

PHARAOKS OF THE SUN

Akhenaten Nefertiti Tutankhamen



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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Throughout the history of ancient Egypt, the life, religion, and art of the Egyptian people remained almost the same for over 3000 years. Yet one pharaoh, King Akhenaten (*akh-na-ten*), and his wife, Queen Nefertiti (*nef-er-tee-tee*), decided to change things. In less than 20 years, they brought about drastic changes in religion and the appearance of Egyptian art. They also created a new royal city, known as Amarna.

Before Akhenaten, the ancient Egyptians believed in many gods and goddesses. Each had different powers; they were portrayed as both animals and people. King Akhenaten wanted Egyptians to worship only one god. This was Aten (*a-ten*), the light of the sun. Aten was represented by the sun disk with rays ending in tiny human hands.

Egyptian artists followed certain traditions to create art that showed ideal and lasting images of strength, youth, and peacefulness. King Akhenaten wanted artists to create more relaxed, everyday poses and scenes. Artists were able to explore new ways of portraying Egyptian life, and to show new images from the world around them.

(cover)
Sculpture of Akhenaten (detail)
New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, 1353–1336 B.C.
Yellow stone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, N831

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STELA OF THE ROYAL FAMILY



Stela of the royal family

Probably from Amarna

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, 1353–1336 B.C.

Limestone

Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin 14145

Meet the royal family of King Akhenaten, Queen Nefertiti, and three of their daughters. *What do you see that tells you that two of the people are a king and queen?*

They sit beneath the protective rays of Aten, the sun. Notice the little ankh signs, symbols of life, in the hands of Aten's rays. *Why do you think the sun is holding them?*

Nefertiti was often shown as important as Akhenaten. *What do you see that tells you this? Remember the carving of the family of Pen-meru? In what ways are they different from Akhenaten's family? How has the artist shown this family's affection for each other?*

RELIEF OF AKHENATEN AS A SPHINX

In this carving, King Akhenaten is shown as a sphinx (*sfinks*). A sphinx is a combination of a human head and a lion's body. *What characteristics of a lion might give this king power?*

What other imaginary characters do you know that combine human and animal parts?

If you were a pharaoh, what animal parts would you show on yourself?

King Akhenaten is shown here worshipping the sun. *What part of nature would you worship?*



DRAW HOW YOU WOULD LOOK AS A KING OR QUEEN.

Akhenaten as a sphinx

Probably from Amarna
New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, 1353–1336 B.C.
Limestone
Egyptian Curator's Fund 64.1944



VISIT THE GREEK GALLERIES ON THE FIRST FLOOR TO DISCOVER ANOTHER ANCIENT SPHINX. WHAT OTHER ANIMAL PARTS HAS THE ANCIENT GREEK ARTIST ADDED?