The Egypt of King Amenhotep III was sophisticated and cosmopolitan. The economy prospered: farms, workshops, gold mines and quarries were efficient and dependable providers of the nation’s wealth, which was the envy of the whole Ancient Near East. The influence of religion was felt in all spheres of life and united the land: the king’s colossal statues at temple gates commanded respect and inspired awe. Egypt’s international standing, relying as much on its overflowing coffers and diplomatic marriages as on its mighty army, was unchallenged, and its external relations were conducted with consummate dexterity and shrewdness. Foreign trade supplied abundant quantities of luxury goods for the privileged, while the royal family led a charmed life of opulence at el-Malqata and in other seasonally inhabited palaces along the Nile. The country’s administration boasted individuals of outstanding intellect, abilities and prowess. Arts and architecture flourished in an unprecedented way.

Yet towards the end of Amenhotep’s reign, or immediately after, the country was plunged into one of the most traumatic periods in its history, made worse by the fact that the crisis was entirely home-grown. It is only with hindsight that any signs of the impending upheaval can be detected in the surviving sources. Art of the reign of Amenhotep III betrays no self-consciousness, doubt or hesitation. On the contrary, it is full of vigour, confidence and a willingness to experiment and search for new forms of expression within the allowed artistic limits, and represents the true peak of the development which had taken place over the preceding two centuries. A profound break in all aspects of artistic creativity was, however, about to emerge with startling rapidity. New monumental temples would appear, revolutionary in their architecture, building techniques and decoration. Traditional subjects would vanish from the walls of temples and tombs, to
be replaced by topics which would draw their inspiration from a contemporary rather than imaginary world. New ways of portraying reality would be introduced, sometimes so strange that even now, more than three millennia later, they can seem perturbing and difficult to accept. The reasons behind such dramatic developments can be understood only in their historical and religious context.

Amenhotep III was succeeded by his son of the same name. The mother of the new Amenhotep was the 'great royal wife' Teye. Amenhotep IV (1353–1337 BC) was a young man when he ascended the throne in 1353 BC (his exact age is unknown), but he had probably married Nefertiti, his chief wife and the most ardent supporter of his religious reforms, well before this. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the new king reigned at first jointly with his elderly father or succeeded him only at his death. The solution to this historical problem is of profound importance for the understanding of the arts of the period. Some historians believe that a joint rule of these two kings may have lasted merely a few months, others claim that it was as long as eleven years. If the latter is correct, then two entirely different and often diametrically opposed artistic styles—the 'orthodox' Egyptian art of Amenhotep III and the new 'Amarna' style (named after the new capital of the country of el-Amarna)—must have coexisted side by side, sometimes even on adjoining walls of the same building. With the exception of the Ptolemaic period, during which traditional Egyptian art had to come to terms with the art of the country's new Greek rulers, such a dichotomy is unknown in Egypt. On the whole, the evidence suggests that there was no co-regency between Amenhotep III and his son, or that it was so short as to be of little practical consequence.

The term 'revolution', which some apply to the period beginning shortly after the accession of Amenhotep IV, needs to be qualified. Amenhotep IV did introduce truly revolutionary ideas into the intellectual foundation of ancient Egypt—its religion—and these concepts were reflected in the arts, language and literature. Some of them had a significant effect on Egyptian economy and the upper strata of Egyptian society, but they did not result in a true social revolution. In fact, the further an individual lived from the new capital at el-Amarna, and the lower down he or she was on the social scale, the less direct the impact of the 'revolution'. Moreover, Amenhotep IV's objectives appear to have been far from idealistic. His reforms focused mainly on his own relationship with the divinity. By monopolizing it completely he removed any doubts about his role as the sole intermediary between the god and the people, and in this way he corrected in one sweep any erosion of the royal status and removed the religious justification for the power wielded by the priesthood of the traditional gods.

The religious reforms of Amenhotep IV were, in fact, an attempt to introduce a form of monotheism (a belief in one god) into polytheistic Egypt. The seeds of these new religious teachings are evident in textual as well as iconographic sources of earlier periods, especially from the reign of Amenhotep III. Now they were developed further, moulded into a coherent system, and put into practice with logic and determination. The new king must have arrived at an intellectual justification of these ideas before his accession to the throne. From the beginning, he was an ardent follower of Re-Harakhty, a deity combining the characteristics of the sun god Re and the hawk-headed Horus, as Harakhty, literally Horus on the horizon.

The link between the sun god Re and the pharaoh ('the son of Re') was very old. The influence of beliefs which centred on the sun god increased steadily during the Eighteenth Dynasty, particularly in connection with the king's afterlife. Amenhotep IV followed a still more recent and radical trend towards elevating the sun god to the position of supreme deity. Re now embodied the qualities of all the other gods and, in this way, rendered them superfluous (this was different from the process known as syncretization in which two or more deities combined without fully losing their own identities). Signs of this had been noticeable during the previous two or three reigns, but the speed with which the
changes in religious thought gathered pace under Amenhotep IV was astonishing.

The cornerstone of the new religious doctrine, and quite likely the king's personal contribution to it, was the preference for the sun god's special manifestation, the impersonal radiant sun-disc (the Aten). The so-called 'Hymn to the Aten' inscribed on the walls of several private tombs at el-Amarna, and which may have been composed by Amenhotep IV himself, contains the main tenets of the new credo. The sun god is the creator addressed as the 'unique god, without another beside you; you created the earth as you desired, alone, [before] mankind, all cattle, all beings on land who walk on their feet, and all beings in the air who fly with their wings.' The 'Hymn to the Aten' has a spiritual predecessor—a similar concept was conveyed around a thousand years earlier by the reliefs on the walls of the so-called Room of the Seasons in the sun temple of King Neuesene (2408-2377 BC) at Abu Ghurab in the northern part of the Memphite necropolis. There, before the watchful gaze of Re-Harakhty and through his life-giving powers, the Egyptian countryside and every living thing in it change as one season succeeds another. Amenhotep IV, however, added a universal character to the sun god, who was now regarded as creator of all life, not only in Egypt, but in all countries 'encircled by the Aten,' that is, all countries on which the sun shone.

The monotheism of the 'Hymn to the Aten' and its praise of god as creator have been compared to Psalm 104 of the Old Testament of the Bible. From the 'Hymn to the Aten':

The earth brightens when you rise on the horizon, when you shine as the Aten by day; as you dispel darkness and give forth your rays, the Two Lands are in festival ... The whole of the country goes about its business; all beasts browse on their pastureage; trees and plants sprout; birds fly from their nests, their wings stretched in praise of your ka; all flocks prance on their feet; all that fly and alight come to life when you have risen; ships sail north and south and roads are open when you appear; the fish in the river leap before you when your rays are in the depths of the waters.

From Psalm 104:

He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills ... He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth ...

He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down ...

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

Eventually, the Aten was worshipped exclusively, at least on the official level, while the old gods were consigned to the religious wilderness. With the disappearance of royal patronage, which was now diverted to the new deity, their temples lost much of their former wealth and influence. The new religious thinking also altered traditional funerary customs; even there the Aten now reigned supreme. The earlier aspirations to life after death in the kingdom of Osiris were transformed to a desire for perpetual existence under the rays of the Aten, although the material needs of the person's ka in the afterlife did not change. Considering the enormous importance of the old concept of the afterlife for all Egyptians, this change may have been the new religion's Achilles heel and the most difficult idea to accept. Moreover, Egyptian religion was always multi-faceted, and different social groups worshipped in various ways; among the poorest the pre-Amarna beliefs continued unaffected.

The names of Egyptian kings, especially those received at coronation, expressed ideas about kingship and the relationship of the king to gods, and some of them were written in cartouches, ornamental oval frames. In order to stress the Aten's unique position in Egyptian religion and to make a direct comparison with the similarly exclusive role of the king in Egyptian society, the Aten was given two 'programmatic' names which, in a similar fashion, defined the deity's character and were written in cartouches, like royal names. The royal family were close to the Aten to the point of monopolization. For the pharaoh such a role was not new, but it was expressed in an extreme form, as if the time-honoured ability
to delegate did not exist; the king and the queen were the new deity’s main officials, and it was only to them, as representatives of mankind, that the sun-disc extended its arm-like rays. In the new religion’s principal icon (156). This relationship was recorded in the change of the king’s name from Amenhotep (“The God Amun is Satisfied”) to Akhenaten, a name which lends itself to several interpretations: ‘One who is Beneficial to the Aten’, ‘The Radiance of the Aten’ or ‘The Shining Spirit of the Aten’.

Changes of this magnitude profoundly affected all the arts associated with Egyptian temples and tombs, and Akhenaten and Nefertiti themselves may have inspired some of the artistic innovations of the period. Akhenaten’s chief sculptor Bak (see 160), in an inscription carved on the rocks at Aswan, boasts proudly that it was the king himself who taught artists the rudiments of their art. Bak’s father Men probably directed the carving of the famous ‘Memnon Colossi’ (see 132) at the entrance to the funerary temple of Akhenaten’s father, Amenhotep III, so the sculptor’s pedigree was impeccable. It remains unclear whether this was the flattery of an obsequious court artist anxious to please his master and to preserve his status in the maelstrom of change and uncertainty engulfing his profession, or whether the king did indeed take a close interest in the arts. The fact that it was deemed useful and desirable to make such a statement illustrates the enormous gulf which separated the new Amarna art from that of earlier periods.

The basic principles of Egyptian art had previously been regarded as given by the gods, thus perfect and impervious to change, a no-go area even for the pharaoh.

In order to observe the first flourishing of what is known as Amarna art we have to go to Thebes, and the heart of Egypt’s religious capital, the great temple of the god Amun-Re at Karnak. The earliest traces of activities of Amenhotep IV in the temple are the reliefs on the walls of the third pylon, later disguised by the decoration of Sety I (1294–1279 BC) which was superimposed over them. These date from the very beginning of the reign and were probably begun by his father, but it was not much later that the king forsook continuity and embarked on an ambitious project of his own – the building of several completely new sanctuaries for the sun god.

Already at this early stage the reluctance to come to any arrangement with the traditional gods demanded a site unaltered by their presence. The place chosen for the largest of them, called Gempaaten (‘The Discovery of the Aten’), was several hundred metres to the east of Amun’s sacred precinct. There may have been as many as eight of these new temples at Karnak. In the earliest structure, probably dating from Amenhotep IV’s first year, if not the first few months of his reign, the god was still described as Re-Harakhti and represented as a hawk-headed figure with a large sun-disc on his head. In the others, he was shown in the form of a sun-disc, the relief technique employed to depict it giving it an almost the appearance of a globe. This was the only way the Aten was ever portrayed; during the whole of the period when the new religion held sway there were no iconographic variations in its depiction.
The forms of the worship of the Aten differed from those of the old gods and required new architectural forms. None of the Karnak sanctuaries remain; they were dismantled shortly after the end of the Amarna Period by King Haremhab (1323-1295 BC), and their blocks were reused as cheap building material in new structures.

The reconstruction of the plans of these temples is a matter of careful analysis of the preserved blocks, the study of the surviving traces on the ground, and comparison with representations of such structures in the scenes on the blocks themselves. The major features of the temples were large courts open to the sun, surrounded by rows of rectangular pillars and fronted by pylons.

The pace at which events were unfolding suggests that Akhenaten was a man possessed, consumed with impatience, as if he felt that the time for accomplishing all his reforms was limited. The builders of the temples which were now being hastily put up at Karnak employed stone blocks of unusual dimensions, much smaller than anything that had been used in Egypt before.

This may have been partly due to the relatively thin layers of sandstone in the quarries at Gebel el-Silsila, near Kom Ombo, some 150 km (93 miles) south of Thebes, where the building material was quarried, but the main reason was probably the ease with which smaller blocks could be handled. Of a fairly uniform size (about 52 x 26 x 24 cm or 20 x 10 x 9 in, weighing about 50 kg or 110 lb), these are usually called talatat, a term borrowed from medieval Islamic architecture where stone blocks of similar size were commonly used (talātā means ‘three’ in Arabic, ‘three hand-spans long’). Some forty thousand talatat, most of them with at least one side decorated, have been recovered from structures of later kings at Karnak and Luxor, and they present archaeologists with the equivalent of a huge jigsaw puzzle.

Except for the earliest building, the walls of the new Karnak temples were decorated in sunk relief, a technique that relies for its effect on the contrast created by the dark shadows cast by the sharp edges of the higher planes on to the incised lines or lower surfaces. This was quite logical since large areas of the temples of the Aten were open to daylight. Sunk relief has, however, another advantage over raised relief – it is less laborious to carve because the amount of material that has to be removed is smaller. This was almost certainly an important incentive for its use in the new structures of Amenhotep IV, and it was probably the reason why the builders of the Amarna Period preferred it even where the absence of appropriate illumination made the technique less suitable. The sunk relief of the Amarna Period is characterized by the careful modelling of details which makes it appear more three-dimensional. All representations carved in relief were painted in bright colours, and selected details may have been accentuated by inlays in faience, glass or other materials.

The new focus on a single deity did away with almost all traditional themes of temple reliefs, in particular those showing the king in the presence of various gods. This was of profound importance; the complex, varied and immensely elaborate repertory, full of symbolism and allusions, which had evolved over the preceding
fifteen hundred years, had to be replaced by new subjects. Realistic images were now introduced into temple scenes and at once became predominant. A few of the scenes on the walls of the new temples at Karnak represented variations on well-tried topics, such as the king with his family presenting offerings, or the king’s jubilee festival, but most of the others were completely new: the preparation of offerings in the Aten’s temples, activities taking place in and around royal palaces, ceremonial processions involving the king and his queen, and depictions of palaces and temples detailed enough to be architectural drawings. All these themes were inspired by aspects of everyday life which they probably depicted quite faithfully. Only the arms of the sun-disc, sometimes clutching little symbols of life and dominion in their hands and proffering them to Akhenaten and his family, and the symbol for ‘life’ suspended from the disc, were concessions to metaphysical ideas and the imagination. The new art rejected tradition in favour of realism, and replaced timelessness with immediacy.

Another innovation is that Queen Nefertiti features as prominently in the decoration of the Karnak temples as the king. Some of the roles in which she appears – for example massacring prisoners (no doubt a fictitious, symbolic image) – were traditionally a prerogative of the king alone. It would be difficult to explain Nefertiti’s pre-eminence except by her personal influence over the king and possibly also over the religious changes then under way.

The introduction of a completely new repertory of temple scenes led almost inevitably to changes in the way the subjects were depicted. A tendency towards greater realism was reflected in the decline of standard idealized portrayals of human figures in favour of recording individual characteristics, such as signs of age, or momentary feelings such as triumph, elation or grief. Artists now positively delighted in the attention they paid to some details of the human body – hands, fingers, feet and toes – while the accentuation, almost exaggeration, of others, such as the well-fed rounded stomach above a precariously sagging hill, became a cliché and the stylized hallmark of the Amarna Period, suggesting that even here appearances should not be taken too literally.

There was a greater willingness to show transient states – the movement of a reckless chariot dash, the fluttering of a garment or the ribbons attached to the royal crown ruffled by the breeze. Almost as a consequence of this freedom, a loosening of the typically Egyptian axial symmetry can be observed. The traditional standardized proportions of the human body were slightly modified and a twenty-square grid from base to hairline was now used for the depiction of a standing figure. Attempts to indicate depth and three-dimensionality by showing figures and objects overlapping and partly obscuring each other, in order to achieve a near-perspectival representation, were frequent. The artists of Amenhotep IV came quite close to the concept of a single unified space, as compared with the earlier (and later) understanding of it as a series of stacked-up two-dimensional planes.

If it is accepted that the artists now tried to come to terms with reality in a way not seen before, it comes as a complete shock to be confronted with the seemingly distorted and exaggerated features of the king – the long narrow face with hollow eyes, prominent jutting nose, large sensuous lips, high cheekbones, projecting lower jaw and strikingly narrow chin, long neck, conspicuous breasts, almost swollen stomach, feminine buttocks, heavy thighs and thin, spindly calves. These features can be seen in reliefs as well as in statues, and are clearly not just undisciplined experiments or the aberrations of one artist. Perhaps the most striking examples are the colossal statues of the king that adorned pillars around the courts of his temples at Karnak (155, 158). The greatest degree of this near-caricature grotesqueness dates from the early part of the reign of Amenhotep IV, in later years the tendency was less pronounced.

There is no agreement on the reasons for the distorted portrayal of the king in the early years. It can hardly be explained by a desire to imitate a divinity – the only deity whose features the king might have wished to make his own actually had no human form. It is equally difficult to regard it as a special ‘Amarna’ way of seeing
the human figure; in spite of all the changes in the visual arts which took place during the Amarna Period, their main raison d'être, as an expression of religious ideas, remained intact. The simplest explanation is that the physical appearance of the king was indeed unusual (possibly as the result of a medical condition) and that his features were consistently, faithfully and, from our point of view, completely mercilessly recorded because of the striving for realism which he personally endorsed.

There is something similarly strange in the early representations of Nefertiti: her profile resembles her husband's and sometimes

acquires an almost ape-like appearance. Yet in the quartzite torso from the early part of the Amarna Period (159) and the bust found at el-Amarna (see 161, 162) from the latter part of the period, Nefertiti is shown as a beautiful and sensuous woman. The 'reality' that the artists of the early years of Amenhotep IV portrayed was probably 'the king's reality', dominated by his unusual physiognomy. He was the prototype that the court artists imitated and which influenced the early representations of Nefertiti and, to a lesser degree, those of the royal princesses. Perhaps as a proof of
his proficiency in the new artistic style, the king's chief sculptor, Bak, adopted it for his own three-dimensional self-portrait (160), carved in a niche-shaped stela, which showed him with fat pendant breasts and a large stomach, and so related him closely, at least in physical terms, to his royal master. Even so, it was unusual for people outside the royal family to be represented in a similarly grotesque fashion.

The chasm separating the Egyptian visual arts before and after Amenhotep IV's accession is vividly demonstrated in the tomb of Ramose (see 133). He was a vizier of Amenhotep III whose rockcut tomb in the Theban necropolis was still being completed under Amenhotep IV. On the west wall of the first columned hall, to the left of the doorway leading into the inner room, Amenhotep IV and the goddess Maet are shown seated in a kiosk, in a style typical of the reign of his predecessor. On the same wall, to the right of the doorway, the king and his queen Neferitu appear in a palace window, this time shown in the style of the early years of his reign. The Aten's rays are extended towards them with the signs of life and dominion. It is extraordinary that only a few months or weeks may have separated the two scenes.

It was around his fifth regnal year, well before the massive building programme at Karnak could be completed, that Amenhotep IV made a clean break with the traditional religious centre of Egypt and, now as Akhenaten, moved to a previously sparsely inhabited area of Middle Egypt, some 200 km (125 miles) to the north of Thebes. There, at a place now known as el-Amarna, in a deep bay on the eastern bank of the Nile, whose shape recalled the Egyptian hieroglyphic sign for 'horizon' (akhet), he founded a new royal residence and state capital called Akhetaten, 'The Horizon of the Aten'. It was as if he had decided to reject and abandon everything linked to the time before the Aten was promoted to the supreme deity, and had sought refuge in a new city totally unconnected with the past. There he could create an ideal world for himself and for the Aten, a truly 'heretic city' in the eyes of his successors. It was to serve as the king's residence, the administrative centre of
the country, the main place of worship of the Aten, and the burial place for the king, his family and his officials. It was one of the few occasions in ancient Egyptian history when a whole town was purposefully planned and built, thus providing a contemporary idea of the 'ideal' city, although it was Akhenaten's special personal vision. Memphis, some sixteen hundred years earlier, and Alexandria, a thousand years after el-Amarna had been abandoned, were created in a similar way.

The city extended over an area measuring about 7 km (4 miles) north to south, 1 km (1 mile) east to west. It was bisected by a broad road, and its ceremonial and administrative centre contained a huge jubilee-festival palace and the king's house, linked by a bridge over the street which separated them. There were also two large temples of the Aten, offices, archives and other administrative buildings, as well as kitchens and stables. To the north and south of the central city were densely populated residential areas.

Dwellings of rich officials at el-Amarna were more like country villas, with spacious courtyards and gardens; others belonged to master craftsmen and artists. There were further palaces, temples and administrative buildings on the outskirts of Akhetaten, particularly in the north. Here, in an area unpolluted by the noise and smells of the metropolis (the prevailing north winds carried them in a different direction), may have been Akhenaten's main place.

Additional places for the worship of the Aten were situated in the desert near to the city.

A house in the southern suburb belonging to the sculptor Thutmose was found to contain a remarkable collection of sculptures of the royal family, among them the famous bust of Nefertiti (161, 162). This probably served as a prototype for her statues, which perhaps explains her 'blind' eye — there was no need to complete both eyes on a mere model. A group of remarkably realistic faces in plaster from the same sculptor's workshop (163) should probably be seen in the same way. Although the names of a few Amarna artists, such as Bak and Thutmose, are known from inscriptions, most art remained anonymous.

Images of the 'holy family' were everywhere: some private houses contained shrines with representations of the Aten, Akhenaten and Nefertiti, often accompanied by their daughters (see 156). These shrines were reserved for private worship and thus replaced the veneration of house-gods and household spirits in the semi-official religion of old. The two- and three-dimensional representations of the 'holy family' are remarkable for their sympathetic and almost sentimental portrayal — at which other time during Egyptian history could the 'great royal wife' be depicted seated on her husband's knee, or the king joyously kissing his little daughters?

Although the temples at el-Amarna were no longer built of sandstone but of locally quarried limestone, the builders retained the
talatat dimensions of the building blocks. The plans of these temples confirm the evidence provided by remains of the early temples of the Aten at Karnak. They consisted of several large courts separated by pylons. Altars, sometimes surrounded by a large number of smaller offering tables, were placed in these courts and in the sanctuary at the far end of the structure. The courts as well as the central part of the sanctuary were open to the sun. The walls of the temples were decorated with scenes in sunk relief, with subjects similar to those found in the temples of the Aten at Karnak. A block with three antelopes may have been part of a scene showing animal pens belonging to the palace (164). Limestone was better suited to the carving of fine details than the rather coarse sandstone of the Karnak talatat, and this may have contributed to the softening of the line of the reliefs in the later phase of Amarna art.

Large numbers of statues, almost all showing the king and the royal family, and mostly executed in the style which abandoned the extreme caricature of the early years, were placed in the temples at el-Amarna. Images of the king are characterized by the conspicuously long skull, also recorded in reliefs. Statues of Nefertiti and the princesses (165), similarly rendered, were nearly as frequent as those of the king. Sometimes figures were composite, with different parts made of different materials, and inlays were frequently used for eyes and eyebrows. Few statues of private individuals are known, since the royal monopoly on communion with the Aten did not encourage their presence in temples.
Amarna palaces and houses were mostly built of mud brick, although relief decoration carved in stone is also found in the palaces and represents a new departure in their architecture. Practically all the interior walls, ceilings and floors of civil dwellings were whitewashed or plastered, and the decoration was painted on this white background. In private houses, it often consisted of simple geometric patterns, such as alternating rectangles of different colours, floral friezes and complex garlands - lotus flowers, bunches of grapes, cornflowers and the fruits of the mandrake. Palaces contained elaborate mural paintings of daily life, similar to the scenes that occur in Amarna Period temples and tombs. Sometimes these included representations of the royal family (166). Polychrome faience inlays and tiles with repeated vegetal motifs, such as lotus flowers, marigolds and mandrake fruits, were frequently used, but more complex compositions, for example cattle amidst tall rushes, are also found.

Gardens and ponds teeming with aquatic life and birds - a subject known in Egyptian paintings from as early as the Old Kingdom - occur only on palace walls and floors.

The Amarna Period was in no way a retreat into austerity and contemplation of divinity, and many small objects, especially those made of glass and faience, show that the religious zeal that pervaded contemporary thinking did not diminish the desire for luxury and the enjoyment of beautiful things which characterized the preceding period. Extremely beautiful jars and flasks, sometimes in the shape of fish (167), were made of multicoloured glass. Indeed, Egyptian glass manufacture reached its peak during the Amarna Period.

As the final resting place for himself and his family, Akhenaten chose a remote and desolate spot in a desert valley some 10 km (6 miles) east of the central part of the city. There a tomb was cut into the rock, but its decoration, executed in sunk relief, is quite unlike that of the earlier royal tombs. There are no representations showing the pharaoh in the company of gods and no scenes or texts from the Imi-duat, the Book of the Dead or other similar compositions. Instead, the subject matter echoes that of the temples of the Aten: the royal family, accompanied by courtiers and attendants, worship the Aten; the Aten appears over the horizon (perhaps in a visual pun on the name of Akhenaten's city) and is greeted by gazelle and ostriches 'dancing' in the desert as the sacred disc sends its life-giving rays over the bustling city of Akhetaten, where it is hailed by the king and his family. Representatives of foreign lands pay their respects, as do courtiers and soldiers: rows of their chariots wait nearby. Quite unexpected are two scenes which show the royal family in grief, probably mourning the deaths in childbirth of two of Akhenaten's daughters. The tomb would have been made inaccessible once the burials were deposited there, so this was not a public display of emotions. Such a record of tragic events in the life of the royal family is unparalleled in Egyptian art.

Although two groups of officials' and priests' tombs were begun in the cliffs to the northeast and southeast of the central city, most were left unfinished and were probably never used. Tomb architecture was the weakest aspect of Amarna art, not surprisingly in a society in which the brightly shining disc of the sun was the supreme deity. As in the rock-cut tombs at Thebes, these tombs
comprised an entrance corridor leading to one or two halls where the ceiling was often supported by two or four columns, and a centrally situated shrine with a statue of the tomb-owner. Their decoration was executed in sunk relief. The poor quality of the rock forced the artists to resort to an extensive use of plaster in order to make the surface suitable for receiving the reliefs. As in temples, the subject matter drew on scenes of everyday life. Some of these are connected with the tomb-owner, such as scenes in which he is rewarded for his exemplary service by the king before the other members of the royal family and courtiers. The majority of them are, however, similar to those found in temples, and here again are the ubiquitous set scenes with the king and royal family resplendent under the rays of the Aten.

Akhenaten’s religious reform, which for the only time in Egyptian history reversed many of the basic and time-honoured conventions of Egyptian art, did not see out two decades, and the ‘Amarna revolution’ came to an end with the death of its main protagonists. Akhenaten died in his seventeenth regnal year, in 1337 BC. The exact circumstances of the closing chapters of the Amarna Period are not yet fully known. Many modern accounts seem to delight in lurid stories of revenge exacted on the representatives of the Amarna regime and its deity. They tell of Akhenaten’s body ‘torn to pieces and thrown to the dogs’, and of destruction wrought upon Amarna works of art by fanatical supporters of the old gods. These tales are certainly fictions, however, inspired largely by unwarranted comparisons with revolutionary events in modern history.

More often than not, the reign of Akhenaten is portrayed in negative terms. His successors had good reasons for vilifying him because his reforms represented a challenge to their own right to rule, in that they rejected the religious foundations on which the pharaoh’s powers and his relationship to Egyptian society were based. Egyptian priesthood had a similarly vested interest in removing all traces of the Amarna Period. In modern times, Akhenaten is often regarded as an anomaly, a freak who dared to challenge the religious and artistic values that, even in modern Western eyes, embody the spirit of ancient Egypt. He is held up to criticism not least because his mission ultimately failed. There is, however, another less popular but more plausible interpretation, namely that this was the period during which Egypt made a brave attempt to anticipate difficulties ahead and to come to terms with the rapidly changing world by reforming its ideological foundations from within.

The reality of the Amarna aftermath was, remarkably, fairly benign and tolerant, perhaps because the changes were not brought about by an opposing faction that wrested power from the old regime by force. An era of reconciliation and restoration was inaugurated under King Tutankhamun (better known as Tutankhamun, 1336–1327 BC), probably a son of Akhenaten and only a child of about ten or, at most, in his early teens, at the beginning of his reign. The ideas of Akhenaten’s ‘revolution from above’ were gradually abandoned and a return to orthodoxy in all respects was under way. Official Egyptian art followed the same course. Temples and shrines of the traditional deities that had been seriously affected by neglect and sometimes open hostility during the preceding years regained their previous religious and economic status. Their buildings, decoration, statues and other furnishings were restored or replaced, and in this conscious effort was made to return to the earlier artistic conventions. The god Amun, the chief loser during the Amarna years, was the main beneficiary. Tutankhamun’s restoration efforts focused mainly on the temples of Amun at Karnak and Luxor; completely new building projects were few.

In the third year of his reign, in an act which was a reversal of that performed by his father fifteen years earlier, Tutankhamun formally proclaimed his renunciation of the sun-disc doctrine by replacing the ‘Aten’ in his name with ‘Amun’, thus becoming Tutankhamun. The role of the king’s advisers in these moves is difficult to assess, but in view of Tutankhamun’s youth it probably was considerable. The city of el-Amarna was abandoned and the king with his court and officials moved to the old Egyptian capital of Memphis in the
north. Many of the craftsmen and artists who had previously worked under Akhenaten migrated with the court. But, just as a complete eradication of the ideas which the Amarna interlude produced was not possible, so the artistic innovations of the period were not lost altogether. It was here, in the Memphite area, that a very remarkable artistic development was taking place.

Tutankhamun’s Memphis has not yet been rediscovered, but there is plenty of evidence that the necropolis at Saqqara, to the west of the city, was now the focus of activities on a scale not witnessed since the end of the Old Kingdom a millennium earlier. Three things fortuitously combined: firstly, the presence of the court at Memphis and its demand for richly decorated tombs; and secondly, the availability of a large number of immensely skilled tomb-builders and artists who had become redundant as the result of the abandonment of the Amarna projects. Thirdly, the geological conditions at Saqqara rendered the site unsuitable for rock-cut tombs. The form which finally resulted was a masterpiece of Egyptian private tomb architecture, the Memphite freestanding chapel of the post-Amarna Period.

The plan of these Memphite tomb chapels had all the features of the earlier, pre-Amarna, Theban rock-cut tombs, but reinterpreted to suit a freestanding structure as demanded by the local setting. In its simplest form, the chapel consisted of a single room with a stela in its western wall, and in its most elaborate version, the tripartite complex of rooms with a stela at the western end was approached through a pylon and a series of peristyle courts and rooms with stelae and statues. If the visitors lifted their gaze, they could just see the tomb’s small pyramid looming above the western end of the chapel. The mummmified body of the tomb-owner was placed in underground rock-cut rooms. The walls of these tomb-chapels were adorned with exquisite reliefs that subtly combined the Amarna innovations with traditional pre-Amarna representations.

Perhaps the earliest large tomb to be built at Saqqara under Tutankhamun belonged to General Horemhab, whose support for the young ruler was essential. He himself, as an old man, was destined to ascend the Egyptian throne when the Thutmoside line came to an end. He was buried in a tomb on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes in 1295 BC. The reliefs in his Saqqara tomb are a heady and confusing mixture of styles and techniques. The badly damaged and incomplete figures of his royal masters, originally on the western wall of the second court, can only represent Tutankhamun and his queen Ankhesenamun (168). The sensuous but cruelly unflattering portrayal of their young bodies running to fat, clad in diaphanous garments that conceal little, are unmistakably Amarna in style. Elsewhere, the irregularly uneven baseline in the military encampment scenes (169) also betrays the hand of an Amarna-trained artist, but all is executed in raised relief, a technique which was almost unknown under Akhenaten. Sunk relief was, however, used for a scene showing a group of African captives (170). As is to be expected, the figures quite unaffected by the Amarna Period are the representations of deities.

While the king and the court now resided at Memphis, Thebes was once again acknowledged as the country’s religious capital. The most important tomb created there during this period belonged to the viceroy Amenhotep Huy who was governor of gold-bearing Nubia (see 6). Some influence of the preceding Amarna Period is still felt in the tomb’s painted decoration, particularly in the interest in scenes of everyday life and the depiction of the well-fed minor figures, but in the more formal representations of the king the link with the art of Amenhotep III seems closer. It is difficult to escape the impression that in the immediately post-Amarna Period artists at Memphis worked in much more relaxed conditions than their colleagues at Thebes.

Tutankhamun died during the tenth year of his reign when he was only eighteen or, at most, in his mid-twenties (the results of the examination of his mummy were ambiguous). As an ultimate repudiation of his Amarna origin, a tomb was made for him on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes, opposite the Karnak temple of Amun, in the Valley of the Kings. It is the only royal tomb in
Geneva
Herrenshaus
of the future
King
Horemhab
and Sytem
chiefs being
recovered by
Tutankhamun
and his queen,
from his tomb
at Tell el-Daba,
c. 1330 BC.
Painted
limestone;
142 x 256 cm,
40 x 100 in.
Bibliotheca
Vaticanana,
Rome

Military
camp with
of horses,
from General
Horemhab's
tomb at
Tell el-Daba,
c. 1330 BC.
Limestone,
painted sunk
relief;
66 x 127 cm,
26 x 50 in.
Musco Civico
Archaeologico,
Bologna

African
captives,
from General
Horemhab's
tomb at
Tell el-Daba,
c. 1330 BC.
Limestone,
painted sunk
relief;
69 x 86 cm,
27 x 34 in.
Musco Civico
Archaeologico,
Bologna
ancient Egypt, before the royal burials at Tanis several hundred years later, which has been found intact (171–173). The fame of its discovery is forever linked with the names of Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon — in a remarkable story of courage, optimism, romance and sheer bloody-mindedness which, for once, had a happy ending. It would have been difficult to foresee in 1891, when Carter was appointed by the Egypt Exploration Fund to assist Percy E. Newberry in copying tomb-scenes, that some thirty years later he would make the greatest archaeological discovery in Egypt, and possibly in the world. Carter’s archaeological career was far from smooth and nearly came to an end in 1905 when he was forced to resign from his position as Chief Inspector of the Antiquities Service for Lower Egypt for defending the actions of his Egyptian site guards in an altercation with a group of disorderly European tourists. His support for his Egyptian employees
View of the chariot chamber of Tutankhamun's tomb, 1332 BC. As acquired by Howard Carter in 1922. Photograph by Henry Burton.
astonished his contemporaries and still seems to baffle some of his biographers. He was, thus, available when some three years later Lord Carnarvon was looking for an archaeologist to take charge of excavations financed by him on the Theban west bank (and later in other parts of Egypt). However, it was some fourteen years before he made his great discovery.

It came as Carnarvon's patience was running out and funding was at risk. On 5 November 1922 Carter noted in his diary: 'Discovered tomb under tomb of Ramses VI. Investigated same and found seals intact.' He telegraphed Lord Carnarvon, who immediately set out from England for Luxor. On 26 November Carter, Lord Carnavon, his daughter Lady Evelyn and Arthur R Callender, Carter's close collaborator, opened a sealed doorway. Carter later wrote:
I inserted the candle and peered in, Lord Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn and Callender standing anxiously beside me to hear the verdict. At first I could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber causing the candle flame to flicker, but presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold — everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment — an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by — I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, 'Can you see anything?' it was all I could do to get the words, 'Yes, wonderful things.' Then, widening the hole a little further, so that we both could see, we inserted an electric torch.

The tomb of Tutankhamun gives us some idea of the wealth, both artistic and in terms of precious metals, which was deposited in royal tombs of the New Kingdom. There are occasional glimpses of the work of Amarna workshops. On one of the thrones (174, 175), probably dating to the king's early years, the Aten confidently shines over the figures of Tutankhamun and Queen Ankhesenamun. In other pieces, the return to orthodoxy is complete, and there is little to connect Tutankhamun's coffins (176) and gold mask (177) with the art that flourished under Akhenaten. The tomb's most striking contribution to our knowledge of art lies in items which are not attested elsewhere, such as the gold coffins, gold mask and various other objects found on the mummy, and the gold covered shrines (178). There are some unusual sculptures, including one showing Tutankhamun standing on a black leopard (although there is some question as to whether the piece was originally intended for Tutankhamun). An enigmatic 'mannequin'
appears to be one of the rare examples of sculptures in which the human body is not shown in full, but it may have been used for the display of jewellery or garments. There are also statuettes of some rarely attested deities. The tomb was a treasure trove of elegantly designed furniture: chairs (179), beds, couches with grotesque animal heads, chests (180) and boxes, small tables. These pieces can be studied and information about their manufacture can be gathered which mere representations on tomb or temple walls would never be able to provide. Garments preserved in Tutankhamun's tomb have provided some completely new insights, including the type of underwear worn by the king, but perhaps more importantly they display the variety of decorated textiles used in their manufacture. Some of the alabaster vases have such unexpectedly complicated whimsical forms that, for a moment, one wonders whether they belong in an Egyptian setting at all.

Many everyday objects are found in the tomb in highly decorative forms: sandals where the soles bear the figures of captives over which Tutankhamun actually physically trampled (181), walking sticks decorated with foreign foes which the king firmly grasped in his fist, torch-holders in the form of ankh (life) symbols provided with arms, a fan with a beautifully engraved chariot scene, ankh-shaped mirror cases, a trumpet with its bell imitating a lotus flower, and many others. But most of all, it is the variety of unexpected forms and the astonishing accomplishment of the jewellery which fires the imagination (182, 183).
Tuankhnuma’s ‘Painted Box’, showing the king wearing war on the Mediterranean and hunting in the desert, c. 1550 BC. Polished and painted wood; h. 44 cm, l7 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
The wall decoration in the tomb of Tutankhamun (184) is painted, minimal, self-conscious and hesitant, as if the artist responsible was unsure of his task, and it is confined to the four walls of the burial chamber. It contains curious echoes of the royal tomb at el-Amarna, with its scenes of the royal funeral and the Opening the Mouth ceremony performed by Tutankhamun's successor Ay (1327–1323 BC) on the king's mummy. Only one wall displays a scene from the texts of Ipi-duat and so rather shyly demonstrates a return to the former funerary beliefs.

Tutankhamun was the last credible representative of the royal family which ruled from the 'heretic city' of Akhetaten. With his death, the curtain finally fell on the drama of the Amarna Period: the Thutmose line of kings had reached the end of their journey. After the brief reign of the elderly Ay it was Haremhab's task to pick up the pieces of the Egyptian state and continue with the massive task of restoration of the pre-Amarna values. As a sign of his elevation to the royal status, the royal uraeus (cobra) was
added to some of the representations in his existing tomb at
Saqqara. A new large rock-cut tomb was made for him in the
Valley of the Kings on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes and
eventually became his final resting place. At Karnak, three pylons
were worked on simultaneously during Haremhab's reign, while
the structures erected by Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) were disman-
tled and their relief-decorated blocks reused in the pylons' cores.
In Egyptian art, recollections of the excitement and innovation of
the Amarna episode could still be felt, but otherwise the way was
now clear for a new departure. Haremhab can be seen as the first
of a new line of kings, the Ramessides.