



The Great Aten
The God and Disk of the Sun

In connection with the Sun-gods of Egypt and with their various forms which were worshipped in that country must be considered the meager facts which we possess concerning Aten, who appears to have represented both the god or spirit of the sun, and the solar disk itself. The origin of this god is wholly obscure, and nearly all that is known about him under the Middle Empire is that he was a small provincial form of the Sun-god which was worshipped in one little town in the neighborhood of Heliopolis, and it is possible that a temple was built in his honor, in Heliopolis itself. It is idle to attempt to describe the attributes which were originally ascribed to him under the Middle or Early Empire, because the texts which were written before the XXIIIrd Dynasty give us no information on the subject. Under the XVIIIth Dynasty, and especially during the reigns of Amen-Ra-Heru-khuti, Horus, etc. but it does not follow that they originally belonged to him. In the Theban Recension of the Book of the Dead, which is based upon Heliopolitan, we find Aten mentioned by the deceased thus:—"Thou, O Ra, shinest from the horizon of heaven, and Aten is adored when he resteth {or setteth} upon this mountain to give life to the two lands. Hunefer says Ra, Hail, Aten, thou the lord of beams of light, {when} thou shinest all faces {i.e., everybody} lives. Nekht says Ra, O thou beautiful being, thou doest renew thyself and make thyself young again under the form of Aten; Ani says Ra, Thou turnest thy face towards the Underworld, and thou makest the earth to shine like fine copper. The dead rise up to thee, they breath the air and they look upon thy face when Aten shineth in the horizon;-----I have come before thee that I may be with thee to behold thy Aten daily: O thou who art in thine Egg, who shinest from thy Aten," etc.

These passages show that Aten, at the time when the hymns from which they are taken were composed, was regarded as the material body of the sun wherein dwelt the god Ra, and that he represented merely the solar disk and was visible emblem of the great Sun-god. In later times, coming to protection afforded to him by Amen-hetep III, the great warrior and hunter of the XVIIIth Dynasty, other views were promulgated concerning Aten, and he became the cause of one the greatest religious and social revolutions which ever convulsed Egypt. After the expulsion of Hyksos, Amen, the local god of Thebes

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The sun disc Aten was deified by Akhenaten and became the sole god of his reign. Aten was the giver of all life. Aten only spoke through the Pharaoh. The principle cult site of Aten was at Akhetaten (Tell el Amarna), although there was a temple built at Karnak and in some other cities. Akhetaten was purpose-built on a new site for the capital of Akhenaten.

It is unknown whether Akhenaten was trying to revive the cult of Re or he was using the change of religion to counter the influence of the cults of Amun. However, he seemed to personally devote himself to the religion, writing several hymns to the Aten that are still beautiful when read today.

As the temples of Amun and the other gods of Egypt were economic centers of exchange and tax collection, the change to a single god with only one head priest, Akhenaten, who sequestered himself at a new and distant city, was destined to fail for economic reasons alone.

The Egyptian pantheon of gods were in human or animal form or as part human part animal figures. The sun god Aten was one of these gods and had grown in importance during the New Kingdom. Akhenaten raised Aten to the position of sole god, bringing monotheism to Egypt. He and his family are frequently shown worshipping Aten by reaching out to him. Aten's rays radiate out resolving into hands holding the ankh, the symbol for life. Depictions of the royal family show them invariably under the rays of Aten.

Akhenaten's primary wife was Nefertiti with whom he had six daughters. He had other wives, including Kiya, probably the mother of the famous Tutankhamun.

URL: <http://www.egyptianmyths.net/ankh.htm..>
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MEANING: WHILE THE ORIGINS OF THE ANKH MAY BE OBSCURE, THE MEANING IS CERTAINLY CLEAR - "LIFE". IT IS WITH THIS BASIC CONNOTATION THAT THE SIGN IS CARRIED IN THE HANDS OF MANY EGYPTIAN DEITIES.

THE ANKH MAY REPRESENT THE LIFE-GIVING ELEMENTS OF AIR AND WATER. IT WAS OFTEN SHOWN BEING OFFERED TO THE KING'S LIPS AS A SYMBOL OF THE "BREATH OF LIFE." ANTHROPOMORPHIC PICTURES OF THE ANKH SOMETIMES SHOW IT HOLDING AN OSTRICH-FEATHER FAN BEHIND THE PHARAOH IN A VARIANT FORM OF THIS IDEA SIMILARLY, CHAINS OF ANKHS WERE SHOWN Poured OUT OF WATER VESSELS OVER THE KING AS A SYMBOL OF THE REGENERATING POWER OF WATER. LIBATION VESSELS WHICH HELD THE WATER USED IN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES WERE THEMSELVES SOMETIMES PRODUCED IN THE SHAPE OF THE ANKH HIEROGLYP

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At the most physical level, the ankh is representative of male and female, the phallus and the gates of life. Acting in combination they create life. Birth and death are the same thing, viewed from different angles. Life and death are two sides of the same portal. There is no difference between them except the level of manifestation.

The cross is a loop, an endless symbol of eternity, the cycle of life. It could also represent the sun, the moon. Perhaps both, signifying the alternating polarity in all things as they ascend the planes. It is balanced polarity, equilibrium. Not static, but dynamic balance, constantly shifting to maintain a delicate poise that is both eternally in movement, but perfectly stable.

It is a circuit of force that flows from the divine to the mundane, from the male to the female, positive to negative, receptive to dynamic, life to death to rebirth. All are manifestations of the same force, reflected at different levels across the dividing line of manifestation

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Preface :

"Adoration of Re-Horakhty-who-rejoices-in-the-lightland,
In-his-name-Shu-who-is-the-Aten, living forever ;
the great living Aten, who is in jubilee,
Lord of all that the Disk surrounds,
Lord of the Sky, Lord of the Earth,
Lord of the House-of-the-Aten in Akhet-Aten.

Adoration of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
who lives by Maat, the Lord of the Two Lands,
Nefér-kheperu-Re, Sole-one-of-Re,
the Son of Re who lives by Maat, Lord of Crowns,
Akhenaten, great in his lifetime
and of the beloved great Queen,
Lady of the Two Lands : Nefér-nefru-Aten Nefertiti,
who lives in health and youth forever !

The Vizier,
the Fanbearer on the right of the King (...)
he says :

The Hymn :

I) THE ATEN AS RE WITH HIS COURSE

morning beauty

1 Splendid You rise in the lightland of the sky,
2 O living Aten, creator of life !
3 You have dawned in the eastern lightland.
4 You fill every land with your beauty.

noon dominion

5 You are beautiful, mighty & radiant.
6 Risen high over every land,

7 your rays embrace the lands,
to the limit of all that You made.
8 Being Re, You reach their end.
9 You bend them for your beloved son.
10 Though You are far, your rays are on Earth.
11 Though seen by them, your course is unknown.

night chaos

12 When You set in the western lightland,
13 Earth is in darkness, as if death.
14 The sleepers are in their chambers, heads covered,
no eye seeing the other.
15 One could steal their goods from under their heads,
they would not notice it.
16 Every lion comes from its den.
The serpents bite.
17 Darkness hovers, Earth is silent.
18 For its creator rests in the lightland.

dawn rebirth

19 At dawn You have risen in the lightland.
20 To shine as the Aten of daytime !
21 You dispel the dark and cast your rays.
22 The Two Lands celebrate daily.
23 Awake they stand on their feet.
You have made them get up.
24 They wash and dress, their arms raised
in adoration to your appearance.
25 The entire land sets out to work.
26 All cattle are satisfied with their fodder.
The trees and the grass become green.
27 Birds fly from their nests, their wings praising your Ka.
28 All game animals frisk on their hooves, all that fly and flutter,
29 live when You dawn for them.
30 Ships fare downstream and back upstream,
roads lie open when You rise.