

CHAPTER 12

RING BEZELS WITH ROYAL NAMES AT THE WORKMEN'S VILLAGE,
1979-1986

by

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12.1 Introduction

In *AR I* appeared a preliminary analysis of faience ring bezel fragments found in the Workmen's Village up to 1983. It compared proportions of bezel types found between 1979 and 1983 with those found during the 1921-22 excavations at the Village, and with a sample from the Main City found in 1923-24 (Shaw 1984). Concentrating mainly on bezels with royal names, Shaw noted the high incidence of fragments from the Workmen's Village bearing the name of Tutankhamun, and the scarcity of those with Akhenaten, a reversal of the trend in the main city (*ibid.*: Figure 9.2). In addition it discussed the recent bezel finds in their archaeological contexts, underscoring the necessity for doing so if the objects are to be a valid basis for historical conclusions. The present study is a follow-up, utilizing the additional data available at the completion of the present excavations at the Workmen's Village.

Excavations from 1984 to 1986 yielded fragments of 16 Tutankhamun bezels, 3 Smenkhkara, 1 Akhenaten, 1 Meritaten (?), and 1 unidentified, totalling 22 bezels recognizable as bearing royal names.¹ Added to the 1979-83 finds, they make a total of 38 Tutankhamun bezels identified with certainty, and 4 additional questionable Tutankhamun bezels; 16 certain Smenkhkara and 3 uncertain; 2 certain Akhenaten plus 1 possibly Akhenaten; 2 Meritaten (both open to question); 1 Aten; and 7 unidentified, a total of 73 royal- (and divine-) name bezel fragments. These numbers converted to percentages appear in Figure 12.1.

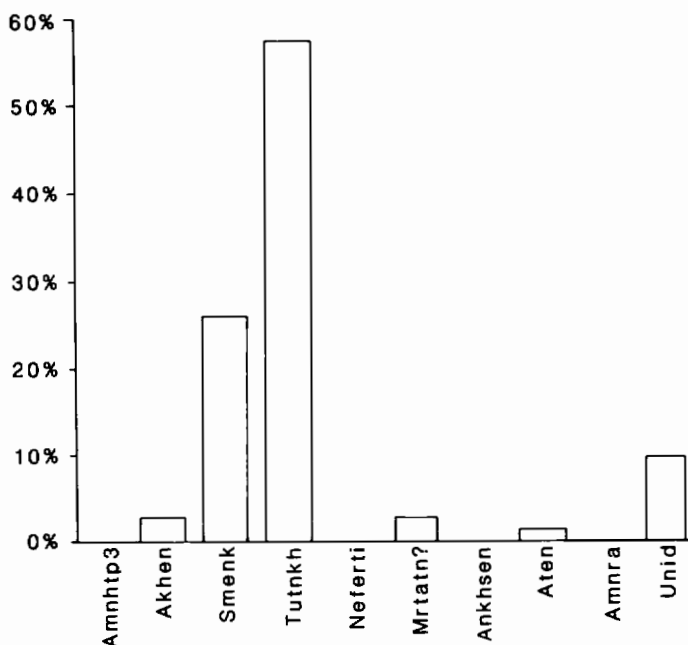


Figure 12.1. Royal and divine name bezels from the Workmen's Village 1979-1986.

¹ The small number of unidentified bezels is partly from the exclusion from this study of 2 fragments containing only the \bigcirc element, which may come from a royal name, but might also belong to some other type, such as Petrie 122, 124, 126, etc., some of which are known from the Workmen's Village.

As can be seen, recent excavations have confirmed the previously observed trend whereby Tutankhamun bezels are by far the most numerous from the Village and its vicinity, followed by Smenkhkara, with Akhenaten bezels quite rare (Shaw 1984: 126 ff.). Since presumably the Village was first occupied by the tomb construction workers and their families, and the tombs seem to have been decorated almost entirely during Akhenaten's reign (*RT* I-VI), the question arises as to why so few bezels with that king's name have come from the Workmen's Village.

12.2 Bezel types from the Workmen's Village

Faience ring bezels, amulets and pendants conform almost without exception to published types from the main city. This is not surprising, since little evidence for faience manufacture has been found in the Village, and none at all for the manufacture of faience rings.² As Shaw has noted (*ibid.*: 126), the inhabitants of the Village apparently obtained their faience, like so much else, from the city proper.

Recent excavations have, however, furnished one addition to the published bezel corpus (object no. 5410), a *Nb-hprw-Rc* design with the plural strokes in a vertical line to the left of the *hpr* sign. This reverses the placement of Petrie type 109 (1894: Plate XV, and cf. no. 112), and is a more complete and clearly moulded example. A trace of the *nb* basket remains at the bottom (Figure 12.2).



Figure 12.2. Object no. 5410, blue faience ring bezel with prenomen of Tutankhamun written in a slightly variant form (with plural strokes to left). Scale 1:1.

Other Tutankhamun types common from the Village include those with only the prenomen, and Petrie types 114, 115 and 119 (1894: XV) which combine the prenomen with other elements. No. 119 also contains the name of Amen-Ra. No examples with either form of this king's nomen have come to light from the 1979-86 excavations.

Similarly, all bezels identified in this and the previous study as Smenkhkara's are actually *nh-hprw-rc* without any nomen, either *Nfr-nfrw-itn* or *Smnh-kz-rc dsr-hprw*. Slightly more than 25% link this prenomen with Akhenaten's (usually *mr Wc-n-rc*; more rarely *mr Nfr-hprw-rc*). The rings linking the names of these two rulers are scattered evenly throughout the contexts in which Ankhkheperura bezels are found, and do not follow any discernible grouping by structure, structure type, or chronological phase of occupation. No design from the 1979-86 excavations contained the *.t* element which has been noted in speculations about the sex of this ruler (Samson 1973). If Smenkhkara was a separate king from Ankhkheperura, the absence of his name in this concentration of bezels from the late years at Amarna becomes difficult to explain.

Two fragments found in 1979-86 have been provisionally identified as possibly bearing the name of Meritaten. In both cases, the hesitation arises from the fact that only the upper portion is preserved, containing *itn* and traces of the \square sign. This matches Meritaten types 106 and 107 (Petrie 1894: XV), but the same configuration appears in type 11.A.6 (*COA* I: Plate XLIX), *mr itn*, an inscription presumably placing its wearer under the protection of the Aten without mention of any royal personage. Since no bezel of another queen has been found at the Workmen's Village, these two remain open to question.³

² From the total number of finds from the 1979-86 excavations only a single mould for a small faience object has been identified, and that from a disturbed deposit above West Street 1. The object, no. 6179 from unit [1784], is a pottery mould for a *wedjat* ornament. Note that the "furnace" found in the annexe to West Street 13 was not associated with evidence for faience manufacture (*COA* I: 86-87).

³ One of the two, no. 6600, should be regarded with special caution, as its blurred signs seem to be a misspelling: $\begin{matrix} \text{h} \\ \text{c} \end{matrix}$. The top sign, however, does not look like a $\begin{matrix} \text{h} \\ \text{c} \end{matrix}$.

Royal name bezels

Another bezel which should be mentioned again is object no. 3785, found in an upper packed layer of the *Zir*-area (Shaw 1984: 126). It was initially identified as possibly an Amenophis III design. Re-examination has shown that no feather or hair appears on the sign to the left, but instead two curved strokes such as often on these objects are intended for beetle legs, and between them a small projection such as represents the insect's head. The traces of the ϵnh sign at the left are also larger than would be usual for the ϵnh held by the goddess Maat. Therefore, this bezel should probably be read (though still with caution) as another Smenkhkara rather than Amenophis III. If this reading is correct, no bezel from the 1979-86 excavations indicates anything but a late date in the chronology of the Amarna Period.

12.3 Contexts

Areas excavated outside the Village walls include the *Zir*-area, animal pens and gardens, middens and chapels. Within the walls, contexts include houses and one rubbish deposit.

Zir-area The significance of stratigraphy for bezels from this area has been dealt with previously (Shaw 1984: 126-7). Bezels with Tutankhamun's name comprised 40% of all royal name bezels, Smenkhkara's 30%, and unidentified 30%.

Main Quarry midden. This was the largest single source for bezel fragments, including those with royal names. A breakdown of the most important by context has already appeared (Shaw 1984: 127-8). In addition, the Aten ring (no. 4199, one of two bezels registered under this number) was a surface find from here. The occurrences of bezel fragments with royal names is: Tutankhamun 58%, Smenkhkara 27%, Aten 3%, and unidentified 12%.

Animal pens and gardens. Several groups have been excavated. The chronology is complicated (cf. *AR* I: 40-59; *AR* III: 34-49; this volume, Chapter 5). Parts of them were also disturbed. However, the sets of pens known as Building 350 and Building 300 represent later strata than those in the Main Quarry in which two Tutankhamun bezels (2898, 4595) were found (*AR* I: 86-8; this volume, Chapter 5, section 5.4); and the set of pens numbered 400 is at least partly later still. However, relatively many Smenkhkara bezels occur as well. Another fragment (no. 2010 from the uppermost level of Building 350) may possibly be Akhenaten type 1A.2.K (*COA* II: Plate XLIX). The trace at the top of the sign at the right looks narrow and flat with corners, as for a *nfr* sign. However, these objects are often crudely moulded, and the trace may be of an ϵnh , in which case the name would be that of Smenkhkara. Given the many indications that the ancient Egyptians believed in the continued protective powers of a king after his death, it is possible that the large proportion of earlier bezels represent rings which, whether or not they were any longer being manufactured, were being worn either for amuletic or ornamental purposes into the reign of the next king, until the ring happened to break.

The part of the complex of pens and gardens numbered "Building 250" yielded two bezels, one (6268) Tutankhamun (?), and the other (6243) definitely identifiable as belonging to that king. Building 200, which is a continuation of 250, produced three Tutankhamun bezels. Two are from disturbed contexts, and the third (6718), from T27 [2086], was found in a layer which had accumulated following the Village's abandonment. Percentages of royal name bezels from the above structures are thus: Tutankhamun 62%, Smenkhkara 17%, Meritaten (?) 4%, and unidentified 17% (including the Akhenaten or Smenkhkara no. 2010).

Chapels. Except for one Smenkhkara bezel (7184) found in a disturbed unit in Chapel 529, all royal name bezels found in chapels come from the Main Chapel (561/450). One Tutankhamun bezel (4756) and one Smenkhkara (5323) come from deposits sealed after abandonment. A Tutankhamun bezel (5410) and a Smenkhkara (5164) were found in disturbed units, two Tutankhamun bezels (6886, 6491) were recovered from the surface, and in a sand deposit north-west of Chapel 561 and dug over in modern times was found another with the name of Tutankhamun (5425). The Main Chapel is thought to have been built late in the history of the Village, and subsequently, when a ruin, a small part was used as an animal pen. Like a portion of the animal pens Building 400, the front edge of the chapel was built over a rubbish deposit which in turn covered the remains of the animal pens 350. Within the chapel was also found the one piece of evidence which points to the presence of a military unit, namely the painted top to a wooden military standard (*AR* I: 27-30). On general grounds the chapel should be placed in the reign of Tutankhamun, but again we find the mixture of slightly older bezels. From the chapels as

a whole the percentages of royal name bezels are: Tutankhamun 63%, Smenkhkara 37%, and none of Akhenaten.

Within the Walled Village. As expected, fewer bezels were found inside houses than in rubbish accumulations outside the Village walls. Faience had little intrinsic value, and the bezels were easily broken and thrown away. A total of seven royal name bezels was recovered from within the Village walls between 1979 and 1986. Five came from houses, and two from a rubbish accumulation in the space (West Street 1) between West Street 2/3 and the Village wall. Inside the walls, as outside, Tutankhamun bezels predominate. Three were found in houses, and one in the West Street rubbish deposit. There was none of Smenkhkara, but two bore the prenomen of Akhenaten: object no. 88 from Long Wall Street 6, and no. 6855 from the West Street rubbish deposit. This last deposit has a place in the relative chronology of the site, for it can only have formed after the building of West Street 2/3. As discussed already in Chapters 1 and 2 the decorated bricks found in this house imply that the date of building fell within the reign of Tutankhamun. This bezel was already quite old when it was discarded. These results compare well with those of Peet and Woolley, who excavated many more houses. The totals for the 1921-22 season were: Tutankhamun 18, Smenkhkara 2, and Akhenaten 2 (the only Akhenaten bezels found by them were from within the Village walls, Shaw 1984: 129).

Thus we find that Tutankhamun bezels were present in even larger proportions within the walls than outside, yet a small but positive presence of Akhenaten bezels in contrast to their absence outside the walls is surprising, if deposits within the houses represent litter left there at the time of abandonment. With the Akhenaten bezels found in 1979-86 in every case a Tutankhamun bezel was found in the same level or unit, but in neither case was the context undisturbed although there has to be a strong presumption, as just noted, that all deposits from West Street are significantly late in the Village's history. It is still interesting to find that the houses produced all of the positively identified Akhenaten bezels, and not the lowest levels of the middens, as might be expected had the Village seen a large and continuous occupation throughout the Amarna era.

12.4 Interpretation

The main city of Akhetaten, an official royal residence from about year 6 of Akhenaten to some point during the reign of Tutankhamun, has yielded more royal name bezels of Akhenaten's reign than those of Smenkhkara or Tutankhamun, while the Workmen's Village reverses this order. These results are puzzling if the Village saw the main era of its occupation as the home of the workmen excavating and decorating the tombs, as thought by Peet and Woolley (*COA I*: 51ff.). Shaw (1984: 132) has put forward the explanation that a royal accession saw a peak in the manufacture of royal name rings. This would, indeed, explain why bezels of Tutankhamun, the latest king, outnumber those of Smenkhkara, and particularly those of Akhenaten, whose accession was nearly two decades before Tutankhamun's, and did not take place at Amarna. It also explains why Smenkhkara, with seemingly only the briefest of reigns, is still relatively well represented. It does not, however, fully explain the percentages in the main city, or the distribution in the Village rubbish heaps. Furthermore, the comparatively large number of Amenophis III bezels from the city shows that other occasions as well must have been events for manufacture and/or demand for these rings. All published bezel types for Amenophis III from Amarna use his prenomen and never his nomen (in contrast to the other kings, e.g. Petrie 1894: Plates XIV, XV; *COA II*: Plate XLIX; *COA III*: Plate CXII). With its reference to Amun, the nomen of this king seems to have been generally avoided on objects manufactured at Amarna. In the case of the Akhenaten bezels, the two types naming him *imn-htp ntr hkꜣ Wꜣst* might date to some early event in his reign, either his accession, or possibly his *hb sd* at Thebes; that is, if they are connected with any specific event at all. However, the great majority of nomen bezels give his later name, and must certainly date after his accession. If they had been manufactured for the occasion of his name change, comparison with the proportion of Smenkhkara bezels from structures postdating Smenkhkara's reign shows that Akhenaten bezels would still be quite numerous by the time of the work on the earliest tombs, which contain only the Aten's early

Royal name bezels

name.⁴ In other words, many Akhenaten bezels should have been extant during the presumed early period of the Village's occupation. Moreover, if important public events were occasions for the moulding of these rings, the successful campaign recorded at Buhen and the "reception of foreign tribute" (if these two events are not actually stages in a single occasion) would be obvious ones. This pattern, or else a continuous production, would create exactly the percentages seen in the main city.

Bezels linking Smenkhkara's prenomen with Akhenaten's are usually taken as evidence for a coregency. If so, some (if not all) Smenkhkara bezels actually date from late in Akhenaten's reign. But a correlation with archaeological evidence shows that they come from structures which date after Akhenaten's or Smenkhkara's reigns, and after the work (or at least, the decoration) in the tombs had ceased. Therefore, they are of little use in solving questions of chronology.

In the case of Tutankhamun, his bezels do not outnumber Smenkhkara's in the main city as they do in the Workmen's Village. Since Tutankhamun undertook building and restoration projects in the Amun temples at Thebes which reached a degree of completion, had time to begin his own mortuary temple there (Schaden 1984), and may have been responsible for work on the Aten temple at Karnak,⁵ but is not mentioned as king on any Amarna block known thus far, these indications along with the bezel proportions in the main city suggest that Akhetaten ceased to be the centre of things quite early in his reign. Here at last is one possible clue as to the reason for the large number of Tutankhamun bezels from the Workmen's Village. Given the apparent uncertainty in the main city as to whether the court would reside again in Akhetaten, the burials in the Royal Wadi may have been allowed to remain there for years after the court had removed. In this case, a tomb guard community occupying the Village would have stayed for some years, dependent upon a depleted but still existing official staff in the city. The upper limit to their occupation is set by the lack of any objects datable after Tutankhamun's reign, yet the decision to abandon the Village may have come as late as the very end of Tutankhamun's reign. This would account for a large number of bezels with his name, as well as giving time for the apparent abandonment of the Village and its successive stages of structures, all within his reign.

This explanation would still not account for the scarcity of Akhenaten bezels from the Village, had it been the thriving and continuous community of tomb workers envisaged before the 1979-86 excavations.

One possible explanation is that the Village was not occupied at all until the reign of Tutankhamun, and so was never a tomb workers' community. There are a few points in favour of such an interpretation. Firstly, the Village, while close to the South Tombs, is not convenient for access to the North Tombs or Royal Wadi (although for the latter, no known settlement is). Secondly, artists' and scribes' practice pieces like those from later Deir el-Medina have not come from this Village. The few drawings on ostraca are extremely crude, and inscriptions are jar labels. However, there are also strong points against this theory. The parallels between the Workmen's Village and Deir el-Medina are too close to be discounted (though the animal pens are an important feature peculiar only to the former). In the second place, one man with the title *sdm ḥš m st* was present in the Village (COA I: 101). Because of the relative proximity of the South and North Tombs to the southern and northern parts of the main city it is possible that the draftsmen, sculptors and scribes who might be expected to leave ostraca did not live in the Workmen's Village (with the exception of one official in charge, perhaps commemorated in the Main Chapel wall paintings, AR II: 111-112, 129),⁶ but that stonecutters and other workmen did.

⁴ The Aten's early name in the decoration of these tombs supports an early beginning for the carving out of the finished chambers, at least.

⁵ However, Schaden (1984: 54, note 14) raises the question whether Tutankhamun reused Akhenaten blocks (cf. Smith and Redford 1976: Plate 84.2 for the specifically mentioned *talatat*).

⁶ Another small item of possible support for this idea is the careful portrait and doubled occurrence of the name of the sculptor Yuti in the tomb of Huya (RT III: Plate XVIII). Yuti is shown in his workshop among his assistants, all engaged on work other than carving out tombs. Yuti himself is called sculptor to Queen Tiy. This seems to be an imposition not unlike that of the sculptor Ankh-nay-ptah in the Saqqara mastaba of Ptahhetep. If the tomb artists belonged to a community isolated from their colleagues in town, why should they be so anxious to preserve the identity of this Yuti?

It is also possible that the stonecutters, like the sculptors, were a fairly small number of people,⁷ since the need for skilled stonecutters would have been great in the main city also. The original community at the Workmen's Village may have been quite small, and may have enjoyed more complete support from the government than a later guard community after the removal of the court from the city, and so had no need to farm. With these possible differences between the Amarna tomb workers and the Ramesside Deir el-Medina workers, perhaps it is not altogether impossible that during the work on the North Tombs the stonecutters as well as artists and scribes may have lived in some more convenient location in the north suburbs, and not isolated at all. Occupation of the Workmen's Village during Akhenaten's reign may have been quite intermittent, lasting only during the creation of the South and Royal Tombs.⁸

It does not seem likely that complete excavation of the Village would change the proportions of datable objects there, unless there were some small undiscovered midden dating to Akhenaten's reign. A representative picture of the Village chronology seems to have been obtained.

As for the presence of Akhenaten bezels in the houses, perhaps the case is not so different from that of the presence of Akhenaten's figure and name in the house niches and private chapel stelae in the main city, which were not replaced by those of his successor(s) after his death. Though a return to traditional religious practices seems to have been speedy, the founder of the city and ruler of such an apparently strong personality may still have been regarded as a beneficent force, until later policy created a reaction against him and his actions.

References

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⁷ The same few sculptors' hands occur throughout the tombs, indicating a long, continuous period of work rather than a spurt or two by many sculptors in a short time (Shannon: forthcoming).

⁸ Until more is known of the Stone Village east of the Workmen's Village, it should not be entirely forgotten in this discussion.