Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections

Handbook of Amarna Cuneiform Palaeography: A Project Update

Jana Mynářová
Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague

Since 2012 a project dedicated to the palaeography and scribal practices of the Amarna tablets has been carried out at the Charles University, supported by the Czech Science Foundation (Grant No. GA ČR P401/12/G168, "History and Interpretation of the Bible").[1] One of its main aims is to publish a special volume dedicated to the palaeography of the Amarna cuneiform corpus. Since their discovery in the late 1880's at the site of Tell el-Amarna (ancient Akhetaten) in Middle Egypt, the tablets (Fig. 1) have been considered one of the most important written sources for our understanding of the political and cultural history of the Levant, as well as of the diplomatic and administrative procedures employed in the region in the 14th century BCE. A thorough study on the palaeography of the whole corpus has, however, never been published in its entirety.

Up to the present day the most complete and frequently used tool for the study and the discussion of the Amarna cuneiform palaeography is the sign list published by O. Schroeder in an Appendix to his two-volume set of autographs, dating back to 1915.[2] While Schroeder's sign list is based on the material kept at the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin (which, with slightly over fifty percent of all preserved Amarna tablets and fragments in its collection, is the largest in the world), unfortunately less than one hundred tablets were used to compile the list in question.

Given the importance of the Amarna cuneiform palaeography for the 2nd millennium BCE cuneiform corpora in the Levant,[3] a new volume entitled *Handbook of Amarna Cuneiform Palaeography* is now in preparation and will be published in 2018 (ed. J. Mynářová, Charles University, Prague). The main part of the volume consists of a palaeographical chart with the individual signs organized in a sequence corresponding to the one employed in the *MZL*.[4] Each sign is identified by its name and the respective *MZL*/*MÉA* number. As such, it is the

Figure 1: A letter from Zitriyara to the king of Egypt: EA 213, BM E29859, obverse (© Trustees of the British Museum).

sign itself that represents the main category in the chart. Within this category the reader will find representatives of all variants of the same sign employed in the corpus (in a graphic form[5]) with clear reference to the attestation of the variant and the provenance of the respective text. The individual variants are arranged within the sign category in a standard sequence starting with a single horizontal wedge, followed by a downwards diagonal, an upwards diagonal, the "Winkelhaken," and a vertical wedge.[6] Information on each variant is further supplemented by its phonetic or semantic referents. Since the individual variants of the signs show a substantive graphic variability, a synoptic table of all variants with references to the category of the respective signs will be provided, as well as individual indices.

At present slightly over fifty percent of the Amarna tablets have been collated, analyzed, and included into the palaeographic chart. The already analyzed corpora include the following collections: the British Museum (London), the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the Egyptian Museum (Cairo), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Oriental Institute (Chicago), Musées Royaux et d'Histoire (Brussels), and the first set of the collection of the Amarna tablets kept at the Vorderasiatische Museum (Berlin). In the course of 2017 the remaining tablets housed at the Louvre (Paris), the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow), and the Vorderasiatische Museum will be included in order to ensure that the volume will be published in accordance with the project schedule, i.e., in 2018.

---

1 Jana Mynářová, "Amarna Palaeography Project: The Current State of Research," in Jana Mynářová, Pavel Onderka, and Peter Pavúk (eds.), *There and Back Again—The Crossroads II: Proceedings of an International Conference Held in Prague, September 15–18, 2014* (Prague: Charles University in Prague, 2015), 409–421.

2 Otto Schroeder, "Zeichenliste," in Otto Schroeder, *Die Tontafeln von El-Amarna*, d zweiter Teil (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1915), 73–94.

3 Elena Devecchi (ed.), *Palaeography and Scribal Practices in Syro-Palestine and Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age: Papers read at the Symposium in Leiden, 17–18 December 2009* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2012); Elena Devecchi, Gerfrid G. W. Müller, and Jana Mynářová (eds.), *Current Research in Cuneiform Palaeography: Proceedings of the Workshop organised at the 60th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Warsaw 2014* (Gladbeck: PeWe-Verlag, 2015).

4 Rykle Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon. Zweite, revidierte und aktualisierte Auflage*, revidierte und aktualisierte Aufl. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010). See also Rykle Borger, *Assyrisch-babylonische Zeichenliste* (Kevelaer—Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker—Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); also provided is a concordance with the *MÉA* signlist of René Labat and Florence Malbran-Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne. Signes, syllabaire, idéogrammes*, 6. éd. (Paris: Geuthner, 2011[6]).

5 Christel Rüster and Erich Neu, *Hethitisches Zeichenlexikon. Inventar und Interpretation der Keilschriftzeichen aus den Boğazköy-Texten* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989).

6 For the expansion, consult especially Catherine Mittermayer, *Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der sumerisch-literarische Texte* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006).