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**Sunk relief representation of women.** Karnak, Egypt, Dynasty 18, reign of Akhenaten (1363–1347 B.C.), sandstone, h. 8¼ in. (21 cm.), w. 10¼ in. (26 cm.)

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Almost all the monuments in the Egyptian collection that can be dated to the time of the “Heretic King” Akhenaten come from the period when he had abandoned the ancient capital Thebes for his newly founded city Akhetaten (modern Tell el Amarna). It is particularly gratifying, therefore, to be able to add to the group a relief that can be assigned on the basis of its material and style to this king’s early years at Thebes.<sup>1</sup>

Akhenaten spent only the first six or seven years of his reign at Thebes, but in that short time he built at least eight temples and shrines in the sacred precinct of Karnak.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarly interest in these buildings, which were dismantled soon after his death and had been known to us only from the individual surviving stones, has just culminated in the announce-

1. The Karnak buildings were constructed almost entirely in sandstone, the Tell el Amarna buildings of limestone. A Karnak provenance is even more strongly suggested by a comparison of the faces with those on blocks recently found there; see Berlin Ägyptisches Museum, *Nofretete, Echnaton* (Berlin, 1976), no. 22.

2. Donald B. Redford, “Studies on Akhenaten at Thebes,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 10 (1973), 78–79.

ment that the foundations of one of the walls have been located and uncovered.<sup>3</sup> A full understanding of the lost buildings will require many more years of study, but it is not too much to hope that someday we will know in which temple at Karnak, and even on which wall, our new relief was originally placed.

Once part of a much larger scene, the Boston relief preserves the heads and torsos of five young women standing in a row, and the near figure from another row in front of them. Each wears a short round wig with a thick fall of hair on one side, and had an elaborate broad necklace, of which only the rounded line at the neck survives. The beads must have been indicated in paint, which has disappeared. In token of her rank and office, each girl carries a fan, a single large ostrich plume, mounted vertically on a slender pole.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know the names and titles of these women. Although they appear frequently in reliefs of the Amarna Period,<sup>5</sup> they are never identified. But the large scenes that have survived on the walls of tombs at Tell el Amarna invariably show them following closely behind the royal family during visits to the temples and other public appearances.<sup>6</sup> Theirs was an exalted service (unlike other courtiers, they are never shown obsequiously bowing), and like their counterparts in more recent royal courts, they were probably daughters of the highest men of the land. But there is little evidence to support the recent suggestion that they represent the little-known minor wives of Akhenaten.<sup>7</sup> They seem rather to have been ladies-in-waiting, in personal attendance upon the queen and other royal women.<sup>8</sup>

The coarse grain of the sandstone in which the relief is carved imposes a rather simplified style, without a great deal of detail. Much would have been added in paint; traces of blue remain on the wigs. Nevertheless, the faces of the girls, in their variety, reflect the freshness and liveliness of early Amarna Period art. Since they were not members of the royal family, they were spared the distortions that the king, probably in imitation of his own peculiarities, imposed on representations of his immediate kin. The face of the nearest girl in the back row is surely one of the finest minor portraits of the time. Her high forehead, childish full cheeks, short upper lip, and soft little mouth are those of a pretty and very young adolescent, who has just taken her place in an adult world of great events that were to reverberate through history.

Edna R. Russmann

3. *New York Times*, 22 February, 1976, pp. 1, 18. The excavation is being conducted, under American auspices, by Donald Redford. The article illustrates a relief head of Akhenaten, which is the Boston Museum's only other significant monument of the period from Karnak (no. 67.992).

4. The form of the fans, with their graceful papyrus-shaped mountings, can more clearly be seen on other representations: see my note 1 and Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (New York: Brooklyn Museum with Viking Press, 1973), p. 124, no. 44. They were not just for show: the little princesses are shown flailing them clumsily about, in a childish attempt to fan their parents; see Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, vol. 3 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1905), pl. XVIII.

5. See notes 1 and 4 above; also Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, p. 123, no. 43, all from Karnak. From Tell el Amarna: *ibid.*, p. 201, no. 137; Günther Roeder, *Amarna-Reliefs aus Hermopolis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1969), pl. 193, no. PC 143; and the tomb reliefs noted below.

6. Davies, *The Rock Tombs*, 6 vols. (London, 1903-1908), *passim*.

7. R. Krauss in Berlin Ägyptisches Museum, *Nofretete, Echnaton*, text to no. 22. These obscure women, like their presumed sons Smenkhkare and Tutankhaten, seem to have been kept out of sight. Only one, Kiya, is known by name, and possibly in relief representations; see J. R. Harris, "Kiya," *Chronique d'Égypte* 49 (1974), 25-30.

8. Besides accompanying the royal couple, they are shown at Tell el Amarna attending Queen Tiy (Davies, *Rock Tombs*, vol. 3, pl. XVIII), Tiy's daughter Baketaten (*ibid.*, pl. VIII), Nefertiti's sister Mutnodjmet (*ibid.*, vol. 6, pl. II, replacing her usual pair of female dwarfs), and the princesses (*ibid.*, vol. 1, pl. XXV, top; vol. 3, pl. XIII).