

Thesis title:

Akhenaten's 'leap': How can 'rethinking' Akhenaten's and recent historiographical developments, and contemporary Egyptology further our understanding of his religious experience?

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Summary of thesis:

This thesis reveals that early twentieth-century political and national, intellectual and religious agendas have dominated, distorted and distracted Egyptologists' from Akhenaten's own time and experience. Anachronistic concepts abound: 'modern', 'pacifist', 'Christ-like', 'miscegenation', 'heretic', 'false prophet', even 'totalitarian'. As a result, there is a sense of being left outside as a distant observer of the shifting, restless Akhenaten. This thesis, guided by later invaluable, critical contributions from Hornung and Assmann, follows and extends contemporary Egyptologist James Hoffmeier's exploration of Akhenaten's 'theophany', enabling a sympathetic access inside Akhenaten's religious experience. This is supported by the diverse, pioneering work on lexical semantics by Orly Goldwasser and Pascal Vernus as well as new findings and analyses of continuing fieldwork, especially at Tell el-Amarna.

Contemporary Dutch philosophers of history, Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia, further these developments. Like Assmann, Ankersmit confronts the dynamics of trauma, opening new approaches to the ancient concept of the 'sublime'. Deepening Ankersmit's insights Runia explored how, throughout history, human beings reach a 'threshold' of what is beyond them, and impelled by a rising sense of 'vertigo', 'leap' into the 'unknown'. This is an exploration of Akhenaten's 'leap' to find a radical, unique experience of the divine, to become the first known monotheist.

Statement of Originality

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: 

Date: 26/10/2018

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Introduction

Barry Kemp, despite the extensive praise for his meticulous fieldwork at Tell el-Amarna and his groundbreaking publications, concludes his magisterial *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (2012) on a modest note of caution:

‘The last word should be with Dominic Montserrat, *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt* (London and New York Routledge, 2000). His study is of how people have received Akhenaten and Amarna, interpreting them according to their own personal philosophies. I am sure I am now one of them.’ (2012: 313)

This is a magnanimous caveat for every student of the Amarna period to take to heart. This era has raised so many issues that continue to arrest and haunt, enthrall and taunt our twenty-first century community, all these 34 centuries later. These include religious extremism, traumatic change, intellectual crisis, iconoclasm, exclusion, persecution and imperial ambitions as the ancient Near East was caught in the throes of a sequence of perilous realignments among the Bronze Age superpowers.

In our parallel context, framed by our own subjectivities, our ‘own personal philosophies’, it is very easy, perhaps inevitable, to fall prey to lapses of presumption and projection when engaging with Akhenaten, his experiences and his times. (Kemp, 2012: 313) We should continue and, as Kemp would wish, be sensitive and alert to the limits of our contemporary understanding and assessment of Akhenaten’s life and reign, and especially his religious experience. Nevertheless, we should be conscious and grateful that we sit on the shoulders of giants, our present generation of Egyptologists in particular, and philosophers of history in general. They have challenged us to arrive with them at a new and compelling research and methodological horizon in the study of ancient Egypt and the political and social, intellectual and religious experience of humankind.

Tragically, Montserrat was not able to witness the continuing transformation of Amarna studies. Yet, his eclectic, erudite work shifted seamlessly from traditional Egyptological concerns to ‘Egyptomania’ and its widely-divergent progeny – horror movies, avant-garde opera and queer theory. As well as a carefully-

researched warning, he pioneered a critical new integrated discourse for Egyptology together with historiography and cultural studies. It still remains an 'insightful' and pioneering contribution to the '[r]eception of [our] culture initiated by Akhenaten'. (Gange, 2006: 1093 n.39)

Chapter 1

From ‘progress’ to ‘decadence’: late nineteenth- and twentieth-century anachronistic distractions and distortions of Akhenaten’s reign

In Dominic Montserrat’s wake, later scholars have further examined the academic and scientific, religious and intellectual background of modern Egyptology. They have revealed the dynamic, often unconscious forces that have shaped the modern emergence of the new science of and Egyptology, especially in the English-speaking world. They charted barely-remembered cultural routes to guide us toward the deeper motivations behind late nineteenth century’s “‘heroic age” of archaeology’ from William Flinders Petrie to James Henry Breasted, with particular reference to the Amarna period. (Gange, 2006: 1083)

For the ‘father of American Egyptology’, James Henry Breasted, the belief in one god was an essential element in the ‘great leap forward’ toward the creation of ‘civilisation.’ This ‘breakthrough’ impelled the ‘western world’ into our ‘modern civilized society’ – ‘advanced science and lasting monotheism.’ (Ambridge, 2012, 21) Much depends on the nature of this ‘monotheism’. It has set an unstable agenda and configured the changing and critical shape of a long debate that has led scholars down distorting and distracting lines of inquiry and interpretations.

Indeed, what one would consider as a critical aspect of Akhenaten’s religion, would be his *own* religious experience, that is, the *actuality* of his spiritual breakthrough into a new apprehension and experience of the divine: the nature and sensation of this encounter with the One; the transforming moment he could become *Akhenaten, Sole one of Re*. Until the late twentieth century, discussion or even recognition of this experience has been minimized, if not ignored in the rush to engage with what was agreed to be more important issues in ancient or modern history and thought. It is as if we have only been looking at him and his religion from the *outside*, not trying see it from the *inside*. This is, of course, a methodologically presumptuous and pretentious ambition, fraught with insurmountable difficulties.

Critical to an attempt to enter the religious experience of this radical ruler, it is crucial to explore these vital, yet distracting issues which, while important in themselves, have diverted the attention of earlier Amarna scholars from the experience at hand. These anachronistic issues have been made evident by

Lipson, Gange and Ambridge in their inquiries into Egyptology's early developments in general, and Akhenaten, in particular. They reveal how political, religious and intellectual tensions within late Victorian British society framed early analyses and understandings of Akhenaten. Indeed, these fault lines in the unstable, changing landscape of British imperialism and Christianity, civilization and science, have shaped, consciously and unconsciously, scholars' divergent approaches to this radical New Kingdom ruler and his relationship to his god, revealed in the sun disk, the Aten.

While Akhenaten's religious experience was not central to late Victorian interest in Egypt, the general religious question was very much on the agenda. Beneath the confident, positivist ground of British Egyptology and the development of its scientific method and objective analyses, there ran a deep religious undercurrent that mobilized its recent archaeological findings intended to turn back the rising tide of Darwinism and the challenge to the historicity of the Bible, Higher Criticism. This was particularly evident in the work of the popular and prolific writer of exotic fiction and travel, Amelia Edwards, and the support she gave to the archaeological expeditions into Egypt organized by the fledgling Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF). (Gange, 2006, 1086-89)

To Edwards, an interest in Egyptology was needed "to wake the Bible-loving, church- and chapel-going English people from their long sloth." (Gange, 2006, 1087) Indeed, Reginald Poole, the British Museum official who established the EEF, sent a prominent European Egyptologist, Edouard Naville, to search for the road taken, in Old Testament times, by Moses, leading 'the children of Israel out of Egypt.' Poole claimed that Ramesses II was the infamous pharaoh of the Exodus and that the British public could behold his statues in the British Museum, recognizing the face of the king who had 'mocked Moses and felt the wrath of God.' (Gange, 2006, 1088) Despite its antipathy to Moses, Poole allotted to ancient Egypt high material and spiritual achievements, acknowledging that the 'Egyptians raised monuments that have defied time, to show to all who should come after them that they believed in the immortality of the soul.' (Gange, 2006, 1088) His Egypt was a place for late Victorian spiritual aspiration. Poole further pointed to the Egyptian desert as a realm to foster transcendent philosophical speculation; 'in Egypt 'more than even in the midst of the ocean, man seems conscious of the divine presence.' Yet, the EEF had been unable to discover any definitive confirmation of the existence of the heroes from the Books of Genesis and Exodus. Then an unexpected opportunity came for high Victorian Christianity through the activities of William Flinders Petrie.

This complex ‘father of scientific archaeology’ had also been inspired by ‘other-worldly’ ambitions. His earlier survey of the Great Giza Pyramid aimed to support the idea, proposed notoriously by Charles Piazzi Smith, that God influenced its construction and had encoded within its silent, enigmatic structure the key to human progress and enlightenment. At Tell el-Amarna Petrie’s work enabled the Victorian public to be awe struck and to participate, albeit vicariously, in this archaeology of belief, to witness a religious revolution. A nascent monotheism had overturned traditional polytheism. Petrie oversaw the recovery of a forgotten, indeed erased from memory, Bible-like divine entity: the sacred sun disc, the one god, Akhenaten’s Aten. (Reeves , 2001b, 83-85)

In the words and images of this king, Petrie had found a literally god-touched man, who like every self-proclaimed virtuous Victorian family man reveled in ‘domestic affection.’ With an open ‘honesty of expression’, this ruler embodied ‘a revolution in ideas’ and behaviours. His domestic life was ‘his ideal of the truth of life.’ (Gange, 2006, 1094-95) Petrie did not ignore the modern scientific and aesthetic dimensions of his discoveries at Akhenaten’s capital. He believed he had encountered an ‘unparalleled’ pre-modern artistic achievement that surpassed even the ancient Greeks at the zenith of their Classical Age. Akhenaten’s attainments in science, philosophy and religion dazzled Petrie and his colleagues, British and American alike. (Gange, 2006, 1095)

They viewed Akhenaten’s monotheism as critical in the rise and triumph of western civilization. It was the precursor of English-speaking Protestantism. The pioneer of scientific archaeological practice and theory, W. Flinders Petrie, merging religious with social and intellectual advancement, praised Akhenaten’s success in triumphing over the ‘1,000-year old shell of habits, superstitions and conventions of society’ as this unique ruler ‘courageously resisted the power of the clergy.’ (quoted in Lipson, 2013, 275)

Petrie’s American colleague, Breasted, envisioned an Akhenaten for a modern liberal age. He endorsed Petrie’s anti-clerical sentiments. Breasted’s Akhenaten, born into a world of dark priest craft and superstition, eliminated the ‘Amonite papacy.’ However, his enlightened legacy did not last. It was overcome by ‘the malignant triumph of the Amonite priests’. (1933, 310) Here was a prophet whose beatific insights had arrived too soon for the rest of the benighted human race. (Gange, 2006, 1095) Breasted proclaimed him as ‘the first *individual* in history’ (Breasted’s emphasis, 1905 [1909], 356)

...who desired to be freed from the 'inherited' 'sacerdotal thrall.' (1905 [1909], 362) '[Akhenaten] saw his God as a kindly Father...[i]n all the progress of men...through thousands of years, no one had ever sought such a vision...*monotheism*.' (Breasted's emphasis, 1916 [1944], 117)

Petrie's English assistant at the EEF, Arthur Weigall, favourably characterized Akhenaten's visionary heroism: 'Akhenaten evolved a monotheistic religion second only to Christianity. He was the first human being to understand rightly the meaning of divinity. When the world reverberated with the noise of war, he preached the first known doctrine of peace.' (1922, 250) This is what the post-World War I generation needed; a gentle, Christ-like figure, ruling an empire. This simplified religion allowed, for the first time, a 'scientific theism' according to Flinders Petrie. It was a flawless 'view of the energy of the solar system'. Weigall termed it as a 'religion based in science'; an ancient understanding compatible with 'modern scientific' conceptions. For Breasted, Akhenaten's insight and understanding was prescient of 'the early cosmogonic philosophies of the Greeks.' (1905, 361) The king reveled in the joyous harmony of nature, presaging 'Wordsworth and Ruskin.' (quoted in Lipson, 2013, 276) While this description approaches Akhenaten's religious experience, it only labels the consequences of the experience, not the experience itself.

Another significant dynamic shaping any discussion of Akhenaten can be found in the rhetoric of modern nationalism. These Anglo-Saxon evaluations reflect what Carol Lipson describes as the broad lenses of different European nationalities revealing distinct versions of this ancient king. (2013, 270-284) In addition to the liberal, scientific Akhenaten, she analyses how the Germans and the French saw him. Contemporary German Egyptologists bewailed Akhenaten's religion as 'derivative and alien' (like his mother). It was not true monotheism; rather it was 'henotheism', tolerating the worship of lesser deities. Such impurity in religion was also seen as 'unhealthy' with the influence of foreign bloodlines evident in the 'peculiarities' of the king's appearance: 'soft womanish traits' as well as 'features of the black race.' Such miscegenation disturbed some German Egyptologists who valued the traditional features of earlier and later New Kingdom Egyptian rulers. Indeed, under the Third Reich, Akhenaten was reviled as treacherously turning away from the traditional ideals and beliefs of the Egyptian *volk* and, according to the Nazi-inspired Herman Kees, a decadent, racially impure Akhenaten had neglected the defense of the empire. (Lipson, 2013, 276-277)

After a shaky start at the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the trauma of the Paris Commune, the French Third Republic, a secular liberal democracy, gained in confidence. It enabled the nation to prosper and assert itself again as an expanding world power. According to Carol Lipson, integral to such resurgence was France's rise to preeminence in the arts, especially in the late nineteenth century, the *Fin de Siecle*. It was natural for the French to follow such trends when they examined the Amarna period.

Under August Mariette, French Egyptology concentrated on the artistic achievements of Akhenaten's reign. Together with Gaston Maspero and Alexandre Moret, Mariette characterized portrayals of Akhenaten as 'realistic', conjecturing that the king may have been wounded in battle, having an alien racial background or suffering from a debilitating disease. (Hornung, 1999, 9, 18; Lipson, 2013, 280) This striking realism exuded a brave new sense of freedom from convention; an exhilarating improvement on the traditional restrictions imposed on Egyptian artists. Indeed, after the flowering of Amarna art, Egypt fell back into the inevitable, perpetual 'monotony' of reasserted, stifling canons. (Lipson, 2013, 280)

Perhaps reflecting the anti-clerical sentiments of their Republic and era, French scholars delivered a harsher commentary on Akhenaten's religious changes. They see his eradication of other gods as 'puerile fanaticism' with an unoriginal religious rhetoric. However, when he confronts the Amonite priesthood and their 'gloomy' cults, Akhenaten does display some redeeming qualities such as a bright, joyous outlook. Akhenaten's faith offers the world a new fraternal harmony, a hopeful universal bond with even 'the humblest being in nature.' (Lipson, 2013, 280) Indeed, a revival of the human spirit rejoicing, returning to a natural state. As Lipson writes, the 'French' Akhenaten embodies the *topoi* of the nascent Third Republic – liberty, equality, fraternity. Their Akhenaten meant liberation and innovation in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant obsession with Akhenaten projecting a monotheism which heralded the 'great leap forward' – civilization; or the tense German concern for racial and religious purity. (Lipson, 2013, 280-81; Ambridge, 2012, 21)

These early twentieth-century views were determined and embedded in each of these three national/linguistic groups of scholars' particular cultural and rhetorical, historical and historiographical contexts. As E.H. Carr, at least two generations ago, argued in his then-highly contested *What is History?*, special attention must be paid to each historian's background: 'before you study the history study the historian...and before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment.' (1961, 44)

As Barry Kemp has noted recent opinion had begun to swing against Akhenaten. (2012, 17-18) This had occurred in later twentieth-century Amarna studies. After World War II and the Cold War, Akhenaten, in the English-speaking world at least, could assume sinister political and religious motivations and traits. The Canadian Donald Redford, particularly as a consequence of his discoveries at East Karnak, has spoken of his need to challenge the then-dominant paradigm of the earlier Anglo-American Egyptologists. (Interview, 1991) His Akhenaten is a 'necessary' corrective to their benign portrayal of Akhenaten. His 1984 volume, *Akhenaten*, was subtitled '*The Heretic King*'. Redford questioned his 'mental state', because, among other things, Akhenaten forced Assyrian ambassadors to stand in 'the open sun'. This was 'intolerable behaviour'. It was 'totalitarian.' Akhenaten 'demanded universal submission.' Redford concludes: 'I cannot conceive a more tiresome regime under which to be fated to live.' (1984, 235)

The prolific Egyptologist, Nicholas Reeves, entitled his work *Akhenaten False Prophet*. He has been deeply influenced by the work of W. Raymond Johnson on the identity of the Aten as Akhenaten's father, Amenhotep III. Reeves, therefore, envisioned an Amenhotep III (as 'the divinized Aten') who was 'but one royal essence among many. The cult of the Aten had become the cult of kingship itself.' (2001a, 100-101) Reeves saw his reign as a 'nightmare'. During '17 years of dictatorial rule, dominated by the paranoia of an Amonist conspiracy, the heretic king had brought the country and its people to the very brink of disaster. (2001a, 100-101) Once again, these studies continue to distract the student of Akhenaten's religious experience with anachronistic distortions such as 'heretic', 'false prophet', even 'totalitarian'.

However, the late English Egyptologist, Cyril Aldred in his *Akhenaten King of Egypt* (1988) has presented Akhenaten on his own terms, in his own words. To Aldred Akhenaten is 'the Good Ruler who loves Mankind'. Indeed, Aldred has written movingly of how Akhenaten had witnessed a natural occurrence: the sun rising over the *wadi* between the distant eastern mountains at Tell el-Amarna. It brought into his mind the hieroglyph, *akhet*, 'horizon'. Here the Aten commanded Akhenaten to build a new capital at this 'Horizon of the Sun Disc', Akhetaten. (1976, 184; 1988, 48)

Chapter 2

The adzes of Wepwawat, ‘Opener of the Ways’: beyond anachronisms; opening up Akhenaten’s religious experience – Erik Hornung and Jan Assmann

The god, Wepwawat, the ‘opener of the ways’, in its pre- and post-Amarna, polytheistic embodiments ‘split open’ the bound, silenced mouth of the mummified ruler with the sacred adze ‘in the ceremony of vivification.’ (Hart, 1986, 222-223) This is an apposite mythic image for the roles played by two trail-blazing late twentieth-century German Egyptologists – Jan Assmann and Erik Hornung. They could be described as the adzes to bring back to life, to open up the sealed king to life-giving air, to resurrect Akhenaten’s religious experience.

Their rigorous, finessed and complex approaches to the Amarna period have left 21st-century Egyptology a challenging and enriching legacy which penetrated and deepened the extent and nature of earlier areas of discussion: the nature and representation of polytheism and monotheism; the dynamics of kingship and royalty – the role of the King, Queen and the Royal Family including images and physiognomies of royalty; the art and architecture of East Karnak and Akhetaten; the eradication of mythology; the new funeral beliefs and practices, sites and architecture; an altered Afterlife; the role and status of the Amarna elite – their new roles, beliefs and ontologies focused new revelations of the king which affect their eternal destinies, even taking on new, altered names from the king down; and taking the spoken language of his era, Late Egyptian, and integrating it into written forms, abandoning fossilized Middle Egyptian.

2.1 Erik Hornung: Akhenaten’s exclusive and ecstatic singularity of light; at the limits of a new absolute

Hornung’s monograph, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, gleams with a myriad of insights, illuminated by decades of carefully-considered judgments and a scrupulous analysis of the diverse source material from this contested era. While it does employ contemporary academic and political language, especially the insights of Jungian psychoanalytic thought, this does not distract from the significant issues at hand during Akhenaten’s reign. For instance, when Hornung introduces Akhenaten’s ‘Perestroika’, ‘reorganisation’ of New Kingdom society, he does this in the context of the ‘unique’ changes which Akhenaten wrought in the fields of ‘religion, art, language and literature.’ (1999, 49-50) This late-Soviet

expression, as a political and cultural metaphor, clarifies and sharpens our understanding of these reforms, rather than cast a pall of misleading evaluations of his reign.

In fact, Hornung reveals that this book developed from a paper, 'Akhenaten – The Rediscovery of a Religion and Its Founder', originally delivered to an expert forum at the annual Eranos Conference in Ascona, Switzerland in 1988. The Ascona group uses the latest academic findings to bring the scholarly tradition of C.G. Jung and his colleagues into a more contemporary and relevant context as it critically enhances the development and advancement of research across a range of disciplines, often, in post-Jungian terminology, 'revisioning' now-outdated assumptions and bodies of knowledge. (1999, 127-128)

This volume is replete with probing and pertinent observations such as those describing the essence, indeed the drama, of Amarna art. To Hornung, among others, it mounted an energizing stage, charged with 'motion' and 'emotion'. Across it raced the chariots of the royal couple, often kissing, driving in an 'ecstasy of speed'. Here Akhenaten was not a solitary warrior pharaoh. He presented himself in scenes of tender intimacy with his family – kissing, embracing, caressing and even in their stooped, heart-felt grief – under the Aten's rays. (1999, 44-45)

Hornung is alive to the historiography of Akhenaten explored within the frame of comparative religion. This enables his readers to appreciate how different Akhenaten, as the founder of a religion, was from Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, through their very distinct later changes in circumstance and approach. Sensitive to the concerns of earlier late Victorian and early twentieth-century 'Akhenatens', Hornung mobilises a searching analysis of the contested historicity and traditions of each founder. Akhenaten has been only revealed comparatively recently to our generations, while the lives and teachings of Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, in some cases, have endured the millennia-long debated processing of intermediaries and followers to subtly, yet tellingly, if not alter, then adjust the original messages of these later founders. On the other hand, 'all that we have of [Akhenaten] is contemporary and goes back to the man himself. His teaching is revealed to us by him alone, with no [distant] intermediaries and it is subject to falsification only by modern interpreters.' (1999, 17)

Such a distance in time has also meant the appearance of another distinguishing feature in the Amarna period. Other founders of religions have either not been earthly rulers like Jesus the carpenter from

Nazareth or Muhammad originally a merchant from Mecca, despite his later political and military leadership; or, if they had held positions of power such as the Buddha, Prince Siddhartha, or Moses as a young member – albeit adopted – of pharaoh's family, they had forsaken their privileges and pleasures at the behest of their respective higher calling. Hornung is aware that a central element in the rise of the Aten religion was the simple and significant fact that Akhenaten was king; he held 'all the instruments of state power at his disposal...' (1999, 49)

This vital distinction meant that Akhenaten's own religious experience was conditioned by his standing, indeed his divine status and supreme political authority in New Kingdom Egyptian society. His elevated position shaped his response to the Aten. It was absolutely *exclusive*. As part of his royal titulary, at the core of his new name as the Son of Re was 'Akh-en-Aten' – 'He who is useful to the Aten' or 'The glorious spirit of Aten' as well as another epithet, 'The Beautiful Child of the Living Aten'. He was also as the Lord of the Two Lands: 'Neferkheperure Wa'en-Ra', the 'Perfect/Beautiful are the manifestations of Ra, Sole one of Ra'. Hornung writes that even though the Aten was a universal god, Akhenaten was still King of Egypt and 'never became a prophet for all humankind'. (1999, 56) In historical and religious terms Akhenaten was at the centre of Amarna worship. Hornung echoes his fellow Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, to reiterate the fact that just as the Aten was *the exclusive god of the king*, so the king was the one and only 'personal god of the [non-royal] individual', who had no direct access to the Aten. The king was 'the god...who intervened in the destiny of the individual, holding [one's] life and death in his hands.' (Assmann quoted in Hornung, 1999, 55)

This awareness of the limitations of Akhenaten's new royal religious perception has enabled Hornung to enter into the king's one-sided absolutes as Akhenaten eventually denied the possibility of other deities, of an 'other-worldly' Hereafter and of the religious complexities of both day and night. (1999, 96-100, 122-123) Alive to such reductive certainties and attuned to the Jungian lexicon of analysis, Hornung sees at the heart of Akhenaten's religious experience a limiting totality: that light is the ultimate '*single principle*' explaining existence; all creation – natural and human. He writes that '[l]ike Einstein, Akhenaten made light the absolute reference point...making him in fact the first *modern* human being in his quest to explain everything on the basis of a single principle.' (1999, 127-128)

Writing at the brink of the 21st century's Age of Terror (2001 –), Hornung sees this 'one-sided' perspective as the essence of modernity. He even considers Akhenaten history's first 'fundamentalist'; a very modern predicament, especially for an individual from the 14th century BCE, which can scarcely deny him our 'respect and sympathy.' (1999, 125-126) At the same time, while it is tempting to be led to such seemingly 'simple and clear solutions,' this can lead to 'intolerance, [which] can have no future: things must not be reduced to a single isolated principle, [no matter how] noble and elevated. Always and above all, the whole is at stake.' (1999, 128) At this critical juncture, it is necessary, indeed urgent, to seek unity, not through an isolating imperative, but among an expanding and enriching diversity and complexity. Such a cultural and religious singularity experienced, enforced, ensured and then maintained by Akhenaten has impelled Hornung reach out across the wider cultural traditions of humanity not only among the founders of the world's religions, but also later thinkers such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Carl Gustav Jung.

One of Goethe's ultimate observations was that for humankind, as 'children of the earth', the sun is 'a manifestation of the highest Being', 'the most powerful which we...are allowed to behold. I adore in him the light and the productive power of God; by which we all live, move, and have our being – we, and all the plants and animals with us'. (Goethe quoted in Hornung, 1999, 85) This universalist apprehension of God reflects J.H. Breasted's later meditations on his own translation of the *Great Hymn to the Aten* as well as Alexandre Moret's earlier-discussed judgment of the Aten as the god for all humankind. (Breasted, 1905 [1909], 359; Lipson, 2013, 280) Indeed, as Hornung noted, Akhenaten did build *gm(t) p3* *Itn* temples, not only in East Karnak and Akhetaten, but also in Nubia and quite possibly in Syria. Later Jan Assmann would see this *gm(t)*, 'finding/discovering', as the 'revelation' of the god for the king. (1999, 85-86)

While in Carl Jung's response to the raucous screeching and leaping of baboons at an African sunrise, there is a deeper, most pressing appreciation of the divine essence revealed within the sun – light. 'The *moment* in which [the sun] becomes light is God. That moment brings redemption, release. To say that the sun *is* God, is to blur and forget the archetypal experience of that moment.' (Jung quoted in Hornung, 1999, 85; with Jung's emphasis) Echoing Jung's sacred insight, Hornung opens up the possibility of the depth of Akhenaten's religious experience. More than the lone sun disc, it involved the Aten's elemental force, light.

This overwhelming, all-encompassing experience of light drove Akhenaten to be constantly present to it. In the Tell el-Amarna tomb reliefs, the long reach of the Aten's rays sought out the king and queen, their daughters, their horse-drawn chariots; the tall pylons, fluttering flags on high flagstaffs, open lintels and offering tables of its temple; and the exclusive throne room, prominent balconies, and a myriad of apartments and storerooms of the palace. All this shimmering wonder climaxed each dawn when the Aten rose over the eastern mountain's *wadi* to flood the Tell el-Amarna plain and its high, cliff-bound Boundary Stelae with its light. In one sudden, shining moment, Akhenaten encountered 'that which the Aten found', *gm p3'ltm*. This led to a ceaseless push toward the visible, to everything that was lit. Even the traditional raised relief sculptures were inverted, sunken to allow more light across them. (1999, 73)

Yet to extend a metaphor from Jung's general psychology, Hornung wrote, in the context of emerging evidence of mockery and despair found at Akhetaten, that Akhenaten's religion of light had begun to cast 'deep shadows' over the once-bright core of 'the simplest and clearest religion that had ever been devised.' (1999, 103, 94) For instance, the cult of Pa Shed, the young and vigorous Horus the Saviour, able to intervene and rescue those in peril, rose to urgent prominence in the immediate wake of the Amarna period. During this 'time', Hornung writes, 'of crisis and anxiety, human yearning intensified into a new deity.' (1999, 125) Hornung does not recoil from this 'shadow side' of Akhenaten's religious experience and the consequent stark eradication of Egyptian mythology and tradition, especially the elimination of the Theban cult of Amun and the Osirian afterlife.

2. 2 Jan Assmann: the radiant harmony of light, time and Akhenaten; at the frontier of ‘counter religion’

Hornung’s fellow German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, has been involved in expanding the ancient boundaries of human history and consciousness, memory and experience. Assmann’s growing research and expertise in Egyptology, by the 1980s, was beginning to impact on and transform new areas of wider German intellectual and cultural endeavour. His work on ancient Egypt energised a shift from presenting Egypt as an isolated historical instance, a model ‘in the field of cultural memory’, to Egypt becoming the original frame of the historical reorientation of humankind’s development. In the next decade, he underpinned this critical transition with his formulation of a theory of ‘collective memory’ bringing the concept of ‘mnemohistory’ into the sphere of German theory. He focused this notion on the binary nature of memory: short-term ‘communicative’ memory and long-term ‘cultural’ memory. (Winthrop-Young, 2005, 107) As a result, ancient Egypt was now the original, indeed archetypal stage across which the oldest and most original dramas of the human condition could be reenacted with all the raw, vivid elements that had impelled our civilization into being.

Like Erik Hornung, Jan Assmann has acknowledged the historiography of late-nineteenth and twentieth-century studies of Akhenaten. (1997, 23-24) In fact, he also positioned himself in a parallel context to Hornung’s call for a holistic, tolerant and inclusive approach. Assmann has criticized the ‘positivist’ school of Egyptology – Adolf Erman, Kurt Sethe and Alan Gardiner – for ‘their project of demystification’, for bringing to bear a much-needed yet narrow and dry, logical and scientific methodology to the history and language, religion and culture of ancient Egypt. (1997, 22) To paraphrase Max Weber in a different context, under these Anglo-German Egyptologists, such approaches lead to the ‘disenchantment’ of ancient Egypt.

However, haunting memories of ancient Egypt, which persisted throughout the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, (however distracting or all-too-often incorrect they are), did spark a search for an Egypt acting as a repository of deep, hidden truths encoded in their art and architecture, history and memory. Another alliance of scholars yearned for a revival of a lost memory and experience of Egypt, its aura and allure, of ‘mysteries’ that underlay the esoteric discourses that have shaped wider human destiny, still in

the process of being revealed. (1997, 20-21) Assmann sees himself in the wake of a generation of German Egyptologists – Joachim Spiegel, Eberhard Otto, Hellmut Brunner, Siegfried Morenz and Walter Wolf. They, in a compassionate and imaginative, open-minded and painstaking response to their ‘witness’ of the traumas of the Third Reich, the Second World War and the Cold War division of Germany, have embarked on a study of ancient Egypt that aims to be more beneficial and significant than an accumulation of ‘archaeological, historical and philological discoveries and problem-solving’ ventures. (1997, 22)

They have endeavoured – ‘more or less unconscious[ly]’ – to reach insights that they hope will reilluminate and reinvigorate the essential fundamentals of a ‘moral and religious orientation’ which had been repressed, darkened and almost obliterated in the first half of twentieth-century European history. Their scholarly quest, conditioned by their own ethical, political and personal traumatic experiences, was to revive and bring the discourse of ancient Egypt – its ‘collective memory’, its ‘mnemohistory’ – back to enrich cultural memories and traditions and experiences of a new, reoriented, post-fascist Europe. (1997, 22)

With Erik Hornung, Assmann, holds an honoured place in this German tradition of Egyptology. They both envisage Akhenaten’s introduction of a radical new religious concept, indeed experience – monotheism – as a critical eruption of a performance on the dramatic stage that was ancient Egypt, the first fateful entrance of the ‘One’, the Aten. Indeed, like Hornung, Jan Assmann does not shrink from the complex nature and reception of this Being, who briefly compelled and commanded the action of the First Act, the Amarna period. In his influential 1992 analysis, ‘Akhanyati’s Theology of Light and Time’, Assmann concludes: ‘Only by eliminating these dimensions of signification’ through which ‘language and interlocution construct the world as moral space,’ mindful that ‘nature itself is amoral’, does Akhenaten point to the ‘natural character of reality’. This requires a shaper consciousness of his program that aimed at a radical reassessment of New Kingdom politics and religion, the potent forces, militating against the ultimate, natural revelation of the Aten. (1992, 163)

Assmann charts the dynamics of this religious experience through a close semantic, historical and theological study of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*. This text reveals the vital dimensions of light, time and kingship which shaped Akhenaten’s encounter with the Aten. It is introduced with a vivid appreciation of Akhenaten’s direct engagement between the Aten and all that had been made visible. This action occurs

in another dimension to the traditional, pre-Amarna process of life being regenerated in a mythological context. Here life and light are directly predicated in a clear lexical field of transitive-active relationships; the sight of the dawn's extending rays brings life:

You are the One yet a million lives are in you,
to make them live. The sight of your rays
is breath of life to their noses. (1992, 148)

For Akhenaten, the Aten is released from its complex and enveloping mythological constellation, no longer 'included and embedded in divine interaction', but 'now apart from the world, far away and on high, visiting and pouring down all over the earth its own "life-giving rays."' (1992, 148) As Assmann continues, 'we have a direct, transitive subject-object relation between the god and the earthly political sphere.' (1992, 149) Naturally, this dynamic can only occur during daytime.

Night is a different matter. In this new 'dispensation' where only the real is visible, the night is reduced to the dark, a realm without light. The world then fades into chaos and death, only to revivify at dawn. The divinity has then returned and the world – human, animal and vegetable – responds with excitement and energy. This sense of animation is clearly, indeed visibly heightened. The earth is irrepressibly alive:

All flowers exist, what lives and sprouts from the soil,
grows when you shine, drunken by your sight.
All flocks jump on their feet,
the birds in their nests fly up in joy,
their folded wings unfold in praise
of the living Aten, their maker. (1992, 151)

The very motion of the Aten – from morning, midday, night, and then dawn – fills the world with a sacred rhythm that is time, the radiant continuum of works and days that makes up the eternally-returning, life-giving existence of the Aten: the flow of nature, existence itself. (1992, 151-152)

Akhenaten's religious experience is clearly 'structured by a sensual apprehension of reality.' (1992, 152) This becomes even more evident when Akhenaten addresses the actual, intimate advent of life. He does not enmesh the Aten within a host of creation narratives. Jan Assmann describes Akhenaten's approach 'as ingenious as it is innovative.' (1992, 153) What now presents itself, according to Assmann, is not a 'cosmogony', but an 'embryogony' where the 'seed' quickening within the womb and the chicken incubating inside the egg show the power of time as an element of the fertile force emanating from the Aten into the most interior, hidden and yet potent of spaces. These microcosmic cells are then counterpointed with larger panoramas of life on earth such as humankind with all its diverse races, blessed by the sun and an array of watered terrains.

From within these different visions of the spectacular diversity of life on earth, Akhenaten's hymn resounds with joyful exclamations, with the wonder of it all: 'how many!' ... 'how excellent!' (1992, 154) Here both Erik Hornung and Jan Assmann are in accord; everything living – seen and unseen – has come into being because of a single, elemental force: 'cosmic energy'; the 'radiance'. (1992, 155) And it is this sense of becoming that is an essential dynamic of Akhenaten's religious experience: '*hpr*', 'to become'. The world itself is in a constant, vivifying state – a 'becoming', a 'transformation-manifestation of God himself', in a unique range of interrelationships with the world, as distinct from those established within the cultural contexts of either traditional Egyptian religion or Old Testament beliefs. Akhenaten's own apprehension involved a deep, intimate, almost symbiotic 'interlocking', so that 'God is identified as the source of energy which maintains the world by "becoming" the world, by constant self-transformation.' (1992, 155)

This interconnectedness through the divine state of 'becoming', energising the experience of the Aten as 'time', that is the continuum through which time is made manifest as both cyclical and linear phenomena. As Assmann succinctly argues, 'God is time (*nḥh*) and everything unfolding, developing in time (*hpr*) is a manifestation (*hprw*) of his essence or energy.' (1992, 156) Here the experience of 'seeing' is critical. The Aten sees, and is seen by all that he has created. This is an active and a passive interplay, or as Jan Assmann puts it – 'intervision'. (1992, 156) The all-seeing Aten and his creation exist in a sacred communal space where light and vision all co-exist, reflecting one another in a radiant harmony.

However, this balance is complicated by the emergence of an additional factor – the assertion of royal power, the king's *exclusive* ability to 'know' the Aten; something the rest of creation cannot share with the king or the Aten: 'knowledge'. 'Only the king is able to proceed from outward solarly to inward divinity and to speak of God's own power within him.' (1992, 157)

This 'knowledge' is critical as Assmann considers the third and final section of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*. Its focus is the king. The names of the king, together with his queen, have appeared in the first column of this hymn on Ay's tomb wall at el-Amarna (Davies, VI, 1908, Plate XXVII) His cartouches rest under the double cartouches that contain the didactic name of the Aten and its descending list of the Aten's epithets. The king returns to an explicit significance at the conclusion of the hymn. There, in verses that have proved challenging to be translated coherently, a potent force is revealed in the new religion. Within Amarna's restless alternating states – day/night, life/death and the comings/goings of divine energy across the world – there is a stable focal point in this alternating motion of the Aten's realm: the king. The Aten has revealed itself to the king's heart, and there the Aten will always be:

When you have gone and there is no eye,
whose eyesight you have created in order not to be
compelled to look at your[self as] the only one of creation,
you are in my heart.
There is no other who knows you,
only your son Napkhupruria, 'Sole-one-of-Ra',
whom you have taught your ways and your might. (1992, 159)

The king, to rephrase Assmann, had monopolized knowledge of the Aten, and such knowledge as opposed to seeing, is essential to the position, and indeed the religious experience of the king. The Aten visits and stays in the heart of the king, day and night. There the king learns the nature and extent of the Aten's message: 'you taught [Akhenaten] your ways and your might.' (1992, 160)

While all the forces in Amarna religion seem to be, to use Assmann's expression, 'tripolar' (1992, 158) – the Aten, the world and the king – reflecting the harmonious tripartite structure of the *Great Hymn*, there is another dimension to this balance, the unexpected eruption of the king's exclusive relationship with the Aten. It creates investigative and analytical problems, including incoherencies and inconsistencies,

oversimplifications and emerging complexities which are, of course, expected and accepted by students of the Amarna period, and in particular, the religious experience of Akhenaten. These perils also had earlier stalked the people of the Amarna Age.

It must be remembered that Jan Assmann in his 1992 article is analyzing what is essentially ‘theology’, that is, an idealized distillation of religious thought into the patterns and abstractions of systematized concepts, and not necessarily the actual religious experience of the king, his court and his people. Indeed, it is apparent from Assmann’s oeuvre that the longer he has considered the nature and significance of Akhenaten and his religion, the more he is aware of its negative repercussions. In 1997 he published, originally in English, another seminal work, *Moses the Egyptian*. Here, he employed a series of specialist, technical terms: ‘primary religion’, ‘secondary religion’, ‘counter religion’ and the ‘Mosaic distinction’. These became integral to his analysis of the religious revolutions of the ancient Near East.

A ‘counter religion’ sees itself as a ‘secondary religion’ which stands apart from other religions which are, in turn, designated as ‘primary religions’. Such a division shapes the Old Testament’s Exodus narrative. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. (Exodus, 20: 2014; Deuteronomy, 5: 6-18) The first two commandments centred on the unique nature of God. God is One, indivisible and invisible. This is a new, revolutionary religion. It establishes itself in direct opposition to all other religions, that is, primary religions. In the case of the children of Israel, who received these commandments after God had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt and pharaoh’s pursuing chariot squadrons, a chasm had opened up between Egyptian polytheistic religion of ‘false idols’ and the Hebrew ‘one true God’. This is a compelling binary which Moses brought to his people; the ‘Mosaic distinction’. (1997, 1-2) However, Assmann argues that the expression the ‘Akhenaten distinction’ should not be used. Despite the fact that the king introduced the first recorded monotheistic faith, bringing about ‘the most radical eruption of a counter religion in the history of humankind’, he nevertheless was not a figure, like Moses, whose memory and religion survived the millennia. (1997, 2, 25)

As Erik Hornung has earlier cited, it was an age of anxiety to the extent that the trauma people at the time suffered intensified into a new deity, Pa Shed, the ‘Saviour’. In addition, Assmann is profoundly engaged with this ‘dark’ side of the Amarna period. One consequence of Akhenaten’s religious change was the abolition of the annual festive celebrations of the particular gods and goddesses. These feasts, with their

spectacular display of the deity's image, the gaudy procession and the generous banquets were profoundly missed under the Amarna state. A scribe, Pawah, late in the Amarna period, scrawled across the wall of a Theban tomb owner, Pairi, his anguished nostalgia at never seeing his beloved god's image: 'My heart longs to see you!' (1997, 26)

Moreover, Assmann in his analysis of the significance of a 'secondary religion' saw that this new differentiating force generated stark, sudden categories: truth and falsehood. They were then divided from each other along an antagonistic frontier, the newly-emergent border between opposing binaries which would begin to extend across the continents and centuries: Israel/Egypt, Jews/Gentiles, Christians/pagans, Muslims/infidels, nature/culture. (Assmann, 1997, 1; Slavet, 2010, 387) At the core of these distinctions an overwhelming negativity appeared, 'a violent denunciation of all other religious truth and the peoples who believed in them.' (Slavet, 2010, 387)

Previously and much later in the Classical Age of Greece and Rome there had been a relatively non-threatening, free and open correspondence between deities in polytheism. The Egyptian sun god was Re, while the Greeks called him Apollo; the Greeks worshipped Aphrodite, the Romans were devoted to their goddess of love, Venus; Dionysus became the Roman Bacchus; Ares, Mars; Hephaestus, Vulcan... There was a mutually inclusive, accepted tolerance and interchange of divine names for particular common features of existence: the sun in the sky, love and wine, war and the iron forge, for instance. Such a rich 'medium of translation and communication was radicalized into silence and misunderstanding. Monotheism now installed 'a barrier to communication: the names for God became not only untranslatable, but also unpronounceable and unrepresentable.' (Slavet, 2010, 387)

As a result, a divinely-sanctioned alienation escalated into communal mistrust and hatred, and then violence as witnessed at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 32: 21-35) or in the earlier persecution of the Theban god Amun and other deities. Assmann sees this experience for many Amarna individuals as a 'terrible shock' to a people who had previously equated harmony between gods, cults and people as the foundation of their well-being and prosperity. He writes: 'The nonobservance of ritual interrupts the maintenance of cosmic and social order. The consciousness of a catastrophe and irreparable crime must have been widespread.' (Assmann, 1997, 25) He cites the war between Egypt and the Hittite empire and the consequent plague sweeping across the ancient Near East for two unforgiving decades as a woeful

confluence of cataclysms that resulted in a trauma for royal and non-royal Egyptian alike. (Assmann, 1997, 1)

Finding themselves in this unprecedented condition, the Egyptians had very few words, let alone concepts, to express and diagnose, reconcile and alleviate their distress and terror. Many Egyptologists have since turned to *The Restoration Stela of Tutankhamun* to help elucidate the nature of this sense of despair. It does not shrink from describing the extent of post-Amarna desolation. The sensed their Egyptian Nile had been abandoned by the gods and goddesses; their temples were left to ruin. 'The land was in grave disease [*znj-mnt*]'. (Assmann, 1997, 27) In an unparalleled admission, Egyptian armies warred without victory. People's prayers went unheard. Everywhere bodies weakened; hearts failed. (Murnane, 1995, 212-213; Assmann, 1997, 27) Yet, despite these desperate admissions, no ruler or god had been targeted and named. There was no self-conscious rationalising or guiding concept such as 'monotheism' or a 'jealous' god. For the post-Amarna Egyptians 'grave disease [*znj-mnt*]' was all they could articulate to characterize their dire condition, their extreme dis-ease.

The very dynamics producing this trauma had become unidentifiable, indescribable. Official decrees as well as the *damnatio memoriae* issued against Akhenaten and the memory of his reign denied the existence of these once-potent, divine entities, king and the Aten. These silences intensified it. It was driven 'underground'. As Hornung was influenced by Jung, Assmann has ventured into the dangerous territory of the justifiably-contested theories of Sigmund Freud, the 'father of psychoanalysis', on a possible connection between Akhenaten, Moses and monotheism. Yet Assmann's exposure to Freud's clinical vocabulary and conceptualisations has had a significant effect on Assmann's intellectual interests which include the study of memory and trauma as well as the complexities of repression and latency. For the memories of this time, if they were not completely repressed, had begun to slip past the individual horizons of consciousness where, generation after generation, they were to remain dormant or latent for centuries, only to resurface in disturbing, but otherwise extraordinary tales such as the leper legend.

Indeed, one of Freud's biographers, Richard Bernstein, has centred on Freud's motives for writing and publishing his *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939. This year saw the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe and the catastrophe that would follow for the Jews of Europe. Indeed, the year before marked the first organized, full-scale pogrom across the Third Reich – *Kristallnacht* – and Freud's own flight from

his native Vienna. These years resonate tragically in the history of Judaism and Freud had been desperate to search for the origins of anti-Semitism and its corollary, the unique features of Judaism, one of which included the crucial cultural and religious development Freud termed '*Der Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit*', the 'The Advance of Intellectuality' or 'The Progress in Spirituality' depending on which respective English translation is preferred – James Strachey's or Katherine Jones's. (1998, 31-32)

Bernstein follows Freud's argument that it was the Jewish breakthrough into a new relationship with the divine that directed their religion into a distinct new field of interaction with God. It was no longer the senses-based, especially the visual apprehension of the many gods of the Jews' neighbouring peoples. Rather, it was a total and intellectual embrace with their one invisible God; an embrace which enlarged the intellectual and spiritual (*Geistigkeit*) faculties of the Jewish tradition – practice, experience and theology – with its emphasis on ethical truth and justice as well as its conception of a grander God, not bound to the finite products of the human hand. While these developments, of course, matured much later than New Kingdom Egypt, they provide an insight into the evolution of 'monotheism' and the notion of the 'sublime'. This fierce and austere, anti-polytheistic and abstract rigour of a unique, abstract relationship with their God had marked them out. Bernstein claims that Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgment* revealed that the Jewish religious preoccupation transcended the senses. It concentrated on *thinking*. To Kant, this was a 'sublime' endeavour, best expressed in the Second Commandment against making 'any graven image'. (1998, 33) This prohibition meant that the sensual boundaries which arrested and contained the imagination, when removed, could allow the imagination to feel unbounded, to experience 'the exhibition of the infinite', and expand the 'soul'. (1998, 33-34)

Bernstein explores an experience not extensively or even directly addressed by Erik Hornung or Jan Assmann, the 'sublime'. To Bernstein this is at the heart of the Jewish people's experience of God. While Bernstein, having discussed the figure of Akhenaten briefly, does not pursue the implications of this idea for Akhenaten and his religion which, according to Bernstein, had clearly enthralled Freud enough to create his notorious narratives about Moses's discipleship of Akhenaten. However, parallel to the Jewish experience of the 'sublime', as described by Kant, a case could be made that the earlier monotheism of Akhenaten, itself another 'counter religion' – a 'secondary religion' – had the potential to be considered as having its own version of the 'sublime'. It was, after all, a radical religion released from its original mythological and conceptual matrices which had bound traditional Egyptian religion to the status of a

‘primary religion’. This could open up new possibilities for a deeper engagement with Akhenaten’s own religious experience.

Undoubtedly, Hornung and Assmann, nevertheless, have staked out new ground in our perceptions of the religious revolutionary, King Akhenaten. They have bequeathed a legacy of penetrating insights and altered the paradigm for Amarna studies, leaving us with incisive intellectual instruments to dissect and examine the core of the turbulent and enthralling reign of Akhenaten. These new implements have been cleared of the earlier distracting accretions and anachronisms of the religious and national, political and scientific agendas that have distorted our Egyptological antecedents’ understanding and evaluation of the radical meaning of Akhenaten’s religious experience. Yet, we can proceed further under the guidance of contemporary Egyptologists and new ways of thinking about history and historiography – revolution and change, the excitement and trauma of breaking away from the past into an unknowable present, let alone future.

Chapter 3

Re-thinking history: Dutch twentieth- and twenty-first century approaches

Working with a different, but not mutually-exclusive orientation to the past and history are two Dutch late-twentieth and early twenty-first century philosophers of history; Frank Ankersmit (*Sublime Historical Experience*, 2005) and Eelco Runia (*Moved by the Past*, 2014). Together, as colleagues at Groningen University, they have also encountered and engaged with these concepts of ‘trauma’ and ‘rupture’, ‘revolution’ and the ‘sublime’, already discussed and analysed by Hornung and Assmann, Kant and Freud. The observations of these Dutch philosophers of history may prove to be relevant and complementary pathfinders in bringing us through to new, enlightening ways of furthering the exploration of Akhenaten’s religious experience as they introduce notions of ‘sublime historical experience’, that is, the total ‘rupture’ of the past from the present; the attendant ‘trauma’ of this ‘rupture’ – ‘discontinuity’; the rhetorical device of ‘*inventio*’ which can assume a broader significance if it is applied to the moment when an individual or group confront all the characteristics *that they are not* as they challenge their own tradition and future in order to find a transfigured identity, a new sense of their own being; at this threshold of transcendence they then find themselves in the throes of a sensation of ‘*vertigo*’, that is, when empowered and mobilized by this new mesmerizing sense of themselves, they venture out spontaneously and excitedly out on a new course of action to experience their own dizzying sense of innovation, transformation and destiny, perhaps even encountering a state of ‘discontinuity’ and its concomitant, ‘historical mutation’...hurtling toward a ‘brave new world’....

3.1 Franklin Ankersmit and the sublime historical experience: on contacting, accessing and being inside the past

For over a decade Frank Ankersmit’s *Sublime Historical Experience* has been regarded as an unsettling work. It has interrogated one of the critical precepts of post-modern historiography, that in all its different forms ‘language precedes all’; before the action, the words. However, some thinkers like Ankersmit, were concerned that all this apparatus of language prevented a clear, direct way of seeing, indeed experiencing the past. Under this post-modern influence, the

past itself was hidden behind a plethora of linguistic filters which in the long run, closed it off ‘behind an impenetrable screen of language.’ (Ankersmit quoted in Menezes, 2018, 45)

This challenge from Ankersmit aimed to disengage from this post-modern ‘linguistic bureaucracy’ which was supported by and, in turn, sustained American philosopher, Richard Rorty, among others, who declared that ‘language goes all the way down’, that without language there could be no experience; language completely embeds, envelops and realizes experience. (Menezes, 2018, 51) There are many levels to this bureaucratic structure: ‘semiotics, hermeneutics, tropology, deconstructivism, textualism...’ (Menezes, 2018, 46) Ankersmit has refused to be thwarted by this stifling edifice. He has searched for a way to enable an authentic access to the past, for a direct experience of the past.

Ankersmit is very much aware of his own guide into this alluring experience: Johann Huizinga, a fellow Dutchman and late medieval historian, whose *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), remains one of the classics of twentieth-century historiography. Dutch historians, according to Ankersmit, pride themselves on a distinct intellectual and cultural heritage. The Dutch, for instance, are very different in their approach to the past because of their original late nineteenth-century literary movement, the *Tachtigers*. One of its leading theorists, Lodewijk van Dayssel, in his challenge to the earlier ascendant school of realism or naturalism, took an idiosyncratic, innovative path to that taken by his French associates. Whereas the French followed artists like the poet Mallarmé in his turn towards Symbolism and its dominance of ‘language [over] reality (and/or experience)’, this Dutch ‘school’ took another direction. (Menezes, 2018, 49) Mistrustful of language, they experimented with the notion of ‘*the subjection of language to experience* and to how the world presents itself to us, hence, as undistorted by language and by how experience is codified by language. They challenge familiar, restrictive words by inventing new ones thought to better fit the actual experience of life.’ (Menezes, 2018, 49)

This gave rise to Johann Huizinga’s concept of ‘historical sensation’, of experiencing the world through the senses – sight, sound, touch, smell and taste; sensing life ‘from within’ (through a contact with the past). It is ‘a momentary flash in the minds of historians possessing an unusually acute sense of history.’ (Ankersmit quoted in Menezes, 2018, 49) Such a nuanced contact with

the past can engender a deeply-felt sense that one could encounter and engage with the past with ‘complete authenticity and truth.’ This identification and internalization of the past can be triggered spontaneously, unpredictably ‘by a line from a chronicle, by an engraving, a few sounds from an old song.’ (Huizinga quoted in Menezes, 2018, 50)

Probing the dynamics or perhaps tensions within the work and mind of the historian as she enters into an experience of the past, there is an unavoidable realisation of a ‘tragic split between life and history that one may become aware of the loss of a “former identity” that will define oneself in terms of what one “no longer” can be.’ (Ankersmit quoted in Menezes, 2018, 48) Such a longing over this irretrievable loss ignites a momentary sensation of the sublime, an experience which ‘is not repeatable or reproducible.’ Here the historian is in thrall to a ‘sensation’, as Huizinga would term it. It is unpredictable and transitory, abrupt and alienating. In fact, the historian can be reduced from the *active* director of the resources at hand and the literary skills at representing the past, to the state of being *passive*, lost and dislocated from being able to associate with even the most familiar and trivial objects in her immediate environment, so overwhelmed by this ‘sensation’ of the past penetrating the present, by what Ankersmit reveals to be ‘a fissure in the temporal order so that the past and the present are momentarily united in a way that is familiar to us in the experience of “déjà vu”’. (2005, 132)

Paradoxically, the sublime has another dimension, centred on ‘experiences of rupture’, the sudden state of a ‘Gestalt switch’ as endured during the European conquest and colonization of the New Worlds, the French and Russian Revolutions, the post-bellum US Southern States and the two World Wars, culminating in the Holocaust and the A-bombs dropped on Japan. (Ankersmit, 2005, 13-15) His ‘notion of historical experience is defined by the manner in which a civilisation may relate to its past as expressed in and by its historical consciousness. In the case of the West, it is shaped around “experiences of ruptures”, when a civilisation abandons its previous identity while defining its new identity previously in terms of what has been discarded or surrendered.’ (Ankersmit, 2005, 13) These ‘ruptures’ are traumatic. They are torn ‘by feelings of a profound and irreparable loss, of cultural despair and of hopeless disorientation...’ (Ankersmit, 2001, 31) Ankersmit then diagnoses the raw actuality of such a broken, discarded sense of being: ‘...for here one really loses oneself, here a former identity is irrevocably

lost...superceded by a new historical or cultural identity...This sort of trauma is just as permanent as the loss of the former identity.’ (2001, 302)

In this context of traumatic experiences, Ankersmit realizes that concentrating on traditional historical texts alone may not ‘address the question of what experience of the past is meant to express – or to suppress...Since experience has no voice of its own, since it depends on its mortal enemy – language – for its expression, we have remained deaf to it up until now and ignorant of how it determines our relationship with the past. So it will be the difficult but challenging future task of the historical theorist to liberate the history of historical experience from the heavy and oppressive weight of (the historian’s) language and to unearth experience from the thick sedimentary strata of language covering it. (2005, 14)

Jonathan Menezes, discussing Ankersmit’s historiographical and philosophical significance, turns to another element of experience in a profoundly intimate aspect of many lives – religious experience. Here sublime experience, an encounter with a god or God, often leaves the individual overwhelmed, ‘mute or it is not a sublime experience at all.’ (2018, 57) Indeed, Johann Huizinga’s notion of ‘sensation’ is a suitable point to begin an engagement with this often-life changing event because/when ‘it is impossible to find the right words to describe the content of this experience.’ (2018, 57)

Religion itself, according to Menezes, embodies the sum total of experience and organization, that is, of the sudden, irruptive and immediate encounter with the divine by the blessed person, and the manner it is mediated and organized by the leaders of religious institutions for the wider faithful. Despite the well-intentioned organisers, the original sublime experience is ‘irretrievable’. In this case ‘experiencing God’ precedes the talk about God; the action comes before the words. (2018, 57)

It is here that Ankersmit’s thoughts on the sublime correspond with those of Kant and Freud. It is in Ankersmit’s fleeting, ungraspable encounter between the past and present, historian and history, the chosen and God, into that momentous ‘fissure’ that the sublime enters and is gone. This echoes the earlier assessment of the Jewish religion whose interdiction on material images

of gods released the Jewish faithful from being confined to sensory awareness alone, their souls could expand momentarily into the limitless expanse, Kant's 'exhibition of the infinite', that instant to apprehend, as Ankersmit's historians or Menezes' saints to enter the sublime, 'unspeakable' (to use Jan Assmann's expression) encounter with the past, history and God. (2014, 2)

3.2 Eelco Runia: at the interface of ‘discontinuity’ and ‘historical mutation’ – the ‘inventio’ and ‘vertigo’ of ‘sublime historical events’

Eelco Runia succeeds Huizinga and Ankersmit, enriching his own critical perceptions with his Dutch predecessors’ substantial advances within the restless sphere of twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy of history. His own experiences as a scholar and novelist of contemporary events, such as the Dutch army’s failed peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, during the Srebrenica Massacre in 1995, has sharpened his appreciation and encounter with ‘sublime historical events’ which he also names as ‘catastrophes’. These incidents are not ‘acts of God’, as he classifies them, but ‘acts of people’. Parallel to Ankersmit’s analyses, they include the French and Russian Revolutions and the First World War.

Runia’s doctoral dissertation on Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, focused on the novel’s complex relationship with historical experience, memory and representation. His *Waterloo, Verdun, Auschwitz: De liquidatie van het verleden (The liquidation of the past)* (1999) explored the way societies, like individuals, seek to reduce ‘dissonance’ in their histories, how they attempt to explain away, to rationalize disturbing, shocking episodes in their communal or national narratives, how they try, in one of Leopold von Ranke’s celebrated aims for the historian, ‘to bring recent history [i.e. the French Revolution] into harmony with what happened before.’ (Ranke quoted in Runia, 2014, 9)

Yet Runia does not follow this traditional path of modern historians. He does not invest in detailed rational, longitudinal studies to explain how and why such epoch-marking and -making events happen. He does not focus exclusively on the concept of continuity. He questions the familiar explanations of how at a profound level history become a prolonged succession of episodes driven by an often-hidden but, nevertheless, continuous sequence of meaning: a logical, coherent discourse of cause-course-consequence; a ‘horizontal’ narrative along a clear plane of sequential actions.

Rather, in latest work, *Moved by the past: discontinuity and historical mutations* (2014), Runia envisions history as an unsettling series of radical unpredictable breaks with the past. These sudden turning points are not driven or even simply predated by an unstoppable procession of events, by the trope of ‘inevitability’. We may see and understand it as such from our privileged

vantage point of hindsight enhanced by historians' highly-specialised and -disciplined skills in research and narrative, analysis and explanation. However, he suggests that the movement of events should be seen as history launching upon a set of surprising, unsettling 'discontinuities', 'leaps and bounds', twists and turns toward unforeseeable developments or more precisely, 'mutations'. (Runia, 2018)

Such movements are presented in Runia's opening chapter in *Moved by the past* – 'Burying the Dead, Creating the Past' – by a series of 'Theses' (2014, 1-16). For instance, his 'Eighth Thesis' reads:

Every now and then we create new pasts for ourselves by committing fresh 'original sins' by fleeing forward in horrendous, sublime – in short, historical – 'acts of people.' (2014, 13)

Some of these 'theses' resemble Zen *koans* or riddles, such as the classic "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" They challenge the mind's self-conscious, 'logical distinctions' and compel the seeker to open themselves to unexpected insights, revealed by reaching into the unconscious to break through to a solution at the heart of each *koan*'s riddle. (Giroux, 1974, 36)

He ventures to consider this trajectory toward 'catastrophe' as a primal human 'need to energize [its] own evolution by habitually, even chronically creating situations ('catastrophes' or sublime historical events) that put a premium on mutations.' (Runia, 2018) This disturbing, even distressing dimension to his work is acknowledged by Frank Ankersmit, who writes, with reference to the French Revolution, '...one was thrown into a breathtaking "rollercoaster of terrifying events"' (Runia), where each event provoked, in its turn, a new set of nauseating novelties. It was like a nightmare, but, as Runia puts it, "All these flagrant events had really taken place: the storming of the Bastille, thousand-year old traditions were cast aside in a moment, the execution of the king, the desecration of the Church, the mangling of the clergy, the orgiastic indulgences in political idealism, the regime of virtue and terror, an attempt to start history anew, acclamation of coups d'état, wars were fought, a Corsican artilleryman became Emperor, and so on" (Runia, 1999, quoted in Ankersmit 2005: 143-144) Frank Ankersmit views the French Revolution – 'this chain of unheard-of miracles' – opening before contemporaries and historians alike as 'a yawning abyss' rapidly erupting 'between the past and the present', as the

‘natural biotope of historical experience’ gripped by unspeakable awe and terror, by the sublime. (2005, 144)

Runia and Ankersmit are historians and philosophers for our age. Ever since the end of the Cold War we have been living in a period no longer shadowed and shaped by antagonistic polar binaries generating a symmetrical gridlock, holding the Soviet Union and the United States at bay, stalled, frozen before the threat of mutually assured destruction. We are all too aware of the dangerous surprises of radical discontinuity: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the USSR, genocide in Rwanda and the Balkans, the September 11 2001 attacks on the US, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the election of the first US African-American president, the UK Brexit Referendum and then the presidential ascent of Donald Trump. In fact, Runia has engaged with this most recent unexpected event in his 2017 essay *Waarom Trump?* (Runia, 2018)

Citing an early 18th century philosopher of history, the Italian Giambattista Vico, Runia explores the development of language through the concept of metonymy (Greek: ‘change of name’). A metonymy is the figurative use of the name of an ‘attribute or adjunct...that replaces the thing meant’, a distinguishing part to stand for the whole, instance, ‘spectre for authority’. (Runia, 2014, 66) Vico elaborates on how language, in this case Latin, establishes how a metonymy was found to invent the name, Jupiter, ruler of the gods. In this name the Romans’ ancestors identified and encapsulated the most threatening force of nature that they did not comprehend, and therefore feared, ‘the thunder’. They called it ‘Jupiter’.

Such a summoning was their *inventio*, invention: the naming of the greatest deity of the Roman pantheon. A new omnipotence was brought into being, in a very Roman manner, and asserted himself through the celestial violence of the world. The Romans were empowered to believe that they had tamed ‘nature’ herself, calling forth her divine ruler by giving a name to what they feared, and devising a set of ritual beliefs and practices to contain and ensure, sustain and channel his power. Their empire, *Pax Romana*, would eventually extend to the limits of the known world from his marble temple rising above the most sacred hill of Rome in the name of Jupiter Maximus Capitolinus.

As Vico argues, now ‘nature is the language of Jove.’ Once his name was invented ‘nature was seen in terms of ‘Jupiter’. ‘Jupiter became a bridgehead’; a way across the terrible, unnamed unknown. Nature’s force, now named and tamed, was quite literally *managed*. ‘From then on

humans lived “in” Jupiter’. They merged with ‘Jupiter – “became” Jupiter in the sense that Jupiter constituted their consciousness’, integrating with their gradual, rising realisation of conquest and destiny. (Runia, 2014, 74)

However, over time, this epic process eventually did not remain stable. Once it became complete and natural, it was taken for granted. And then the Romans (and their successors, ourselves) nevertheless began to sense, in the face of this *inventio* of Jupiter (and the Roman pantheon), an uneasiness that ‘[they] are what [they] don’t understand...’ because, according to Vico/Runia, “being” is always and irredeemably one ontological and evolutionary level ahead of “understanding”...’ which, through a counterintuitive process lead them (and us) toward a new cognitive and psychological vista through which to see and to be able to ‘understand what we are not’, that is, we only begin to know and understand ourselves by identifying and acknowledging the differences between ourselves and our experiences on the one hand, and those beyond us on the other. Runia continues ‘*we begin to dare to not understand* Jupiter and spring a fresh surprise on ourselves by fleeing – by means of another invention – forward to a new bridgehead,’ to a heroic crossing where a new consciousness waits to be named and experienced. (Runia, 2014, author’s emphasis, 74)

Runia terms this sensation as ‘*selbsthervorbringung*’ – ‘transforming yourself ever more into what you are.’ (Runia, 2014, 142) or as he describes, in the context of his analysis of Friedrich Schiller’s 1782 play, *Die Räuber* (The Robbers), to reach an ‘hallucinatory’ edge of the action and ‘stand on the brink of time’. (2014, 114) Here was a new point of departure for individuals and civilisations, a sublime ‘threshold’, off which to ‘bring oneself forward’ and take a ‘leap’ into the unknown. (2014, 115)

This soaring beyond the familiar frames of Roman (or an even more ancient civilization) could arise from and further engender, according to Runia’s conceptualisations, a sense of ‘vertigo’; not so much a sense of falling or a fear of heights, but an ascent, ‘straight into the unknown.’ (2014, 140) (See Appendix 1) This can overpower individuals, sometimes even generations. It impels them, often herd like, ‘fleeing forward’ toward a reckless mobilization into a sublime historical event. Modern history is marked by a myriad of these disruptive, discontinuous instances reaching from an isolated incident to large-scale movements.

Disturbing lines from a young English poet, Rupert Brooke, resonate with this sense of vertiginous energy and excitement. He, like many in his generation, gloried in the daring and dangerous prospect of marching off to war, of holding off the German advance on the Marne in 1914. Runia instances one of his war poems. Brooke turned it into a shrill, avenging paean aimed at the arrogance of the Prussian battalions two generations earlier. Whence, from their hilltop positions overlooking occupied Paris, they had taunted its defeated and demoralized citizens with their victory anthem, *Nun danket alle Gott* ('Now thank we all our God') (Maas, 2015, 114):

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love! (1914 [1941, 11])

These swimmers will wash away their 'old', 'dreary' past and be transformed by their dive 'into cleanness'. So too would Brooke leave the lives and loves of the dissident, decadent Bloomsbury circle of intellectuals behind him, gladly, bravely...blindly. (Laskowski, 1994, 60) (See Appendix 2)

This 'fleeing forward', the sublime pressure of this vertiginous acceleration often, paradoxically, assumes the form of what seems to be another *inventio*, when a new consciousness takes on unpredicted, but recognisable dynamic of 'inventing the new from the old'. (emphasis added; Runia, 2014, 153) In fact, Runia quotes Marx in the epigrammatic opening of his Chapter 7 to underpin his thesis:

At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names. their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honoured disguise

and with such borrowed language. (from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, quoted in Runia, 2014, 144)

This parallels how other civilisations have speculated on and/or implemented change, that is, by looking ‘backward’ to the past, by re-adopting old models of art and architecture, thought and writing under the force of new circumstances, new revelations. It is an often-instanced tendency to steady such a leap forward into the unknown that visionaries (and otherwise) delineate and justify their arrival on history’s stage – the American and French revolutionaries and the ancient Roman Republic; Bismarck, the Kaiser and the medieval Holy Roman Empire; and, as Runia muses ‘one might hypothesize that George W. Bush leapt into the ‘cleanness’ of the Middle East [in 2002 (Afghanistan) and 2003 (Iraq)] because a concoction of high school knowledge about Richard the Lionheart, Abraham Lincoln, and Douglas MacArthur suddenly took possession of him.’ (2014, 143)

Was the reign of Akhenaten an earlier, just as archetypal a flight? The work and approaches of Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia can provide an extensive and detailed theoretical matrix across which to situate and further illuminate the findings of recent Egyptologists in their examination of Akhenaten and his religious changes, centred on Akhenaten’s religious experience. Their exploration of the ‘sublime’, trauma, historical experience, ‘inventio’ and ‘vertigo’ can delineate new and instructive approaches to the ever-perplexing, exquisite and unique theophany of Amenhotep IV and his transfiguration into Akhenaten, his encounter with the Aten.

Chapter 4

Re-thinking Akhenaten's religious experience in the light of recent Dutch historiography and contemporary Egyptology

4.1 James Hoffmeier: phenomenology of religion and experiencing 'theophany'

The dynamics of Runia's 'flight forward' or Rupert Brooke's 'into cleanness leaping' resonate with other ways of situating, in the wider history of experience – particularly religious experience – the earlier, archetypal 'threshold' Akhenaten had reached. Indeed, American Egyptologist and Old Testament scholar James Hoffmeier has recently brought us significantly closer to engaging with Akhenaten's religious experience.

In the preface to his seminal 2015 volume, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism*, Hoffmeier acknowledges the moment when, in his fifth chapter, he arrived at 'a bit of a paradigm shift in how I understood Akhenaten's religious evolution', that is, the moment he arrived at a new 'threshold' of understanding the instance and nature of Akhenaten's encounter with the Aten. (2015: xii) While Hoffmeier's own 'epiphany' clarified and galvanized his research, this nevertheless troubled him. He realized he had ventured into uncharted territory. He, himself, had come to a new 'frontier' as he led us inside the religious experience of Akhenaten.

Spurred on by scholarly scruples, he immediately contacted four trusted fellow Egyptologists – Kenneth Kitchen, Ellen Morris, Boyo Ockinga, and Richard Wilkinson – for their opinion of his unexpected insight. (2015: xii; Hoffmeier, 2018: interview) He postulated that Akhenaten had experienced, what in another religious and historical context would be categorized as a 'theophany', a direct encounter with God.

Hoffmeier's own intuition and his careful consultation have sharpened the focus of our appreciation of the dimensions of Akhenaten's direct religious experience. In addition, the new insights of Ankersmit and Runia, and other intellectual developments beyond Egyptology can, as Hoffmeier has demonstrated by his openness to other disciplines, raise his and our responsiveness and consciousness of the subtleties and nuances of religious experience. It has enabled him to present a detailed, deep and empathetic appreciation of the phenomenon of Akhenaten's encounter with the Aten.

When the present writer asked James Hoffmeier why earlier Egyptologists has not followed this line of investigation and analysis, he responded that most Egyptologists did not share his good fortune of studying, as a graduate student at the University of Toronto, in the extensive and systematic courses offered there in Biblical Studies as well as in the diverse field of the Study of Religion. (Hoffmeier, 2018: interview) Critical to his perspective on religion, which involved a comparative religious approach, was his openness to the earlier groundbreaking works of Edmund Husserl, Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, among others, on the phenomenological approach to religion and religious experience.

Like Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia, all these pioneering thinkers emphasise the importance of ‘experience’ itself. They are sensitive to and serious about the manifold ‘phenomena’ activated during a religious experience when an individual, overtaken by the divinity, is allowed to have an authentic voice, and be recognized as such. This approach was undertaken in a sympathetic manner, as an ‘empathetic insider’. Hoffmeier continues, ‘there is a place for the critical eye of the “outsider” in the study of religion. But something is lost when the only approach used is supposedly “objective” and scientific, as sociological, psychological, and spiritual considerations are often overlooked.’ (2015, 138)

As Rudolf Otto saw, whatever the religious milieu, this encounter with the *numinous*, the ‘holy’ was of a non-rational and subjective dimension. It was a confronting experience of the ‘*mysterium tremendum*’ for any individual held in thrall to an overriding sense of ‘fear and awe’ before the ‘numinal’ phenomena, ‘beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar.’ (1959 [1923], 27) Otto understood this as ‘an experience of ‘the wholly other’ (‘*das ganz andere*’) outside the sphere of the mundane world’. (Hoffmeier, 2015, 139) He found examples of these ‘numinal’ encounters within the Old Testament – God appearing to Moses on Mount Sinai, Ezekiel’s dreams and visions or the *Book of Job*. (Otto, 1959 [1923], 35, 87, 92-96) This sympathetic methodology went against the grain of mainstream scholarship in religious studies and, by implication, the academic background and practice of many Egyptologists. (Hoffmeier, 2015, 139) Indeed, Hoffmeier cites the work of twentieth-century Egyptologists, such as Steindorf and Seele, and John Wilson, who all ascribe Akhenaten’s new religion to the service of ‘political/religious’ agendas’. (Hoffmeier, 2015, 140) This parallels earlier twentieth-

century Egyptologists' anachronistic perspectives on Akhenaten's religious experience discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Hoffmeier recognizes that, in the Christian context, Paul of Tarsus underwent such a 'theophany'. Previously, as Saul and an active agent working for the Jerusalem religious authorities against the first Christians, he was overwhelmed by a flash of light. It forced him to the ground, somewhere on the road to Damascus. A voice addressed him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" ...' (Acts 9: 4-5) As a result, Saul became Paul, a disciple of the risen Jesus. This conversion and transformation to Paul unleashed his zealous missionary activities in works, words and wanderings. It marked a turning point in the history of Christianity, indeed for Western civilization.

In *The Acts of the Apostles* 26: 13, Paul recollects his experience of the *numinous* before the Roman governor, Festus, and King Herod Agrippa. It abounds with images of light and the sky, and the reaction of Paul and his fellow travelers: "...when at midday...I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions..." This religious experience has echoes throughout Christian and Islamic history. They have involved Constantine, Muhammed, Martin Luther and Teresa of Avila. All these religious experiences have had deep, lasting impacts on these individuals as well as the adherents of these different variants of Christianity and Islam. Each experience shares a series of common 'phenomena' with those of Paul of Tarsus. There are, of course, significant differences, such as the appearance of angels and the searing bodily experiences of Teresa.

However, they all have much in common with Akhenaten, especially with the transforming appearance and presence of light, and the sudden, unexpected, eruption of the *numinous*. These powerful, archetypal experiences are integral to the experience of the 'sublime' of Kant, Ankersmit and Runia. They are experiences which abruptly interrupt the normal passage of time, of everyday life. They cast those who undergo such 'sublime' transitions into new, challenging transformed spheres of 'being'. They are never the same again. Their experience of the once-implicit, indeed unselfconscious connection between past and present is severed forever. Yet, unlike Ankersmit and Runia, this notion of the sublime, this 'Gestalt switch' as Ankersmit termed it, has, especially in the religious realm, a positive, ameliorating sense. (2001, 301)

This is definitely the way Akhenaten viewed his own encounter with the sundisc; when he found the Aten, *gm.t p3 itn*, set up his new city – the Horizon of the Aten, *3h.t itn* – and composed his devotions to the Aten. It has been recognized, of course, that Akhenaten's *Great Hymn to the Aten* closely resembles the imagery and belief system of *Psalms 104*. The original translator of this Amarna hymn, James Henry Breasted, has famously twinned them in his 1905 *A History of Ancient Egypt*. (371-376) The parallels are arresting and we have to be careful not to be overwhelmed by the reformed language and threnody suffusing Breasted's translation of the *Great Hymn* into the earlier English of the *King James Bible*. However, what is crucial in this encounter is not a literal 'direct' connection between the Amarna period and the Old Testament psalmist, but the deeper, universal experiences resonating through both texts of an ever-present, supreme being, who has created and sustained all forms of life across the earth and sky.

In fact, the 'sublime' *numinous* imagery of the mystic sensation is evoked and echoed in the experience of Teresa and the angel. Over and over, his spear penetrated her heart. She is profoundly shocked and rapturously shaken by the ecstatic shafts delivered into her by a blissful, angelic being. At this 'threshold' of soaring, animating joy, she 'leaps' to experience God's love, again and again, permeating her entirety – body, soul and spirit. (Landre, 2015, 17-18) Despite the distance in time, place and religion, this experience was resonant millennia earlier when the natural world – trees are in bloom, birds spring from their nests, fish in the sea are brightened and leap at the touch of the descending, penetrating Aten. All of creation – human, animal and vegetable – is charged with the sun's dawning power and beauty in this early section of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*. This vibrant experience is deepened by Akhenaten's own encounter with the rising Aten. In the *Boundary Stelae*, the king exulted that the Aten, at sunrise, 'fills the land with love', breathing 'eternally while his rays are seen...' (Murnane, 1995, 74, 76)

Somehow, we are at a very human, experiential depth which speaks to our shared experience across class and gender, language and religion, time and place. In this context, we are swept into the *vertigo* of transfigured and transcendent belief. This energy, which Runia has introduced and about which he has created a new field of discourse, underpins and explains so much about the religious experience of these historical individuals whose lives have been touched by the numinous light and love of their deity.

4.2 James Allen, Pascal Vernus and Orly Goldwasser: ‘sublime’ lexical fields at Akhetaten

Elaborating and supporting Hoffmeier’s example of Paul of Tarsus’ ‘theophany’, all of these individuals have experienced instances of Runia’s notion of ‘vertiginous’ energy. They share this with Akhenaten’s religious experience. This is apparent in James Allen’s exploration of the written language of the Amarna age. He argued a new clarity entered the linguistic realm of Akhenaten. As well as bringing more of the direct speech of his contemporaries into the written, official form of Egyptian, Akhenaten explored new ways of representing, describing and understanding his new god or more precisely his new experience, *itn*. It was a rapid development, which not only ignored Amun-Re, but transformed the written version of the traditional solar deity, Re-Harakhti, as a falcon crowned with a small circle and two ‘land’ signs. Initially, the Aten’s name, beginning with Re-Harakhti, was enclosed within a double cartouche and the god could be experienced as a cosmic process: ‘The living one (*ʕnh*), Re-Harakhti (*rʕ-hrw-3hti*), who becomes active (*hʕi*) in the Akhet (*m 3ht*); in his identity as the light (*m rn.f m šw*) that is the sun disc (*nti m itn*)’ (Allen, 2014, 238-239)

As his new temples were roofless, open to the active rays of the sun, so his radical description of his *itn* involved a consciousness, an experience of energy contained in the *itn*’s name. It is activated on the horizon as the radiance (*šw*). As Allen argues, the all-dominating image of the *itn* is not ‘a depiction of the sun, but...a hieroglyph, a more elaborate form of the normal hieroglyph for “light”’ (2014, 239) Still, Akhenaten’s religious experience continued to change. By his 9th regnal year, Akhenaten’s religious experience had intensified. As he stayed longer at Akhetaten and composed his final version of the *itn* name, he dropped the hieroglyph for Re-Harakhti. Even the word, *šw*, radiance, because it is literally the traditional god, Shu, disappeared from the *itn*’s new name. Akhenaten now chose to use the ‘neutral word *h3it* “light” for *šw*...’ Allen suggests this was done to emphasise the sun disc’s ‘role as the *vehicle*, not the *origin* of Light’...as Akhenaten reformed his already-untraditional, double cartouche-enclosed name for the climax of his *itn* experience: ‘The living one (*ʕnh*), the Sun (*rʕ*), ruler of the Akhet (*hʕʕ hti*) who becomes active (*hʕi*) in the Akhet; in his identity as the light (*m rn.f m hʕit*) that comes in the sun disc (*iit m itn*)’ (2014, 240)

Our appreciation of Akhenaten’s religious experience should now be characterized by this new, unadorned clarity and directness. While addressing the significance of the name of Akhenaten’s

largest temple at East Karnak, Hoffmeier proposes that its name – *gm.t p3 itn* – can be translated as ‘either a passive (*sḏm.t[w].f*) form (‘the Aten has been/is found’) or the relative form (‘that which the Aten found’).’ (2015, 142) In the former case, it could be understood as having a *tw*-passive voice. However, such a form is unclear. In Egyptian such a passive construction would appear as *itn gm.(w)*, ‘the Aten is or has been found’; a Pseudo-Verbal construction with an Old Perfective predicate. (Ockinga, 2012, 45, 86) A clearer approach is to read *gm.t p3 itn* as it stands; a relative form – ‘that which the Aten found’ (Hoffmeier, 2015, 142; Ockinga, 2012, 67-69) This allows an understanding of a direct, unambiguous act. It reveals the definite, singular power of the Aten, the *h3it* ‘light’ to shine forth, locate and illuminate this sacred, potent place.

This explicit, purposeful energy is literally reflected in perhaps the most dramatic (at least so far found) of the el-Amarna wall reliefs. It was discovered in the Royal Tomb whose deep entrance lies in the open wadi’s winding royal valley, enfolded within the eastern mountain. In Geoffrey Martin’s *The Royal Tomb at El-Amarna Volume II*, Mark Lehner has drafted a detailed line drawing of a section of the Royal Tomb. Lehner has outlined ‘a hypothetical shaft of sunlight striking [the] sarcophagus area.’ (1989, Plate 12A) This unbroken, vertiginous corridor drops away into the long darkness. At dawn, despite the fact that the tomb would have been sealed and secured, the Aten’s rays would have targeted the royal burial chamber, ‘awakening’ the king and his family for another day at Akhetaten.

On this royal tomb wall relief that the Aten is presented in all its vibrant glory, rising over the mound of the horizon, which Akhenaten, in his *Boundary Stelae*, names as the ‘primeval mound’, the place where the world began. (Murnane, 1995, 74) The Aten is actually shown in the Royal Tomb rising over a high mound, whose summit slopes down in the middle to resemble the base of the *3ht* hieroglyph. It is a spectacular sight with the royal couple holding offerings to this vision. Its rays directly touch them. The Aten has such an impact on them that the bands of cloth at the base of their crowns float and flutter before the force of this onrushing light. (Martin, 1989, Pls. 34, 47) The hieroglyphs on the *Boundary Stelae*, that mirror, literally and metaphorically, such a brilliant apparition, proclaiming that the Aten, risen on its horizon, ‘fills the land with love and [pleasantness]...[in the] place of the primeval event’. (Murnane, 1995, 74)

This radiant, energizing ‘becoming’ (*hpr*) of the Aten, can also lend a deeper dimension to Akhenaten’s religious experience. Pascal Vernus, using the new lexical semantic approach to

ancient Egyptian, has linked the verb *gm(i)* to its close lexical associates on the semantic spectrum, the verbs ‘be there’ (*wnn*) and *hpr* “be as the result of previous transformations”. (2012, 387) It allows one to enter more comprehensively into the initial appearance of the Aten for the king. As Akhenaten announced, in his ‘Earlier Proclamation’ on the *Boundary Stelae* at el-Amarna :

‘On this day, when One was in Akhet-[Aten], his Person [appeared] in the great chariot of electrum – just like Aten, when he rises in his horizon and fills the land with love and [the pleasantness (?)] of the Aten. [Akhenaten] set off on a good road [toward] Akhet-Aten, his place of the primeval event...his horizon, [in which his] circuit comes into being, where he is beheld with joy while the land rejoices and all hearts exult when they see him.’ (Murnane, 1995, 74)

Now one can become more attuned to a resonance here not only with a direct, transitive verb, *gm(i)* – that which the Aten found – but also with Akhenaten’s encounter with the Aten ascending over the place of the ‘first time’, its *hpr* at *zp tpy*. Akhenaten, like the Aten, on his bright chariot, beheld the Aten with his heart brimming with jubilation. Such an experience opens up the possibility that when this religious encounter occurred Akhenaten was transfigured. He embodied his altered name: *3h n Itn*. He was ‘the glorified or effective spirit of the Aten’.

This may allow speculation to emerge following Vernus’ own recent researches on the cognitive elements that constitute *gm(i)*. He argues the semantic frame of *gm(i)* can be broadened to allow a more nuanced and fuller comprehension. These understandings may be taken beyond what Polotsky proposed for *gm(i)*; that it meant “‘to find something in such and such a state’”: the expression of this state occupying the centre of interest, while “to find” is a verb of incomplete predication.’ (Vernus, 2012, 387 n.1) Significantly enough, Vernus is not ‘perfectly happy’ with this definition and syntactical function.

Vernus does not consider this ‘incomplete predication’ as final. There are additional calibrations of meaning which may be located along ‘the complex polysemic network’ constellated around *gm(i)*, one of the most frequently encountered verbs in the ancient Egyptian lexicon. Vernus identifies a wide semantic scale for *gm(i)*. Its meanings can shift ‘from concrete predications such as “to meet”, “to come forward”, “to find again” to the expression of cognitive processes

like “to figure out”, “to imagine”, “to invent”, “to become aware”, “to recognize” or “to identify”. (2012, 387) There is even the potential for *gm(i)* to range across the scale of meaning, to engage with the notion of “showing up”.

It is at this moment and place of ‘showing up’ that the meeting of the Aten with Akhenaten may even go beyond the simile in the *Boundary Stelae* extract quoted above, when Akhenaten, in his chariot of electrum, appears ‘like the Aten’. This figure of speech where a similarity is made between the king in his chariot and the Aten itself, may, if not merge, then simultaneously approach each other, perhaps to empower and energise each other so that they encounter one another on the primordial mound at the place of the ‘first time’, bringing them directly together, in a ‘sublime’ unity when they, the Aten and Akhenaten, ‘recognised’ and became aware of each other. Vernus proposes that *gm(i)* could be linked ‘to the same semantic field of verbs such as *wnn* ‘be there’ and *hpr* ‘be as a result of a previous transformation’” (2012, 387) Then, in the religious context of the name of the temple – *gm.t p3 itn* – Akhenaten, having arrived at the place ‘that which the Aten found’, could have been changed into a new being ‘as a result of a previous transformation’, *hpr*.

This echoes Hoffmeier’s notion of a ‘theophany’ which Paul of Tarsus experienced when Jesus strikingly manifested himself and spoke; and Saul became Paul. In Akhenaten’s case the king encountered the Aten in a synchronic intersection where at the place (‘that which the Aten found’) the king was confronted with a sacred power which engendered for him a transfiguration – the union of the holy and the human – when the king was no longer ‘Amenhotep IV’ but *3h n itn*, the ‘glorious or effective spirit of the Aten’. Understanding the temple’s name now enables a deeper engagement with Akhenaten’s religious experience. Here was the Aten’s direct, unambiguous action. The god had revealed its definite, singular power – its pure ‘light’ – to shine forth, locate and illuminate the place which Akhenaten revealed and revered for the rest of his reign.

Another leading voice in this semiotic field of the Egyptian language has been the groundbreaking Israeli Egyptologist and semiotician, Orly Goldwasser. She has dedicated part of her career to exploring the semiotic and religious significance of the evolution (or revolution) of the Aten, *Itn*, in word and by implication, from ‘sun-disc’ to ‘god’. (2002, 111) Essential to her investigations are the ‘silent icons’ of the hieroglyphic Egyptian language: ‘determinatives’. She

views them as critical ‘classifiers’. They establish meanings to the phonetic structure of each Egyptian word. They sit at the end of each word and provide a singular nature to each word. They initiate and sustain a ‘cognitive procedure’ for the writer/reader to follow toward distinct semantic expectations and experiences. (2001, 114)

Goldwasser carefully identifies the development of the divine classifier from the abstract icon best described as a ‘cloth wound round a pole’ [DIVINE + INANIMATE] (Gardiner’s Sign R 8, 489). Later there have been further iterations such as a ‘seated god’ in human form – [DIVINE + ANTHROPOMORPHIC] (Gardiner’s Sign A 40, 439); in animal form – ‘the falcon of Horus on the standard’ [DIVINE + FALCONIDE] (Gardiner’s Sign G 7, 459); in animal form – ‘goddesses, especially those to whom the appearance of a snake was attributed’ [DIVINE + FEMALE SNAKE] (Gardiner’s Sign I 12 or 13, 466). (Goldwasser, 2002, 116) Discussing the *itn*’s appearance in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, Goldwasser begins to identify only two emerging representations of *itn* with a divine classifier – the [DIVINE + ANTHROPOMORPHIC] in the *Coffin Texts*, as ‘the *itn* begins to edge its way toward divinity.’ (2002, 118) By the Second Intermediate Period, the written word *itn* appears, in particular, in Upper Egypt, even in non-religious texts, but still in only a few instances. In the early New Kingdom, while its use begins to spread substantially, any appearance of the divine classifiers is still rare.

While it is important to remember that prominent gods like Amun-Re and Osiris did not have such divine classifiers, when it comes to addressing the shifts in thought and writing of the word *Itn*, during the Amarna period, there was a radical turn in understanding, an ‘*inventio*’ in Runia’s terms, and as a result, in written representation; the *itn*, after once having had a divine classifier – [DIVINE + ANTHROPOMORPHIC] – then appears ‘*without* any divine classifier.’ (Goldwasser’s emphasis, 2002, 124) She continues, ‘[h]ere we arrive at one of those unique junctures in history where the study of classification exposes the reasoning behind the reigning dominant system, with startling lucidity.’ (2002, 124)

In this new, radicalised context, the silent icons at the end of the word, *itn*, are no more. Their absence must not have gone unnoticed. The haunting sense of their disappearance from the well-traced and recited lines of logograms, phonograms and determinatives must have concerned many a well-trained and sensitive scribe. The entire notion of divinity, in the context of the *itn*,

has been detached from a polytheistic framework where human, animal and inanimate classifiers all once co-existed. Now, in a new, emptied monotheistic field of the word *itn*, there is no recognition – written or otherwise – of any other gods or goddesses, let alone other divine classifiers. The category – [DIVINE +] – is no longer appropriate in the context of the *itn*. The Aten has been freed from its traditional orthography. It is no longer a cosmic entity, the sun-disc. It is now the ‘sublime’ revelation emanating out of the *itn* without any categorical mooring in Egyptian cosmology and theology, indeed it is outside, alien to the lettered Egyptian consciousness. It is as if, in silent compliance with the raising and scraping of an Atenist eraser’s chisel, the scribe self-censored his own calligraphy. His pen no longer crafted the old familiar divine classifiers, which ‘as a category of beings rather than a unique occurrence would have been flatly inadmissible.’ (2002, 124)

This was a new type of natural and supernatural experience of and for the Egyptian world. To rephrase Goldwasser, an entire ‘cognitive’ region (category) in the Egyptian landscape had disappeared, once *Itn* lost its divine classifier. (2002, 124) Their map of mental contours, along which the ancient Egyptians charted and negotiated their way through life and death had been intensively redrawn as a result of this sudden abandonment. James Hoffmeier considers that Orly Goldwasser has revealed in these changes a ‘significant theological shift.’ (2015, 210) She has pushed her understanding of Akhenaten’s revolution to attempt to get inside the nature of Akhenaten’s own experience, to probe the ‘essence’ of what she calls ‘the concept of oneness’, the revelation that comes through the *itn*, the lone sun disc. (2010, 267)

Nevertheless, such an absence in the presence of this ‘oneness’ was only the prelude to a transfiguration. Another religious and intellectual dynamic had emerged during Akhenaten’s reign. Alongside his ‘strict avoidance of any [DIVINE] classifier by the word *Itn*’, a new radiant hieroglyph literally dawned over the horizon of the ancient Egyptian lexicon. (Goldwasser, 2010, 159) This emergence, according to Goldwasser, ‘carries a theological weight.’ (2010, 159) She notes that the sun classifier appears consistently as essential to spelling the Amarna *Itn*. However, she has observed that the new hieroglyph has entered the radical religion’s semantic vista. It is ‘a miniature picture of the Aten god: the sun disc emanating a splay of rays from the lower arc of its orb. It is never employed as a classifier to the word for the

Aten. It is used as a classifier for the noun *stwt* (rays) as well as verbs such as *wbn* “break out with light”, *shd* “illuminate” and infrequently *psd* “shine” and *h’t* “raise in glory””. (2010, 161)

This new hieroglyph has been situated at the centre of a new body of knowledge and experience. Goldwasser has given it a new classification, an ‘inventio’: ‘[LIGHT] rays’ and has constellated it around a definite epistemological structure categorizing the elements of light – rise, shine, illuminate, brilliance, splendour, appear in glory; all under the dynamic image of the ‘rays’; ‘all activities of the sun rays, altogether creating the effect of *light*.’ (Goldwasser’s emphasis, 2010, 162) She argues that any exploration of ‘the name and essence of the Amarna god’ involves an examination of its didactic names with separate cartouches. She now extends this groundbreaking interpretation to surveying an often-overlooked text, the recurring refrain below or beside the display of the Aten’s double cartouche:

Itn ʿnh wr (imy) ḥd-sd nb šnn(t) nb pt nb t3 ḥry ib m 3ḥt itn

‘The living Aten (*Itn ʿnh*) great of Sed-festivals! Master of all that the Aten encircles! Lord of heaven lord of earth in the midst of Akhetaten.’ (Goldwasser, 2010, 163)

Goldwasser translates *Itn ʿnh* as ‘the “Energy of light”’ (2010, 163) This new understanding of the energy and power of the Aten – its light (*ḥʿit*) as Allen has explained – ‘complement[s]’ the older aspect of the Aten, as lord/master of all of the space that it encircles. She frames this new relationship between the old and the new beings of the Aten as the ““whole” larger Amarna divine concept’. (2010, 163) While other gods ‘speak’, this is the only known instance of the Aten speaking, and what it says is significant, literally and metaphorically, to underpin Goldwasser’s new classification under the icon of the sun’s rays. Found on an obscure sarcophagus fragment from the Royal Tomb at el-Amarna, she cites this ‘voice’ of the Aten, albeit it broken, as the direct speech of this radiant new being: *dd in p3-itn ʿnh iw stwt.i ḥr šḥ(d)* ‘said by the ‘Living Aten’: ‘my rays illuminate...’ (2010, 163; Martin, 1974, pl. 13, 308) Akhenaten had come to an instance of ‘inventio’, he was at the ‘threshold’ of a new religious consciousness, entering a new religious experience.

While the rest of the speech has been broken up and lost, it lends itself to tentatively extend Goldwasser’s own speculations. Here is the new active force of the Amarna religion centred on the rays which extend down across the landscape of Akhetaten and its royal family, totally

focused on elements of the new Amarna classifier: '[LIGHT] rays'. In this all-too-brief moment of the Aten's direct voice – *iw stwt.i hr sh(d)* – it does establish the fact, not noticed by Egyptologists before Goldwasser, that the Aten *speaks*, not only to Akhenaten, but to all who read and write ancient Egyptian. Such direct communication in this funerary context is modelled on other deities. For instance, on Tutankhamun's Shrine III there are 'words spoken' by divinities including Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Hapy, Anubis... (Piankoff, 1962, 70-76) Yet, in this context, a new god can be heard. This reveals a deeper dynamic to what we would consider to be Akhenaten's 'theophany': seeing and *hearing* the Aten. And this encounter developed rapidly over nine years until the final form of the Aten's didactic names were written in 'strictly phonetic form, avoiding Horus and Re. The divine names Horus and Shu were removed from the new double cartouche, leaving only Aten and Re. The new creed – for this "dogmatic" name is just that! – reads: 'Live Re, the ruler of the horizon, who rejoices in the horizon in his name Re the father (?), who returns as Aten' (Figure 18). (Hornung, 1999, 76-77)

Akhenaten had a direct experience of the Aten in sight and sound. It was unencumbered and detached from any polytheistic distractors; without any now-redundant images impeding his access to the 'Energy of Light', within the disc, *h'it*, light, itself alone... only he knew and experienced such a direct, brilliant encounter. This '*inventio*', this *itn* experience was propelled toward '*vertigo*'. It continued to energise many of his other activities.

4.3 Erik Hornung and Eelco Runia: vertiginous ‘ecstasy of speed’ and power

Such bewildering semantic energy has been transferred into what Erik Hornung, in another context, has indicated as the ‘ecstasy of speed’ so apparent when Akhenaten and Nefertiti are often shown in their racing chariots. (1999, 44) Some of these scenes, found as wall reliefs in the el-Amarna rock tombs, reveal this ‘new motion in the king’s encounter with his god’. (1999, 44) For instance, in Mahu’s tomb, the royal family is shown leaving the Great Temple at Akhetaten. A vast assemblage of courtiers, attendants and soldiers accompanies them. The Aten extends its rays over the royal couple as they kiss. (Davies, 1906, Vol IV, Plate XXII) This playful energy animates their activities, even ‘the fluttering bands of cloth that dangle from clothes, crowns, and articles of furniture.’ (Hornung, 1999, 44)

In fact, when Akhenaten kisses Nefertiti, he has such faith in Aten’s power, his own, and the vigilant, bent obedience of his attendants and soldiers that he can be carefree, if not careless, in the progress of his chariot. His little princess, reaching out to the horses with her miniature toy whip, is the only one paying attention to the road ahead as she gently taps the steeds forward. (Davies, 1906, Vol IV, Plate XXII) In Meryra I’s tomb the royal couple drive separate chariots. Akhenaten is in the lead, closely followed by Nefertiti. They both hold whips at the ready under the high extending central vector of the Aten with its long, radiating rays, turning into human hands as these descend earthward. Some rays hold *ankh* (life) symbols before the nostrils of each crowned rider. Their advance is energized by their life-giving contact with the Aten from heaven’s heights. Iconographically, the Aten from its vectoral centre appears to be in complete control of this scene of movement. Under the widening ambit of its rays, they are propelled headlong in the same direction as the attendant squads of chariots and armed escorts, all moving in the wake of these intent royal charioteers. (Davies, 1903, Vol I, Plate X)

This mobilization is also reflected in Panehesy’s tomb wall. Once again, in separate cars, with Akhenaten in the lead, his queen, to keep pace with her husband, has raised the whip in her hand to spur on her steeds into a more determined gallop. They both drive under the Aten and are followed by their chariot-mounted daughters and the urgent advance of more armed guards, bent over and running in the same direction, purposefully charging with their weapons and shields at the ready. (Davies, 1905, Vol II, Plate XIII)

These wall reliefs reveal a deeper significance to these displays. Here the royal family, elated by their devotions in the Great Temple at Akhetaten, have mobilized themselves across their city – *3ht-Itn* – where Akhenaten ‘found’ a new place for a new form of a new god and a new kind of king and queen, in an ‘ecstasy of speed’, racing away from the traditional royal practice of using a New Kingdom chariot for war, liberation and victory. The representation of this Bronze Age military technology had changed utterly. Gone were the taut, alert finely-muscled warrior pharaohs, striding forward with the confident part-smile, part-sneer of conquest. Gone were the gigantic scenes of the victorious king smiting his enemies. Now the blue war crown sat on the sleek head of Akhenaten, no longer charging straight at the core of the enemy forces with composite bow drawn and primed to fire, but careering along the secure, isolated Royal Road at Akhetaten on a peaceful family outing.

Uncharacteristically, his queen was represented smiting the enemies of Egypt. There was a complete turn about, a ‘Gestalt switch’, a ‘sublime’ break with the past. Akhenaten’s Egypt was now on the verge of being completely released from its polytheistic and mythological, military and imperial matrix. Akhenaten had ‘leapt’ into the unknown, Otto’s ‘*das ganz andere*’, as he rode toward the natural hieroglyph, *akhet*, appearing at dawn, with the Aten rising through the two slopes of the eastern mountain. The sway of the vertiginous rays of the Aten for Akhenaten at Akhetaten was integral to the dynamic of his religious experience, his revolution, his ‘*inventio*’ to realize a new identity for himself and his family; in a new city in a new Egypt.

Hornung wonders if all this energy and activity ‘might well have [been] intended to imitate the swift course of [Akhenaten’s] god across the sky.’ (1999, 44) Here is Runia’s ‘*vertigo*’ in action. Akhenaten has been energized by his daily visit to the temple and has mobilized his police chief Mahu along with a significant part of Akhetaten’s populace. It is apposite that Hornung has drawn our attention to an earlier *talatat* block, of the horses yoked to a royal chariot. It reveals a depiction that is unsettling, exciting. It is as if the sculptor has released one of the horses from Egypt’s traditional artistic template. This horse’s face has been turned a radical 90 degrees to gaze directly at its viewer at East Karnak and now we can look directly back at its full face. (Hornung, 1999, Figure 10, 45) A new Egypt is staring back at us, across the millennia; released, mobilised and in thrall to an energizing ‘*inventio*’. And just as East Karnak was built quickly with the smaller, hand-sized *talatat* blocks, so too Akhetaten was raised at a rapid speed.

The Amarna kingdom was now under the accelerating pace of a king under the spell of a new ‘*vertigo*’. Indeed, Akhenaten expected his construction crews to work at speed. Jerome Rose, a physical anthropologist working with Barry Kemp’s fieldwork team of the Egyptian Exploration Society at Tell el-Amarna, has unearthed from four excavated South Tombs cemeteries the damaged skeletons of a number of Akhenaten’s workforce. He found over 20% of the deceased were juveniles, 5 – 17 years, and that such a percentage was significantly higher than normal. It was evident that their and other Amarna lives were stressful, especially from their ‘work loads high enough to result in spinal and limb trauma; and the diet not sufficiently adequate to resolve the problem of anemia.’ (2006, 76) Clearly, in the rush to complete the new capital, there was inadequate preparation and care taken to provide for the health and well-being of those building it.

The oppressive experience of ‘*vertigo*’ was counterbalanced by more positive elements. For instance, creation, in the opening stanzas of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*, was animated and restless at the sun’s rising, so too the new capital was alive with a variety of royal events. The king and queen were the central characters on this vast ceremonial stage that was Akhetaten. In Huya’s tomb the royal couple are shown, carried aloft on the state palanquin high above their subjects, touched by the human-handed ends of the Aten’s rays as, at the same time, they were cooled by the action of their human fan bearers. Even this scene is framed by a dynamic double vector which endows it not only with a sense of light and air, sun disc and fans, but also with a remarkable visual vibrancy; the long staves of the king’s high fans are aligned, in both converging directions, with the shafts of the wide-reaching, descending Aten’s hands, directly above the royal couple. It is a symmetrical communion between heavenly and earthly powers that frames this royal progress. (Davies, 1905, Vol III, Plate XIII)

This display of royal power under the Aten light reaches one of its climaxes in the tomb of Meryra II. Here the enthroned monarch, ruler of an empire, is receiving tribute from his foreign subjects. There is a perpetual and all-pervading frenzy of activity across all the nine registers which surround the king, whose throne kiosk is situated to dominate the wall relief from its central placement. Diminutive figures crowd around him. Some carry exotic gifts up the sloping ramp to the throne; some bow down before him in supplication; others assemble foreigners, bound or unbound; others are stationed to protect the king. (Davies, 1905, Vol II, Plate XXXVII)

This is the climax of empire, pacified and compliant, a 'Pax Aegyptiaca'. (Redford, 1992, 169)

This reflected the Aten's vertiginous sway over all humankind. As the Great Hymn extols:

How manifold it is...

You create the earth according to your wish...

People, all large and small animals,

All things which are on earth...

The foreign countries of Kharu and Kush, (and) the land of Egypt...

...their tongues differ in speech, their natures likewise. Their skins are
distinct, for you made foreigners to be distinct...

(As for) all distinct countries, you make their life...

(Murnane, 1995, 114-115)

4.4 Janet Richards and Michael Mallinson: connections across the ‘sacred landscape’

In the imperial capital Runia’s concepts of ‘*inventio*’ and ‘*vertigo*’ are given full expression. Here, Akhenaten, at the ‘command’ of the Aten, had followed its light into Middle Egypt. Its radiance revealed to him where to found his ultimate city of ‘light land’ as the king proclaimed on his many *Boundary Stelae*. (Murnane, 1995, 73-86) These inscriptions relate that Akhenaten was shown a point on the eastern mountains where a long ridge was suddenly cleft, hollowed out by a *wadi*. This striking desert valley opened out before a wide bay in the desert, a vast amphitheatre ringed by two rugged arcs of encroaching hills to its north and its south. It amplified and codified the U-shaped *wadi*, the place of sunrise, into the icon of a transforming moment of life on earth – sunrise; the hieroglyph, *akhet*, horizon; a hieroglyph formed through a natural/supernatural configuration of earth and light. This hieroglyph is an abstraction of the sun rising (and setting) through a wide, plunging valley as if it was shaped and placed by the sun between two mountains. (Wilkinson, 1992, 134-135; 1994, 166-167)

This natural hieroglyph, *akhet*, conceptualized and then provided the focus for transforming this desert space into a sacred site, the holy city of Akhetaten. Here was a ‘pure place’, writes American Egyptologist Janet Richards, specialist in landscape studies. It was an ‘ideational landscape’ without any link to earlier use or memory – divine or dynastic. She contrasts it to the landscape of Abydos, further upstream, where, for millennia, many deities, especially centred on the Osiris cult, were honoured and worshipped; very ancient kings and their elites were buried in this region. Its terrain was thoroughly covered with sacred sites and tombs. It could not have been more different to Akhetaten. (Richards, 1999, 91-95, 96-97)

Unlike any major settlement in the Nile Valley, Akhetaten’s populated centres for the living and the dead were built east of the river. In fact, the temples were aligned to the east, toward the place of sunrise, the Aten’s natural *akhet*. Over this vast arena Akhenaten and his family, as depicted in the many tomb wall reliefs, performed their activities like actors on a ‘stage’. While Richards claims the ‘non-royal inhabitants of the landscape experienced it as spectators, not participants’, we must be careful to allow some of the non-royal population to have minor supporting roles in this drama. (1999, 97) Barry Kemp reminds us that some of Akhenaten’s officials, as patrons, did have their own substantial number of clients in their supporting, but no less significant performances. (2012, 42-44) This is reflected in another wall relief, ‘Parennefer

rewarded'. With his arms raised in jubilation, he is given gifts from Akhenaten and Nefertiti, standing at their elevated 'Window of Appearances'. They are touched by the Aten's descending hands. These extend an *ankh* symbol to each royal nostril and a *uraeus* cobra-headed symbol to the king's crown *uraeus*, representing 'the enduring...power of the king'. (Kemp, 2005, 60) In turn, a significant number of the royal court and Parennefer's retinue celebrate his royal reward in a scene saluting his achievement. (Davies, 1908, Vol. VI, Pl. IV)

However, Akhenaten's performance remained central in this immense natural auditorium. And when he drove his chariot on the north-south Royal Road, he activated another notion of the place. It was as if in his vehicle he was following the distinct contours of this mountain/hieroglyph, as if enacting a scene of his religious experience. As the present writer has previously argued, the king is riding the hieroglyphic landscape – the *akh* (glorious or effective spirit) of the Aten travels the *akhet* (the horizon) of the Aten: Akhenaten at Akhetaten. (Hayes, 1997, 122) This was an experience whose sonorous, but monotonous onomatopoeic reverberation, even in English, resonated the exclusive royal monotheism of his later reign. Here idea and image, word and light burst into being and were one at Akhetaten.

Even the placement of Akhetaten's *Boundary Stelae* reveal other salient aspects of Akhenaten's religious experience. They loom high over the city, cut into the high cliffs enveloping the el-Amarna plain. Barry Kemp has commented that these *Boundary Stelae*, once they were carved into the rock face, were polished to a high level of lustre. They were meant to be seen from a distance, and even approached by a narrow, but accessible path along the cliffs. (2012, 33) They would have given the visitor, gazing out from these bright heights, a sense of wonder, and indeed a dizzying sensation of vertigo, standing on this reflecting precipice, overlooking this place the Aten found, at dawn, as if the vast desert bay below were an open temple, *gm.t p3 itn*.

The work of Michael Mallinson, an architect who has collaborated with Kemp on some of his expeditions to el-Amarna, has produced some provocative computer-generated imagery of Akhenaten's capital, the value of which has not persuaded Kemp himself. (2012, 82) Nevertheless, Mallinson has speculated on the religious nature and significance of what he termed in his 1999 article 'The Sacred Landscape'. Mallinson enables us to approach and comprehend another aspect of Akhenaten's religious experience; the king's vision of how, where and why the Aten discovered this place – *gm.t p3 itn*, 'that which the Aten has found'. Through a

series of geodesic calculations, across the vast open Amarna terrain, he has charted the alignments from the *wadi* to each of the 17 Boundary Stelae. He has discovered horizontal sight lines or ‘light lines’ casting a splay of connections, emanating from the central desert *wadi* in the east and fanning westward to each of the seventeen boundary stelae carved into the distant encircling cliffs and polished until they blazed in the sunlight. His digital reconstruction reveals a scene reminiscent of Amarna art – rays extending over the royal family – but now reaching across the terrain, out from the *wadi*, such as the dramatic scene in the Royal Tomb where the Aten’s rays are almost horizontal as they reached the royal couple. (Martin, 1989, Pls. 34, 47) At the same time, while the Royal Tomb was constructed to descend into the *wadi*’s depths, these rays like a living hieroglyph, as Allen has argued (2014, 239) are ‘drawn’ in light across the city, the river and the faraway western mountains. (Richards, 1997, 74-75)

4.5 Jacquelyn Williamson and Boyo Ockinga: the Afterlife at Akhetaten

This temple was aligned eastward to the wadi. It was here, as stated earlier, that Akhenaten built his royal tomb with its descending corridor oriented to the east and sunrise. (Martin, 1989, Plate 12A) Here, once the sun rose over the tomb and the capital, its deceased non-royal inhabitants, along with their interred king and queen, would continue living forever in a simplified (almost distilled) version of the Afterlife continued in ‘the celebration of the body of the deceased and ...of their tomb statue...This represents a general turn in the Amarna period away from abstraction or intellectualism in religion toward concrete or practical expressions of cultic devotion.’ (Williamson, 2017, 121 n.37) This supports Boyo Ockinga’s assessment that the ‘reformer’ Akhenaten had returned to an ‘earlier state of affairs’ without ‘the accretions of the intervening centuries’ since the Old Kingdom. (2008, 35) Barry Kemp echoes Ockinga in claiming that one of the aims of Akhenaten’s reforms was to purify the Egyptian religion, especially such ‘accretions’. (2012, 17-18) Under Akhenaten the Afterlife was situated in ‘this world’, not in an underworld or an ‘other world’. (2008, 34-35) The Amarna deceased would be cared for and sustained in the Afterlife at Akhetaten. Jacquelyn Williamson’s research reveals that the Sunshades of Re chapels at Akhetaten were ‘funerary locales’ for the spirits of the non-royals. There they were ‘revivified’ by the power and presence of the Aten and the king and especially Nefertiti, at her Sunshade in Kom el-Nana, southern Akhetaten. Her feminine regenerative powers reanimated the Amarna dead. (2017, 119-122) A new goddess for the dead, the queen, Nefertiti, had emerged, albeit briefly, to care for and awaken the dead, particularly at dawn.

A bright, silent Amarna religious experience, now for the living and the dead and centred on the king, was proclaimed each dawn. Across this holy horizon, the Aten would rise, shine, be reflected on the royal tomb and fill the capital with the ‘light’ emanating from the ‘primeval mound. This was the place of the ‘first time’, the point of intersection of light with time. This was Akhenaten’s ultimate ‘*inventio*’, the final ‘threshold’, where caught in the vertiginous thrall to this pure, first ‘light’, activated at the *Akhet*, from the beginning of time, reaching and touching, supporting and impelling the king and queen into action, as they live forever in its and as its recurring presence and present, at ‘lightland’, that is, Akhetaten, the city of his ‘*inventio*’

and the dizzying stage of this radical and brief, divine and brilliant '*vertigo*'. It is from here, in this pure desert capital, where, without deity, dynasty or memory to distract or deter him, Akhenaten could 'leap' into the 'sublime' 'light' of his unique religious experience.

Conclusion

Alert to Barry Kemp's concluding cautionary note that all investigators of the Amarna period will be judged on their 'philosophies of history', this exploration of Akhenaten's religious experience has attempted to be conscious of potential inhibiting perspectives. Indeed, it has endeavoured to examine and utilize some significant 'philosophies of history' to extend and deepen our knowledge of this radical king. Other Egyptologists are also sensitive to the developing strands of historiography that are emerging in this discipline. As discussed above, there are a number of such studies on the distorting and distracting agendas – national, imperial, religious and scientific – that shaped and limited a wider encounter with Akhenaten's reign. These anachronisms have been challenged by later scholars, especially the German Egyptologists, Erik Hornung and Jan Assmann. Their work has taken us, through their thorough and meticulous scholarship and their own deep, abiding intellectual quests, towards new ways of examining Akhenaten's religious experience.

Their valuable work has been supplemented from two distinct disciplines, Egyptology and the 'philosophy of history'. The Dutch philosophers of history – Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia – have probed the nature and meaning of 'experience' in history. They have presented a valuable lexicon of understanding and analysis to guide scholars in this cautious venture of entering Akhenaten's own 'experience'. Their concepts such as 'sublime historical experience', *inventio* and *vertigo* have much to offer. They can deepen the already groundbreaking studies of contemporary Egyptologists, who through their distinct avenues of approach are revealing new insights by their engagement with the phenomenology of religion, the deep lexical structures of ancient Egyptian writing and thought, a new sensitivity to the significance of the ancient Egyptian landscape and a reconsidered appreciation of the Amarna Afterlife.

There are many 'philosophies of history' which have inspired this venture toward Akhenaten's religious experience. However, Kemp was right to acknowledge Dominic Montserrat's verdict about being defined by one's own perspective. At the same time, Montserrat pioneered a self-reflexivity within Egyptology about how to approach this complex, unprecedented pharaoh. He showed how we should be aware of complexity, echoing Hornung's 'Always and above all, the whole is at stake' (1999, 126), and how to engage with, to quote and place Henri Frankfort in another context, a 'multiplicity of approaches'. (1961, 4) Following Montserrat's legacy this

thesis has tried to approach the enthralling, restless Akhenaten from many angles and catch, albeit briefly, a dazzling flash of his religious experience as he ‘leapt’ into the ancient, unparalleled ‘light’ (*h^cit*).

Appendices 1 – 2

Appendix 1

Imaging the experience of ‘vertigo’

Modern history is marked by a myriad of instances of ‘vertigo’ reaching from a small scale to large movements. The historian, Philipp Blom, introduced his 2008 work, *The Vertigo Years: Change and Culture in the West, 1900-1914*, with a young photographer, Jacques Henri Lartigue, who, in 1912, stared in disappointment at an imperfect still snap of a racing car careening along a countryside road on the course of an early French Grand Prix. (See below) He holds a print of what, unbeknownst to him, would become a classic *imago* of the future: a shot of long telegraph poles and spectators, all bent ‘backward’ in the forward rush of the camera’s lens to keep the careening car in centre shot. Not only had half the car run out of frame, but he felt he had distorted the background of poles and people, all now leaning in the opposite direction to the car – a strange new emblem of a new age; steel, rubber, machine, horsepower, speed. The features of the car itself – spokes, wheelrims, number – bent in a forward trajectory under the pressure of its velocity. There goes ‘the age of vertigo’ out of frame; forcing, bending the edges of experience. (2008, 1)



Jacques Henri Lartigue, ‘Car Trip, Papa at 80 kilometers an hour’

[retrieved 30.05.2018 from <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/133137732704341780/>]

Appendix 2

The poetry of the 'vertigo' experience

Rupert Brooke's bold call to adventure in his 1914 poem, *Peace*, had celebrated the vertiginous 'leap' he and his 'wakened' generation were making as they surged forward to enlist in the British Army. His sense of exhilaration was echoed by other voices, enthusiastically mobilizing into the sudden, unexpected, yet-to-be-realised Armageddon that would become World War I. Geoffrey Hill dramatizes this flight to fight for another contemporary of Brooke, the French nationalist poet Charles Péguy. This ardent volunteer also yearned for the release and energy of war as he and his courageous, unsuspecting comrades were framed, generations later, in Hill's stanza as if they were caught on early newsreel footage:

The brisk celluloid clatters through the gate;
the cortège of the century dances in the street;
and over and over the jolly cartoon
armies of France go reeling towards Verdun. (1986, 183)

Over a century before, with a searing nostalgia for the lost innocence of the earliest days of the French Revolution, the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth, penned the ecstatic prospect of rallying against the forces of tyranny:

Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
For mighty are the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, we who were strong and in love!
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven! (1802 [1969, 163-164])

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