

# CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE FOR AN AMENHOTEP III/IV COREGENCY

by Dennis Forbes

**T**he possibility of a coregency between Nebmaatre Amenhotep III and his son/successor, Neferkheperure Amenhotep IV, has been heatedly debated at least since 1933, when it was first proposed by Ludwig Borchardt. The arguments in favor of such a joint rule, for a period of from two to twelve years, has depended by and large on several examples of what can be styled circumstantial evidence. This article presents some dozen of these, in light of the recent discovery in Asasif Tomb 28 of two sets of those rulers' prenomen and nomen cartouches in the exact same context (see Francisco Martin Valentin's article this issue, p. 17).

Of the examples, perhaps the strongest — or at least most difficult to refute by coregency naysayers — is a small pigmented-limestone raised-relief stela from the house of Panhesy at El Amarna and now in the British Museum (57399, detail at right), which depicts a decidedly corpulent Amenhotep III seated (or, more accurately, slouched) beside Great Royal Wife Tiye, with a heavily loaded table of offerings in front of them and the Aten disc overhead, the hand of one of its fourteen rays extending an *ankh* (life) to the king. Cartouches at the top of the stela identify the royal pair and the god, although the king is identified only by his Nebmaatre prenomen, repeated twice, instead of his Amenhotep nomen. The Aten's name is in its late form, suggesting that the stela was carved after Akhenaten's Year 9.

A good portion of Tiye's figure is lost, only her lower face profile, part of a Nubian-style wig, her lower torso and red-pigmented legs remaining. She is seated on a garland-draped armless chair and her sandaled feet rest on a low

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footstool or cushion.

The figure of Amenhotep is largely intact, most of the original pigmentation remaining. He wears the *Khepresh* crown and a large broad-collar. His pleated garment would seem to be sheer (similar to the one he wears in a Metropolitan Museum statuette), his sagging breast and distended abdomen visible through the folds. The king's sandals also rest on a foot support, just lower than Tiye's. His right arm lays along his right thigh, the hand hanging limp beyond the knee; his left hand may be draped across his spouse's lap (although the thumb position for a left hand is wrong).

Anti-cogregency scholars have argued that the Panhesy stela is a posthumous depiction of the king, a cult object used in the worship of the deceased Nebmaatre. This seems highly unlikely, inasmuch as Tiye was definitely living well into Akhenaten's residency at Akhetaten (which began in Year 8 of his reign), and it would be totally bizarre to depict her casually intimate with a dead husband in what appears to be a domestic setting. Rather, the stela most probably was carved on the occasion of the deified Nebmaatre's visit to El Amarna, which would seem to be recorded in an-

rather in greeting to him, fully alive, after his arrival at Akhetaten, for a visit to his coregent and other family members. Because the scene is in the tomb of Tiye's employee, it is highly probable that she is set apart from her husband in order to indicate her prominence and due importance.



**A**nother evidence of Amenhotep III's presence at Akhetaten is a pigmented sunk-relief *talatat* in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum (above, Author's photo) that would seem to come from a scene with the king represented wearing the *shebyu* collar that was part of

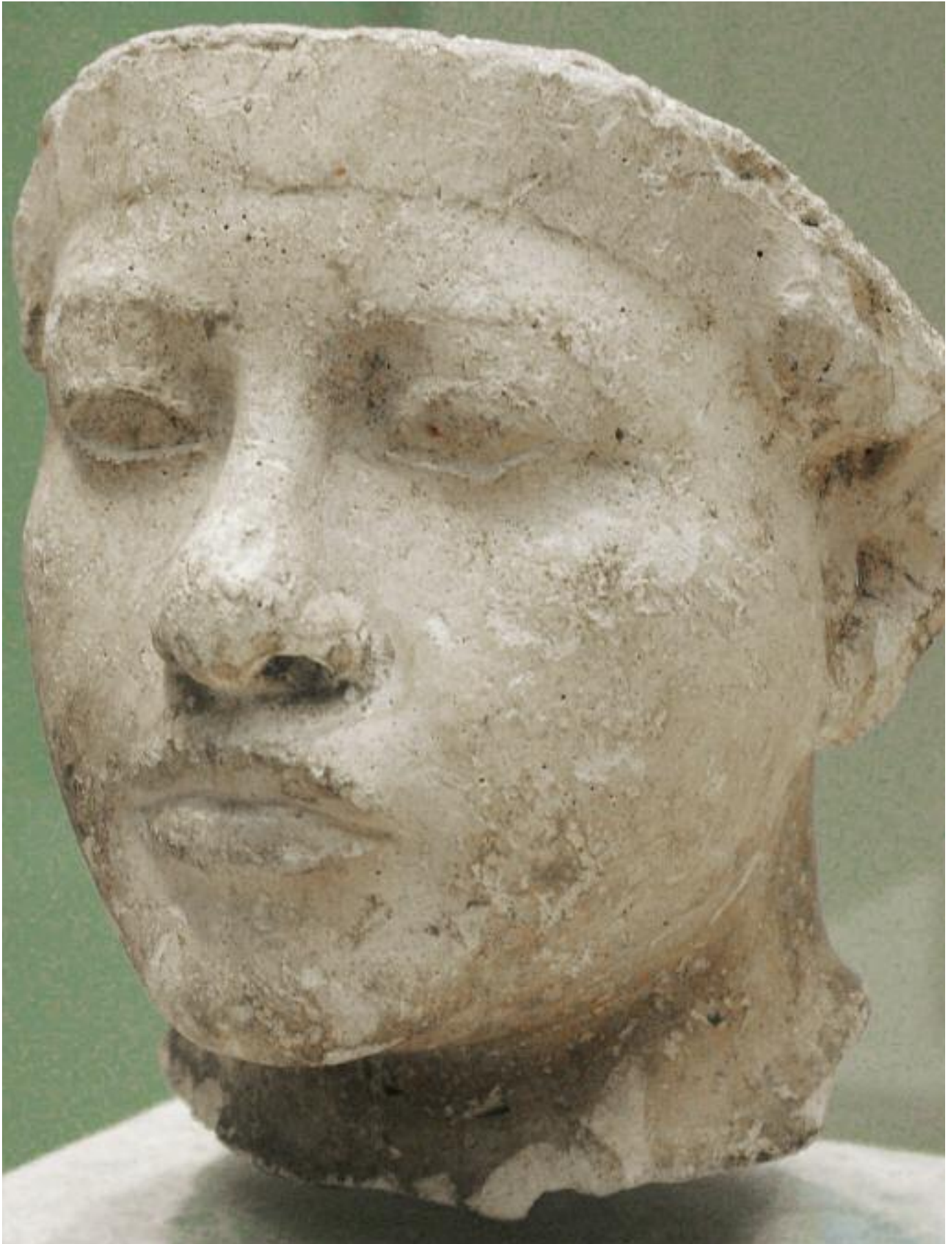


other context.

**T**his would be a relief scene (drawing above, after Norman Davies) on a lintel in the El Amarna Tomb of Huya, steward of Great Royal Wife Tiye at Akhetaten. Balancing a companion scene of seated Akhenaten and Nefertiti greeting four of their daughters, the composition in question shows seated Tiye and her standing daughter, Baketaten, facing a seated Amenhotep III (although both of his identifying cartouches have been erased), the Aten shining on the grouping, *ankhs* being extended to both the king and his spouse. While this almost certainly records the occasion of the visit of Nebmaatre to Akhetaten, scholars debunking a coregency have argued that the king is deceased in the scene, as evidenced by his separation from Tiye and Baketaten. Rather it seems wholly unlikely that mother's and daughter's hands are raised in adoration of Amenhotep's ghost, but

the regalia he affected following his deification as a moon-deity, Nebmaatre, in Year 30, during his first Heb-Sed. That this depicts Amenhotep III rather than Akhenaten is further evidenced by the shortness and thickness of the neck, rather than the long, thin, arching neck that the latter king is typically shown with in El Amarna reliefs.

**A** fourth evidence of Amenhotep III's presence at Akhetaten is a plaster head found in the workshop of the sculptor Thutmose there (opposite, photo by Aidan Dodson) and today in the collection of the Berlin Egyptian Museum (AM 21299). Although always included along with the numerous plaster "mask" studies found at the same site, this under-life-size representation of a chubby-faced, thick-necked king (judging from the indicated head-band) is a cast of a stone statue head in the round. That it is





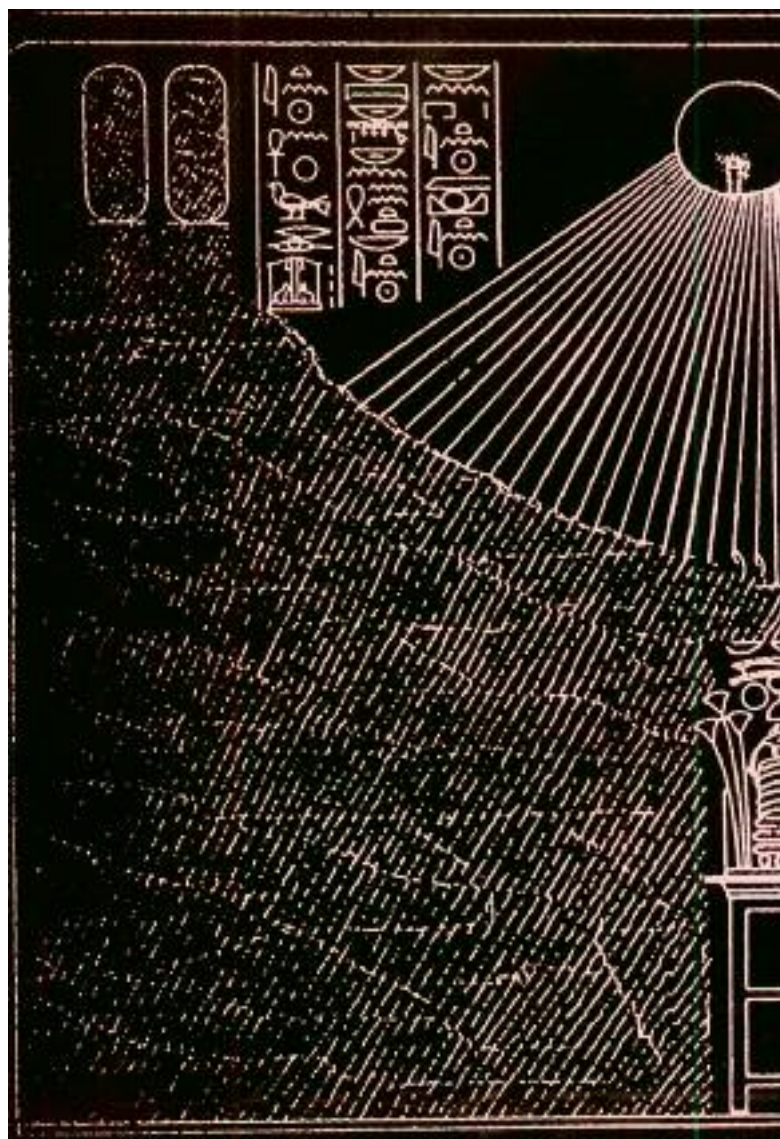
almost always identified as representing Amenhotep III later in life is probably correct (since it clearly doesn't depict another of the kingly personalities of the time: Akhenaten, Neferneferuaten, Smenkhkare, Meritaten or Tutankhaten). But why a study of the sculpted head of Nebmaatre Amenhotep III in the Thutmose workshop, if not to create his likeness(es) for display in the Aten capital on the occasion of the elder



king's state visit there?

Perhaps a depiction of Amenhotep III together with his coregent at that time is an unfinished stela from El Amarna and now in the Berlin Egyptian Museum collection (above) which shows two kings facing one another, one seated and holding a goblet, the other standing and pouring wine into the other's drinking vessel. The seated king, wearing the *nemes* royal head-covering, is shown to a slightly larger scale, suggesting his seniority. The standing king wears the tallish version of the *Khepri* crown favored by Akhenaten. Some scholars have interpreted the anonymous pair as Akhenaten (seated) and his putative coregent, Smenkhkare; while others would prefer them to be Akhenaten attended by his more likely coregent, Neferneferuaten (Nefertiti). But an Amenhotep III/Akhenaten identification is equally plausible.

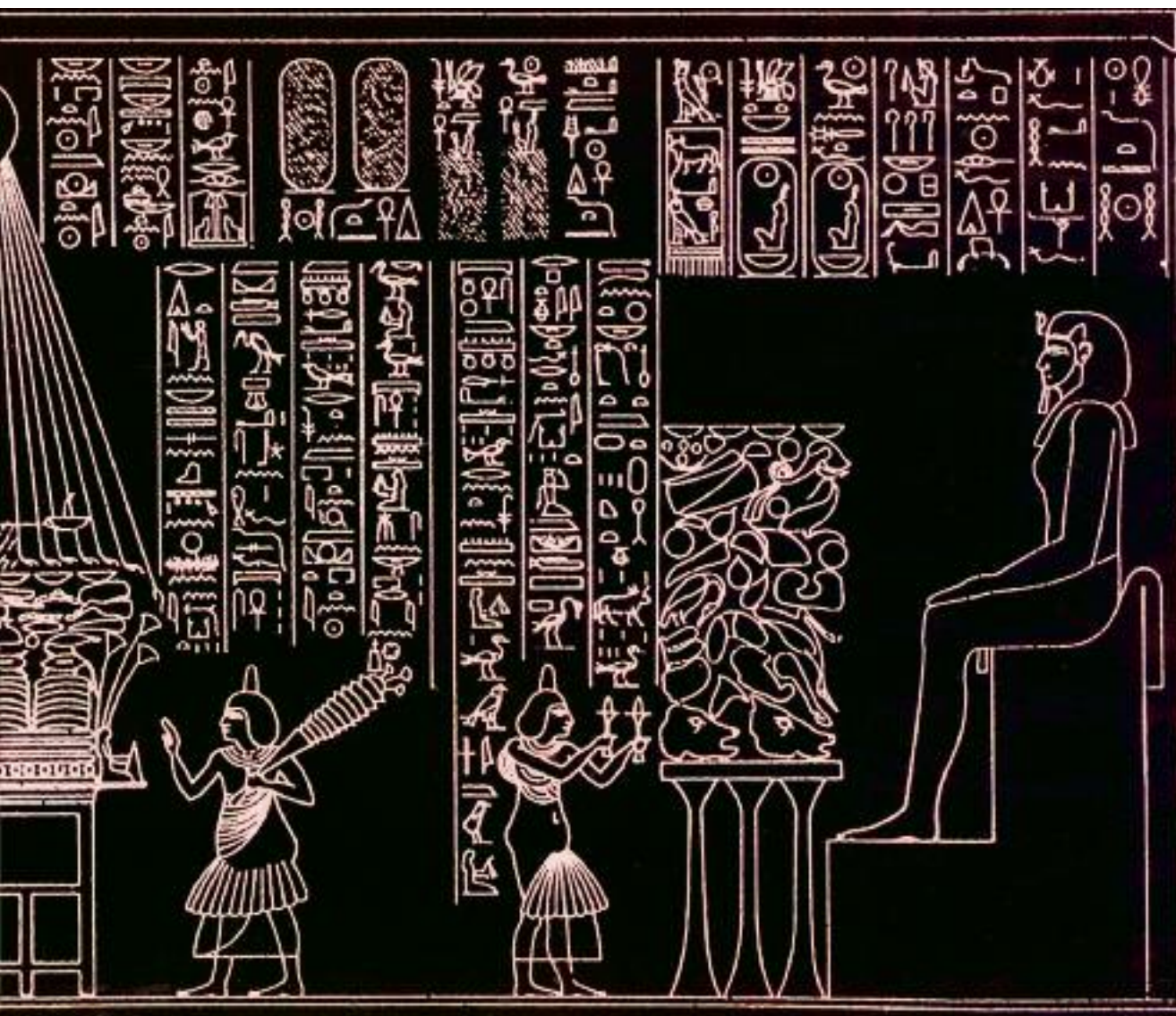
Amenhoteps III and IV are represented mutually on a private monument of father/son royal sculptors Min and Bek at Aswan. Unfortunately this open-air relief, carved on a boulder near the Old Cataract Hotel, has been



greatly damaged by drainage pollution, but was drawn by Auguste Mariette in the Nineteenth Century (adaptation above right). Min, who was probably responsible for the several colossi of Amenhotep III that decorated his memorial temple (modern-day Kom el Hettan, see p. 50 this issue), is shown offering to a representation of such a seated colossus. Balancing this is a representation of son Bek likewise offering to an erased depiction of Amenhotep IV (his cartouches also hacked out in antiquity), under the protective rays of the Aten. This private joint-memorial was most likely carved late in the prospective Amenhotep III/VI coregency, as both father and son sculptors are shown with physiques in the exaggerated Amarna style.

Another circumstantial evidence for an Amenhotep III/Amenhotep IV simultaneous rule can be found on the mostly gone Third Pylon at Karnak (bottom opposite, Author's photo). On the right-hand (northern) wing is a sunk-relief depiction of Amenhotep III standing aboard a sacred barque, offering to a deity shrine. Immediately behind the king is a somewhat-smaller figure of a

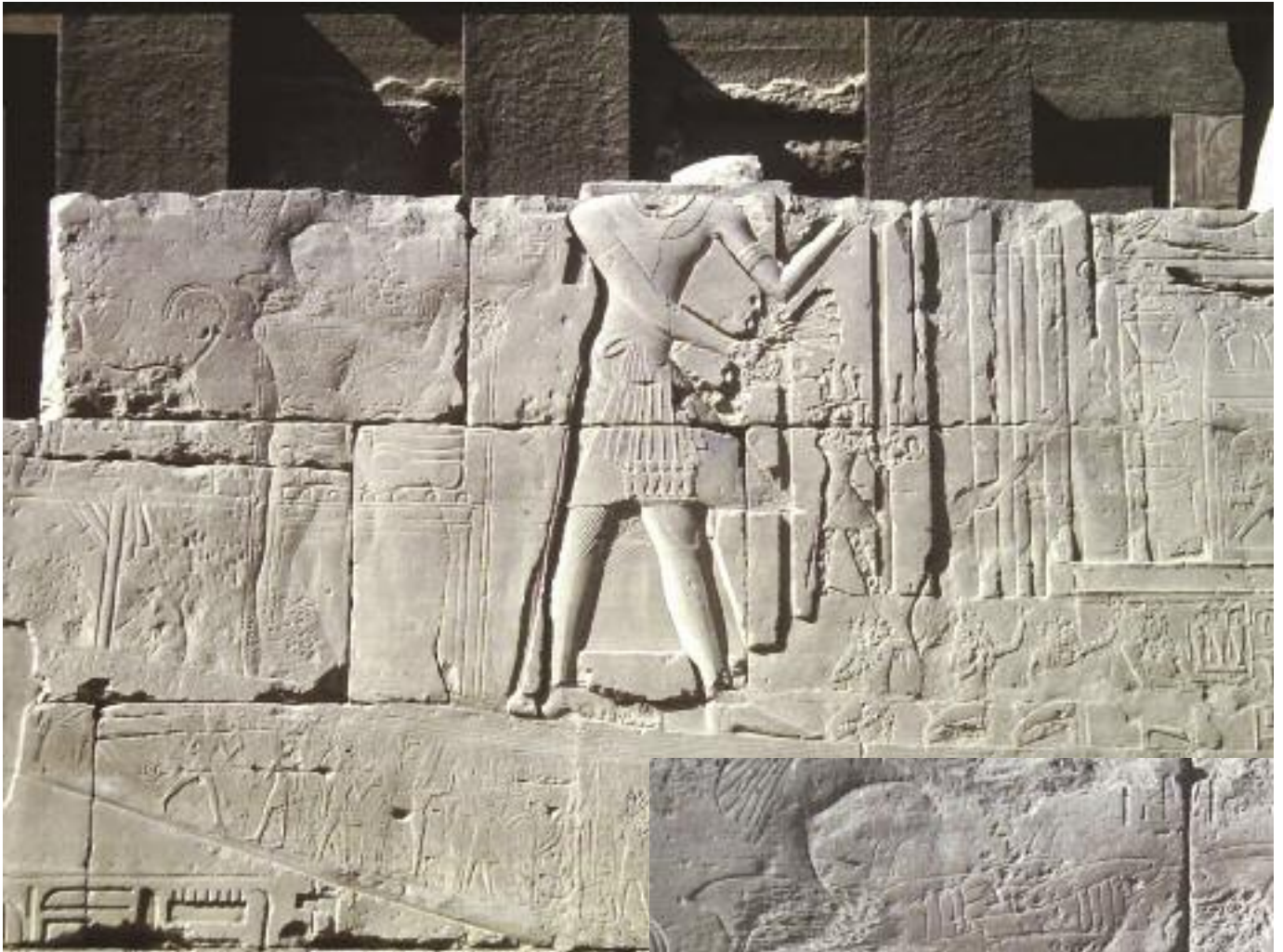




*Adaptation of August Mariette's drawing of the Min & Bek joint-monument at Aswan, recording the father-son sculptors' service to two kings, Amenhotep III & Amenhotep IV. The reliefs are greatly damaged today.*



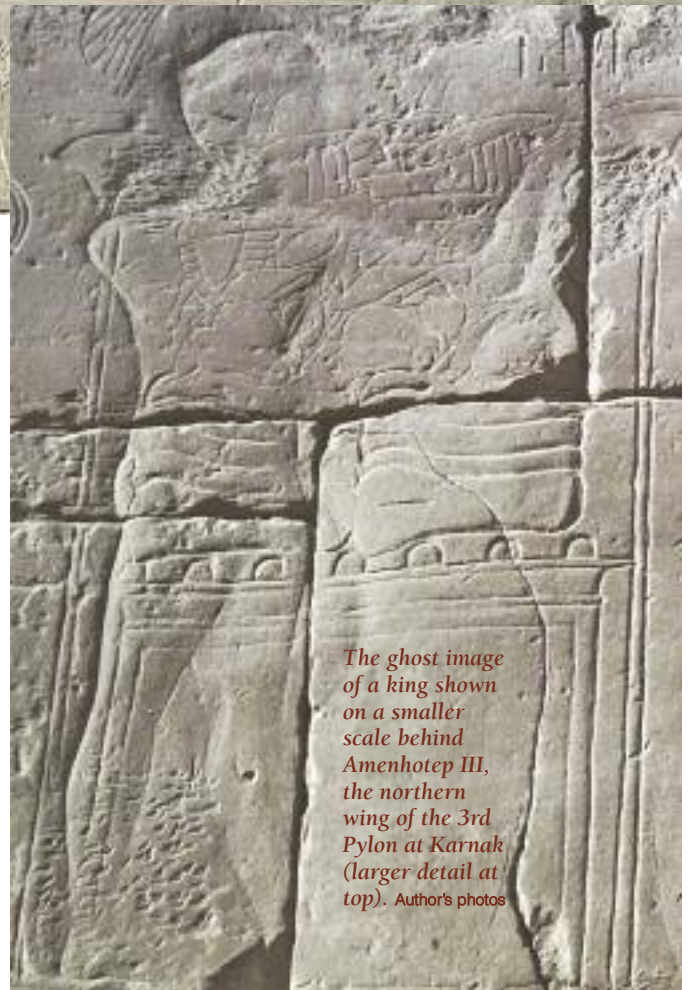




standing king (wearing the *Khepresh* crown), also originally in sunk relief, but then cut back and mostly erased, the area subsequently recarved with an offering table. The identity of this phantom second king has been debated, some commentators favoring Tutankhamen, depicted in the post-Amarna style affected by that king's artists. But then, why the erasure? The act of agents of Horemheb (who tended to favor usurpation of Tutankhamen's images) or the early Ramessides?

It seems more reasonable that the second king depicted was not a later addition to the pylon scene (Tutankhamen), but rather represented Neferkheperure Amenhotep IV in the early years of the coregency with his father, when his personal style was evolving from that of Amenhotep III's artists towards the radical royal-depictions of the first decade-plus of the Amarna period. The squattish *Khepresh* is of the sort favored by Amenhotep III, and the smaller scale of the figure would have been appropriate to the junior status of Neferkheperure in the joint-rule arrangement. Of course, any convenient public representation of the "heretic" would have been eliminated in the post-Amarna rewrite.

But Neferkheperure was also depicted on the Third Pylon in a scale that would've been all but impossible to obliterate. On the southern (left) wing of the gateway, the king is shown, monumentally in deep sunk-relief, in the tradi-



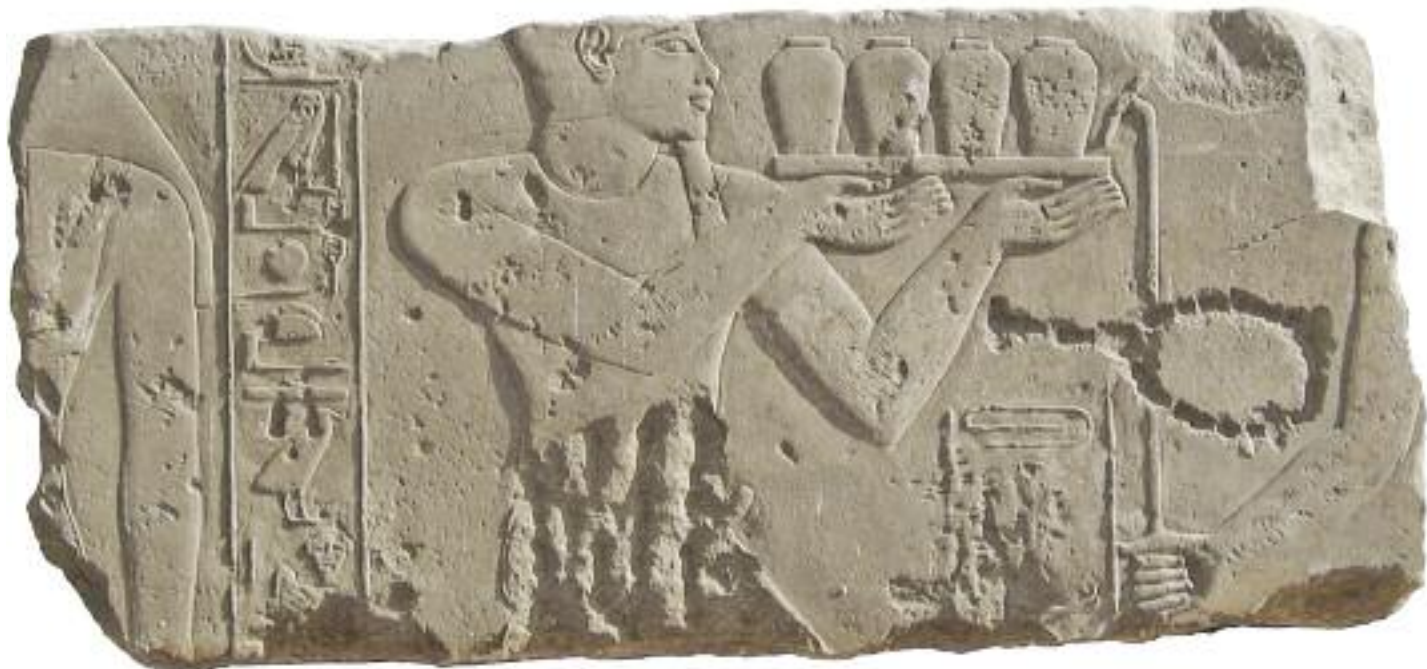
*The ghost image of a king shown on a smaller scale behind Amenhotep III, the northern wing of the 3rd Pylon at Karnak (larger detail at top). Author's photos*



*The Karnak Third Pylon scene of Amenhotep IV smiting foreign foes, on recovered & re-assembled blocks in the Open Air Museum.*







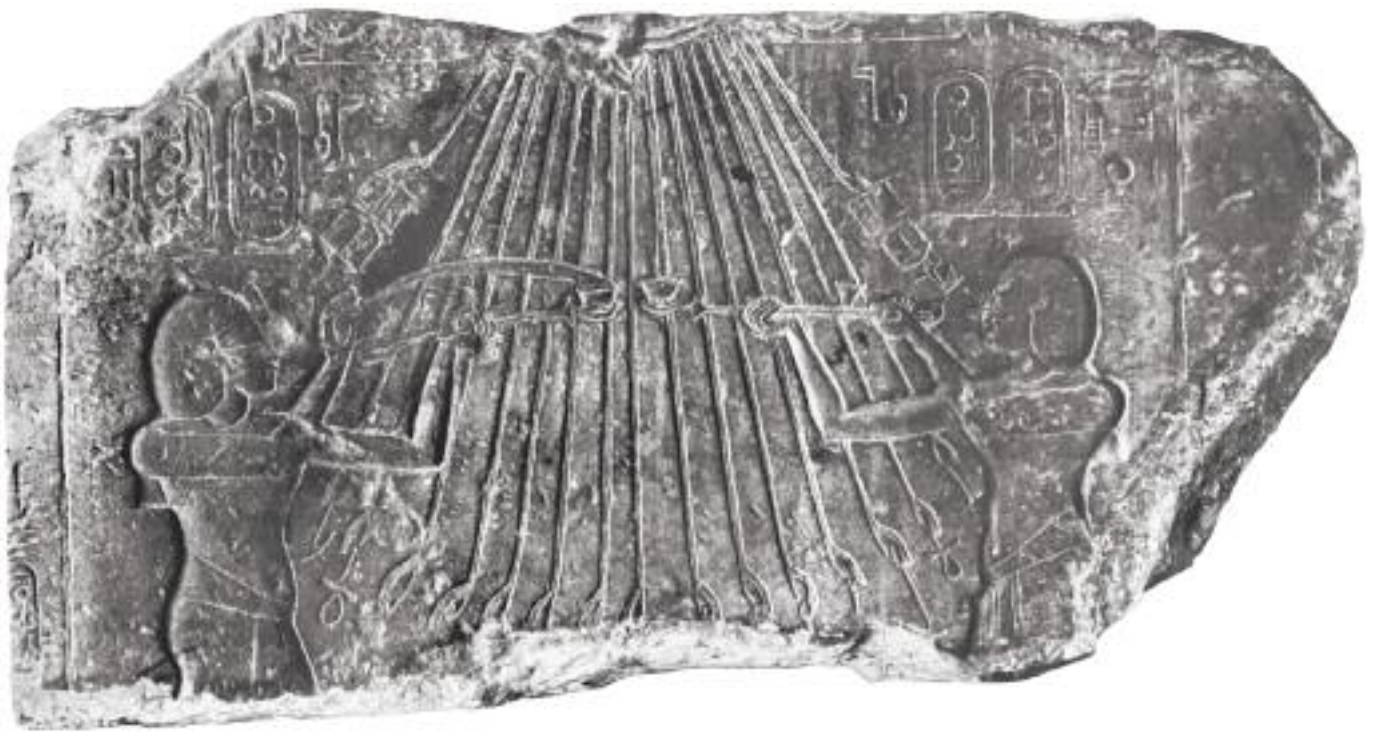
tional act of smitting foreign foes, as represented today by a section of dismantled Third Pylon blocks reassembled and displayed in the Karnak Open Air Museum (previous page, Author's photo). It is highly improbable — if he was consumed with defining and refining perimeters of his new deity, following the death of his predecessor — that Neferkheperure would have expended the considerable time and expense to have himself portrayed on a grand scale in a kingly role of the sort he was definitely turning his back on. It is more likely that co-ruler Amenhotep III allotted decoration of that half of the Third Pylon to his son and ultimate successor.

**T**hree individual sandstone blocks from Karnak-area monuments dismantled in antiquity also are evidence that Amenhotep IV Neferkheperure was represented early on in the style of the last part of Amenhotep III's reign. One of these (above, photo by W. Raymond Johnson), from a demolished Temple of Re-Horakhty, shows him in raised relief with a thick neck and snub nose, offering to a deity (probably the sun god).

Two others were found in the Tenth Pylon as filler. One (at right, photo by Aidan Dodson), now in the Berlin Egyptian Museum collection, probably also from the same Re-Horakhty edifice, in well-cut raised relief, shows that hawk-headed god, sun disc on his head, on the left in one scene and Neferkheperure in a different scene on the right, separated by a vertical band of text including the king's prenomen. Here he is also shown in the Amenhotep III late style, wearing the *Khepresh* helmet-crown. Above the king's head is the earliest surviving representation of the Aten, as a sun disk with three *ankhs* radiating from it and two protective uraei, with an *ankh* suspended from each of their necks, as well. The other block (top right, opposite page), also in











Berlin, reveals a further development of the Aten iconography, the deity now shown as a sun disc with long rays ending in hands holding *ankhs* and *was* scepters, and flanked by its name in cartouches. Here Neferkheperure, represented twice, censures his god. His accompanying nomen reflects the change from “Amenhotep” to “Akhenaten.” The sunk-relief style reflects the beginnings of the distinct alterations in depicting the king: while not yet having the radical anatomy seen in the Karnak Aten Temple reliefs, Neferkheperure’s chin is shown here as heavy, his belly low-slung and the buttocks prominent.

**T**wo private tombs in the Theban necropolis on the Luxor west bank are the final circumstantial evidences for an AIII/AIV long coregency. One, TT192, is the Tomb of Kheruef, steward of Great Royal Wife Tiye, and is famous







for its elegant relief depictions of the various events of Nebmaatre Amenhotep's First and Third Heb-Sed celebrations. But it is also noteworthy for its inclusion of four images and accompanying cartouches of Neferkheperure Amenhotep IV, shown in the art style of his father, strongly suggesting that he was co-ruler at the time of the First Heb-Sed. On a lintel (above, adapted from the Epigraphic Survey drawing) the junior king is depicted twice (both times accompanied by his mother, Tiye), in one instance offering to Amen-Re and Hathor (Epigraphic Survey photo-detail at left), in the other to Re-Horakhty and Maat. In a larger scene (inset, opposite page, adapted from the Epigraphic Survey drawing) Neferkheperure is seen back to back (both images hacked out), on the left offering to Re-Horakhty and on the right to Nebmaatre (who is accompanied by royal spouse Tiye). Coregency naysayers would have Nebmaatre deceased in this









instance, despite the fact that the obviously still-living Tiye is shown clasping her husband's wrist. Neferkheperure would not be offering to a ghost in this instance (nor even to a statue), but rather to the living deity Nebmaatre.

The second tomb, TT55, is that of Vizier Ramose, and is unique in that it depicts Neferkheperure Amenhotep IV in the elegant raised-relief style of the third Amenhotep, shown on a large scale enthroned within a pavilion and accompanied by the goddess Maat (opposite page, archival photo); and in a parallel scene (above, archival photo) is the first instance of a Window of Appearances depiction of the same king, now Akhenaten, accompanied by his Great Royal

Wife, Nefertiti, both under the protective descending rays of the Aten. The raised-relief carving is in the radical style seen at the Karnak Aten temple and, later, at El Amarna. Thus, in TT55, it is likely that Neferkheperure Amenhotep/Akhenaten is shown early in the coregency and again perhaps at the beginning of his sole reign.

One or even a couple-three of these cited examples might be dismissed out of hand as lacking proof of anything; but so many (over a dozen) examples surely are arguments that an Amenhotep III/ Amenhotep IV coregency is not only likely but rather very probable, even without the newly discovered "smoking gun" in Asasif Tomb 28.