Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten*, 13.9-14.4.

²⁵ For a discussion of the various types of offerings, see Cathie Speiser, *Offrandes et purification à l’époque amarnienne* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010).

²⁶ Donald B. Redford, “Studies of Akhenaten at Thebes 2: A Report of the Work of the Akhenaten Temple Project of the University Museum, The University of Pennsylvania, for the Year 1973-4,” *JARCE* 12 (1975): 9-14; Sayid Tawfik, “Aten and the Names of His Temple(s) at Thebes,” in *The Akhenaten Temple Project*, Volume 1 (eds. Ray W. Smith and Donald Redford; Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1976), 61-63.

²⁷ See Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism*, 11 and references.

²⁸ Meltzer, “Glossary of Amenophis IV-Akhenaten’s Karnak Talatat,” in *Akhenaten Temple Project* II, Fig. 13, nos. 17, 18, 19 and possibly 20.

²⁹ Georges Legrain, “Les Stèles d’Aménôthès IV à Zernik et à Gebel Silseleh,” *ASAE* 3 (1902): 259-266.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

³¹ Georges Legrain, “Sur un Temple d’Aten a Hermonthis,” *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes* 23 (1901): 62.

fragmentary remains, 42 x 40 x 40 cm, it appears to have been a rather small obelisk.³² The second has been analyzed recently by J. R. Harris.³³ Where it stood originally also remains unknown, but this granite pyramidion (along with the one studied by Legrain), coupled with the sandstone *bnbn* mentioned in the Gebel el-Silsileh inscription, suggest that there were possibly two different granite obelisks (possibly a matching pair) and a larger sandstone one associated with Akhenaten's Karnak temples.

The determinative used consistently for the writing of *Hwt bnbn* in the Karnak talatat is the  sign.³⁴ The difference between the determinatives used in the Silsileh quarry inscription and the writings for *Hwt bnbn* on the later Karnak talatat may suggest that two distinctive cult objects were intended. Early in the study of the Karnak talatat, Sayid Tawfik thought the *bnbn*-stone of the *Hwt bnbn* temple may well have been an obelisk based on the use of the  sign.³⁵ Subsequently E.S. Meltzer's glossary of terms from the Theban talatat documented several writings of *Hwt bnbn* and only the obelisk sign is used in the Karnak talatat, confirming Tawfik's observation.³⁶

One appealing theory recently advanced by several scholars is that the great obelisk of Thutmose III (relocated and rededicated by Thutmose IV)³⁷ in the Amun-Re temple nearby might have in some way been the focal point of the *Hwt bnbn* temple.³⁸ This obelisk, now in Rome, was removed from Karnak in the 4th century A.D. on the orders of Constantine. Today it is known as the Lateran obelisk.³⁹ Standing just over 31.18 m (105 feet) in height, this obelisk was to our knowledge the tallest erected at Karnak,⁴⁰ and thus would have been a sensational site visible from any point in the Karnak precinct. Its original location at Karnak, however, remains uncertain.

³² Ibid., 62.

³³ Harris, "Aten min fader," 21-25.

³⁴ Meltzer, "Glossary of Amenophis IV-Akhenaten's Karnak Talatat," Fig. 13, nos. 17, 18, 19 and possibly 20.

³⁵ Tawfik, "Aten and the Names of His Temple(s) at Thebes," 61.

³⁶ Meltzer, "Glossary of Amenophis IV-Akhenaten's Karnak Talatat," Fig. 13, nos. 17, 18, 19 and possibly 20.

³⁷ Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt* (Cairo: American University Press, 1984), 112-114.

³⁸ R. Vergnienx and M. Gondran, *Aménophis IV et les pierres du soleil: Akhénoton retrouvé* (Paris: Arthaud, 1997), 86 & 102; Barry Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and its People* (London: Thames Hudson, 2012), 82; Redford, "Akhenaten: New Theories and Old Facts," 22.

³⁹ Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt*, 115.

⁴⁰ The unfinished obelisk of the Aswan Quarry would have surpassed it.

Paul Barguet pointed to what he believed was the foundation for the great obelisk, a base made of large blocks interlocked with butterfly clamps.⁴¹ It is located east of the Akh-Menu Temple of Thutmose III, and is aligned with the central axis of the temple complex and lines up with the later Nectanebo gate to the east. In the 13th century B.C. Ramesses II built a temple in such a way that the great obelisk was the focal point, and then in the early 7th century, Taharqa erected a pillared hall in front (west) of Ramesses II's edifice.⁴² Given that later monarchs regarded this obelisk as such a significant feature that temples were situated in order to highlight the great Thutmoside obelisk, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Akhenaten might have somehow oriented the *Hwt bnb*n temple to optically focus on it, one of the great symbols of Heliopolitan solar religion.

If indeed the obelisk of Thutmose III/IV was the focal point of Amenhotep IV's *Hwt bnb*n temple located to its east, it begs the question: what was the function of the great sandstone benben quarried at Gebel el-Silsileh? Several options present themselves. First, it may have been part of an earlier, smaller shrine that was later superseded and abandoned by the new *Hwt bnb*n edifice built from talatat. Alternatively, could it be that the great sandstone *bnb*n was incorporated into the second *Hwt bnb*n temple, and aligned with or oriented toward the Thutmoside obelisk? This suggestion is shared by Barry Kemp, who describes the placement of the obelisk by Thutmose IV on the axis of Karnak temple as being "where it formed the focus of attention for approaching the temple from the east side..."⁴³ Then he suggests that the Silsileh Quarry inscription's reference to the great *bnb*n-stone "probably points to the building of a temple that gave greater attention to the existing obelisk."⁴⁴

It is clear that there were many obelisks or benbens at Karnak, but what about at Amarna? The archaeologists who have worked in the "Great Temple," a descriptive name used by 20th century investigators to refer to both *Pr itn* (House of Domain of Aten) and *Hwt bnb*n, have found no trace of an obelisk or even foundation stones⁴⁵ for one within the temple, even though its name would suggest that one was present, as in its earlier counterpart at Karnak.⁴⁶ Moreover, despite the name, which is typically written with the -sign, there is surprisingly no corresponding depiction of a *bnb*n-stone or obelisk in the temple reliefs of *Hwt bnb*n. As Kemp has rightly pointed out, "none of the pictures carved in the tombs at

⁴¹ Paul Barguet, "L'Obélisque de Saint-Jean-de-Latran dans le temple de Ramsès à Karnak," *ASAE* 50 (1950): 269-280 and *Le Temple D'Amon-Re À Karnak, essai d'exégèse* (Cairo: IFAO, 1962), 241-242.

⁴² Barguet, "L'Obélisque de Saint-Jean-de-Latran dans le temple de Ramsès à Karnak," 270, fig. 1.

⁴³ Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 82.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁵ When the great obelisk of Thutmose III was removed from Karnak, the foundation blocks were left intact; see discussion in *ibid.*, Chapter 4 and Fig. 49.

⁴⁶ Barry Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 82-83.

Amarna show an obelisk, even though some of them include detailed renderings of Aten temples."⁴⁷ Kemp also points to an example where *Hwt bnb*n is written with the stela determinative (), suggesting that one should not expect an exact correspondence between writing, the reliefs, and what is discovered archaeologically.⁴⁸ It is noteworthy, however, that temple scenes show an elevated stela that corresponds to the writing *Hwt bnb*n +  (e.g. Mery-Re, *Amarna* I, xxxiii; Ahmes, *Amarna* III, xxx; Tutu, *Amarna* VI, xx).

Although Kemp suggests that there may have been a benben at Amarna despite the pictorial and archaeological record, there is another possible, tantalizing explanation for the absence of the Heliopolitan solar symbol in the Amarna temple. While it is true that some writings of *Hwt bnb*n in inscriptions at Amarna use the

expected  -sign, there are some other noteworthy variants. The tomb of Tutu has three different writings. First there is an occurrence where *bnb*n is written with only

the  -sign as determinative, and in a different inscription no indicator is used at all.⁴⁹ The third occurrence of *bnb*n in Tutu's tomb is in the Short Hymn in the very passage quoted above that refers to the cultic activities in the open court of *Hwt*

*bnb*n. In this writing of *bnb*n the determinative  was apparently originally written. A careful examination of Davis's edition of the text of the Short Hymn in Tutu's

tomb, however, shows that the vertical  -sign was carefully scratched out leaving

just the surrounding hieroglyphs  ⁵⁰ (Fig. 7). This erasure was also noted in Sandman's edition of the Short Hymn in Tutu's tomb.⁵¹ This appears to be a small, but significant case of iconoclasm. It is as if some literate and astute observer (Tutu himself?) saw the text and had the obelisk-sign removed to reflect the reality of the architecture of this temple. This example of iconoclasm in Tutu's tomb is not an isolated one. Another case of defacing the obelisk-sign is also found in the tomb of Panehsy, where one can clearly see the careful and intentional elimination of the vertical *bnb*n sign (Fig. 8).⁵²

The combination of the erasing of the obelisk sign in some writings, or its complete absence, along with the use of the *pr* and stela-sign as determinatives in other writings, prompts the question: was there a *bnb*n-stone in the *Hwt bnb*n

⁴⁷ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁹ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 6 (London: EEF, 1906), pl. XIV, S. ceiling inscription & XV, left jamb, l. 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pl. XVI, l. 10-11.

⁵¹ Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten*, 13.16.

⁵² Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 2 (London: EEF, 1905) pl. xxi, left most vertical column.

temple? Then too there is no archaeological evidence for an obelisk in the *Hwt bnb* temple at Amarna, not even so much as a foundation or platform for one has been found,⁵³ and there are no cases of the sacred solar emblem in the temple scenes in the decorated tombs of Akhet-Aten. Could it be that either the *Hwt bnb* at Amarna never had a *bnb*-stone or, perhaps more likely, that it was removed after the year 9 purge of the last vestiges of other deities, their names and images and emblems? Redford has noted that Heliopolitan elements disappear over time and especially in conjunction with final phase of Atenism, observing that “gone was Re-Harakhty the falcon, the *hpr*-beetle, the Ennead with Atum at its head, *Bḥdy* the winged sun-disc, the solar boat, the *Himmelsfahrt*, Apophis, myth and its use in magic, and a host of other mechanisms and images, read as referential icons.”⁵⁴ Noticeably absent from this inventory of abolished images is the obelisk or *bnb*. Perhaps just as these other traditional solar icons had to go, so did the obelisk or *bnb*-stone even while the name *Hwt bnb* was retained.

The orthography of *Hwt bnb* in the Short Hymn includes the -sign and may simply reflect the orthography of the name that was standardized during the years at Thebes when the hymn was written. This theory, when combined with the use of the early form of the didactic name written in cartouches, might indicate that the Great Hymn and the shorter hymns were composed near the end of the stay in Thebes or very early in the Amarna sojourn at the latest.

Finally, and somewhat expectedly, we have examples cited here of Atenist iconoclasm at Amarna against the Heliopolitan icon *par excellence* (the *bnb*) in order to reflect the final religious developments of Akhenaten’s thought. The ultimate form of the didactic name is the final confession of Atenist dogma:

(Living Re, Ruler of the Horizon, Rejoicing in the Horizon)  in His Name of ‘Re,’ the Father, who has come [or appears] as the Sun-disc . This name and the sun-disc and extended rays were the only acceptable expressions permitted in official representations during the final years of Akhenaten’s reign.

The practice of iconoclasm is well attested in ancient Egypt, and there was no more ardent practitioner than Akhenaten. His program to annihilate Amun and other deities (to a lesser degree) is legendary. What is unexpected is to find Akhenaten’s iconoclasm against solar symbols and images as Atenism advanced to its final stage. The discovery of this likely case of iconoclasm came from an unexpected source, viz. my study of the Aten Hymns from Amarna to see if any dating criteria might be discernible in the text. Several conclusions now emerge regarding these celebrated hymns.

⁵³ Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 82.

⁵⁴ Donald Redford, “Akhenaten: New Theories and Old Facts,” 27.

1. The Great Hymn in the Amarna tomb of Ay, along with the short hymns in the tombs of Apy and Tutu, utilize the early form of the didactic name, suggesting that both hymns were composed prior to year 9 when the final form of the didactic name became the standard. Thus despite the fact that the Great Hymn contains sophisticated Atenist doctrine, even trending monotheistic, it was written before year 9 when the didactic name went through its final transformation. Consequently, the Great Hymn, as central to Akhenaten's theology as it was, was not the final doctrinal statement of his religious revolution.
2. In the final reforms, the names Hor and Shu were removed from the didactic name to eliminate any polytheistic elements, and the tombs of Any, Meryre, and Mahu use the final form of the Aten name in the writing of the short Aten hymns. Further purging of the previously acceptable solar images, even those of Heliopolitan origin, was carried out. It stands to reason that it would have been around year 9 that the *bnbn*-stone or obelisk likewise fell out of favor, and if the *Hwt bnbn* temple at Amarna ever indeed had a *bnbn*-stone, then it was likely removed around this time. The intentional erasing of the  -determinative in the tombs of Tutu and Panehsy reflects this development and indicates that the shorter hymns were composed well before this year 9 purge.
3. The ultimate theological statement of Akhenaten's religion, then, has to be the final didactic name itself,  Living Re, Ruler of the Horizon, Rejoicing in the Horizon   in His Name of 'Re,' the Father, who has come [or appears] as the Sun-disc .

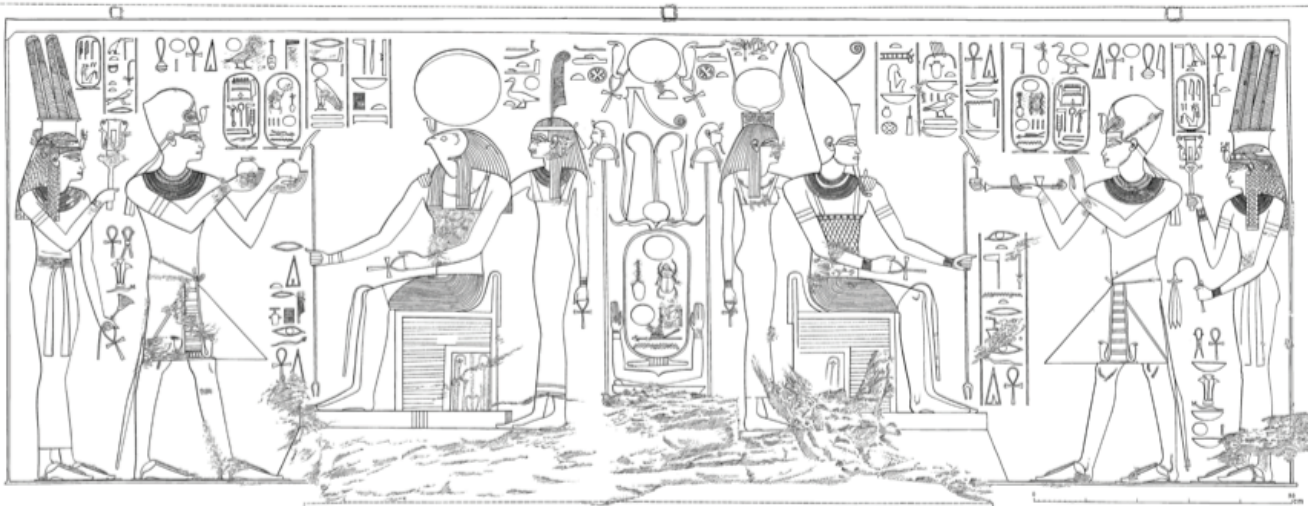


Fig. 1 Amenhotep IV making offerings to Atum and Re-Harakhty (Tomb of Kheruef) -- Epigraphic Survey, The Tomb of Kheruef, Theban Tomb, Theban Tomb no. 192 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980), pl. 9.



Fig. 2 Berlin Block -- Photo James K. Hoffmeier

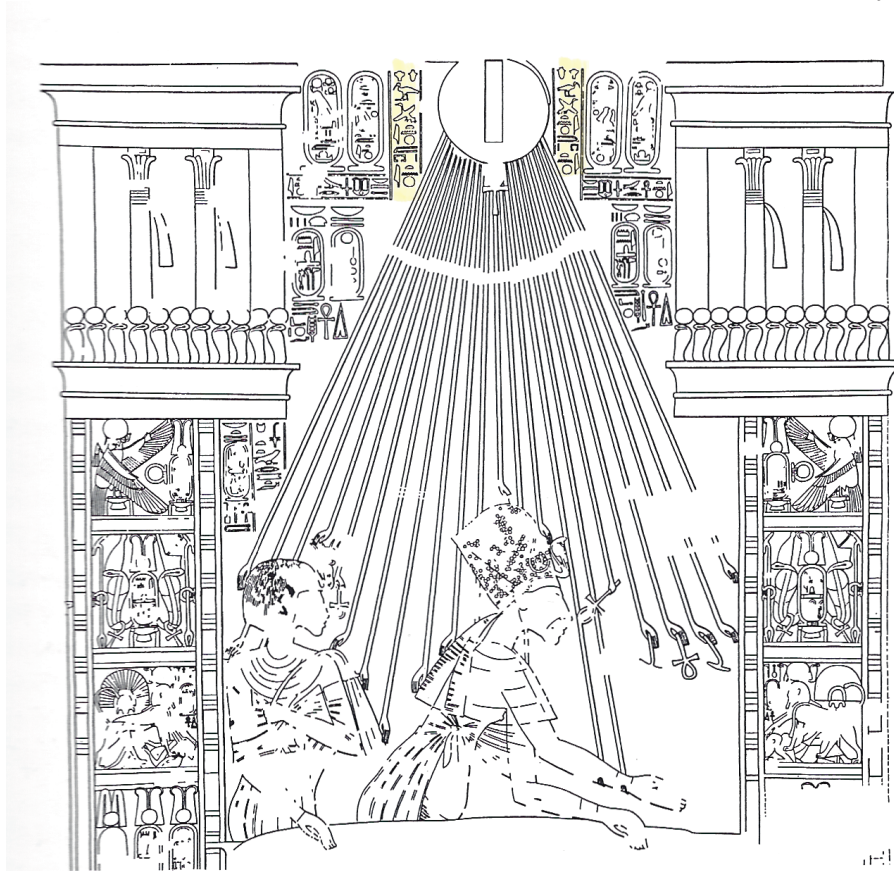


Fig. 3 Akhenaten and Nefertiti with early depiction of the Aten-disc (Tomb of Ramose) – N. de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of the Vizier Ramose* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1941), xxxiii a.



Fig. 4 Early didactic name of Aten in cartouches (Berlin Museum) -- Photo James K. Hoffmeier



Fig. 5 Final didactic name of Aten on bronze door fragment (Neues Museum Berlin) -- Photo James K. Hoffmeier

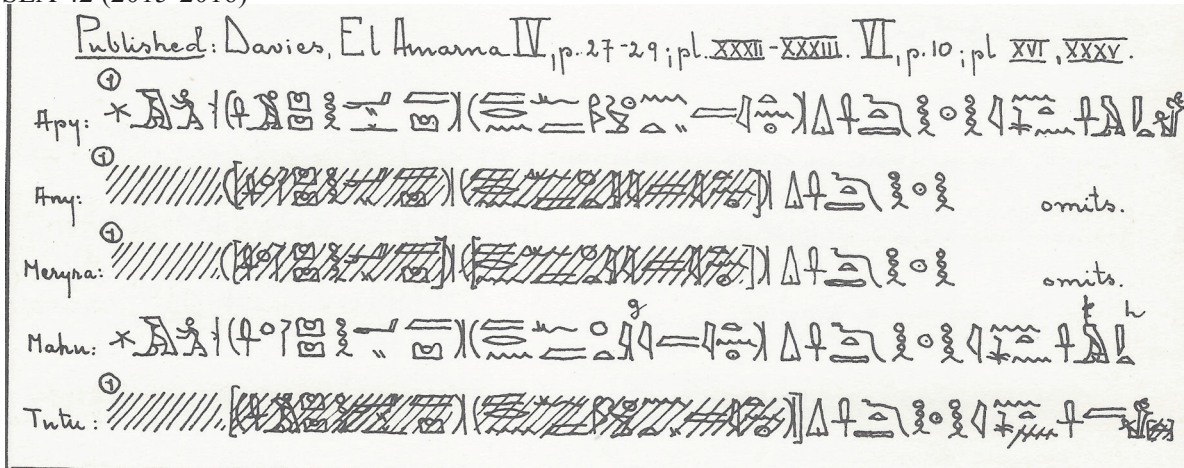


Fig. 6 Short Aten hymn in tomb of Tutu – Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 6 (London: EEF, 1906), pl. XVI.

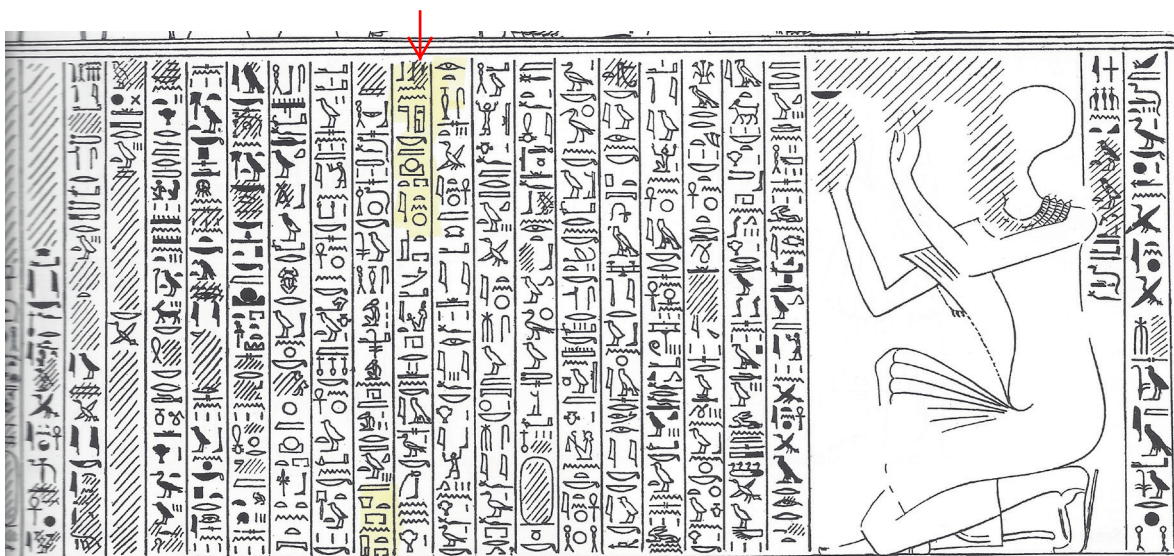


Fig. 7 Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 6 (London: EEF, 1906), pl. XVI, l. 10-11.



Fig. 8. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna*, Vol. 2 (London: EEF, 1905), pl. xxi, left most vertical column.