

CHAPTER 9

RING BEZELS AT EL-AMARNA

by

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9.1 Introduction

This study of faience rings and ring bezels at Amarna is based on three different sources: (i) the object cards of the current excavations at the Workmen's Village; (ii) the object lists of the 1921-22 excavations of Peet and Woolley inside the Workmen's Village and in the southern area of the main city (Peet and Woolley 1923), as checked against the original records in the archives of the Egypt Exploration Society; [1] (iii) the object lists of the unpublished 1923-4 E.E.S. excavations in the main city (cf. Griffith 1924; Chapter 7). This material was chosen for examination in order to provide comparisons between the bezels inside the Walled Village and those outside it; and between the village area as a whole and the main city. All of the bezels from these sources were recorded on Fortran forms, using a code based on the design corpus in *City of Akhenaten* III. They were then typed into the Cambridge University Phoenix/MVT computer, and the resulting files were analysed using the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences". This analysis may be used as a basis for speculation as to the nature of the village site, its stratigraphy, and its relation to the main city.

9.2 Bezels outside the Walled Village

The rings from the 1979-83 excavations (outside the Walled Village) represent the most reliable sample, owing to the more careful methods of excavation. Firstly, the rings' provenances are known in greater detail, so that they can be examined both in terms of horizontal spatial distribution and stratigraphic position. Secondly, all excavated material was sieved, so that the relative statistical frequency of different bezel-designs is likely to be fairly close to reality. It is thus a good idea to consider these recently excavated bezels in isolation, before moving on to the analysis of data from the excavations of 1921-24.

The first statistical analysis performed on the ring-bezels from the extra-mural area produced the quantities and percentages of each design type. The

[1] I would like to record my thanks to Dr. Patricia Spencer for her help with my examination of this material.

dominant design motif is the "wedjat-eye", which is almost always in blue faience and open-work style. The wedjat-eye type accounts for 36.2% of the total number of bezels and fragments of bezels outside the village (and 58.7% of those with legible designs).

COMPARISON OF THE PROPORTIONS
OF BEZEL DESIGN-TYPES
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE

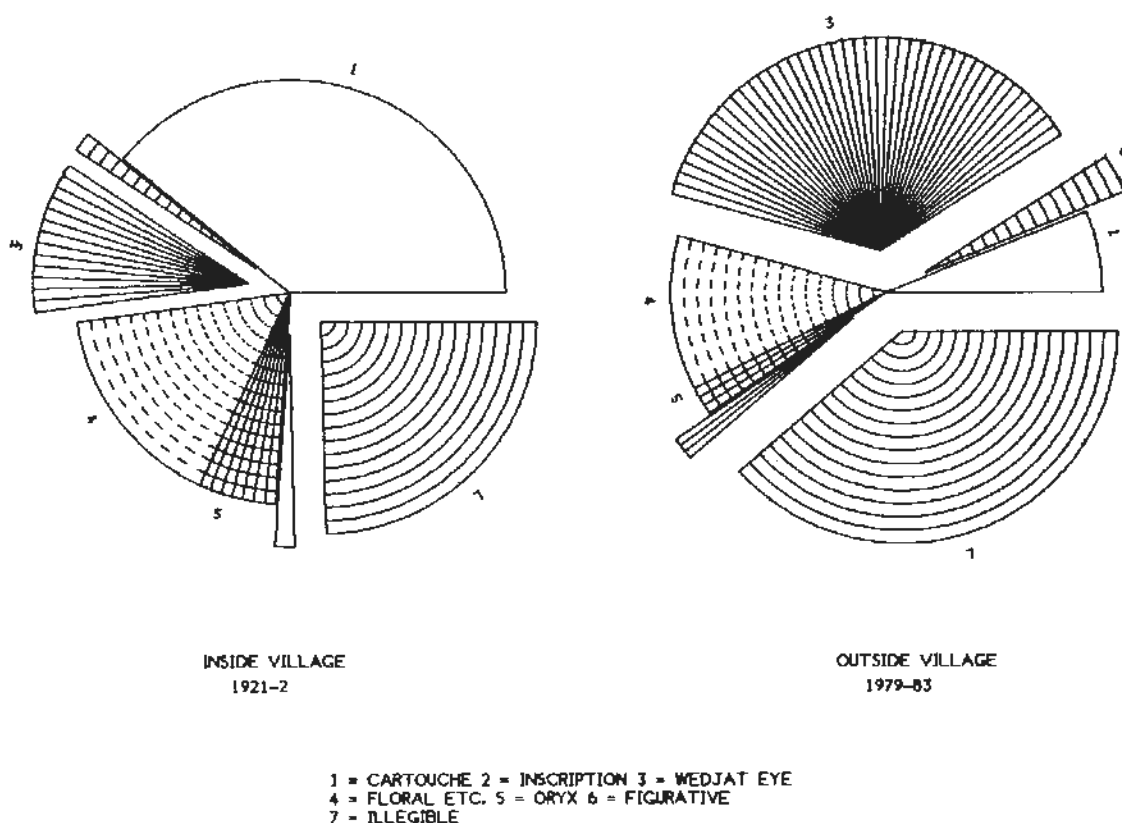


Figure 9.1. Comparison of the proportions of bezel design-types inside and outside the Walled Village.

Over a third of the bezels outside the village consisted of pieces of faience which were identifiable as bezels but were so worn or badly manufactured that the designs were illegible. This information highlights the inadequacy of the object-registers of the 1920's, since such "illegible" bezel-types actually constitute a much lower proportion of the total number of bezels from the 1921-2 excavations (cf. Figure 9.1). Similarly, the percentage of wedjat-eye bezels from inside the Walled village, according to the excavators of 1921-2, is only about 6.5%. It is therefore obvious that any study based solely on the written evidence from the 1920s' object-registers would yield a gross underestimate of the total number of bezels involved. It may be argued that Peet and Woolley were justified in disregarding items which were of no use to them in their interpretation of the site. However, such large quantities of apparently insignificant objects may often provide unexpectedly useful evidence. It is, in fact, important to be aware of the high total numbers of

bezels scattered around the village site, many of which seem to have been poorly manufactured. These were evidently mass-produced and popular items, and yet there are virtually no clay moulds, inside or outside the village, from which they could have been made. The excavations in the main city at Amarna, on the other hand, have produced many such moulds. It therefore seems that, whereas the inhabitants of the main city were producing faience rings for their own use, those who lived in the Workmen's Village had to receive theirs from an outside source. This suggestion reinforces the idea that the village, like that at Deir el Medina, was a community heavily dependent on outside organization.

This dependency must have been almost inevitable with regard to such commodities as grain and water, but it is surprising to find that personal jewellery seems to have been placed in the same category. [2] The function of the faience rings was not merely decorative (although this was obviously an important element). They are often amuletic in character, the most obvious example being the ubiquitous open-work wedjat-eyes. The bezels with moulded inscriptions also often feature combinations of "nefer"-signs signs and wedjat-eyes; and the bezels with cartouches must have had a vital significance in a community which, even by Egyptian standards, was evidently state-dominated.

This study concentrates on the bezels with cartouches, which constitute 14.5% of all bezels from both inside and outside the village. An analysis of the stratigraphic distribution of the cartouche-bezels from outside has produced some useful contributions to the stratigraphic record of the area. Many with cartouches are from "surface" or "disturbed" deposits, but five are from very secure Amarna Period contexts.

Firstly, the upper layer of an ancient packed surface (Unit [169], square H6) in the *Zir*-Area has yielded a fragment of a grey/blue faience bezel which bears the moulded upper part of a cartouche (3785). Since the sun-disc and the top of a "Maat" sign are visible, this cartouche is cautiously identified as the prenomen of Amenophis III (cf. Petrie 1894: Plate XIV.11,13). The find suggests that the *Zir*-Area may have been used at a fairly early point in the history of the Amarna site as a whole. By contrast, the 1921-2 excavations inside the Walled Village produced no Amenophis III bezels at all (this general paucity of cartouches before Tutankhamun, inside the village, is discussed below). This is a rare piece of possible direct evidence for the existence of the village early in the Amarna Period. [3] Since the *Zir*-Area seems to have functioned as a reception point for supplies to the village, it would naturally have been a part of the site likely to have been in continuous use throughout the history of the village. The surface layers of the *Zir*-Area indicate such continuity since they produced four Tutankhamun and three Smenkhkare cartouche-bezels (as well as two illegible inscribed bezels which are probably

[2] Two exceptions were alabaster ear-rings and ostrich egg-shell beads, both of which were manufactured at the site, as material from the current excavations has shown.

[3] Another is the hieratic ostrakon of "year 31" (2089, from square O15, level 4), presumably of Amenophis III.

cartouches). The Tutankhamun bezels are:

- 4394, from F6 [399]
- 4601, from H7 [494]
- 4973, from G8 [643]
- 4923, from G9 [550]

The Smenkhkare bezels are:

- 5096, from G6 [713]
- 5095, from G6 [713]
- 3286, from J7 [100]

The royal unidentified are:

- 4896, from G9 [550]
- 5019, from F6 [640]

Secondly, in 1980, the excavation of a floor deposit (Level 11, square M17) belonging to Building 350, produced a blue faience ring bezel (1020) with the upper and lower tips broken off, leaving a badly moulded cartouche which is nevertheless clearly identifiable as "Ankh-kheperu-re", the prenomen of Smenkhkare (cf. Kemp 1981: 14). Building 350 was almost certainly already in ruins and partly invisible during the final phase of the village's occupation (phases VI to VIII) when the chapels were built. A Smenkhkare bezel at the phase IV level, in the extra-mural area, therefore suggests that the extensive constructions above phase IV occurred well after the reign of Akhenaten.

Thirdly, the stratigraphy of the "quarry deposits" (the lynch-pin of the stratigraphic record outside the village) can be clarified by reference to the ring-bezel record. The surface sand, above the quarry, has produced several faience bezels with cartouches of Smenkhkare and Tutankhamun:

- 4260, from M11 [264] (Tutankhamun)
- 4504, from M11 [264] (Tutankhamun)
- 4475, from M11 [264] (Tutankhamun)
- 4283, from M11 [333] (Smenkhkare)
- 3457, from M12 [126] (Smenkhkare)
- 3530, from M12 [126] (Tutankhamun)

But, more importantly from the stratigraphic point of view, four bezels with cartouches have also been found lower down within the midden layers. It has already been pointed out (Kemp 1983: 7, Figure 2; 14) that object 2898 (a green faience bezel with the cartouche of Tutankhamun cf. Petrie 1894: Plate XV.108) was found in the lower midden layer of the quarry (phase III). This lower midden layer also probably incorporates stratigraphic unit number [127], in square M12, where objects 3651 and 3749 were discovered. Object 3651 is the upper portion of a ring bezel in glossy blue faience, heavily glazed and bearing the deeply sunk impression of Tutankhamun's cartouche (cf. Petrie 1894: Plate XV.108-110). Object number 3749 is a green faience ring fragment, consisting of part of the shank and the upper portion of a bezel bearing the cartouche of Smenkhkare (cf. Petrie 1894: XV.93-101). Between the upper and lower midden

layers in the quarry (phases VII and III respectively) lies a thick sand-deposit (phase VI) which may represent a period of abandonment. Stratigraphic unit [339], in square M11, which is part of this sandy (phase VI) layer produced object number **4595**, a blue faience fragment of ring bezel with Tutankhamun's cartouche (cf. Petrie 1894: Plate XV.115) in sunk relief.

There are, therefore, two Tutankhamun cartouches, and one Smenkhkare in the lower midden layer (phase III), and one Tutankhamun cartouche in the clear sand deposit (phase VI). Together they provide a *terminus post quem* of well into the reign of Tutankhamun for the upper midden deposit (phase VII).

9.3 Bezels from within the Walled Village

Peet and Woolley found 60 bezels and fragments of bezels during the 1921-2 excavations at the Workmen's Village. They excavated 38 houses; thus an average of less than 1.5 bezels are recorded for each house. In the 1979 excavation of Long Wall Street 6, on the other hand, 7 bezels were found (consisting of one Akhenaten cartouche, one Tutankhamun cartouche, four wedjat-eyes, and one bezel with an illegible moulded design). It would be rash to make too many extrapolations from the modern excavation of one house, but these modern results can perhaps be used to compensate for the inadequacies of the 1921-2 record. Firstly, the two cartouches from Long Wall Street 6 would seem to confirm that the village was occupied during and after Akhenaten's reign. Secondly, the discovery of four wedjat-eye bezels, in a single house, suggests that the statistics derived from the 1920's object register (cf. Figure 9.1) give an improbably low frequency of wedjat-eye types, when compared with the extra-mural data. It is much more likely that the bezels in the rest of the village also consisted of about 50% wedjat-eyes, but that these were not recorded by the excavators in the 1920's. It was not possible to study the bezels from the 1922 excavations as carefully as those from 1921, 1923 and 1979-83, since the 1922 bezels were numbered in a sequence independent of other objects found in that season. A list (Peet and Woolley 1923: 170) gives only the barest description of each bezel, and there are no comments and drawings. Furthermore, whereas the bezels from 1921 and 1923 can be studied by means of the object cards in the E.E.S. archives, and can therefore be assigned corpus numbers by reference to the drawings in Petrie (1894), those from 1922 are virtually undocumented in the archives (apart from notes on the first fifteen, consisting of a few drawings and additional comments). This basic loss of information for 1922 is exacerbated by various mistakes in cross-references between the main body of the text and the list of bezels at the back of the book. It was therefore essential to extract the basic skeleton of data from both the excavation report and the archives, in order to re-examine the bezel record, with particular reference to those with cartouches. Peet and Woolley (1923: 66) claim that the bezels with cartouches from the Walled Village consisted of five of Akhenaten, three of Smenkhkare, and nineteen of Tutankhamun. Despite a thorough examination of the published object-lists for each house and the object-register in the E.E.S. archives, only two bezels with Akhenaten's cartouches could actually be identified: one at East Street 1, and the other at West Street 26. The first of

these ("B43") is mentioned in the text (Peet and Woolley 1923: 71) but not in the list of Akhenaten bezels (ibid: 170). The second ("22/10") is one of the fifteen bezels mentioned in the truncated manuscript "Notes on Bezels" from 1922, but this bezel is not mentioned at all in the published volume. The actual list of Akhenaten bezels (ibid: 170) from the 1921 and 1922 excavations in the main city and the village totals seven. Two of those listed ("B32" and "B37") are to be found in Peet and Woolley's field cards, in the description of the two houses in which they were discovered (Main Street 5 and 4 respectively). However, the drawing of "B32" (consisting of the phrase "rejoicing on the horizon") shows that this is in fact a cartouche of the Aten; and the drawing of "B37" indicates that it is actually the cartouche of Meritaten. Another of the seven is "B45". This is mentioned in the object list of house O47.18, in the main city (ibid: 28). The other four ("B25", "B26", "B44" and "B51") are mentioned only in the list at the back of the book. They cannot therefore be given a provenance (it is not even known if they are from the city or the village) and consequently had to be discounted in these statistical analyses.

Thus there are apparently only two bezels with Akhenaten cartouches from the 1921 and 1922 excavations in the village. One more Akhenaten bezel (Petrie 1894: Plate XIV.54) was discovered in the 1979 excavation at Long Wall Street 6, but this still means that, inside the village, only 11% of the bezels with cartouches actually bear that of Akhenaten. There are, on the other hand, nineteen Tutankhamun bezels from inside the village (including one from the 1979 excavation of Long Wall Street 6), mainly of the types 108, 110 and 115 in Petrie's corpus. The bezels with cartouches from inside the village therefore consist of predominantly late cartouches, except that there are only two Smenkhkare cartouches (less than those of Akhenaten), whereas, in the extra-mural area, the proportion of Smenkhkare bezels is five times that of Akhenaten cartouches. This discrepancy is unlikely to be related to the differences in excavation techniques between the 1920's and the modern excavations, since the proportion of cartouches in the object register of Peet and Woolley indicates that they paid close attention to such chronologically useful bezels.

The contention of Peet and Woolley (1923: 66) is that the many Tutankhamun bezels from inside the village represent only the most recent examples of a disposable item which would have quickly and easily disintegrated and been thrown away, outside the village. The old bezels, with cartouches of Akhenaten and Smenkhkare, would therefore, according to this theory, be likely to occur, in large numbers, outside the village, in the rubbish. It is, therefore, not surprising that the bezels from outside the village consist of a higher proportion of Smenkhkare bezels and lower proportion of Tutankhamun bezels, relative to the proportions inside the village. Although this information confirms the theory of Peet and Woolley that the bezel record within the village represents only the last phase of its occupation, it does not support their deduction that the village was likely to have been a "prosperous" settlement under Akhenaten. If the village had indeed been flourishing under Akhenaten, the earliest bezels (i.e. those from the extra-mural rubbish heaps excavated 1979-83) would be expected to include large numbers of bezels with Akhenaten cartouches. Instead, there are, if anything, fewer Amenophis III and Akhenaten cartouches on the bezels outside

the village.

The total village bezel-record (both inside and outside) therefore suggests that this was a community which began in a small way in Akhenaten's reign, steadily grew during the reign of Smenkhkare, and reached a peak under Tutankhamun. It could be argued that during the reign of Akhenaten bezels with cartouches may have been simply less popular or even unavailable in the village (remembering the lack of moulds and hence the probable dependence on an outside source). However, the discovery of many Akhenaten bezels (as well as bezels of Smenkhkare and Tutankhamun) in the main city would seem to indicate that rings bearing the king's cartouche were just as prevalent during Akhenaten's reign as those of his successors.

9.4 Bezels from the main city excavations (1921-24)

A total of 38 bezels with cartouche designs were found in the course of excavations in the main city (principally in grid-squares Q44 and N49) between 1921 and 1924. Part of the excavations are published (Peet and Woolley 1923), and part unpublished (see Chapter 7). As in the case of the 1921-2 village excavations, there are few recorded bezels with illegible designs since these were rarely considered worthy of mention. Of the bezels with cartouches, 11 were decorated with the cartouche of Akhenaten, 8 with that of Smenkhkare (Ankh-kheperu-re), and 7 with that of Tutankhamun. In addition, 3 were cartouches of the Aten, 4 of Amenophis III, 2 of Nefertiti, and one was an unidentified inscription likely to be a cartouche (cf. Figure 9.2). Since this material is introduced simply to provide a point of comparison with the Workmen's Village, no further documentation is provided here, though it will form part of a wider study of artefact distribution at Amarna now in progress. The chronological picture in the main city which it provides is fairly constant, with a slight peak in the reign of Akhenaten, and a gradual decline through the reigns of Smenkhkare and Tutankhamun. This situation, of course, presents a sharp contrast to the evidence from the village, where the bezels with the cartouche of Tutankhamun represent almost half of the total numbers of cartouche-bezels. The bar-graph for the main city (Fig. 9.2) suggests a strong continuity of occupation through the reigns of Akhenaten, Smenkhkare and Tutankhamun. Whereas the graph for the village portrays a settlement which flourished at a time when the main city had gone into decline.

9.5 Wider implications

Two points of more general significance arise from this study.

At the Workmen's Village, the distribution of cartouche bezels varies according to context: a mixture of cartouches of the reigning king and his predecessor in the rubbish heaps; a concentration of those of the reigning king only in the houses themselves. This must reflect the very normal human

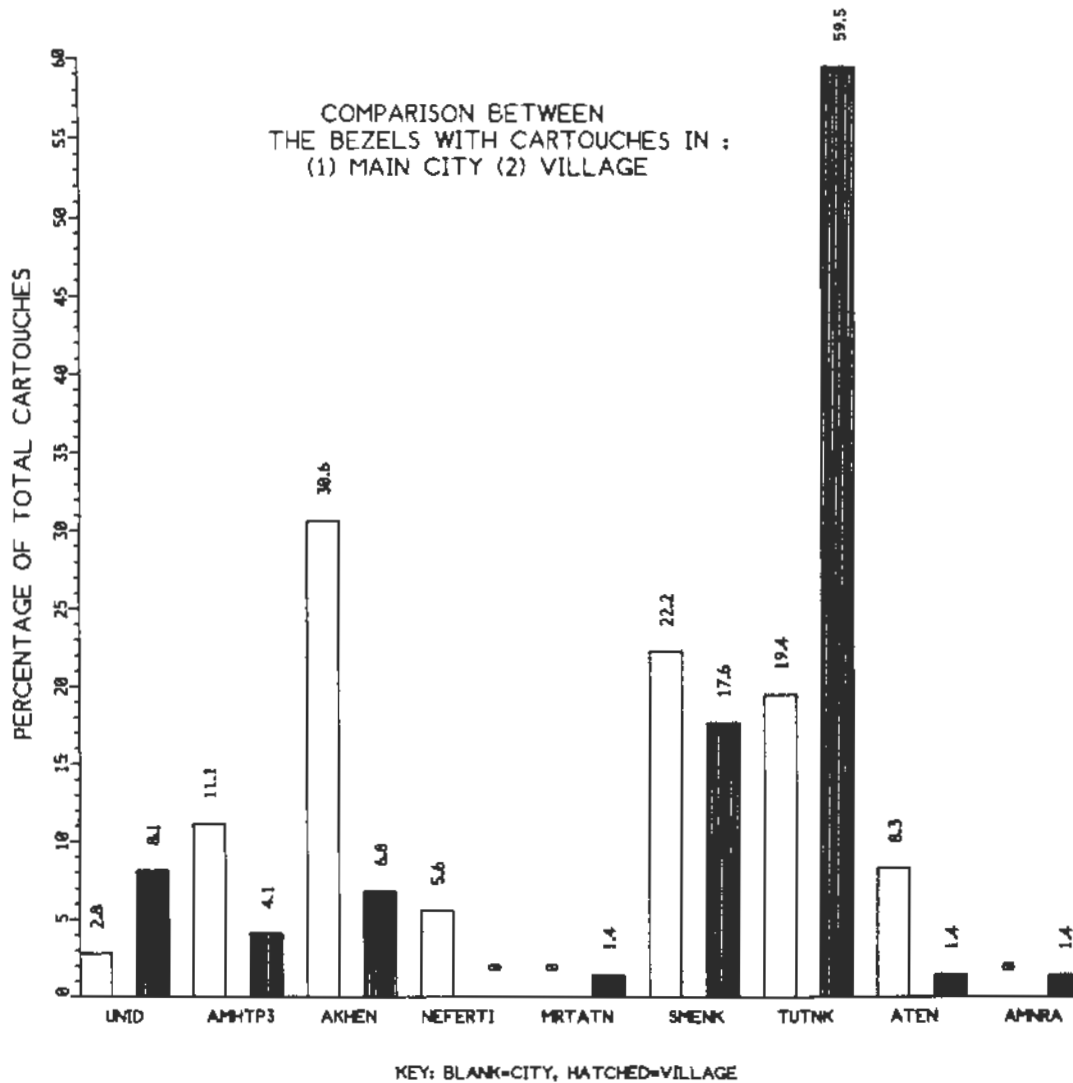


Figure 9.2. Bar-graph of bezels with cartouches in the Main City (1921-24 excavations) and Workmen's Village.

practices of throwing away older things, and keeping houses swept clean. But it introduces an important qualification into the study of cartouche bezels from the older excavations at Amarna. If they are to be used in historical arguments (e.g. in trying to determine the royal occupancy of the North City, cf. Pendlebury 1931: 243), some care and attention must be given to individual contexts. One needs rubbish heaps as well as floor deposits, and to be able to distinguish between the two, before making a balanced assessment.

The bezels may also reflect a pattern of popular demand. The timespans of the three reigns are not equal. Around 10 to 12 years should be allowed for the city's occupation in Akhenaten's reign, only 2 or 3 (or even less if a coregency is allowed) for Smenkhkare, and a maximum of 8 for Tutankhamun, with a likely much lower minimum, perhaps only 2 or 3 years, in view of the king's return to Memphis and consequent abandonment of the city by the

court. If bezels were produced continuously, all of the diagrams, and especially that for the main city, should show a marked dip in the reign of Smenkhkare. This is not, however, the case. The most obvious explanation is that most bezels were made at the time of a new king's accession, older ones being quickly discarded. On this view, whatever the historical background to this personage may have been, the start of Smenkhkare's reign was perceived by the inhabitants of Amarna as a full royal accession.

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