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999 words

Akhenaten

One of the most fascinating rulers of the ancient Egypt in Eighteenth Dynasty (1353-1336BCE) was Akhenaten or Amenhotep IV.¹ During his reign, there were enormous innovations. His significant works that make his name in history was the first person who brought monotheistic which worshiped only one god “Aten” (sun disc) to an interest from a very complicated state religion of polytheistic that had been devoted by Egyptian for thousand years.² His implementations for the new religion had affected many aspects of Egyptian life even alter the political power base. Although this new era lasted only at his time and rapid vanish soon after his death. The ideal of one god that he created was close to Christianity, Judaism, Islamic as they are flourishing nowadays.³ Thus he would call a heretic pharaoh by his people or a revolutionary by some historian. This essay will argue causes why his changes would not be accepted by Egyptian.

An heir of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye, Akhenaten began to the throne as Amenhotep IV.⁴ He married with the most beautiful queen in an Ancient Egyptian history, Nefertiti. Unfortunately, he was growing under the shadow of his predecessor,

¹ Wikipedia contributors. “Akhenaten” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 20 Jan. 2012.
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten>>

² Richard Allen Landes. Heaven on Earth. 2011. p.178

³ Bruce LaFontaine. Gods of Ancient Egypt. 2002. p.1

⁴ George Washington Singleton III. The Egyptian “Mystery School of On (Annu)”. 2004. p.309

his great-grandfather and his father. Thutmose III, the great-grandfather, was very famous conqueror who occupied tremendous land and esteem from North Africa and the Middle East.⁵ At the time of his reign, Egypt was supreme power by his military actions. His victories over 350 cities were surrender to him.⁶ The great pharaoh was considered as “the Napoleon of Egypt.”⁷ Later of time, during Egypt was governed under the Akhenaten’s father power; the country was much flourished and successful with worldwide diplomatic displacing ferocious military policy.⁸ In his era which last 40 years, it mark as the highest peak of politic, international affair and culture. In contrary, Akhenaten’s lack of focus in expansion power of Egypt kingdom and hatred of war were often an accusation of his unwillingness to intend to international relation. Later in his era, his pacifism made him neglect in sending troop to Palestine and Syria that make Egyptian empire lost land that was built by Thutmose III.⁹ Thus his kingship in Egypt was dim as he was unable to gain any victories or conquered any more land if compare to his great ancestors. This brought about an issue of loyalty among his court officers.

While his role was not admired among his citizen, he devoted himself to his idealistic of new religious, a sole god Aten. From the combination of an enormous of independent tribal cults made the Egyptian develop into complexion of polytheistic

⁵ Editor, Ara. “The Order of Maat-Akhenaten”. Akhenaten-The Mysterious King-Part 2. 7 Feb 2012. <<http://maat-order.org/order/maatakhenaton.htm>>

⁶ Wendy Christensen and Josef Wegner. Empire of Ancient Egypt. 2004. p.47

⁷ J.H. Breasted. Ancient Times. 1914. p.85

⁸ Dr.Kate Spence. “Akhenaten and the Amarna Period”. BBC. 1 Feb 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/akhenaten_01.shtml>

⁹ Sir Alan Gardiner. Egypt of the Pharaohs. 1961. p. 230

which worship many gods.¹⁰ Each town had their own deity and it was rooted in Egyptian culture over thousands of years. Since it was bound solidly with their custom, this state of believes withstood over time. Most of gods and goddesses depicted in human-animal hybrid and connected with myths and rituals.¹¹ However, Akhenaten abolished all tradition and announced to worship only a new deity, Aten which depicted as sun disc. As an idea of sun is creator, he took away the imaginary figure of god which linked to many aspects of life and replace with only great of god. This made people of Egypt struggle to practice the new foundation since it was far away from their old custom.

In Amenhotep III's reign, the cult of Amun is the highest power. The central of governmental was Memphis and the State God was grounded in Thebes.¹² To promote his religious reform, he even moved the city out of Thebes and started new construction projects of his own city, Armarna.¹³ It took four years to move all ministry, statues and population from the old city.¹⁴ Once it was complete, he changed his name from Amenhotep IV to Akhenaten as to honor Aten. To hammer his reform, he began to eradicate all connection to traditional deities. Name of Amun on many monuments were destroyed and temples of other gods were collapsed.¹⁵ Furthermore, he took a drastically step by sending out workmen throughout the empire to eliminate

¹⁰ Sir Alan Gardiner. Egypt of the Pharaohs. 1961. p. 214

¹¹ Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin. Ancient Egypt. 2002. p.377

¹² Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin. Ancient Egypt. 2002. p.378

¹³ Thomas F.X.Noble. Western Civilization. 2007. p.23

¹⁴ Paul Flux. Ancient Egypt. 2001. p.9

¹⁵ Philip Wilkinson, Jacqueline Dineen and Robert R.Ingpen. The Land of the Bible. 1992. p.51

other deities name even word Amun in his father cartouche.¹⁶ The other contributes factors that spread unpleasant emotion among people that these implementations shook influence of power by the priests of Amun. Early in his reign, temple of Amun and priesthood gain strong power and had much impact on politic. In society that political and religious was a thin line, this could be the main reason for his revolutionary to gain complete control.

Even though Akhenaton put efforts for the alteration for almost twenty years of his reign, he had no clear successor to continue his legacy. Historians pointed that after two brief periods of two Pharaohs in time of numerous conflicts, everything he created was destroyed. People move back to old capital, Thebes. The temples, many deities worship came back normally as before. Eventually, all items with connect to Akhenaton was removed. In addition, there some incidences showed a severe plague spread though out Egypt and Middle East.¹⁷ This circumstance may explain why people abandon Armana. Egyptian may consider that they condemn from the old god and got punishment. This made feeling against Akhenatan's philosophy arose.

We cannot deny that Akhenatan's works was innovative at that time. The idealistic of one and only god as monotheism occurred for the first time in the world history. For hundred years after the idea then flourish. However, his religious is not religious of faith and it can not convince people to follow. The time was not ripe for changing. His interest in religious reform instead of military action made him weak. It bring conflicts in the society with have root their belief in thousand years and it

¹⁶ Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin. Ancient Egypt. 2002. p.380

¹⁷ Wikipedia contributors. "Akhenaten" Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 20 Jan. 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten>>

hard to change. His radical obliterated by erase and destroy to old temple could not force people to alter their mind. Instead it spread more rage among people more than influence them. This can be arguing why Akhenatan's revolution was not last and only settled only in his era.