**Armana Period Style**

The relief of Mai and Urel was included in a banquet scene found in the tomb of Ramose, a vizier during the reign of both Amenhotep III and Akhenaten. Because the construction of the tomb spanned the rule of both kings, decorations within the tomb show the progression of style from classical themes to the unique depiction preferred in the Armana Period. An examination of media, method, and message uncovers an early devotion to classicism presented in concert with later stylistic modification. In this portion of the relief, Mai and Urel are depicted in a classic theme related to the *sed festival*. They are seated at a funerary banquet to honor Ramose. They are unpainted but for their eyes and carved in high quality raised relief that includes intricate textural detail. The couple sits close together. Urel is behind her husband with her arm around him. The figures of Mai and Urel are individuated from the other couples in the scene. There are variations in height, hairstyle, dress and adornment. This attention to detail adds visual interest to the classic theme.

The reign of Akhenaten is a counter-culture moment at odds with millennia of entrenched belief. Attacks on the pious Egyptians had come from chaotic forces outside their boundaries throughout their history. Never had an attack on the Pantheon come from within. Never had a king so deliberately attacked the culture he was born into. His insistence on the monotheistic worship of the sun disk and of himself as the incarnation of the Aten, set him at odds with the powerful priests of Thebes. In year five of his reign Akhenaten abandoned Thebes and the restrictions of tradition. This break marks a historical re-orientation of established religious dogma, the scale of which goes unparalleled until the moment of Constantine's conversion. It is known as the great heresy.

The city of Akhetaten was built on isolated desert land. The king relocated his family, his temple cult, his government and his religion. As he did so he renamed himself and was reborn as Akhenaten. He rose daily with the sun and presented himself for adoration as the embodiment of Aten as he rode from the residential palace in the north to the governmental palace in the south. This embodiment of his god became a principal component in the ideology Akhenaten created. The creation of a new system of representation was necessitated in order to support this drastic theological shift. This new system was pervasive in the art of the period, intentionally setting itself in stark contrast to everything that came before it. Whether to infer fecundity or simply to illustrate complete dissolution with the past, there were startling changes in the depiction of the human form.

Vastly different than anything that had come before it, the art sanctioned by Akhenaten had an entirely different message than those of the classical period. Figures with long necks, large heads, narrow shoulders and protruding bellies reflect obvious visual changes. These pale in comparison to the ideological shift that was taking place. In the deeply carved relief of the royal family the king and queen sit facing each other. They are an embodiment of the sacred masculine and feminine relationship. They sit beneath the Aten, anointed by his rays and the *ankh* he offers. Children scramble over Akhenaten and Nefertiti, interacting and activating the scene. They no longer cling to the legs of their parents, but close to the center of the composition. Here the children are more than included within the family. They are the reason for the existence of family. A sacred perpetuation of life, they are embraced by their parents and blessed by the one, the Aten.

The visible differences found in the rendering of facial features of the two kings in "set 1" are remarkable. The relief of Sety I is faithful to the traditions of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Apart from changes brought by materials and freehand craftsmanship, these traditions were a resurrection of classical ideology. The inclusion of the vulture goddess Nekhbet, the *uraeus* and the *wedjet eye,* signify a return to the symbols of the past. Perhaps it is particularly significant as Seti I was also attempting to reunify Egypt after the eruption of chaos that followed the rule of Akhenaten. The image of Akhenaten is almost a caricature of the king. So exaggerated are his features that they have lead to widespread theorizing as to the reason behind such a depiction. Whatever the inspiration, all images of Akhenaten are remarkably similar. This may indicate the artists were more concerned with creating a new canon than with depicting the actual likeness of the king.

The statues of the kings in "set 2" provide evidence in the round of the vast fluctuation in the depiction of human form during the reign of Akhenaten. It begs the question, "Who is that lovely woman on the left and why does she have a beard?". The fleshy body of the heretic king does seem a bit androgynous. It is certainly both a unique and intentional treatment of the figure meant to disassociate this king with all those who came before him. The stylistic schism is apparent when compared with the statue of Tuthmosis III, a king who also worked to establish his authority after the long rule of his predecessor. This earlier king ruled in the height of the New Kingdom. The stability and strength of the state is portrayed in his regal stance. The *nemes* headdress and short kilt are typical attire of the kings and are intended to associate Tuthmosis III with the glory of his royal ancestors.

In a final comparison of the relief carvings in "set 3", the differences in portrayal of the deities is perhaps the most critically important component. The image of Merenptah honored significant gods of the Egyptian Pantheon. Most notably present were Ptah, Osiris, and Ra-Horakhty. The name of the king referred to Ptah, the Memphite god who breathed life into existence through utterance. The king wears the *atef* crown and receives a *was scepter* which has been combined with an *ankh* and *djed pillar.* These accoutrements were associated with Osiris as well as Ptah and reference both gods simultaneously. The symbiosis continued within the merged god Ra-Horakhty. He was an incarnation which combined Ra and Horace that became popular toward the end of the reign of Amenhotep III.

It was this god, Ra-Horakhty, that Akhenaten later morphed into his image of the one true god, the Aten. In compositional contrast, the image of the Aten was placed above the head of the king, giving prominence to his deity. The image of Aten was never depicted with anthropomorphic characteristics as was Ra-Horakhty. Instead the god was shown exclusively as a sun disk reaching down with rays of light that concluded in hands. These rays often held objects like the *ankh* sign and seem to correspond to the height of the king and queen, protectively touching their crowns. As the living embodiment of the Aten, pictured in offering below the image of his god, Akhenaten perpetually adored and received the adoration of himself.

Certainly the ultimate narcissist, notable even in a long line of rulers held in awe by their own greatness, Akhenaten effectively buried his head in the hot sands of Akhetaten. Devoted to his religious convictions he ignored everything but his own divinity. While elsewhere his country suffered, he paraded from palace to palace, and relished in the worship accorded to a living god. All the while he was unaware that behind his back there were whispers. "Look... the emperor has no clothes."