

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 10 (2022-2023) An Egyptian Limestone Relief, Amarna Period (c. 1351- 1334 B.C.)	
Statement from Expert Adviser	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the relief meets Waverley criteria one, two, and three. See below
Statement from the Applicant	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria against which the Committee will consider whether an item referred to it is of national importance. a) <i>Is it so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?</i> b) <i>Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?</i> c) <i>Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?</i> See below
Note of case hearing	See below
Press release	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 23 January 2023 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ancient-egyptian-limestone-relief-of-female-musicians-at-risk-of-leaving-uk
Recommended price	£69,300 (plus VAT of £2,860 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
1st Deferral period	22 April 2023
2nd Deferral period	
Note of outcome	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of object(s)

- What is it? An ancient Egyptian relief, depicting female musicians asleep in their compartments, surrounded by their instruments.
- What is it made of? Limestone
- What are its measurements?
Height: 21 cm
Width: 40 cm
[Depth: unclear from the sale catalogue.]
- Who is the artist/maker and what are their dates? Anonymous.
- What date is the object? New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Akhenaten, c. 1340 BC
- What condition is it in? Well preserved: somewhat battered along the lower edge, but otherwise intact and complete.

2. Context

- Provenance:
Probably originally from one of Akhenaten's temples at el-Amarna, where he founded a new capital city. It is either from the Great or from the Smaller Aten Temple, or else from one of his palaces there.

Not long after Akhenaten's death, between the end of the 18th and the early 19th Dynasty, the city was dismantled and abandoned. The block must have been among the thousands that were reused, c. 1270 BC, in the foundations of a temple gateway built by Ramesses II at Ashmunein (Hermopolis), opposite Amarna on the west bank of the river Nile. The first 1500 or so blocks were discovered by a German archaeological mission in the late 1930s, but more came to light during illicit excavations by locals in the early 1940s. The latter blocks were all put on the art market in the nearby town of Mallawi, and they are now in many public and private collections around the world.

Acquired by Margret Burg sometime between 1940, when she and her husband Hermann settled in England, and Margret's death in 1957.

- Thence by descent to the anonymous consignor of the piece to the Christie's sale (London) of 6 July 2022, lot 40. The price realised is £69,300. [REDACTED]
- Key literary and exhibition references
Not previously published or exhibited, except in the Christie's sale catalogue.

3. Waverley criteria

- Which of the Waverley criteria does the object meet?
All three criteria apply.
- Very briefly why?
The block is of outstanding significance for the branches of Egyptology, art-history, and the study of early human societies.

It is strongly connected to Britain's modern history. The block originates from an important collection, that of Margret Burg. She and her husband Hermann were notable art dealers, collectors and art-historians. From the 1920s, the Burgs had galleries in Cologne and Berlin, but they fled Nazi Germany, settling in England in 1940. They acquired pieces for various prominent museums, including the British Museum.

The relief is in the revolutionary 'Amarna style'. Very few exemplars of the Amarna style exist in public collections within the UK, as opposed to Egypt, Germany and the USA. The Amarna style was promoted by King Akhenaten as part of a broader, radical push for cultural innovation, in which he even rejected the worship of any gods other than Aten, 'the sun-disc'. The Amarna style barely outlasted Akhenaten's tumultuous 17-year reign. The most striking characteristics of this style are an uncompromising push for artistic freedom, experiment, greater naturalism, and an interest in aspects of daily life not normally depicted. All these characteristics are superbly illustrated by our relief.

The scene depicted on the block is unique and holds immediate appeal, even to the casual modern observer. It is a key piece for the study of both the evolution of pharaonic art *and* of Egypt's social history. The scene affords a rare glimpse of palace life as lived, not by the royal family, but by humbler folk in their entourage. Other images of Egyptian musicians only ever show these people as marginal figures entertaining persons of higher station. In the present relief, it is the lives of the musicians themselves that are, for once, given the focus of attention.

The block was part of a much larger scene. The wall would have displayed the palace grounds at el-Amarna, including sectors for the accommodation of the royal family's attendants and associates. Immediately adjacent blocks would have shown more rooms, doors and corridors – and, of course, their inhabitants. Unfortunately, no other blocks from this scene have yet been positively identified.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of object(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

What does it depict?

This relief is unparalleled in Egyptian art, showing the sleeping quarters of musicians attached to a royal palace. The block preserves four figures of female musicians, each shown asleep in a different pose. They lie on mats and under sheets drawn up to their necks, their heads resting on pillows (not, as known for wealthier people, on headrests). The women's musical instruments are placed nearby in the same rooms: harps, box lyres and lutes. Each room is equipped with a brazier to keep it heated overnight. It is noteworthy that the women wear their natural hair; they have not removed any wigs for the night (as would, again, be expected for wealthier folk).

What does it tell us about that period?

As said, the relief is in the revolutionary 'Amarna style', a radical but short-lived departure from earlier artistic conventions. The playful imagery and unconventional subject matter make this relief an important piece. It not only illustrates the artistic innovations advanced at the time, but also exhibits a growing interest in the lives of ordinary people, not just those of the most privileged.

Who made it/painted it/wrote it?

We will probably never know the identity of the draughtsman who created this scene, nor of the sculptor who completed it in relief. Ancient Egyptian artists did not normally sign their work. However, there can be no doubt that King Akhenaten himself played a major role in choosing the scenes to be laid out on the walls of his temples and palaces.

Number of comparable objects by the same artist already in the UK, in both public and private collections?

We have no means of identifying the responsible draughtsman and sculptor. More work by the same hands has undoubtedly survived, including other blocks originating from the same wall, but much research is still required to bring such connections to light. That said, it should be stressed that Amarna art as a whole is very poorly represented in the UK. This lends considerable weight to our view that the piece should be retained for the country.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the object(s).

Significance of figures associated with the object(s): maker/client/owners?

The relief was commissioned by King Akhenaten. It formed part of the overall decoration programme that the pharaoh and his artists agreed for his palaces and temples at Amarna. The king and his influential wife, Queen Nefertiti, were certainly closely involved in deciding the content of the wall scenes. The royal couple gave intellectual direction to all aspects of their religious revolution, including its artistic and theological expression. Indeed, one

manifestation of these efforts, the Great Hymn to the Aten, is widely believed to have been composed by Akhenaten himself. The hymn is famous for its echoes in Psalm 104 of the Judaeo-Christian canon. It should be noted that our relief was carved at the height of Akhenaten's iconoclastic campaign against the old polytheistic religion. While his agents across the land hacked out the images and names of the gods he rejected, the construction of his temples in Amarna was in full swing.

Significance of subject-matter?

Sleep is rarely depicted in ancient art, both in Egypt and beyond. Artistic convention dictated that people, at least those of high status, be depicted on their monuments in an alert and dignified manner, fit for eternity. Sleep, after all, renders us vulnerable. The best parallels for our scene of sleepers, likewise from the Amarna Period, are relief fragments depicting men sleeping outdoors, apparently camping.

Significance of materials/process/usage?

The block is of limestone, which was the building material of choice for Akhenaten's two principal temples in Amarna. The temple(s) he constructed at Luxor during the first years of his reign involved blocks of sandstone, so there can be no doubt that our relief comes from Amarna. No other temples of Akhenaten's have yet been identified elsewhere in Egypt, but some blocks from his reign have surfaced at Memphis and Heliopolis.

Building blocks from Akhenaten's reign were typically much smaller than those employed in other periods of Egyptian history. These modest dimensions helped the king's builders work at greater than usual speed. Akhenaten was evidently in a rush, founding temples for a god not previously so honoured, as well as founding an entirely new capital where no previous temples existed. The need for speed in completing these projects was obvious. In fact, the king's new city took only five years to complete.

Is/are the object(s) of local/regional/national importance?

Yes. The block originates from an important collection, that of Margret Burg. As correctly noted in the Christie's sale catalogue, she *'was a notable art dealer, collector and art historian, receiving her doctorate in 1925 from the University of Bonn, a remarkable achievement for a woman in this period. She conducted her business alongside her husband, Dr Hermann Burg (1878-1947), who was also an art historian and dealer of antiquities; Dr Burg & Co. of Berlin and Galerie Dr Hermann Burg of Cologne traded from the 1920s onwards. As the Nazis gained supremacy in Germany, the Burgs fled, settling first in Holland, and then, in 1940, in England. They were an important presence on the art market, enjoying personal and professional relationships with many of the major names in antiquities collecting, including Royall Tyler, founder of the collection at Dumbarton Oaks, Heidi Vollmoeller, and the Kofler-Trunigers. The Burgs also acquired pieces for museums, notably [within the UK] the British Museum'*.

Summary of related objects in public/private ownership in the UK:

Very few works of art from the Amarna Period can be admired in the UK's public collections. Outside Egypt, the majority of Amarna pieces have ended up in Germany and the USA,. Within the UK, the most closely related Amarna object is a relief slab preserved in the British Museum:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA47988. This shows musicians while performing in the harem of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. Three of them stand to the left, evidently singing. Two others sit on the ground and were undoubtedly playing harps. All these musicians are depicted blindfolded, respecting the royal couple's intimate privacy. The overall dearth of Amarna material in the UK is a serious academic and educational handicap, given the period's unique place in the intellectual and art-historical journey of our species through the millennia. Wherever possible, important relics of the period should be prevented from loss through export.

RCEWA – An Egyptian Limestone Relief, Amarna Period (c. 1351- 1334 B.C.) Applicant's statement

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

Is the item closely connected with our history and national life?

This relief shows a group of musicians, asleep, likely at the royal court of Pharaoh Akhenaten at el-Amarna. It was in the collection of Margret Burg, art historian and antiquities dealer who worked with her husband Hermann in Berlin and Cologne in the 1920s. They fled the Nazi regime and relocated to England in 1940. The British Museum has 6 drawings and 4 antiquities in its collection which were purchased from them or donated by them. Neither the object itself nor its provenance history seem to have an obvious connection to British history and national life.

Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?

We do not believe that this relief is of outstanding aesthetic importance. Despite bearing the typical hallmarks of the Amarna style, the quality of the carving is fairly stylised probably as it was part of a large-scale scene in one of the temples at Akhetaten depicting the inner workings of the palace. Surface wear and damage have caused the loss of many details.

Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?

Depictions of asleep musicians at the Amarna court are indeed rare. However, other examples of reliefs showing musicians with their instruments are widely known in the literature for the subject. An extensive discussion of these instrument types and Amarna-period depictions of music-making is offered by L. Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1991.

Sleepers are also a widespread motif in Amarna art, well-attested in tombs and on talatat, although admittedly its chronological and regional distribution is limited.

Other examples of fragments of Amarna talatat featuring sleepers seem to form part of an outdoor scene, where sleeping men in similar poses are enveloped in the same way by sheets and warmed by nearby braziers (Boston MFA 67.921, Brooklyn 64.148.3, C. Aldred, Akhenaten and Nefertiti nos. 65 and 70, respectively, and G. Roeder, *Amarna-Reliefs aus Hermopolis*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1969, no. PC 153, pl. 193).

In the UK, the Ashmolean Museum already has in its collection a relief fragment from the Great Palace at Amarna showing a sleeping doorkeeper (see Caris-Beatrice Arnst, " Motivbegriff und Motivforschung in der Kunstwissenschaft Erläutert an Beispielen altägyptischer Kunst." in C-B Arnst and R. Schulz, eds., Typen, Motive, Stilmittel, 29- 49. Beiträge zur Ägyptischen Kunst I, Heidelberg, 2021, relief illustrated in fig. 13, p. 43).

This fragment is undoubtedly of academic interest as it offers us a glimpse of life at the royal court of Amarna, but we do not believe that it can be considered of outstanding importance for the field.

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing on 9 November 2022: An Egyptian Limestone Relief, Amarna Period (c. 1351- 1334 B.C.) (Case 10, 2022-23)

Application

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (the Committee) met on 9 November 2022 to consider an application to export an Egyptian Limestone Relief, Amarna Period (c. 1351-1334 B.C.). The value shown on the export licence application was £69,300 which represented the hammer price at auction (£55,000) plus the buyer's premium (£14,300). The expert adviser had objected to the export of the relief under the first, second and third Waverley criteria on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because (i) it was so closely connected with our history and national life, (ii) it was of outstanding aesthetic importance, and (iii) it was of outstanding significance for the study of Egyptology, art history and early human societies.

2. Seven Committee members and two independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Committee joined in person and inspected the object on the day of the hearing. One Committee member and one independent assessor joined remotely, having viewed the object in advance of the hearing on the 4th November. The Chairman explained that the binding offers mechanism was applicable for this case.

3. The applicant was informed that there was currently an interim process in place for Committee hearings. The Committee was still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, were required to attend in person and inspect the object/s under consideration prior to discussing the case and voting. Any permanent Committee members or independent assessors who were not able to attend in person and view the object were not able to vote.

4. It was established at the meeting that the value did not include VAT and that VAT of £2,860 on the Buyer's Premium would be payable in the event of a UK sale; and that the sale could be structured in such a way as to enable an eligible institution to reclaim the VAT. The applicant confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.

Expert's comments

5. The expert adviser stated that they had nothing to add to their submission. The expert adviser was questioned about the connection of the relief and Margaret Burg (d. 1958) to the UK and it was confirmed that the

relief had been in the UK prior to 1958 as it had been included on a probate list. British archaeologists also had a long excavation history at Amarna. Asked about how many specifically Amarna reliefs were held by the British Museum, the expert adviser confirmed that there were very few and that the majority were fragmentary. The expert adviser also confirmed that there were no other Amarna reliefs in any UK museum with scenes of sleeping figures, apart from a relief with a single man asleep in the Ashmolean. When questioned about the potential traces of colour in the relief the expert adviser replied that it would have to be analysed to verify if there is colour and if it was ancient pigment or added in a later period. They added that there was more research that could be done into the stone and its provenance to try to establish potential quarry sites.

Applicant's comments

6. The applicant stated that they had nothing to add to their statement that disputed that the relief met the Waverley criteria.

Discussion by the Committee

7. The expert adviser and applicant retired, and the Committee discussed the case. The majority view was that the connection of the relief to the Burgs was not of outstanding significance to our history and national life. However, they recognised that the relief itself was remarkable and unique in its depiction of female musicians sleeping. They noted that while the carving was not as fine as other examples from Amarna or other periods, that it was a large well-preserved relief for the time of King Akhenaten's reign of only 17 years. The naturalistic and intimate design features on reliefs during his reign were quite different to other periods and the composition of the relief was of outstanding aesthetic significance.

8. The Committee concluded that the relief would be extremely useful to the study of daily life during this period. This piece was of outstanding significance in its depiction of women as musicians and by making them the focus of attention unlike other, more marginal, depictions of musicians. The relief would also provide an unusual insight into palace life away from the king and queen. Furthermore, they noted that it was rare to have four figures extant on one relief, as most other examples of Amarna reliefs survive in far smaller fragments.

Waverley Criteria

9. The Committee voted on whether the relief met the Waverley criteria. Of the 11 members, one voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. Nine members voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. All members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The relief was therefore found to meet

the second and third Waverley criteria for its outstanding contribution to the study of Amarna period sculpture in particular, and to Egyptology, art history, and early human societies in general.

Matching offer

10. The Committee recommended the sum of £69,300 (plus VAT of £2,860) as a fair matching price.

Deferral period

11. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of three months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the relief, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of three months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.

Communication of findings

12. The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.

13. The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.