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AKHENATEN'S REVOLUTION: RELIGIOUS GENIUS OR A POLITICAL MISCALCULATION?

Polytheism existed in ancient Egypt until the religious reforms of Akhenaten. Historical research shows that Akhenaten achieved a revolution in this area by implementing religious reform, but the reversal of his reforms after his death is controversial. This article will analyze the religious reforms of Amenhotep IV and their consequences, clarifying whether the reforms were a political mistake or a religious revolution. In addition, the impact of these reforms on monotheistic religions is also being investigated. What motivated Akhenaten to reform? Was Akhenaten's revolution religious genius or political miscalculation? What was the relationship between Atenism and other monotheistic religions and Judaism? Considering the influence of atheism on other monotheistic religions, can Akhenaten's reforms be called religious genius? What was the fate of Akhenaten's reforms after his death?

Key words: Akhenaten's revolution, monotheism, Ancient Egypt, polytheistic system

Main part: In ancient Egypt, the belief in gods representing various supernatural powers among the population for centuries was an indication of the presence of polytheism here. According to archaeological sources and historical research, Amun, Ra, Isis, Thoth and other deities held a special place among these gods, Amun and Ra were among the most worshipped deities among the population, representing belief in the sun.

According to the Danish historian Christensen Carsten Sander, all cultures and customs emerged from polytheism. He notes in his article Atenism – the birth of monotheistic religions “It is probably safe to say that all cultures began with some form of polytheism. Every early society needed deities to explain all kinds of phenomena, including the fertility, food, wine, war, the sun, love, etc. These early people had a need to explain different aspects of their lives and for everything that needed to be explained, they could create a god for it” [2, p. 2]. Based on his ideas, it can be concluded that in ancient Egypt and throughout the world in general, people initially worshipped many gods to meet their spiritual needs, and this also paved the way for the emergence of monotheism.

Archaeological excavations in Egypt in the XIX and XX centuries uncovered a temple built in honor of Aten, the sole god believed in by Akhenaten. The English Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie, who conducted archaeological excavations around the temple built in honor of

the god Aten around the city of Amarna from 1891, he wrote that although Aten and Ra were both sun gods, they were completely different from each other. No human or animal form was ever -attached to it; and the adoration of the physical power and action of the sun was the sole devotion” [10, p. 54-55]. This information suggests that belief in the power of the sun was central to Atenism. As far as we can discern, this worship stood distinct and separate from all other Egyptian religious practices, and our limited understanding of it suggests a remarkably consistent and scientifically-grounded concept of the source of life and power on earth. After the death of Amenhotep IV, efforts were made to erase his traces, so little information was available about him. Finally, recent archaeological excavations, including the discovery of a temple dedicated to the god Aten and excavations at Karnak, have provided an opportunity to learn about Amenhotep IV and his revolutionary religious reforms. In his early years in power, he continued the policies of his father Amenhotep III and maintained his ties to the ancient Egyptian gods [8, p. 3-4]. According to historical sources, in the 5th year of his reign, Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten. This was also related to his new religion. He changed his name in honor of his god Aten, the meaning of his new name was “light of Aten”, “useful to Aten [8, p. 3-4]. The fact that many Egyptian pharaohs changed their names in honor of their gods suggests that Amenhotep’s change of name to Akhenaten was related to his religious reforms. The new religion brought by Akhenaten was based on the dependence of life on the sun and the absolute power of the Aten over it. It was considered the duty of the pharaoh to propagate the principles of Atenism among the population [9, p. 8-9]. Based on this fact, we can say that the pharaoh saw himself as the mediator and propagandist of Aten on earth. This idea is somewhat similar to the concept of prophecy. It is from this aspect that the historical and secular significance of Akhenaten’s religious reforms can be revealed by examining the impact of these reforms on monotheistic religions. Queen Nefertiti was considered the driving force behind Amenhotep’s new religious reforms. She was distinguished by her devotion to the Aten, parallel to that of the king [9, p. 8-9]. The depiction of Nefertiti, along with Amenhotep IV, under the sun disk and rays representing Aten in images discovered through archaeological research is a result of this. It is believed that all of Amenhotep’s political work, as well as his religious reforms, was greatly influenced by his mother, Tiye, and his wife, Nefertiti, who is believed to have been of Asian descent [6, p. 355-356]. Akhenaten’s religious reforms were also politically significant. With the dominance of monotheism, ancient Egypt became both religiously and politically centralized. The country began to be governed by a single religious cult, a single religious center, and a single ruler [7,p.187]. In Egypt, where polytheism had prevailed for many years, such a strong process of political centralization should be considered a revolutionary event for the political system of that time.

During this period when Amarna was the capital is known as the Amarna period, and temples were built in this city in honor of Aten, the sun god.Christensen Carsten Sander mentioned in his article [2, p. 4-6] that, archaeological research samples found at Amarna mostly depict scenes depicting the daily lives of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their daughters. From all these studies, it is clear that Akhenaten’s religious reforms have all the classical traditions of monotheism. That is, he introduced the worship of only one God as an innovation, without denying the existence of belief in other gods [1, p. 7-8].

The pharaoh destroyed temples built in honor of other gods and forbade the worship of any god other than Aten. Amenhotep changed his name to Akhenaten, honoring the god Aten. Although temples built in honor of other gods were destroyed, Amenhotep only left the temples of the sun gods untouched. Historians believe that the destruction of these temples was related to ancient Egyptian beliefs. People considered the removal of a god’s name from any place to be the disappearance of that god.On stone tablets found during archaeological

excavations, the depiction of Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti, with the sun disk and rays, the symbol of Aten, above them, indicates that they worshipped this God [3, p. 74-75]. All these facts indicate that Akhenaten's reforms succeeded in creating a centralized monotheistic state.

The introduction of monotheism into the history of Egyptian civilization, which had long had a polytheistic tradition, as a result of religious reforms carried out by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) is of particular importance not only for its impact on ancient Egyptian history but also on other monotheistic religions that would form in the future. Many historians and researchers, who believe that Akhenaten's reforms are at the root of monotheism, have conducted extensive research on this scene. According to Erin Sobat Akhenaten's religion can be viewed as a "monotheism of knowledge,". According to him, the prophet Moses raised monotheism to a legal level. Unlike Akhenaten, he did not prohibit other religions, but rather promoted the denial of the existence of other gods among the population [3, p. 74]. So we can come to this conclusion that instead of forbidding other deities if Akhenaten tried to prove and convince people to the existence of one God – Aten, his revolution might be more long lasting after his death and might be had a deep roots along ancient Egypt's civilization. Sigmund Freud's book – Moses and Monotheism, Freud distinguishes between two Moses role, an "Egyptian" and a "Midianite Moses. According to Sigmund Freud's this book, there was a suggestion that the new religion Moses gave the Jews was his own, the Egyptian one though not the Egyptian one [11, p. 34]. According to his researching Akhenaten was erased plural form of the word "gods" from manuscripts, clay plates and from the other inscriptions. These changes could be considered a major revolution for the Egyptian population, who believed that the removal of the names of gods from the inscriptions meant that the god had disappeared. Moreover, Atenism can be considered the purest primitive monotheistic religion in human history [11, p. 96].

James Henry Breasted wrote "Under the name of Aton, then, Amenhotep IV introduced the worship of the supreme god, but he made no attempt to conceal the identity of his new deity with the old sun-god, Re. Instructing his vizier in the new faith, he said to him, "The words of Re are before thee ... my august father who taught me their essence. ... It was known in my heart, revealed to my face, I understood ..." "He thus attributes the new faith to Re as its source, and claims to have been himself the channel of its revelation" [6, p. 360].

Researcher Jan Assman has examined the similarities and differences between Moses, the prophet of the first monotheistic religion, and Akhenaten. Unlike Moses, Akhenaten IV was a person who remained not in memory but only in history. After his death, his name was erased from the list of Egyptian rulers, his monuments were demolished, and his inscriptions and images were destroyed. For many centuries, his revolutionary religious reform was unknown to history. It was studied in the XIX century based on materials discovered in the city of Amarna and other areas as a result of archaeological expeditions [5, p. 23]. Based on these facts, it can be said that Akhenaten IV was a historical figure who embodied freedom, liberalism, and monotheism.

According to Hecataeus, Moses forbade the creation of divine images because God was not in human shape and could not be depicted in those images [5, p. 34]. Based on this fact, if we compare Moses and Akhenaten IV, we can see a similarity between them. Akhenaten, like Moses, banned the depiction of gods in images on the eve of his religious reform. In the mid-XIX century and the second half of XIX century, the study of archaeological monuments related to Akhenaten in Egypt brought innovation to Egyptology and gave rise to conflicting views on this subject. In Egypt, there are claims that there are similarities between Akhenaten's monotheistic religion and the Hebrew religion, that Akhenaten was the successor of Moses, and sometimes even Moses himself. However, the lack of traces in archaeological finds to substantiate these claims does not allow proving the connection between Atenism and

Judaism[2, p. 12-13]. One reason why we can consider Akhenaten's religious reforms as religious genius is his influence on other monotheistic religions, but this issue needs to be proven in historiography.

As a result of all this research, the following question arises: Why were monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, after Atenism, able to take deep root among the population, but Akhenaten's religious reform was abolished after his death?

During Akhenaten's religious reforms, during the Amarna period, taxes were levied on the common people. They were employed for a very small income. Research shows that the pharaoh could punish them for disrespecting the new religion and the government. All this increased fear of the pharaoh and the monotheistic religion he brought, and distrust of the gods for punishment [4, p. 131]. According to historian Garry Victor Hill all these pressures on the population led to the abolition of Atenism after the death of Akhenaten.

Although the exact date of Akhenaten's death is unknown to historians, it is believed that he died in 1336 BC due to the plague or some other chronic illness. According to historical research, his 17-year reign ended with this, and shortly after his death, attempts were made to destroy the temples, monuments, rock paintings, etc. That Akhenaten had built in honor of the god Aten. Based on these facts, the following question arises: why did the ancient Egyptians abandon their god Aten so quickly and try to destroy everything related to him? Among the reasons for this event, some historians believe that the plague spreading in the country had a major impact. According to this reasoning, people's faith in God, who could not prevent the widespread spread of the plague, had decreased. Another version of why the ancient Egyptian population behaved so aggressively towards their god Aten is that it was impossible for the population to fully accept monotheism in the Egyptian civilization, where polytheism had existed for many centuries [8, p. 323]. Indeed, if the historical event was analysed, it will be clear that throughout history, the transition to a new political or religious system among human societies is a process that requires time, and it is impossible for it to take deep root among the population in a short time. A historical analysis of events shows that Akhenaten's reign and religious reforms also covered a short period, so it can be concluded that he was among the factors that prevented the widespread spread of Atenism among the population and the population's adaptation to the new religious system. In addition to these facts, it is possible to say that the change of the capital, which is known to historians from archaeological excavations, also prevented the new religion Atenism brought by Akhenaten from taking root among the population. It was inconvenient to build a new capital in a desert area where no population group had previously settled, from the previous capital city of Thebes. According to information obtained based on Garry Victor Hill's research, among the factors listed above that made it difficult for the population to accept Atenism as the only religion and abandon other religions and gods was the factor of imposing taxes on the population. If all these historical events are analyzed, the following considerations emerge: a civilization that had existed for centuries as a polytheist was suddenly forbidden to worship its gods, all monuments, places of worship, and images belonging to other gods were destroyed, the capital city was moved to a politically and geographically unfavorable area, and at the same time the population had to pay taxes. All these factors help to explain why the temples and monuments built in honor of Pharaoh Akhenaten's Sun God Aten were destroyed and Atenism was abolished immediately after his death. Even if the population formally accepted Atenism under the strong influence of the pharaoh, it may have created a secret hatred and disgust towards the pharaoh in the population and the administration. This suggests that Akhenaten's rule was represented by Atenism, and therefore, with his death, the new religious reform he brought also disappeared [4, p. 131].

Conclusion: Akhenaten's Revolution have to be evaluated by both aspects as a religious genius and political miscalculating. If a critical analysis of historical events is conducted, it is possible to determine the impact and significance of the revolutionary events that occurred during the reign of the Eighteenth Dynasty on subsequent socio-political events both in Egypt and in the world. There are different views among historians about the influence of Atenism on Judaism and Akhenaten on the Prophet Moses, as the first monotheistic religion, and the similarities between them. However, it is safe to say that Atenism held a unique place in world history as the first recorded religion and paved the way for the emergence of this concept by playing the role of the first foundation of monotheism. With the transfer of the capital from Thebes to the newly built Amarna, there are examples of art and architectural monuments created and built by artists, sculptors, and architects, as well as monuments depicting the god Aten with the rays of the sun disk, paintings of Pharaoh Akhenaten and his family, especially Nefertiti, innovations brought to art, etc. All this gives reason to consider Akhenaten's religious reforms as a religious genius. From a global perspective, and because of its important place in the history of ancient civilizations Akhenaten's reforms, the introduction of the world's first monotheistic religion, Atenism, to Egyptian civilization, should be considered a religious genius based on the facts listed above.

An analysis of Pharaoh Akhenaten's religious reforms in terms of their impact on ancient Egyptian civilization and the lives of the population prevents his reforms from being considered religious genius from this perspective. Based on the research of historian Garry Victor Hill and as is known from archaeological excavations, since the ancient Egyptian population quickly transitioned from polytheism to monotheism during the reign of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the social well-being of the population declined, the failure of Atenism to take root among the people gives reason to say that with the death of Akhenaten, his god Aten also "died". If the religious reforms of the ruler Akhenaten was evaluated from the perspective of the ancient Egyptian population, it would be correct to call these reforms a political miscalculation. However, due to the unique place it holds in ancient Egyptian history and the revolutionary innovations it brought for that period, it is more appropriate to consider these religious reforms as a religious genius.

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EXNATON İNQILABI: DİNİ DAHİLİK, YOXSƏ SİYASİ SƏHV HESABLAMA? XÜLASƏ

Açar sözlər: Exnatonun inqilabı, monoteizm, Qədim Misir, politeist sistem

Qədim Misirdə əsrlər boyu əhali arasında müxtəlif fəvqəltəbii qüvvələri təmsil edən tanrılara inam mövcud idi. Qədim sivilizasiyada yaşayan xalqlar mənəvi ehtiyaclarını ödəmək üçün çoxtanrılıq dinini formalaşdırırdılar, lakin gətdikcə monoteizmin yaranmasına yol açılırdı. Amenhotep, Aten tanrısını şərəfləndirərək adını Axenaten olaraq dəyişdirmişdir. Onun gətirdiyi yeni din həyatın günəşdən asılılığına və Atonun onun üzərində mütləq gücünə əsaslanırdı. Çünki firon özünü Atonun yer üzündə vasitəçisi və təbliğatçısı kimi görürdü. Axenaten daha sərt addımlar ataraq digər tanrıların şərəfinə tikilmiş məbədləri dağıtma əmri vermiş və Atendən başqa başqa tanrıya ibadət qadağan etmişdir. Müxtəlif faktlar Axenatenin islahatlarının mərkəzləşdirilmiş monoteist dövlət yaratmağa müvəffəq olduğunu göstərmişdir. IV Axenaten azadlığı, liberalizmi və təkallahlığı təcəssüm etdirən tarixi bir şəxsiyyət idi. Elmi nəticə: O, insanları tək Tanrı – Atona inandırmağa çalışsaydı, onun gətirdiyi inqilabı ölümündən sonra da uzunmüddətli mövcud ola bilərdi və antik Misir sivilizasiyasında dərin kök salardı. Yəni Atenizmdən sonra Yəhudilik, Xristianlıq və İslam kimi monoteist dinlər əhali arasında nə üçün dərin kök sala bildilər, lakin Axenatenin dini islahatı onun ölümündən sonra ləğv edildi?

Məqalə həmçinin tarixşünaslıq nöqtəyi nəzərindən araşdırılmışdır. Məqalənin başlığından da görünür ki, tədqiqat işi müqayisəli təhlil ilə verilmişdir. Tənqidi təhlillərə görə, on səkkizinci sülalənin hakimiyyəti dövründə baş verən inqilabi hadisələrin həm Misirdə, həm də dünyada sonrakı ictimai-siyasi hadisələrə təsirini və əhəmiyyətini müəyyən etmək

mümkündür. Xülasədə belə nəticə gəlinir ki, Axenatenin inqilabı həm dini dahilik, həm də siyasi səhv hesablama baxımından qiymətləndirilməlidir.

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РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ ЭХНАТОНА: РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ ГЕНИЙ ИЛИ
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ПРОСЧЕТ
РЕЗЮМЕ

Ключевые слова: революция Эхнатона, монотеизм, Древний Египет, политеистическая система

В Древнем Египте на протяжении веков люди верили в различных богов, олицетворяющих сверхъестественные силы. Люди, жившие в древних цивилизациях, создавали политеистические религии для удовлетворения своих духовных потребностей, но постепенно сформировался монотеизм. Аменхотеп сменил имя на Эхнатон, воздавая почести богу Атону. Новая религия, которую он принёс, основывалась на зависимости жизни от солнца и абсолютной власти Атона над ним. Фараон считал себя посредником и проповедником Атона на земле. Эхнатон принял более радикальные меры, приказав разрушить храмы, построенные в честь других богов, и запретив поклонение любому богу, кроме Атона. Многочисленные факты свидетельствуют о том, что реформы Эхнатона привели к созданию централизованного монотеистического государства. Эхнатон IV был исторической личностью, олицетворявшей свободу, либерализм и монотеизм. Научный вывод: Если бы он попытался убедить людей в существовании единого Бога – Атона, совершённая им революция существовала бы ещё долго после его смерти и глубоко укоренилась бы в древнеегипетской цивилизации. Другими словами, почему монотеистические религии, такие как иудаизм, христианство и ислам, смогли глубоко укорениться среди населения после атонизма, но религиозная реформа Эхнатона была отменена после его смерти?

Статья также рассматривается с точки зрения историографии. Из названия статьи ясно, что исследование носит сравнительный характер. Критический анализ позволяет определить влияние и значение революционных событий, произошедших в период правления XVIII династии, на последующие социально-политические события как в Египте, так и в мире. В заключении делается вывод о том, что революцию Эхнатона следует оценивать как с точки зрения религиозного гения, так и политического просчета.

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