



Meryra's Tomb and Thirdspace at Amarna

The archaeological site of Amarna is located c.300 km south of Cairo, midway between the ancient Egyptian cities of Memphis and Thebes (Stevens, 2016, pp. 1-2). The city of Akhetaten , 'The Horizon of the Sun's Disc' (Kemp, 2013, p. 17) or 'Aten's Abode of Light' (David, 2021, p. 2) was founded on virgin desert here in c.1347 BCE, by the tenth king of the 18th Dynasty (Meyers, 1985, p. 35), Akhenaten. Its sacred city site, plan, textual and material culture embodied Akhenaten's political and theological doctrine (Meyers, 1985, p. 36), Atenism, in which the Aten  was the central tenet, rejecting the pre-eminent god Amun  and its powerful priesthood (Meyers, 1985, p. 35). The city was abandoned within 12-15 years (Stevens, 2016, p. 1), co-terminate with his death, or shortly thereafter (Kemp, 2013, p. 17). Fifty rock-cut tombs (Arp-Neumann, 2020) were among the remains, in various stages of completion, and, despite suffering degradation since, they remain the 'sole coherent contexts still standing' (David, 2021, p. 6) for the period; their design and decoration a source for the study of its history, religion and art (Arp-Neumann, 2020, p. 1). Despite much scrutiny of the period it remains "difficult to bring...the lived experience of Atenism into focus" (Hill, 2014) and since the tombs discovery in 1824 (David, 2021, p. 3), scholarship on them is 'relatively rare' (Arp-Neumann, 2020) with Davies work from 1903-08 still their standard reference (Davies, 1903, 1905a, 1905b, 1906, 1908a, 1908b). The lived experience of these elite tombs, and what that may reveal about the period, remains elusive, and is the subject of this exploration, which tests the potentialities of Soja's Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) to provide insight to their 'coherent contexts' and, by extension, Akhenaten's innovations. Meryra's tomb (TA04) (Davies, 1903), is presented as an illustrative case study. Meryra , as 'The High Priest of the Aten' (Arp-Neumann, 2020, p. 22), is of particular interest given

Akhenaten's rejection of the Amun priesthood within his 'politico-religious reform' (David, 2021, p. 2). With Thirdspace, Soja develops theories from Foucault (Foucault, 1986) and Lefebvre (Witrow, 2004, p. 25), to articulate a triadic model of space; 'Firstspace' (the real) interacting with 'Secondspace' (the imagined or ideological engagement with that space) to produce something 'more' (Borch, 2002, p. 114), a 'fully lived' (Borch, 2002, p. 114) 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 2010, p. 363). It avoids the attitude of much historicist scholarship in which time takes precedence (Soja, 2010, p. 362) and space is seen as 'dead' (Foucault, 1980, p. 10); Soja's 'Great Ontological Distortion' (Soja, 2010, p. 362). Thirdspace theory, arising from Soja's analysis of modern urban environments (Soja, 1989, 1996), is little applied in ancient contexts. Soja intended Thirdspace to be inclusive, and it is foregrounded here, augmented by other spatial theorists such as Casey (Casey, 1996) and Foucauldian notions of heterotopia (Foucault, 1986) and supplemented with sensory archaeology and phenomenology; testing the model's efficacy in beginning to develop an experiential appreciation of these spaces, and the world Akhenaten attempted to create.

Indicative Bibliography

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Hieroglyphs:

 Meryra (Davies, 1903, p. 7)

 Akhetaten (Meyers, 1985, p. 35)

 Aten (Meyers, 1985, p. 35)

 Amun (Meyers, 1985, p. 35)