

Limestone Stela with a Seated Figure of Akhenaten
The British Museum

Probably from Tell el-Amarna, Egypt
18th Dynasty, around 1340 BC



In the Amarna Period (1390-1327 BC) a major change of emphasis took place in some religious beliefs and in artistic style. This limestone stela illustrates the shift in both these areas of Egyptian life. The king, Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten, reigned 1390-1352 BC), is shown in a relaxed pose, which would have been unthinkable in earlier times, with a protruding chin and belly; he is seated below the disc of the Aten (the sun) whose rays extend down to the king. Each ray terminates in a small hand and symbolizes the manner in which the sun hands its benefits down to the king.

The new beliefs formulated at Tell el-Amarna, and held to a limited extent elsewhere, stressed that Akhenaten was the sole person with access to the Aten. The Aten, Akhenaten believed, was the principal god and the source of all life. Thus, only the royal family is ever shown making offerings to the Aten; private individuals had to direct their devotions through the king. Stelae like this, bearing images of the king, have been found in a number of houses at Tell el-Amarna, and would probably have formed the centre of domestic devotions.

S. Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian religion* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)

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