

Tell el-Amarna (ancient Akhetaten, Egypt)
The British Museum

In the fifth year of his reign, Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, 1352-1336 BC) moved the royal residence to a previously uninhabited site in Middle Egypt. He called the new capital Akhetaten, 'the horizon of the sun-disc', and marked its limits on both banks of the River Nile with a series of boundary stelae.

The central part of the city was occupied by the main religious and administrative buildings. An archive of diplomatic correspondence between the kings of the Amarna period and rulers of the Levant was found in the records office. The official buildings were linked to the outlying palaces by the Royal Road, a wide processional way. The main royal residence was the fortified North Riverside Palace.

The houses and workshops of officials and artisans were located in suburbs around the central city. They cut their tombs in the cliffs to the north and south of the city. Archaeologists have been able to reconstruct the original appearance of palaces and temples from scenes in these tombs.

When Tutankhamun abandoned the city early in his reign, it had been occupied for roughly twenty years. The fact that the city was occupied for such a short time, and was swiftly abandoned, means that its layout and architecture are clearly distinguishable after three and a half millennia.