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EA 164 and the God Amun

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Source: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 287-291

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/545827>

Accessed: 31/05/2011 09:43

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AMARNA letter 164 presents a problem on line 40: how to interpret the signs DINGIR.A. What could have been a minor question turns out to be one of some relevance, as the context involves diplomacy issues between Egypt and her Levantine vassals in the mid-fourteenth century B.C.

The Egyptian god Amun is mentioned in ten letters in the Amarna archive. His name is always spelled phonetically, although in different ways depending on the scribe: <sup>d</sup>a-ma-nu-um;<sup>1</sup> <sup>d</sup>a-ma-nu;<sup>2</sup> <sup>d</sup>a-ma-a-nu;<sup>3</sup> <sup>d</sup>a-ma-na.<sup>4</sup> Rib-Addi of Byblos refers to Amun as “the god of the king”<sup>5</sup> and Tushratta of Mitanni as “the god of my brother.”<sup>6</sup> This evidence, together with the fact that no other Egyptian god is mentioned in the archive,<sup>7</sup> was used by O. Schroeder to regard the group of signs DINGIR.A, on EA 164: 40, as an abbreviation of Amun’s name.<sup>8</sup> Although abbreviations of gods’ names are uncommon in Akkadian, this reading has been generally accepted.<sup>9</sup>

In Akkadian, the sign A cannot be explained satisfactorily following the divine determinative, DINGIR.<sup>10</sup> From the context, it is clear that a reference to an Egyptian god is intended, but no god in the Egyptian pantheon with this name is known. Aziru (ruler of Amurru) wrote to Dudu (an Egyptian high official, who was Aziru’s main contact in Amarna) requesting the members of the Egyptian court to swear<sup>11</sup> not to contrive evil

\* I thank S. M. Maul for collating the tablet in Berlin, and providing the following information: the tablet has an erasure at the end of line 40, immediately after the sign DINGIR. The following sign, partially written over the erasure, looks like A.

I am also grateful to H. Goedicke, J. S. Cooper, R. Westbrook, C. Kessler, and E. Cussini for advice and criticism given during the preparation of this article. Responsibility for the ideas expressed, however, is entirely mine.

The present article was submitted to the publisher before the appearance of N. Na’aman’s study on this subject in “On Gods and Scribal Traditions in the Amarna Letters,” *Ugarit Forschung (UF)* 22 (1990): 250–52. He questions the traditional interpretation of <sup>d</sup>A and concludes that the signs stand for the abbreviation of the new Egyptian Sun-God, Aten.

<sup>1</sup> EA 1: 46; 19: 15, 24, 76.

<sup>2</sup> EA 369: 29.

<sup>3</sup> EA 20: 26, 74; 24: (I) 76, 101, (II) 65, 77, (IV) 118; 27: 87.

<sup>4</sup> EA 71: 4; 86: 5; 95: 3.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>d</sup>a-ma-na DINGIR ša LUGAL (EA 71: 4). EA 86: 3 has been restored <sup>d</sup>a-ma-n[a DINGIR ša LUGAL] by J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln* (Leipzig, 1915), p. 412.

<sup>6</sup> <sup>d</sup>a-ma-a-nu DINGIR-šu ša šES-ia (EA 20: 26).

<sup>7</sup> The “Mistress of Byblos” (<sup>d</sup>NIN ša URU.GUBLA), frequently mentioned in Rib-Addi’s letters, is commonly identified with the Egyptian goddess Hathor, but at this time she has to be regarded as an “independent” deity.

<sup>8</sup> O. Schroeder, “<sup>il</sup>A = <sup>il</sup>A-ma-na,” *OLZ* 18 (1915): 326 f.

<sup>9</sup> A. F. Rainey, *El Amarna Tablets 359–379*, AOAT 8 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978), p. 108; S. Izre’el, *The Akkadian Dialect of the Scribes of Amurru in the 14th–13th Centuries B.C.: Linguistic Analysis* (Tel Aviv, 1985) (in Hebrew), p. 46; R. Hess, “Divine Names in the Amarna Texts,” *UF* 18 (1986): 150; W. L. Moran, *Les Lettres d’El Amarna* (Paris, 1987), pp. 403 f.

<sup>10</sup> R. Labat, *Manuel d’épigraphie akkadienne*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1988), p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> The verb in line 32, reconstructed as (ú)-[ta<sub>s</sub>]-[a]m-mi (Rainey, “El-Amarna Notes,” *UF* 6 [1974]: 309), and in line 39 tu<sub>4</sub>-ut-ta-mi, are taken as imperfect forms of the D stem from the verb tamû, “to swear.” *AHw.*, p. 1318, gives for the D stem forms two renderings, “to swear” and “to bind by oath.”

against him. First, Aziru informed Dudu that the king had already written to him expressing his “friendly disposition” (towards a treaty);<sup>12</sup> he has agreed with it and has taken a loyalty oath in front of his gods and his messenger.<sup>13</sup> Now, Aziru, aware of a certain opposition against him from the influential circle surrounding the king and among the Egyptian officials in the Levant,<sup>14</sup> not only wants to involve the monarch in the “friendship treaty,” but also the Egyptian officials. Before setting out for Egypt, and after the king has granted him an audience, he tells Dudu that the “friendship treaty” has to be sworn not only by the king, but by his officials too. Following the diplomatic customs of the time, the treaty-oath had to be sworn by the gods of both states:<sup>15</sup> Aziru’s gods are referred to as DINGIR.MEŠ-*ia*, “my gods,” and the Egyptian god as <sup>d</sup>A.

It is not clear what Aziru was referring to when he said he had received “friendship (treaty) words” from the king. It is possible that he was referring to EA 162, where the king expressed his good disposition towards him (l. 32) and toward the land of Canaan (ll. 40–41) and offered him “life”/protection in exchange for a demonstration of vassalage (*e-pu-uš ir-ta*) (ll. 33, 39). The demonstration of vassalage demanded by the king required two things: a loyalty oath and a visit to the Egyptian court. After taking the loyalty oath, Aziru requested through Dudu a (friendship) treaty-oath from the king and the Egyptian officials to ratify the “treaty” proposed by the king, so that he might feel safe traveling to Amarna.

It is important to keep in mind that the letter is addressed to Dudu, the “father” of Aziru in the Amarna court, and not to the king. The Egyptian sources provide us with other examples of vassals requesting a treaty-oath from the king, and, as in EA 164, it is always an Egyptian high official who is in charge of transmitting the request to the king: (1) in the tomb of Dudu himself, the owner addresses the king with a laudatory speech and says, “Syria (*hšrw*), Kush, and all the lands, their arms are (stretched) to you in adoration of your *ka*; they beg ‘life’/a treaty-oath (*dbḥ.sn ḥnh*) humbly, and they say, ‘Give us breath/protection (*tšw*)!’”;<sup>16</sup> (2) in the Memphite tomb of the general Horem-

<sup>12</sup> *a-ma-te*<sup>meš</sup> LUGAL EN-*ia pa-nu-tam u DÜG.GA-ta* (ll. 5–6), “words of the king, my lord, pleasing and good”; Moran, “A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas,” *JNES* 22 (1963): 173 ff., points out the legal nuance of *tābūtu*, “amity established by treaty.” It is not only used to define a relation between equals, but also between a vassal and his overlord. He also makes a reference to the association between *tābūtu* and *damqātu*, “good” (words/things); and the CAD, s.v. *banū*, c. 4’ states: “*banū* begins to replace *damqu* in the MB period.” See also D. R. Hillers, “A Note on Some Treaty Terminology in the Old Testament,” *BASOR* 176 (1964): 46 f.; M. Weinfeld, “Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West,” *JAOS* 93 (1973): 190 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Izre<sup>2</sup>el, *The Akkadian Texts Written by the Scribes of Amurru in the 14th–13th Centuries B.C.: Transcriptions and Translations to Hebrew* (Tel Aviv, 1985), p. 21, translates the verb *ū-taš-am-mi* (l. 32) with a prospective meaning and in the third person singular, taking the messenger as the subject: “he shall swear.” Moran, *Letters*, p. 403, takes the verb in the other way the D stem of the verb *tamū* allows (see n. 11 above), translating it “he (the mes-

senger) shall bind them by oath”; but then, he translates the same verb form in line 39 *tu<sub>4</sub>-ut-ta-mi* as “you shall swear.”

Both occurrences of the verb “to swear” are in the imperfect tense, meant to establish a synchronic relation between Aziru’s oath and that of the Egyptian side and, thus, to overcome the fact that the former has already sworn, “I swear/have sworn to my gods and to my messenger” (l. 32), and the latter still has to pronounce it, “you swear/shall swear to my gods and to <sup>d</sup>A” (l. 39).

<sup>14</sup> In EA 160: 29–32 Aziru writes: “Let the king not hearken to the traitors who slander me to my lord.” See also EA 165: 42–45. Aziru might have had in mind also the opposition of certain officials of the Egyptian administration in the Levant, in particular Yanhamu, who tried to stop Aziru’s demonstration of vassalage by not letting him enter Šumur (EA 157, 171).

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Munn-Rankin, “Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.” *Iraq* 18 (1956), 86 ff.

<sup>16</sup> N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, vol. 6 (London, 1908), pl. 19.

heb, he is represented addressing the king, as “the princes of all the foreign countries come to beg ‘life’/a treaty-oath (*r dbh<sup>c</sup>nh*) from him.”<sup>17</sup>

To understand correctly these acts of requesting an “oath” from the king in the framework of the diplomacy of the ancient Near East, it is important to note the difference between the Egyptian terms *sdf<sup>3</sup> tryt*, a negative promissory statement pronounced by the “criminal” (the defeated enemy in an international context) as a prerequisite for the issue of a legal pardon, and *dbh<sup>c</sup>nh*, a humble petition to the king to express formally his good will towards the petitioner (by means of a treaty-oath). While the former is usually addressed directly to the king, the latter needs a high official to act as intermediary between the foreign vassal and the Egyptian king.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the governors of the northern Palestinian states in the mid-fourteenth century B.C. were exposed to two different political conceptions, which could have led to certain diplomacy-rule confusion. In H. Tadmor’s words: “Unlike the Hittite imperial system, in which the suzerain undertook an obligation—often under oath—to protect his vassal, the Egyptian system postulated—at least in theory—unilateral relationship.”<sup>19</sup>

Leaving aside the unlikely possibility of the abbreviation of a divine name, another way of reading <sup>d</sup>A might be considered: the logogram DINGIR can be regarded as the equivalent of the Egyptian word *ntr*, “god,” and the sign A can be taken as an Akkadian transliteration of the Egyptian word *ꜥ3*, “great.” Consequently, the group DINGIR.A can be seen as reproducing the compound *ntr-ꜥ3*, “great god.”<sup>20</sup>

To support the transliteration of *ꜥ3* as Akkadian A, there is one parallel in the Amarna letters. In EA 14, sent by Akhenaton to Burnaburiash of Babylon, the word for stone oil-container, *watha*, is taken by T. O. Lambdin as a transliteration from the Egyptian word *wḏhw*. But while in line 53 of the second column the word is spelled *wa-at-ḥa*, in lines 66 and 71 of the third column it is written *wa-at-ḥa-a*. Lambdin explains that “the final long *ā* of the latter two attestations is best taken as an added adjective *ꜥ3.t*, “large” (i.e., “great”), hence *wādḥa(t)-[ꜥ3(at)]*.”<sup>21</sup>

By accepting the reading *ntr-ꜥ3*, two questions have to be raised: who is this “great god,” and why did Aziru choose the epithet instead of the name? To answer these questions, the date of the letter has to be established first. The Egyptian official to whom the letter is addressed, Dudu, has been identified with Twtw,<sup>22</sup> whose tomb is preserved in Amarna.<sup>23</sup> He was of very high rank in Akhenaton’s administration, holding the title

<sup>17</sup> *Urk.* IV 2084, 9; A. Gardiner, “The Memphite Tomb of the General Haremhab,” *JEA* 39 (1952): 5.

<sup>18</sup> For a more in-depth study on the terminology here used, see D. Lorton, *The Juridical Terminology of International Relations in Egyptian Texts through Dyn. XVIII* (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 144–48, 132–36; and S. Morschauser, “Threat Formulae in Ancient Egypt” (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1987), pp. 428 ff., and his article “The End of the *Sdf(3)-Tr(yt)* ‘Oath,’” *JARCE* 25 (1988): 93 ff.

<sup>19</sup> H. Tadmor, “Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian’s Approach,” in G. M. Tucker and D. A. Knight, eds., *Humanizing America’s Iconic Book, SBL Centennial Addresses 1980* (Chico, Cali-

fornia, 1982), p. 140. See also M. Liverani, “Contrasti e confluente di concezioni politiche nell’età di El-Amarna,” *RA* 61 (1967): 1 ff.

<sup>20</sup> To explain the transformation from the Egyptian to the Akkadian language, the group *ntr-ꜥ3* has to be divided. It seems that the scribe knew the meaning of the word/sign *ntr* and rendered it with the Akkadian equivalent. On the other hand, he disregarded the meaning of *ꜥ3*, and he transliterated instead of translating it.

<sup>21</sup> T. O. Lambdin, “The Egyptian Words in Tell El Amarna Letter No. 14,” *Or.* n.s. 22 (1953): 368.

<sup>22</sup> Albright, “Cuneiform Material for the Egyptian Prosopography, 1500–1200 B.C.,” *JNES* 5 (1946): 22.

<sup>23</sup> Davies, *Rock Tombs*, pp. 7–15.

“chief mouthpiece of the entire land.”<sup>24</sup> Dudu is mentioned in four letters, all written by Aziru. The different studies on the chronology of the Amarna Age agree in dating Aziru’s letters to the Pharaoh and to Dudu around the middle of Akhenaton’s reign.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the king of letter EA 164, whose name is not mentioned, can be assumed to be Akhenaton (Amenophis IV changed his name to Akhenaton in his sixth regnal year).

On the other hand, out of the ten Amarna letters where the name of the god Amun is mentioned, nine belong to the reign of Amenophis III: two were written by Amenophis himself,<sup>26</sup> three by Tushratta,<sup>27</sup> and four by Rib-Addi.<sup>28</sup> The tenth occurrence has been reconstructed in letter EA 27 sent by Tushratta<sup>29</sup> and can be dated to the very beginning of the reign of Amenophis IV (later Akhenaton), since it concerns the exchange of presents after Amenophis IV’s coronation.

The god Amun is never mentioned in the letters addressed to Akhenaton. Thus there is no ground to assume that the god Amun is implied in EA 164. It is unlikely that the letter would have mentioned the name of the god rejected in the Egyptian court by that time.<sup>30</sup>

Attempts have been made to equate the frequently used term *ntr-ꜥꜣ*, “great god,” with a specific deity within the different periods of the ancient Egyptian history: the results vary depending on the context (Osiris, Re<sup>c</sup>, the dead king, etc.). Among the Egyptian documents from Amarna, there are two occasions where *ntr-ꜥꜣ* is used to refer to Re<sup>c</sup>-Herakhte,<sup>31</sup> the sun god of the Levant, who would seem the appropriate divine witness for a treaty between Egypt and Amurru. On the other hand, there are also cases where the ambiguity of the term is intended, avoiding a reference to a specific god.<sup>32</sup>

While the norm is that the divine witnesses are specified when swearing an oath, in a few cases an unnamed deity is invoked.<sup>33</sup> In an inscription of Nebhepetre<sup>c</sup>-Montuhotep (ca. 2010–1998 B.C.), some Nubians “swore to god” *ꜥnh-ntr* (loyalty) after arriving at Elephantine, in order to be admitted into the Egyptian infantry as mercenaries.<sup>34</sup> The Kushite king Piankhi placed a stela inside the Karnak temple to commemorate his triumphant campaign over a coalition of rulers in the Egyptian delta, led by Tefnakht (ca. 734 B.C.). In the closing section, Tefnakht surrenders, and, in addition to paying tribute, he has to “swear to god” that he will act according to the status quo established by the Kushite king.<sup>35</sup> In the Assurbanipal Annals of the Rassam Cylinder, the rebellion of the Egyptian kinglets (ca. 666 B.C.) is expressed in this way: “Afterwards, all those kinglets

<sup>24</sup> W. Helck, *Der Einfluss der Militärführer in der 18. ägyptischen Dynastie*, UGAÄ 14 (Leipzig, 1939), pp. 51 ff., points out that Dudu held many of the offices pertaining to the position of *imy-r pr wr*. For Dudu’s titles, see also R. Hari, *Répertoire onomastique amarnien*, AH 4 (Geneva, 1976), no. 312a, b.

<sup>25</sup> For an extensive bibliography on Amarna chronology, see Moran, *Letters*, p. 47, n. 50.

<sup>26</sup> EA 1, 369.

<sup>27</sup> EA 19, 20, 24.

<sup>28</sup> EA 71, 86, 87, and 95.

<sup>29</sup> Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, p. 236.

<sup>30</sup> We do not know how fast and accurate the information channels were between Egypt and the foreign courts in the Amarna Age. Due to the constant flow of messengers, the news of the internal politico-religious changes of the Egyptian administration might have crossed the borders with little delay.

<sup>31</sup> M. Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten*, BAe 8 (Brussels, 1938), pp. 140, 149.

<sup>32</sup> *Wb.* II, p. 361. E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 185–89, states that “it is characteristic of the Egyptian conception of god that the epithet ‘greatest god’ can be given to the most varied deities, often in a single text . . . (this) should warn us against isolating the ‘greatest god’ as a figure separate from the other deities.” He translates *ntr-ꜥꜣ* as “greatest god,” since the Egyptian language does not have a separate form for the superlative (p. 186).

<sup>33</sup> Morschauser, *Threat Formulae*, pp. 471 ff.

<sup>34</sup> H. G. Fischer, *Inscriptions of the Coptite Nome*, AnOr 40 (Rome, 1964), pp. 113 ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Urk.* III, pp. 48–52; N.-C. Grimal, *La Stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)u au Musée du Caire*, MIFAO 105 (Cairo, 1981), pp. 160–71. It is interesting to

whom I had appointed acted against my treaty (*adê*), they did not observe the oath (*māmītu*) of the Great Gods. . . .”<sup>36</sup> These references were written by one of the parties involved in an international legal contract about the other party. The divine witness of the oath of the “foreign” party is left unnamed, and the abstract term “god” is used by the scribe to avoid a mistake that would be of special relevance in a legal context.

Apparently Aziru was aware that Amun was no longer “the god of the king” and that some sort of transformation had taken place in the Egyptian religious outlook. Since he was asking the Egyptian court to take a treaty-oath, the mention of a divine witness was essential. Not being certain of the situation, he presumably thought it appropriate to choose a term so vague that he would avoid making a mistake.

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note, in relation to EA 164, the role played by the messenger (*wḫwtjw*) in the request and completion of the oath.

<sup>36</sup> M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum untergange Ninevehs* (Leipzig, 1916), vol. 2, pp. 12 f. (col. I, 118–19).