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**ATENISM – THE BIRTH OF MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS
IN ANCIENT EGYPT AROUND 1350 BC?
AKHENATEN, MOSES, THE SUN AND THE STORY OF SINUHE**

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For more than 75 years, scientists and historians have been working on a theory (of some researchers called a conspiracy theory) that an Egyptian pharaoh invented God more than 3,300 years ago. If the theory would hold water, it could question the foundations of several world religions. Even today in 2018. This article will focus on Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), his religion Atenism and his motive for the first documented implementation of a monotheistic religion in the world. 1) Was it a political strategy to adopt Aton as the supreme God? 2) Did it influence or even invent the Hebrew Religion? 3) Was it a spiritual vision? 4) Was it to outstrip the powers of the priests of Amon? or 5) Was it close encounters of the fourth degree with aliens from the universe? In addition, the relations between the Hebrew religions, here especially Moses, and the Atenism is of great importance to the analysis and all considerations lead to a possible answer of the question: was it the birth of monotheistic religions in this period of Ancient Egypt's history?

Keywords: Akhenaten, Monotheistic Religion, Aton, Moses, Hebrew Religion, Pharaoh, Egypt, Atenism, Polytheistic Religion, Ra, Amenhotep III, the Sun, the story of Sinuhe, Amenhotep IV, Alien Theorists, Sigmund Freud, Mika Waltari.

**АТЕНИЗМ – РОЖДЕНИЕ МОНОТЕИСТИЧЕСКИХ РЕЛИГИЙ
В ДРЕВНЕМ ЕГИПТЕ ОК. 1350 Г. ДО Н.Э.?
ЭХНАТОН, МОИСЕЙ, СОЛНЦЕ И СКАЗАНИЕ СИНУХЕ**

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Более 75 лет ученые и историки работали над теорией (которую некоторые исследователи называли конспиративной), что египетский фараон «изобрел» Бога более 3300 лет назад. Если бы теория была правдивой, тогда

даже сегодня, в 2018 году, возник бы вопрос об основании нескольких мировых религий. Статья уделяет основное внимание Эхнатону (так же известному как Аменхотеп IV), его религии – атонизму и его основной идее первого задокументированного внедрения монотеистической религии в мире. Было ли признание бога Атона единым богом политической стратегией? Это повлияло или даже явилось основой иудаизма? Это было религиозное видение? Это было сделано, чтобы превзойти власть жрецов Амона? Или это был контакт с инопланетянами? Кроме того, связь между иудейской религией – особенно Моисеем и атонизмом, является важной составляющей анализа, и все выводы приводят к возможному ответу на вопрос о вероятности зарождения монотеистических религий в Древнем Египте.

Ключевые слова: Эхнатон, монотеистическая религия, Атон, Моисей, Иудаизм, Фараон, Египет, Атонизм, политеистическая религия, Ра, Аменхотеп III, Солнце, Сказание Синухе, Аменхотеп IV, теоретики пришельцев, Зигмунд Фрейд, Мика Валтари.

In the 1800s archaeologists and Egyptologists found the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten and in the beginning of the 1900s they found the presumed body of the then Pharaoh and ruler of Egypt around 1350 BC, Amenhotep IV. He was found near the tomb of his son, King Tutankhamun, and after more than 3,000 years of oblivion, Amenhotep IV became known again.

The Egyptian religion itself had an origin because Egypt was not always an organized civilization that involved cities and writing. The aspects of ancient Egyptian culture developed slowly from a simpler tribal-based culture. It was probably around 3,500 to 3,000 BC that the Egyptians developed writing and from this complex religious beliefs could be developed. However, even before they had writing, they still had religious beliefs, and at that time, their beliefs were probably in many ways similar to other tribal societies.

It is probably safe to say that all cultures began with some form of polytheism. Every early society needed deities to explain all kinds of phenomena, including the

weather, fertility, food, wine, war, the sun, love, etc. These early people had a need to explain different aspects of their lives and for everything that needed to be explained, they could create a god for it.

For most of its recorded history Egyptian religion was polytheistic. They had many gods, including Bastet, Isis, Osiris, Amun, Ra, etc. The deity that was considered the greatest changed several times over the centuries and was usually determined by the decisions of the ruling pharaoh and the priests who supported him or her and gave legitimacy to their rule. At one point, perhaps during the old kingdom (the time of the pyramids – around 2500 BC), the main god was Ptah. The name “Egypt” actually means “The estate of Ptah”. Later, different groups of Egyptians considered the gods Amun and Ra. By about 1400 BC, the main god was Amun-Ra, which was a combination of the older gods Amun and Ra. This god was always depicted with a sun disk over his head. This depiction of the sun was known as Aton.

Akhenaten, Akhetaten and Louis XIV

In the glorious 18th Dynasty of Egypt, when the country was a world power with borders from Turkey to Sudan, a young Pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, ascended the throne around 1353 BC and reigned over the empire in 17 years. This expanding empire was threatened on every frontier and when Amenhotep III and his son Amenhotep IV came to power, they were not much given to the pursuit of war and were prepared to let the empire fend for itself. Amenhotep IV decided to initiate a war against the gods of Egypt to distract his people from the troubles that the empire was facing politically. In the beginning of his reign, among other countries in the Levant, Syria was subject to Egyptian supremacy. The capital of Thebes flourished and so did the power of the Egyptian priesthood. In Thebes the Priests were in charge and required influence on the country's policy. Egyptian religion was polytheistic at that time. The Egyptian people were used to several gods and some of the gods were even very profitable for the Egyptian priesthood. For instance, the priests of Osiris grew popular with wealthy people, to whom they offered the possibility of immortal life in return for money [10, p. 24].

However, an interesting change in the Egyptian religion happened around the year 1350 BC that changed Egyptian society for a short time but seems to have had a much more lasting effect on other cultures in the Middle East. In the 5th year of his reign, the pharaoh Amenhotep IV, meaning, “Amun rests”, later rebaptized Akhenaten, meaning, “Aton is satisfied”, decided that Egypt should become monotheistic. Instead of having so many gods including Amun-Ra and others, he ordered that everyone should worship Aton, the god of the sun, which was only depicted as a disk when drawn, rather than having human form. Aton was, so to say, an updated version of the old god Ra [4, p. 22-23].

The Pharaoh himself was the living god and substitute for Aton on planet earth and he and his family worshipped Aton. Whereas the Egyptian people worshipped the Pharaoh as their god. As a divine priest the Pharaoh dissolved the traditional priesthood, but the priesthood in Thebes. The effect was more political than religious, as the Pharaoh's pronouncement; banning the old religions effectively stripped the priests of their power. He had the name of the old god, Amun, physically removed from monuments, and had all references to gods in the plural replaced with the new god always in the singular. In addition, the temple of Karnak was banned. It was a strict monotheism rather than an Aton monolatry, as the Pharaoh did actively deny the existence of other gods. Even though, monotheistic ideas were already being developed during Amenhotep's III reign, still today, as far as we know, the implementation of the Atenism religion is the first attempt in the history of the world of implementation of monotheism in a society [5, p. 36].

However, during the years the religion of Akhenaten became more and more a henotheistic religion. In the Aton temples built all along the Nile Valley, there was opposition to the ancient temples that were dark and closed and open to the priesthood only open to the Egyptian people. The new Aton temples contained no depiction of gods, but on the other hand, they lacked a roof so that the divine sun could fill the room with sunrays. Moreover, the old gods simply reappeared from time to time among the Egyptian people in the provinces.

However, that was not the only change. In four years, supported strongly by the military, Akhenaten constructed a new capital, Akhetaten, meaning “horizon of Aton or place of Aton’s power”, on the right site of the Nile, the same site as the old capital, Thebes, was situated. Akhetaten, a city totally dedicated to worshipping of the new religion – Atenism. In the royal palace in the city, Akhenaten received the sunrays in a certain room every morning. The decision to build a new capital was on the fact that the old polytheistic religion had a strong presence at Thebes, which had many monuments and temples of the old gods. The rest of his reign, further development of the new religion was on the highest agenda. From now on, Akhenaten was the single ruler of Egypt and priesthood, civil servants, the elite etc. were only bystanders. However, not innocent bystanders and not all accepted the new religion Atenism. For the first in history, two religions were competing and this resulted in the increasing rivalry that created divide, non-tolerance and deprivation of each other's gods. The religious war was created. The expressions “Divide and rule” and “Divide and conquer” were born, too. In the years to come, Akhenaten had gathered the whole elite around him, whereas the administration of the provinces simply decayed. Furthermore, the massive costs of founding a new capital city and the closing of the Amun temples choked off the growth of the Egyptian economy.

Apart from the genuine logic of the masses, Akhenaten was in a collision course with the established and commercial priesthood who manipulated religion for economic purposes. Judged from the above information, one must acknowledge that it is more like a political move than a religious awakening. Apparently, it is also the fact that the pharaoh did not create a new priesthood nor operate in religious writings. Apart from the Pharaoh himself, there were no priests in whole Egypt. The worldwide religions of Protestantism and Islam are both based on religious writings with a special clergy associated with a system of how to exercise the faith. Nowhere in the historical sources of the Egyptian history in this period is anything mentioned about a revelation or a lucidity of the Pharaoh. Instead of converting the Egyptians to Atenism by mission in the provinces, he reigned from a city; especially build to monitor anyone who had an interest in taking power from him. At last, it is important

to mention that Akhenaten was not acting like a prophet but more like a chief mediator or an autocratic emperor or king [7, p. 420].

However, it is also a fact that worshipping the sun, is very common all over the world, and have taken place for thousand of years. The sun gives life, provides heat and can cure diseases. No sun means no life. In addition, the sun and the mighty elites, especially kings and emperors, are closely connected, as was Akhenaten. The Inkas in Peru, the Mayas in Mexico and the Sun King, Louis XIV of France and his successors are good examples. Like Akhenaten, Louis XIV received the sunrays in a certain room, to manifest that he was the substitute of the sun on earth. The result was the French Revolution (1789-1799) and collapses of the two kingdoms in America. Common for those people is the fact that of none of them have ever heard about either Atenism, Aton or Akhenaten.

After the death of Akhenaten around 1336 BC the cult of Atenism has to flee. Neither King Tutankhamun nor Ramesses II worshipped Aton, although traces are found on the throne of King Tutankhamun. Within few years after the year 1336 BC, the old Egyptian priesthood had restored the ancient religious world order in Egypt. All the temples of the Akhenaten were demolished and all clay tablets and other sources, for instance the Amarna letters, from the 17th-century Pharaohs were dug deep into the sand. The name and deeds of Akhenaten remained a secret for more than 3,000 years. The congregation fled to the island of Elephantine far up the Nile in Nubia near the border of Sudan. In other words, they did not fled to Israel or crossed the Red Sea.

Even though the history of Atenism resembles that of Christianity and Islam in some points, perhaps the most important point fails the aftermath of Akhenaten's religion. Like Akhenaten as well Jesus as Mohammad were not very well-liked among the elite, but whereas Jesus and Mohammad were not in power, and that even though Jesus was living in a territory, that were occupied by the most effective army the world have seen, the Romans, Akhenaten had all possibilities to immortalize his religion. He did not succeeded in that project in anyway. With other words, the

Atenism had the DNA of a personal cult. Almost all religious personal cults in the past and nowadays have disappeared in the darkness of forgetfulness.

Akhenaten, Aton, “The Egyptian” and “The Story of Sinuhe”

“The Story of Sinuhe” is considered one of the finest works of ancient Egyptian literature and it is written on old clay tablets. Its anonymous author is regarded as the Egyptian Shakespeare. It is a narrative set in the aftermath of the death of Pharaoh Amenemhat I, founder of the 12th dynasty of Egypt, in the early 20th century BC. It is likely that it was composed only shortly after this date, albeit the earliest extant manuscript is from the reign of Amenemhat III, around 1800 BC. The main character, Sinuhe, is a personal doctor of the Pharaoh that tells about his memories during several decades of Egypt’s history. An all seeing eye, that describes the state and hierarchies of ancient Egypt, around 4,000 years ago. In this context, the ancient story is interesting firstly because the sun god Aton appears for the first time in history (although it was a relatively obscure god in the story). “The Story of Sinuhe” is therefore considered as one the basic texts of the later religion of Atenism. Secondly, the narrative is interesting because the hierarchy between the Pharaoh, the gods and his people are excellently described in the 600-years old text, that Akhenaten easily could have read and got inspired from it. A text, that describes the society and a hierarchy that he was copying and founding in the 14th century BC. In other words, Akhenaten has invented neither the god, Aton, nor the divine status of the Pharaoh in the ancient Egyptian society.

In the old story, there was a clear hierarchy level between the gods, the pharaoh and the people. Pharaoh worshipped the gods, but at the same time had a divine status in the ancient Egyptian society. His people and minions worshiped the Pharaoh. When a Pharaoh died in story, he has ascended as a god to his horizon and was united with the sun, the divine flesh mingling with its creator. Exactly what Akhenaten wanted to achieve.

In 1945, a Finnish author, Mika Waltari (1908-1979) wrote a prize winning novel “The Egyptian”. Here he had transformed the main character, the personal doctor of the Pharaoh, Sinuhe, from the 20th century BC, to the 14th century BC –

i.e. to the time of Akhenaten 600 years later. World famous Egyptologists and archeologists uttered that they had not read anything as remarkable in many years. In particular, the book was praised for its archaeological accuracy and for its historical credibility to ancient Egyptian history. Another proof that Akhenaten could had copied the role of the Pharaoh in “The Story of Sinuhe” to his own time.

Akhenaten, Hebrew Religion and Moses

The Old Testament tells us how Moses led his Israeli people out of Egypt, sharply pursued by the mighty Pharaoh, who, with armies and tanks, was determined to return the Israelites to a life of slavery. Moses succeeded in getting all the Israelites over the Red Sea and soon they reached the Sinai Mountain. To the sound of the roaring thunder, Moses disappeared on the mountain, where he entered into a covenant with God. That a people should have moved from Egypt to Israel should have taken place about 3,200 or 3.300 years ago. This evidence laid the foundation of a theory that Akhenaten was a human teacher of the only god, a mentor of Moses, a holy Christ like figure or the real progenitor of a full-blown monotheism. In addition, that the Exodus took place during the reign of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC).

At the end of the 1930s the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud became aware of this historical correlation between the rise of monotheism in Egypt and the covenant of the Israelites with God in the Old Testament. He therefore argued that Moses probably was an Egyptian and not a Jew, and he was a priest of the Atenism religion and with his congregation, he fled to Israel. Moses is, nevertheless, an ancient Egyptian word for child. Ever since, various historians, Aton theorists and amateur researchers have sought to prove that the Akhenaten pharaoh conceived the Jews and thus the God of Christians. Among their main indications are written knowledge of ancient times and the fact that the traces of Jewish Christian religions are younger than the pharaoh Akhenaten [3, p. 39-41; 6, p. 7-16].

Other researchers, amateur historians and writers go a step further, and they have declared that Moses and Akhenaten were the same person and that Akhenaten was the founder of the Hebrew religion. The Egyptian born writer Ahmed Osman believes that he has been able to find the answers for these questions that bewildered

scholars for centuries. He claims strongly that Moses of the Bible is no other than that Pharaoh Akhenaten, who ruled Egypt for 17 years in the mid-14th century BC. Ahmed Osman, using recent archaeological discoveries and historical documents, contends that Akhenaten and Moses were the same person. In a retelling of the Exodus story, Ahmed Osman details the events of Moses/Akhenaten's life: He tries to argue that even the Ten Commandments betray the direct influence of Spell 125 in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Osman's book about Moses and Akhenaten provides a radical challenge to the long-standing beliefs concerning the origin of Semitic religion and the puzzle of Akhenaten's deviation from ancient Egyptian tradition. In fact, if the Arabian writer's contentions were right, many major Old Testament figures would be of Egyptian origin [9, p. 180-185].

The problem here is that there do not exist any archeological proofs that Moses and Akhenaten or even where the Jews lived in the same period of ancient Egypt's history. Probably because the archeologists and Egyptologists do not know where to dig in sand near the Nile or even in desert. Egypt was a waste empire and for instance, the Bible does not refer to specific territories in the empire, where the Jewish settlements were established. In addition, what is a bigger problem for Ahmed Osman is the very fact that no archeologists have ever found traces of the Hebrew people's cities in ancient Egypt. Nobody knows when the Jews began to cultivate their faith. The oldest archaeological finds for them are a 3,000-year-old pottery with Hebrew characters. In other words, the pottery originates from the time after Akhenaten and his monotheistic religion in the ancient Egypt.

Although for today's supporters of the Aton theory, the Aton theorists, the missing archeological objects and traces are missing; it is, in their own mind, a proof that their theory is true. The Jews were simply inspired by the Pharaoh Akhenaten, his monotheistic religion and his way of organizing the ancient Egypt in the 14th century BC along the river Nile. For the supporters of the Aton theory, however, the matter is clear: the Old Testament account of the covenant with God must conceal the fact that the Israelites took their god with them from Egypt – Akhenaten's sun god Aton.

Conversely, it is worth remembering that the missing archaeological findings cannot be used as evidence that the Jews do not have their god long time before Akhenaten and Atenism. Archaeologists are still digging and found that a potshot 20 kilometers from Jerusalem the Jewish histories came back to King David's time.

However, Freud's hypothesis, as well as the one of the Aton theorists, has been accused of being reductionist, unscientific and theistic. Especially, their historical inaccuracies with years and facts have been critiqued. Whereas, Akhenaten is a true figure of history without memory, Moses is a figure of memory without history. Moses has no tomb, did not receive a cult and no one has ever found any historical traces or evidence in any kind of written sources in Egyptian or Hebrew of him as a human being. However, he is alive in almost all kind of cultural and religious traditions and religions. Especially in the Bible and the Quran, he plays a very important role [1, p. 61; 2, p.23; 8, p. 104].

The biggest difference between the Hebrew and the Egyptian religion is the fact that the last-mentioned religion made careful provision for an afterlife. In fact, the god Osiris, the god of death, was one of the most popular of all Egyptian gods. The Jewish religion, on the other hand, had made no place for eternal life or immortality. A second difference is as already described above, the different structure of the two religions. In Atenism, there is no religious structure, as we know it from the worldwide religions today. These two differences between both religions suggest that Moses headed a religious reformation, which totally departed from traditional well-established ways that had been on stage in Egypt for nearly fifteen centuries [12, p. 34].

Akhenaten, Art and Aliens

The Pharaoh Akhenaten broke with long-established Egyptian conventions in art, too. He simply invented naturalism in art. Until then, the strict formalism of Egyptian art was changed and now it depicted its subjects more realistically and women were no longer portrayed as lighter coloured than men were. It became also allowed to make intimate portraits of the family of the Pharaoh and their children. In architecture the Armana-style art gained ground. The artwork in Aten's temple

featured portraits of the wife, Queen Nefertiti, without any portrait for the king, which suggest that the Queen may have played a pivotal role in starting the religious revolution. The role of the woman in Egypt Akhenaten popularized the moral philosophy of “maat”, or “divine truth”, and adopted a kingly title “living in maat”, which was a propaganda for truth that found expression in new artistic works. The king's portraits show unusual description of the physique [11, p. 119].

Akhenaten was often depicted with an elongated jaw line and skull, wide hips and a protruding round belly. This development was a complete break from all of the conventions of ancient Egyptian art, and it has led to some wide speculation. Was the pharaoh developing a new art form, or suffering from a physical affliction? Here is no evidence that he suffered from a severe learning disability, and it would certainly have been difficult for him to have succeeded with such a bold challenge to tradition without being fairly astute. Furthermore, he apparently wrote a number of poems or hymns including the famous Hymn to the Aton. Thus, it seems unlikely he was suffering from Froehlich's Syndrome.

Other theorists have suggested that the king actually suffered from Marfan's syndrome. Many sufferers have a long face, slender tapered fingers, long arms and legs, and a curvature of the spine. However, the disease does not affect intelligence or fertility. Marfan's syndrome is hereditary, and it could help explain the high mortality rate within the families. Three of his daughters, and his co-regent Smenkhkare all died young. However, King Tutankhamun, does not appear to have suffered from the condition. This could be explained if King Tutankhamun was not his son, but then, who was his father? Proponents of the view that Akhenaten was physically disabled note that he was barely mentioned during his father's reign and suggest that he was hidden away because of his deformity. However, it was common for the male offspring of the king to remain in the shadows until they held a position of specific importance, such as heir or co-regent and Thuthmosis (Akhenaten's elder brother) was the first choice as heir. Akhenaten only rose to importance when his brother died.

It could also be the “deformity” to an endocrine disorder called Froehlich's Syndrome. In males an elongated face and an androgynous figure typify this disorder.

However, it also hinders sexual development and causes severe learning difficulties, obesity and impotency. Pharaoh Akhenaten had many children, and while his sculptures may give him an androgynous appearance, he is not obese.

With only pictorial evidence of a physical abnormality it is dangerous to jump to conclusions. Egyptian art often employs symbolism to create layers of meaning for a scene. As the god Aton was hailed as “The mother and father of all people” and Akhenaten was the representative of the god on earth, he may have chosen the androgynous image to show that he was more than just a man; he was the embodiment of the Aton. No mummy has yet been identified as being that of Akhenaten, and so the controversy continues.

Was it close encounters of the fourth degree with aliens from the universe? The abovementioned drawings of the pharaoh and his family have caused other theories, among which so-called aliens could have landed in the Egyptian desert and had contact with Akhenaten. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the ufology gained a revival like never before. Flying saucers and aliens became part of everyday life. The drawings of the Pharaoh and his family, especially with the elongated skulls, on the walls in Akhetaten in the time of Akhenaten, matched together with the ideas of the ufologist and theories of an appearance of an extraterrestrial. Or have perhaps given inspiration to the theories. Also the sun disc of Aton matched together with an appearance of a flying saucer. In addition, since more of the Egyptian hieroglyphs could be interpreted as aliens or vessels, space bases or the like, they thought they had a theory to work from. However, ufology as a field, is rejected by modern academia and is considered a pseudoscience, because of lacking objects and traces. In addition, and to build an argumentation on random-letter drawings and symbols also seems to be insufficient.

Conclusion

The rediscovery of Akhenaten and his state revolution in ancient Egypt during the second half of the 1800s ranks among the most important achievements of Egyptology ever and the excavations and objects have inspired researchers from all over the world to an intellectual debate – some more fantastic than others. It is

difficult to argue and to make a proof that the Pharaoh Akhenaten is either the founder of the Hebrew Religion, the mentor of Moses or even Moses himself. The lacking of archaeological objects or traces of Jewish settlements and Jewish culture in ancient Egypt and the differences in written sources, either in Hebrew (the Old Testament) or in Egyptian languages (Amarna letters) currently make a link between Akhenaten's monotheistic religion, Atenism and the Hebrew religion almost impossible.

The alien connection is even more difficult to explain from the sources we have today. Art is merely an expression and an image of reality. The elongated skulls and deformed arms can be an expression of artistic experience, but also a symptom of the time in which they lived. According to the researchers, Egypt should have been haunted by very long droughts in 1400 BC and 1300 BC. This means of the population can have a lot of diseases and even deficiencies that change the human body. It is known today with malnourished children in Africa.

Whereas any researcher has to admit that the world religions, even today in 2018, are flourishing and very much alive, the case of the religion of Atenism is quite another story. After the death of Akhenaten, his monuments and buildings were destroyed, his name erased from the lists of kings and he got a condemnation of his memories that lasted thousands of years. Should Akhenaten and Moses have lived in Egypt in the same years would it be unthinkable that only Moses name should be remembered thousands of years, whereas Akhenaten's name disappeared for more than 3.000 years. Finally, the differences in the Atenism and the Hebrew Religion are so obvious that it is hard to imagine that they are founded at the same time or by the same priesthood/congregation.

However, one must keep in mind. That the day the archaeologists and Egyptologists find the place for the Jews' habitation, perhaps the story may be rewritten. Just like the lack of connection between the Bible and the Egyptian sources may be found again after many thousand years of oblivion.

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