

## Article

# Leaving the “Discomfort” Zone: The Correlation between Politics and New Artistic Practices at the Beginning of the 19th Dynasty

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**Abstract:** At the end of the Amarna Period, a process of political and religious restoration began. This attempt at recovery went beyond the strictly official, as the Egyptian society seemed to demand a moral reparation. It was a much-needed change that would encompass all aspects of society and it was imperative that the changes be visible. It is for this reason that visual art would be one of the main means of communication. The artistic image was the propaganda necessary to reconstruct historical memory and religious sentiment. This was most evident in the early years of the 19th dynasty, when, in addition, the need to legitimize the new royal lineage was reflected in private tombs. The Egyptian artist used art to visually consolidate these changes, and the owner of the tomb was keen to do so. This article aims to analyze the artistic changes, mainly in the private sphere, that occurred in funerary art in opposition to the religious changes that had been made during the Amarna Period and that were most evident from the reign of Horemheb until the first half of the reign of Ramesses II. Politics and art intermingled at a time when reconstructing the past and the relationship with divinity was an urgent necessity.

**Keywords:** New Kingdom; Thebes; Theban art; post-Amarna Period; 19th dynasty



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## 1. Introduction

The post-Amarna Period was characterized by a series of changes that had an impact on many aspects of society. However, these changes lasted longer than the immediate aftermath of the Amarna Period, until approximately the first twenty years of the reign of Ramesses II (Kiser-Go 2006, p. 3). The period of religious and political instability during Akhenaten’s reign, to which many had tried to adapt, likely left the court officials with a feeling of insecurity and social confusion. People had faced a kind of incertitude that could affect the confidence in the traditional divinities and the success of the individual in his journey to the Beyond, aspects that had been nullified during the short Amarna Period. The death of Akhenaten provided an opportunity to put the country and its thinking back on a more orthodox track. The return to the old system and the pre-established order is clearly reflected in the *Restoration Stela* (CGC 34183; Lacau 1926, pp. 224–30). Assigned to Tutankhamen, it was copied on several stelae and usurped in part by Horemheb (Laboury 2010, pp. 345–6). The text reads as follows:

*“When his Majesty appeared as king, the temples of the gods and goddesses, from Elephantine [to] the marshes of the Delta [... lay] in ruins; their chapels had fallen into decrepitude, transformed into rubble covered with [weeds], and their sanctuaries were as if they had never existed. Their temples were passing roads and the whole country was in a state of sickness (...).”* (Urk IV, pp. 2025–32; Bennet 1939, pp. 8–15; Davies 1995, p. 22; Murnane 1995a, pp. 212–4)

The mistakes of the past had thus become catastrophes, and the monarch was presented as the savior of Egypt, destined, and chosen to restore normality. Some inscriptions

in the private sphere reflected this desire to leave the immediate past behind. The Pawah graffito, in the tomb Paury (TT 139) (PM I.1, pp. 252–4; [Kampp 1996](#), pp. 426–7.), dated to the 10th day of the third month of *akhet*, in year 3 of Ankherkheperura-Mery[taten] daughter of Ra Neferneferuaten-Mery[taten], alludes to the followers of Atenism in a prayer dedicated to Amen:

*“Turn to us, O Lord of eternity! You were there when they had not yet come, and you are there when they are gone”*. ([Gardiner 1928](#), pp. 10–11; [Gabolde 1998](#), pp. 161–2; [Dodson 2020](#), p. 360)

The insecurity caused by a period that seemed to be disliked by the majority generated a very accelerated escape from a “discomfort zone” and a desire to remove from memory what they considered to be a past mistake. Individuals were not named in these inscriptions but guilts were sought. The tablet BM EA 5656 reads:

*“The sun of him who was ignorant of you has gone, Oh Amen! (for) he who knows your words has risen in the courtyard. He who attacked you is (now) in darkness, even when the whole country is in the sun. But (for) those who set you in their hearts, the sun has risen”*. ([Assmann 1994](#), p. 22; [Laboury 2010](#), p. 419)

Darkness contrasts with light, order, and re-established morality. We could consider the possibility that the myth of the *Destruction of Mankind* ([Lichtheim 1976](#), pp. 197–9), which is an apocalyptic text with a happy ending, was used not by chance in Tutankhamen’s shrine ([Piankoff 1955](#), pp. 27–29). It should not be forgotten that the text tells the story of a perfect and organized world, followed by an event that generates a crisis, and the recovery by a savior figure, a description that could be reminiscent of the last years of the post-Amarna Period.

## 2. The Momentum of Artistic Change

The imposition of the cult to Aten had repercussions on essential aspects of daily life, such as the celebration of festivals, daily rituals, uncertainty about the afterlife, etc. The poorest population (workers, farmers, herdsmen, etc.), far away from the capital, continued with their domestic cults without any problem and without being victims of persecution ([Stevens 2006](#); [Kemp 2012](#), pp. 234–45). However, the elite, the high officials and temple staff in other areas, were in a more difficult situation. They were, therefore, in the greatest need of restoring their image and demonstrating that they had completely abandoned Akhenaten’s doctrine. Although nearly thirty years had passed between Akhenaten’s death and the coronation of Sety I, what had happened remained in the memory of the elders. Visual art would undoubtedly be one of the sources of restoration. The recruitment and training of new artists, together with the recovery and incorporation of new artistic imagery, would be the most visual and obvious way of demonstrating that they were no longer part of that once flourishing Akhetaten court, but part of the new order and the restoration promoted by the new monarch and a new era.

After the abandonment of Akhetaten, we do not know what happened to its artists. The options for relocation were not many: Memphis and Thebes ([Van Dijk 1993](#), pp. 189–204; [Kiser-Go 2006](#), pp. 416–7). Both had their own advantages. On the one hand, Memphis was the city of the god Ptah, the patron of craftsmen, so it would have had workshops dedicated to the training of artists ([Hofmann 2004](#), p. 95; [Kiser-Go 2006](#), p. 417). It would also be the burial place chosen by many of the high-ranking officials of the civil and military administration of post-Amarna Period ([Van Dijk 1988](#), pp. 38–39, 45). Thebes, on the other hand, regained the funerary and religious importance of years before, as the mummified remains of some of the members of the royal family had been transferred to Thebes ([Gabolde 1998](#), pp. 227–76).

The huge number of workers that moved to build the city of Akhetaten, as well as the royal and elite tombs, chose one of these two scenarios since conditions in the Amarnian capital were no longer suitable for prospering and surviving ([Kemp 2012](#), pp. 226–9). Some of them could be sent to Upper Egypt with the aim of working on official tasks since their

experience and skills were well known. Horemheb was building a tomb at Saqqara when he became king, so he was well acquainted with the work of Memphite artists. It is very likely that this favored the transfer of artists to Thebes in his reorganization plans. The presence of these artists in Thebes led, on the one hand, to the survival of some significant artistic aspects, and on the other hand, to the establishment of new ones. Nadine Cherpion identified several iconographic and stylistic elements of Amarna surviving in the tomb of the sculptor Ipuy (TT 217) at Deir el-Medina, which could be an initial sample of this transfer of artists in this period (Cherpion 1995, pp. 125–39; Vivas Sainz 2017, p. 113).

Part of the artistic restoration came from Sety I. He was in charge of restoring the names and inscriptions of the pre-Amarna sovereigns and the images and names of Amen and recovering the Valley Festival, which exalted Theban power, and the rituals of the royal funerary temples.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, he erected his funerary temple on the west bank, just in front of the temple of Amen at Karnak (PM II.1, pp. 407–21), so that there would be no doubt that the times of crisis would not return. He also commanded one restore the funerary temples of other monarchs in readiness for the great Theban feasts, as the statue of the chief of draughtsmen, Didia, informs us. Many objects of Didia, from the early 19th Dynasty, are preserved. Among them is a painter's palette kept in the Louvre Museum containing an epithet of Sety I, such as the one inscribed on the hypostyle hall at Karnak and on his funerary temple, indicating that Didia was most likely involved in the decoration of both (Louvre N. 2274; Andreu-Lanoë 2013, p. 144, no. 16; KRI I Notes, p. 220). Moreover, he was the descendant of a long line of draftsmen of foreign origin dating back to the reigns of Thutmose III or Amenhotep II, the head of whose family, Petjar, was of Semitic origin (Louvre C 50; Lowle 1976, p. 105, Figure 2; Andreu-Lanoë 2013, pp. 142–3, no. 15). Didia's ancestors had been employed at Thebes, for they held the title of "chief of draughtsmen of Amen". There is no evidence of their presence at Akhetaten, although some hieratic inscriptions mention a certain Didi, the same name that appears at Deir el-Medina, but we do not know if this is the same person.<sup>2</sup> However, the autobiographical text included in his cube statue, found in the Karnak Cache, now in Cairo Museum, boasts of his participation in the restoration of Theban monuments under the command of Sety I:

*"I was ordered by His Majesty to work for Amen, to restore the monuments of Karnak in the west of Thebes (...) I was the supervisor of the craftsmen, who controlled all Amen's work at Akhenamen, Memiset, at Akhisset, at Djoserakhet, at Djaserdjaseru, at Henketannkh (...)"*. (CGC 42122; Lowle 1976, pp. 96–98; Legrain 1906, pp. 71–73, pl. LXXII; PM II, p. 145)

Evidence of this restoration can be found in the chapel of Hathor in the temple of Thutmose III at Deir el-Bahari, now in Cairo Museum (Naville 1907, pl. XXVIII). In the inscription, next to the figure of the god Amen, there is a small sketch made to serve as a guide in the restoration as a reminder of what should have been represented in that space, a sign that, before being restored, was unrecognizable (Laboury 2022, p. 56, Figure 7; Menéndez 2015–2016, p. 197, Figure 2).

### 3. The Use of Art as a Political Justification until the Early 19th Dynasty

Despite the efforts to erase all traces of the Amarna Period, which had disturbed their deepest funerary beliefs and their worldview and obliterated a whole cultural tradition, the feeling of guilt and the need to ensure their status remained in the mind of the elite. The king, the administration, and the officials needed to demonstrate to society and to divinity that they had gotten their lives back on track. The king used his actions and propaganda to show that he had been chosen to bring order back to Egypt and to restore the images of the gods, especially Amen. One of the first actions was to justify the presence of the monarch. Horemheb, Ramesses I, and Sety I all had no royal blood and had held military ranks before becoming kings. It is therefore evident that they needed to justify, in some way, their presence in power. The king, therefore, could no longer be a representative of the divinity to restore order, so the mythology adapted to the circumstances. Horemheb,

in his coronation text, is said to have been chosen by Horus of Hutnesu, his hometown, and to have been raised as prince regent. It was Horus who, as his father, presented him to Amen at the Opet Festival and who promoted him to king ([Gardiner 1953](#); [Murnane 1995b](#), pp. 189–90). Horus, who symbolizes the figure of the monarch, trusts him and accepts him as his son. His coronation name, Djoser-kheperu-Ra, “Sacred are the appearances of Ra”, followed the tradition of the two previous monarchs, Tutankhamen Nebkheperura and Aye Kheperkheperura, whom he wanted to erase from historical memory. Ramesses I and Sety I, however, used a coronation name to justify their status. Ramesses I was crowned with the name Menpehtyra, “Established is the power of Ra”, a name related to the coronation name of Ahmose Nebpehtyra, founder of the 18th Dynasty and Theban ruler. Meanwhile, Sety I was to be crowned with the name Menmaatira, “Established is the order of Ra”, linking the coronation names of Thutmose III Menkheperura and Amenhotep III Nebmaatira, and emphasizing the recovery after the period of crisis ([Kitchen 1997](#), pp. 18–20). Ramesses II was now dealing with an environment in which he felt more secure without the need to present himself as the legitimate monarch. With the situation more stable and consolidated, he erected a series of statues that restored the divine character of the monarch, which he called “Ramesses the god”, as well as various similar statues at the entrance to the pylons that were the object of public worship ([Shaw 2000](#), p. 301; [Habachi 1969](#), pp. 40–42). Without the guidance or support of the god, it would have been difficult to legitimize the power of an individual who did not come from a long-lived royal family. In that way, the god was said to have affected his life and successes. The idea of the divinity intervening in the destiny of the monarch would also pass into the private sphere, where the official boasts about his relationship with the divinity.

The reestablishment of Thebes, and of the Theban dynasty, was another aspect that was reflected in the visual art. The first to give this impulse was Tutankhamen, although his work at Karnak was usurped by Horemheb ([Strudwick and Strudwick 1999](#), p. 60). Behind the monumental restoration, the aim was to reestablish all ties with the 18th Dynasty, before the Amarna Period.

The destruction of the monuments was not so devastating, for it had only been twelve years since their abandonment, and it was only necessary to restore the images of Amen that had been intentionally erased. What had been partially built by Amenhotep III was continued immediately afterward. The colonnade hall at Luxor was one of Tutankhamen’s attempts to show the recovery of the temple so his scenes at the Opet Festival were an attempt to show the return to normality ([Kampp-Seyfried 2007](#), p. 119; [Epigraphic Survey 1994](#)). The usurpation of statues of Amenhotep III, the last Theban monarch, as well as statues of monarchs of the 12th Dynasty, recovered the relationship with classical Theban art ([Brand 2010](#), p. 6; [Connor 2015](#); [Elsharnouby 2018](#)).

The increasing importance of Thebes was also reflected in private funerary art. The depiction of the Theban mountain became an iconographic motif. The realism of these representations, characterized by the pinkish color of the Theban limestone, was their main characteristic ([Semat 2022](#), p. 711). The mountain welcomes the deceased at the beginning of the journey and during the farewell at his funeral, becoming a Theban iconographic motif at the beginning of the 19th Dynasty. Sometimes, the tomb is related to the goddess Hathor, who, in the form of a cow, appears to come out and greet the deceased, and at other times, the Theban landscape is included with the addition of the architecture of the tomb. Examples of depictions of the Theban mountain from this period are known from the TT 41 ([Assmann 1991](#), pp. 95–96, pl. 40), TT 255 ([Foucart 1928](#), Figure 8; [Semat 2022](#), Figure 4), TT 19 ([Foucart 1935](#), pl. 9; [Semat 2022](#), Figure 6) (Figure 1), TT 13 (PM I.1, p. 25 (10)), and TT 31 ([Davies 1948](#), pls. VI and XVI), among others.





**Figure 1.** Tomb of Amenmesse (TT 19). Scene with the representation of the tomb and Hathor in the Theban mountain. Photo by Gema Menéndez.

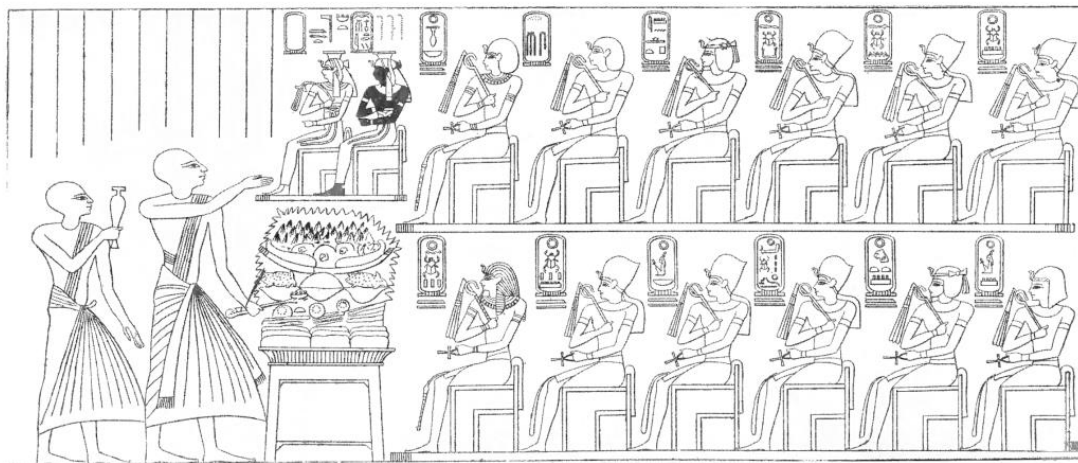
The depiction of the goddess Hathor is the full vindication of earlier funerary beliefs, an iconographic motif that could be related to Spell 186 of the *Book of the Dead*, where the cow welcomes the deceased on his journey to the Hereafter. The representation of the goddess Hathor on the mountain seems to be a 19th Dynasty innovation (Quirke 2013, p. 483):

*“Adoring Hathor, mistr[ess of the west], [kissing the earth] (...). I have come before you to see your beauty, may you grant [me] to be [the head] of your followers. I have passed all the great ones, and no [fault] has been found with me (...), may you grant me offerings with me, that a place made for me in the desert (...).”* (Papyrus of Ra, Leiden AMS 15 (13))

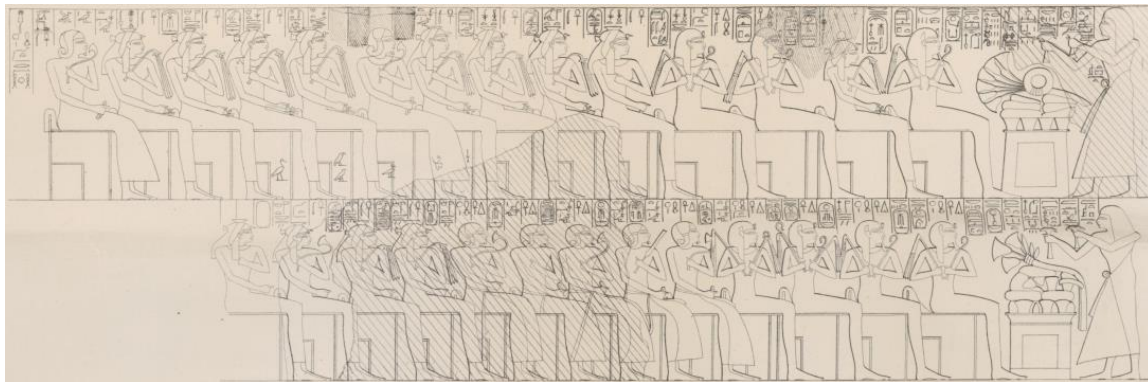
This scene is also related to the chapel of Hathor at Deir el-Bahari restored in the reign of Sety I, or to similar statues from the same site (Semat 2022, pp. 716–7). It should not be ignored that the presence of Ramesside graffiti dedicated to Hathor and the Valley Festival in the temple of Thutmose III at Deir el-Bahari (Marciniak 1974) is evidence of the revival of her cult and of the traditional rituals in the new dynasty. It is complemented by the landscape of the necropolis and the mountain itself, as a sign of the roots of Thebes and the funerary West, lost in the Amarna Period, thus recovering the sacred ground that had been lost.

A further important iconographic theme at the beginning of the 19th Dynasty was the depiction of royal ancestors. The so-called “rows of kings” consisted of a succession of royal statues, arranged in chronological order, from the first king of the 18th Dynasty, Ahmose, to the last reigning king contemporary to the deceased, sometimes including the representation of Mentuhotep, because of his close relationship ties to Thebes. Significantly, such scenes exclude a few monarchs: Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, Tutankhamen, and Aye, who seem to disappear imminently from history. The owner of the tomb chooses the scene with the intention of obliterating from everyone’s memory the uncomfortable moments, and to show his support and loyalty, in a public way, to the Theban dynasties and the new generation of monarchs. All is meant to be forgotten by trying to solidify a new dynasty that was not of royal blood. These scenes appear in TT 2 (PM I.1, 7 (10); Lepsius 1849–1858, p. 2[a]; Hollender (2009), pp. 92–93, figs. 52–53), TT 10 (Lepsius 1849–1858, p. 173[b–c]), and TT 19 (Champollion 1845, pl. CLXXXIV; Foucart 1935, pl. XII) in various forms depending on the number of royal ancestors represented (Figure 2). In other cases, such as TT 4 (Černý 1927, p. 174, pl. IV) and TT 7 (Černý 1927, p. 174), they are limited to depictions of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari, or of Thutmose I, whose presence is more closely linked to his cult in the necropolis or in the workmen village than with the royal lists.<sup>3</sup> Of the three “row of kings” mentioned, two are located at Deir el-Medina and the other at Dra Abu el-Naga. All of them can be dated to the beginning of the 19th Dynasty. A later example is TT 359 from Inkhekhawy, also at Deir el-Medina and much later, from the end of the 20th Dynasty (PM II, p. 422 (4); Lepsius 1849–1858, p. 2 [d]).<sup>4</sup> The early 19th Dynasty

scenes are placed in visible locations, usually in the tomb's chapel. However, in the case of TT 359, it is at the entrance to the burial chamber, a place out of sight.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** (a) Drawing of the rows of kings scene from TT 19 (Champollion 1845, pl. CLXXXIV) (b) Drawing of the rows of kings scene from TT 2 (Lepsius 1849–1858, p. 2[a]).

However, this type of scene seems to have an explanation that goes beyond the representation of the monarchy itself. Their appearance, predominantly in accessible places, may have been related to the celebration of Theban festivals. The kings depicted in TT 19, for example, were worshipped in Thebes and their statues may have taken part in the Valley Festival at the end of the reign of Sety I, the period from which the tomb dates. This becomes even more important if we note that this tomb also has several scenes of a Theban festival (Foucart 1935, pls. IV–VIII, XI–XII) and that each one of those depicted in the “rows of kings” had a funerary temple in Thebes. The relation between this scene and those of the festival is evident. The pGeneva MAH 115274 + pTurin 54,063 of the year 6 of Ramesses III mentions the celebration of *w3h mw n n3 nswt-bityw* (“presenting libations to the kings”) (Fukaya 2019, no. 1248), a ceremony connected to the funerary cult attended by the high officials of the time and involving the visit of Amen to the west bank and the mortuary temples, something very similar to the Valley Festival (Fukaya 2019).<sup>5</sup> They were therefore ceremonies dedicated to the royal ancestors (Fukaya 2019, p. 47). The need to include these scenes had three obvious motives: to vindicate the new monarchs by forgetting the devastating past, to claim the importance of Thebes, and to recover the most important festivals. Heffernan argues that they could only be explained if such scenes were related to events in the life of the deceased (2010, p. 42). This makes sense if we consider that those who include these scenes had a very active participation in the festivals, according to their

titles and scenes from their tombs, and that, at some point, royal statues reproducing the mentioned “rows of kings” may have been publicly exhibited, accepting the inclusion of the new monarchs in the hegemonic dynasty. The restoration of the festivals was another of the resources of the political class to overcome the period of crisis, and, as in the previous cases, it left its mark on art. Moreover, they revived the individual’s relationship with divinity and his involvement in its worship. Festivals allowed the divinity to be seen in a public way. Festival scenes from the early 19th Dynasty are found in TT 2 (Černý 1927, figs. 13 and 14), TT 31 (Davies 1948, pls. XI–XIII), TT 19 (Foucart 1935, pls. IV–VIII, XI–XII), TT 51 (Davies 1927, pl. XVI), and TT 217 (Davies 1927, pl. XVIII), and were included because of the involvement of the owners in the temples or in the celebration of such ceremonies (Figures 3 and 4). Such events were of great importance at the necropolis.



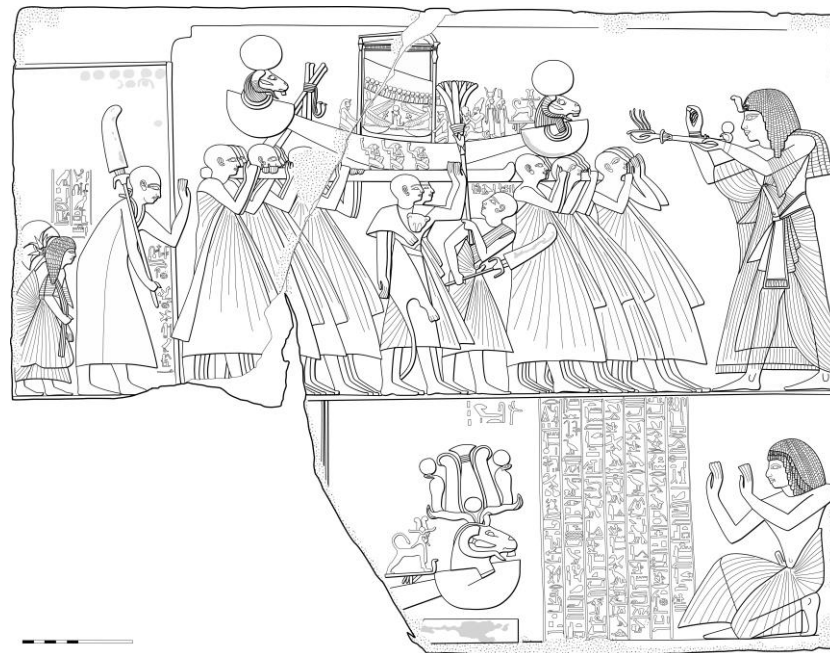
**Figure 3.** Details of the festival scene from TT 19. Photo by Gema Menéndez.

Relief CGC 35053, dated to before the 5th year of Ramesses II and most likely from the decoration of a tomb at Deir el-Medina, shows, in the upper register, the Userhat-Amen boat carried on the shoulders of the vizier Paser, the royal scribe Ameneminet, and the monarch, Ramesses II, making libations to the boat. In the lower register, Ameneminet, a member of Deir el-Medina, kneels in front of the boat and addresses an Amen-Ra prayer to it (Galán and Menéndez 2018, pp. 147–52) (Figure 5). This fragment, which would have come from a tomb, is yet another example of the owner’s link to this type of event, but also of the presence of important figures during the celebration of the festival. We do not know the connection of this individual with the cult of Amen, but it would be none other than to vindicate the divinity as the patron god, some thirty years after the Amarna Period and when the situation in Thebes seemed to have fully recovered.





**Figure 4.** Transport of Amenhotep I's barque during a feast from TT 2 ([Černý 1927](#), Figure 14).



**Figure 5.** Fragment of wall CGC 35,053 with Valley Festival scene. Drawing by Gema Menéndez ([Galán and Menéndez 2018](#), pp. 147–52).

#### 4. Conclusions

Visual art was used by those in political power throughout Egypt's history. After the Amarna Period, however, the need was greater. The very need to forcefully move out of the “discomfort zone”, which had produced so many insecurities, saw private art as a way out. On the one hand, we see the need to accept a new monarchy that was not of royal blood, of military origin and which did not have a divine origin (although it did have the support of the divinity), and on the other hand, linked to this, the vindication of the Theban dynasty and of Thebes itself, with scenes such as the worship of the statues of the ancestors and the representation of the Theban mountain in the tomb itself; and finally, the revival of the main festival, which included the public demonstration of Amen in front of the people, as evidence of a return to tradition. The inclusion of an iconographic repertoire, such as the one we have seen, which reinforced the new dynasty and linked it to the Theban monarchy, together with the public demonstration of the participation and devotion of high-ranking



officials to traditional cults, was one of the ways used to demonstrate their loyalty. Art was thus used in a period of crisis: politically and administratively. It showed loyalty to traditional Egyptian ways and to the new monarchs. From the religious point of view, the Atonian religion was left behind and an attempt was made to regain trust with Amen and the other divinities. This feeling brought the individual closer to divinity, so that he presented himself to it without intermediaries, which led to the rise of popular religion. Finally, the revival of everyday worship and festivities reflected a society that was once again united in the face of the traditional Egyptian pantheon.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Valley Festival was reformed in Ramesside Period. Fukaya says that the earliest Ramesside reference to the festival is in the reign of Ramesses II. However, the tomb of Amenmesse (TT 19) dated to the reign of Sety I includes a festival scene with the Userhat boat. [Fukaya 2019](#), p. 43; [Doresse 1979](#), pp. 37–38).
- <sup>2</sup> A certain Didi is identified on stelae JE 63644, BM EA 1629, Fitzwilliam Museum E. 191.1932, between others ([Bruyère 1937](#), pp. 80–81, 120–121, figs. 38, 51; [Bierbrier 1982](#), p. 26, pl. 63; [Martin 2005](#), p. 67 ([Martin](#)); [Menéndez 2015](#), p. 796).
- <sup>3</sup> Heffernan 2010: 140–141, mentions two other tombs, TT 306 and C7, but as we do not have access to the images and we are not sure if they are of the same type as the one we are analysing, we have considered it appropriate not to include them.
- <sup>4</sup> Images of the current state of the scene at: <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/ttdem/?nom=Khaouy&os=16#galerie> (accessed 15 February 2024).
- <sup>5</sup> O. CGC 25265, dated to the 4th month of Shemu day 1, year 5 of Ramesses IV, specifies that Amen crosses the river in this ceremony ([Fukaya 2019](#), no. 1311).

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