

## **The Emergence of Theatre Arts in The Ancient World Between the Egyptians and The Greeks**

**Prof. Abd-Elghafar Shedid**

**Professor at the Department of Art History - Faculty of Fine Arts - Helwan University**

**Prof. Mohamed Tawfiq**

**Professor, Department of Architecture - Faculty of Fine Arts - Helwan University**

**Researcher / Omar El-Moutaz Bel'lah Mahmoud Bassiouny**

**Faculty of Fine Arts – Helwan University- Master in Art History**

**[omar.elmoutaz@gmail.com](mailto:omar.elmoutaz@gmail.com)**

### **Abstract:**

The research deals with the dilemma of the primacy of the affiliation of theater art to the Greeks at the expense of the ancient Egyptian Civilization. The flourishing of theater and drama in Greece does not mean that the first beginnings of the theater were Greek, as theater was found in some ancient civilizations that preceded the ancient Greek civilization. And if it had taken a different form of theater as the Greeks knew, it does not mean that those great theatrical works that the Greeks knew in the fifth century BC were the first beginnings of this type of art. But reason, logic and artistic readings of antiquities generally rule out that humanity which achieved amazing scientific and artistic achievements in ancient Egypt was unable to discover drama and theater and that it lived without knowing the core fundamentals of theater arts until the Greeks came and achieved what ancient Egypt failed to achieve. The art of theatre in general has many other conceptions that express in particular the thoughts and beliefs of ancient cultures and peoples, especially in ancient Egypt. Therefore, these forms and perceptions must be taken into account if we want to understand the idea of theater, its history, philosophy, components, and the role it plays in the life of the individual and society. Accordingly, any attempt to return theatre and drama to the Greeks alone, adherence to the idea of the Greek origin of theatre, and denying the existence of theatre in the civilization of ancient Egypt and other societies prior to the Greeks, all come from a narrow view that is not without prejudice to everything that is Western.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Philosophy - Ancient Egyptian Art – Egyptology – Art

### **Introduction:**

The research is concerned with the origins of scenography in ancient Egypt, especially in the era of the transfer of political power from Thebes to Amarna in the era of King Akhenaten in the eighteenth dynasty in the era of the new kingdom, specifically the facilities of his capital "Akht-Aten" Tel El-Amarna in Minya in Upper Egypt. The research is an attempt to unravel the artistic evidence of the unique usage of the philosophy of art of scenography to root its fundamental documentation as a political and religious tool in service to the religion in Egypt during that period.

The ancient Egyptian artist was not only thinking of constructing his immortal buildings to emphasize his strength and prestige, or only the status of his religion, but it was built on

philosophical rules formulated by scenography tools as a comprehensive science to employ the arts in a natural spatial space that the artist exploited according to his own idea, and pre-planning stems from the hidden religious belief. Scenography in ancient Egypt included the adaptation of spatial nature and the exploitation of astronomy and the movement of the sun, in order for the ancient Egyptian to build his architecture and various buildings, which he decorated with drawings and pictorial scenes, whether religious, funeral or mundane architecture, and from there to the design and implementation of fashion models of this era.

### **Study Problem:**

How can the ancient Egyptian civilization not know the art of scenography as a holistic approach which combines all forms of visual art, a civilization that distinguished and preceded the world in various types of arts? Everyone who addressed this problem addressed it from a mere archaeological point of view, searching and excavating the remains that indicate the presence of designated buildings, or inscriptions on the walls of temples and tombs, or writings and texts in papyrus scrolls, but no one addressed it from a visual analytical perspective of the scenographic elements. The visual forms and manifestations that had been embraced and included in the arts of architecture, perspective, costumes, and ways of exploiting the possible spaces for the visual dramatic interpretations of the ancient Egyptian religious beliefs, and this may lead us to root for the emergence of this art in Egypt.

### **Study objectives:**

This research is an academic attempt to prove the ability of the ancient Egyptian artist to accurately plan everything related to the foundations of the visual core in architectural structures and his ability to coordinate between them and the topographical nature of Egypt to serve his religious belief.

### **Study procedures:**

The researcher chose the experimental and creative approach through the descriptive approach to describe the philosophy of the ancient Egyptian religion in the era of Akhenaten and its impact on religious and funeral architecture, and the creative analytical approach in analyzing the creative ideas created by the ancient Egyptian artist to document and consolidate his religious faith through his architectural achievements in that period.

### **Egypt between political and technical development:**

The ancient Egyptian art is nothing but a link between the real-time counted in days and hours and the eternity in which the Egyptians believed, and this is what confirmed this art from its inception until its end in the late Roman era. Thus, the Amarna art, which the Egyptian artist emphasized through the body of the king (male and female), emphasized the idea of continuity through his authority to permanently secrete everything and from it to eternity. The scenic drawings on the walls of temples, tombs, or statues, whether of gods, kings, individuals, or even animals, were not only recorded for visual artworks, but also served as a link of a magical nature linking life and the afterlife. Since the ancient state, the rules of Egyptian art have been established, which presented the king in photography or sculpture to a high degree of perfection so that his soul in the afterlife could be able to inhale, pronounce and see through its

embodiment in this elaborate form only; Rather, it was also the embodiment of the idea of the king as a living God in the most perfect perfection of his image as an immortal human being in his temples. The Amarna stage also came to express the same idea and content that the Egyptian artist grew up on and emphasized his religious philosophy in it. He presented the idea of divine perfection to the king this time, but not through the image of a man with a strong structure that retains all his human senses only, but that he exaggerated them and transgressed them with the genius of the permanence and immortality of God through one body in which the ability to continuity and survival, as now the male and female have become in one divine body.

### **Engineering Philosophy at Amarna:**

Professor Peter Lacovara, a well-known archaeologist and technical supervisor of the project to restore the royal tombs in the Amarna area presumes that the most important source that helps us understand the historical period of Akhenaten is that spot that quickly disappeared after the death of the king in the place we know today as Tell el-Amarna, which is located two hundred miles north from the heart of the ancient capital of Thebes, and is represented today by areas such as Bani Imran, Hajj Qandil, and Amarna. Al-Houta, then the few ruins that lie along the length of the old city and beyond it are cemeteries.

Akhenaten's engineers studied that spot well, not only to choose it to be the most suitable land for the new religion only, but to be a clear geographical and artistic symbol for that creed. The limestone is roughly divided into two parts by the Nile. The western bank of it was used for agriculture, while the eastern bank of it was used for burial and for housing together, and the rest of the facilities and markets were distributed around the temples that mediated the city in a semi-circle shape. The city extended for a distance of eight miles parallel to the River Nile and its width was estimated to be about three miles, in the middle it was divided into the east-west axis, and the city was splitting a long road parallel to the River Nile known as the Royal Road. Based on the engineering theory of dividing the circle into four quarters, the design of that spot was ideal for the Egyptians, who expressed the word "city" in the hieroglyphic language with the symbol (niwt).

### **Scenographical planning of Amarna:**

The planning of the new city of Aten (Amarna) is not only due to engineering and geographic rules, but its planning touches on astronomical rules of reference and religious origins of the sun's doctrine, like the greatest Egyptian monuments that were built from the ancient state until the end of the Egyptian era. The border panels that defined the dimensions of this city came to define the urban space of the city technically, religiously, and linguistically as well. The architects of Amarna depended on the rising and setting of the sun on two mountains that surrounded the area to be built in which the plates of the borders encircling the city were distributed to them, where Akhenaten refers to the "Horizon of Aten" as the name of the new city (Akht - Aten), meaning the sun on the horizon, the mountain that overlooks the city from the eastern bank of the Nile, where the long valley leading to the royal cemetery, which is the spot chosen by the king's engineers for his tomb, contrary to the prevailing ancient Egyptian belief in building tombs and cemeteries on the west bank of the Nile, where the sunsets.

We see in this a revolution led by philosophy and uniquely translated by scenography to serve the new religious belief. Thus, Akhenaten gives an important sign and symbol to this mountain, and by extension to the other mountain located on the western side. Based on this principle, the city is established and places of worship and palaces of the king are distributed over it, the representative of the one God on earth and his only connection with humans. The tombs of the nobles and the facilities that followed after that were dedicated to the life of this world or the afterlife. And in this manner of the sequence starting from sunrise to sunset behind the western mountain on the other side, the city was divided by God - utilizing the sun's rays - and not by men.

### **a)Temples**

The temples were also mentioned in the border panels, where the Great Temple or what was called (House of the Sun Disc) was mentioned, and the other temple called (The Palace of the Sun Disc), the two main temples in the city of (Aten's Horizon). The first of them was a huge architectural work of about 750 meters in length and 230 meters in width. It came with a unique design, unlike what the ancient Egyptian temples were built on, which covered the shades of their many columns and huge courtyards that were getting dark gradually as they were standing and gradually darkening as we headed Towards the dark Holy of Holies at the end of the temple. On the contrary, the temples of the Amarna were spacious, open to the sky, without roofs, to be filled with the kind of deity utilizing sunlight. With this architectural planning, the ancient Egyptian artist has made an architectural translation of the core of the new religious message that established the light of the Aten, which illuminates everything, unlike the hidden and invisible Amun.

### **b)Palaces**

If we consider that the Amarna palaces came as a model for the extension of traditional Egyptian architecture, the northern palace, although it was the place where the king used to stay; however, was also a liturgical place. This is where this palace contained all the necessary elements of life from animals, birds, fish, and live plants, including the decree on its walls and floors, emphasizing the idea that the great king is the one who mediates existence and all that it contains the vocabulary of life. Here is the spirit of the ancient Egyptian artist, who combined with unprecedented distinction all the scenographic elements from the topography of the place, to his architecture, to adorn that architecture with a plastic vision that consolidates the idea and serves the faith, even his use of living organisms to root the spirit of the lived scene. To complete the symbolism placed with all care, mastery, and genius for the planning and architecture of the holy city of Aten's horizon, which was the microcosm in all its details.

### **c)Tombs**

The tombs of the senior statesmen were carved into a large cliff on the eastern border of the city, and there are forty-four tombs divided into two groups. The first group consists of seventeen tombs north of the Royal Valley and twenty-seven to the south of it. The themes depicted on the walls of those tombs revolve around scenes from the daily life of the tomb owner, as well as scenes from the life of the royal family as they worshiped a furnace as a kind

of new additions to the subjects depicted inside Egyptian tombs at this time. On the other hand, all the subjects of (Osiris) and his usual scenes in the trial of the deceased in the other world were completely removed, according to the new religion in which the afterlife became eternal with the Aten and his messenger Akhenaten. We can see this clearly by looking at the entrance to each tomb, where we see the deceased owner of the tomb and in front of him, the cartouches of the god Aten and next to them are the cartouches of Akhenaten and his wife, next to the accompanying texts that emphasize the love of the royal couple Akhenaten and Nefertiti and how they embrace them with his love and care and give them life through his rays.

#### **d)Royal Tombs**

The royal cemetery is located seven to eight miles in the hills east of the capital, Amarna. Although it was not completed at the time of Akhenaten's death, most probabilities indicate that he was buried there. The design of his tomb was largely innovative, as all the meanings of philosophy and religion were manifested in it, to exploit the geographical and engineering nature of the place. The royal tomb was uniquely designed, with a large corridor leading to a well (D) and a burial chamber with columns (E), both on the main axes, and a ramp on the sides of stairs believed to have been to facilitate the descent of the royal sarcophagus down.

As for the mural painting inside the cemetery, it was not painted and colored on plaster as is customary in ancient Egyptian art. The most likely reason in this matter is due to the invalidity of the rocks in which the cemetery was carved. Therefore, these rocks were covered with plaster from the inside, then frescoes and sculpture were added to them after installing them to the walls.

The genius of the Egyptian artist and engineer proved its genius through the use of the spatial nature and the spot that was carefully chosen for the location of the royal cemetery for the universe of clear scenographic significance through which we find the iconographic form of the symbol of Aton (the sun disk emanating from rays extending to the earth) through imaginary lines extending from the depth The tomb of Akhenaten himself towards the most important points in his city, where a straight line (like the rays of the sun Aten) connects the royal cemetery with the great temple and the B boundary panel located behind the river, and another line connects the royal cemetery with the small temple, then the imaginary line bisects the two original border panels located in the original directions, A third imaginary line connects the northern tombs to panel X, as well as a fourth line connects the southern tombs to panel M.

#### **References:**

- Assmann, Yann: AlZaakira Alhadaria, Alkitab WalZikraa Walhuia, Alsiyasia fi Alhadarat Alkubraa Al'awa, alhay'a Almisriat Aleama Lel kitab, alqahira. 2013.
- Bernal, Martin: 'Athina Alsawda' (Aljudhur al'afruasiawiat Lel Hadara Alkilasikiat) Aljuz' Al'awala, Talfiq bilad al'iighriq (1785- 1985), Tahrir Wamurajaeat Wataqdim: dr. Ahmad Eitman, Tarjamat Lafif min aleulama', Almashrue Alqawmii Lel tarjama, Alqahirat.1997.
- Durant, Wil: Qisat Alhadarat, Almujalad Alraabie, Aasr Al'iimani, Almunazama Alearabiat Lel Tarbia Walthaqafa Waleulum Dar Aljil Lel Tabei. Tunus. 1988.
- Zikri, Anton: Al'adab Aaldiyn eind Qudama' Almisriyn. Almuthaf Almisrii. 1992.
- Saleh Bek, Majid, Tarikh Almasrah Abr Aleusur, Aldar Althaqafia Lel Nashr, 2001.

- Abdelreheem, Mohhamad, almasrahia Bayn Alnazaria Aaltatbiq, Aldar Alqawmia Lel Tibaea Walnashri, Alqahira, Masr, 1966.
- Mohamed Hussien Mohamed Habib, Yasser Abdalsaahib Brak: al'ashkal ma qabl almasrahia Wamarjjeiaatiha Al'anthurubulujia, Jamieat Baghdad, 2013.
- Wilkinson, Richard. H.: Qira'at Alfana Almisrii, Dalil Hirughlifi Lel Taswir Walnaht Almisrii Alqadim. Wizarat Althaqafat, Almajlis Al'aelaa Lel Athar. 2007.
- Yehia, Lutfi Abd Alwahaab, Almasrah Alshieri, Alam Alfikr, Alkuayt Almujaalad 15, Aladad 1 Sanat 1984.
- Breasted, James Henry; 1916, A History of the Early World, Ginn and Company, Boston
- David, R. Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt. Penguin Books, 2003.
- Faulkner, R.O. A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian. Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1962.
- Mykola, Tarasenko, 2016. Studies on the vignettes from chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead. I, The image of mš.w Bdšt in ancient Egyptian mythology (Archaeopress Egyptology 16), Oxford. 2016
- Wahby, Magdi: A Dictionary of Literary Terms, librairie du Liban. Beirut. 1974