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Limestone relief: Ducks hanging on column.
Egyptian, from el-Amarna, ca. 1350 B.C. Length 21 in.
Arthur Tracy Cabot Fund 62.320

Limestone relief: Bowing figures.
Egyptian, from el-Amarna, ca. 1350 B.C. Length 21 in.
Gift of Schimmel Foundation 62.501

THE THEBAN GOD Amon had by the middle of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty attained supreme rule throughout Egypt, and his temples were the greatest and richest in the land. Amenhotep IV turned his mind from those imperial affairs that had been the concern of his predecessors to questions of religion, and he instigated a complete religious change, removing Amon from his high authority and substituting the Aten, the sun disc, as the source of life and welfare. The young king then changed his own name from Amenhotep to Akhenaten, and rigorously suppressed all references to the god Amon, even to the point of erasing the now hated word from the name of his own father, Amenhotep III. The court was removed to a new capital city, Akhetaten in Middle Egypt, now called el-Amarna, and a Great Temple was erected there to the Aten. The Temple, like the rest of Akhetaten, was completely destroyed after Akhenaten's death, probably by Horemhab, a general who was the first ruler of the 19th Dynasty. A radical reaction took place against the Aten in all its forms, a reaction in every way similar to Akhenaten's own suppression of Amon. The buildings of the Amarna period were constructed of uniformly-sized building blocks of which the two illustrated here are typical examples, and the reliefs were carved after the erection of the blocks.

These blocks give us only tantalizing glimpses of the scenes that must once have covered the walls of the Great Temple or the Palace at Amarna. The ducks hanging like a garland on what appears to be a column are rendered with a wonderful plasticity, accompanied by the flowing, curving lines that are typical of Amarna art. At the right of the fowl is a large figure whose leg is shown under a transparent garment. We know these swags of hanging ducks from elsewhere at Amarna. Several of the tombs of the courtiers cut in the cliffs behind the city are decorated with reliefs including pavilions held up by light columns adorned with duck-swags, and another tomb has an actual column so ornamented. The second relief, generously given to the Museum by the Schimmel Foundation of New York City, shows a kneeling figure bowing low to the ground carved in that quick, sketchy style that is another aspect of Amarna relief sculpture. At the same time, the toes of the larger figure at the right are carefully and fully modelled and have the mannered curves of the period, which in this case suggest a certain naturalism in the pressure of the toes against the ground. The large foot is evidently that of either the king or queen, who is apparently bowing low before the rays of the Aten as on an Amarna stela now in Cairo. The figure on the left and the slight remnant of a similar figure below are courtiers worshipping with the royal personage, and it is possible that there were several more registers above and below. We call attention particularly to the soft, curving forms of these figures, forms that are par excellence typical of the art of the Amarna period.

E. L. B. T.