

The Hymn to Aton

This poem was found in a tomb in El-Amarna, Egypt, the capital city built by pharaoh Amenhotep IV. He eventually changed his name to Ankenaton as part of his attempt to honor the god, Aton. It is unlikely that the pharaoh himself actually wrote this hymn, but it clearly reflects his policies and beliefs.

Thou appearest beautifully on the horizon of heaven,
Thou living Aton, the beginning of life!
When thou art arisen on the eastern horizon,
Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.
Thou art gracious, great glistening, and high over every land;
Thy rays encompass the lands to the limit of all that thou has made;
As thou art Ra, thou reachest to the end of them;
Thou subduest them for thy beloved son.
Though thou art in their faces, no one knows thy going.

When thou settest in the western horizon,
The land is in darkness, in the manner of death.
They sleep in a room, with heads wrapped up,
Nor sees one eye the other.
All their goods which are under their heads might be stolen,
But they would not perceive it.
Every lion is come forth from his den;
All creeping things, they sting.
Darkness is a shroud, and the earth is in stillness,
For he who made them rests in his horizon.

At daybreak, when thou arisest on the horizon,
When thou shinest as the Aton by day,
Thou drivest away the darkness and givest thy rays.
The Two Lands are in festivity every day,
Awake and standing upon their feet,
For thou hast raised them up.
Washing their bodies, taking their clothing.
Their arms are raised in praise at thy appearance.
All the world, they do their work....



SOURCE: J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, trans. J. Wilson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 370.