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John Barton · Reinhard G. Kratz
Choon-Leong Seow · Markus Witte

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alttestamentlicher und hebräischer Forschung,
200 Jahre nach seiner ersten Auflage

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The Amarna Letters in the 17th and the 18th Editions of Gesenius' Hebrew Dictionary

Juan-Pablo Vita

1. The first tablets of what would eventually become known as the 'Amarna Archive' were found in Egypt in 1887.¹ The find took place amongst the ruins of the ancient city of Achetaton, about 300 km South of Cairo. It was one of the ancient capitals of Egypt, created by Pharaoh Amenophis IV (Echnaton) in the mid-fourteenth century BC.

2. The publication of the tablets started almost immediately. The first Amarna letter was published in 1888 by J. Oppert.² Between 1889 and 1890 H. Winckler and L. Abel published the cuneiform copies of the tablets. At the time, the tablets were in the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin, the Egyptian Museum of Cairo, and the Louvre in Paris. There were also three further tablets in private hands.³ In 1892 C. Bezold and E. W. Budge published copies of the tablets housed at the British Museum.⁴ In the subsequent years new texts from the same archive were published. In 1896, that is, just nine years after the find, H. Winckler published all the Amarna texts known up until then with new transcriptions and translations.⁵

3. The prompt publication of all the text material from Amarna known by the end of the nineteenth century AD had an immediate impact on the fields of ancient Near East history, Semitic philology and biblical research at the time. Indeed, the Amarna letters were perceived as the most important historical source for the study of international relations in the ancient Near East in the fourteenth century BC. All the political powers of

1 Cf. KNUDTZON, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 1–4; RAINEY, *The Amarna Age. Late Bronze Age II*, 87–88, and, above all, the updated and comprehensive work by MYNÁŘOVÁ, *Language of Amarna – Language of Diplomacy*, 13–33.

2 This is letter EA 260. Regarding the history of the publication of the Amarna letters, cf. RAINEY, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets* 1, 1–6.

3 WINCKLER / ABEL, *Der Thontafelfund von El Amarna*.

4 BEZOLD / BUDGE, *The Tell el-Amarna Tablets in the British Museum*.

5 WINCKLER, *Die Thontafeln von Tell-el-Amarna*.

the time interacted directly in this correspondence – Egypt, Babylon, Mit-tani, Ḫatti and Assyria. Most of the letters, however, were sent by minor kings of Syria and Palestine who, in their role as vassals of Egypt, wrote to the pharaoh. The letters of the Syro-Palestinian vassals were written in Akkadian, the international language at the time, usually by scribes whose mother tongue was not Akkadian but a Canaanite dialect (Northwest Semitic). The local linguistic substratum could be clearly identified in these letters by the lexicon, syntax, and also from its morphology and verb system. From the very beginning, they were of great interest to Semitic studies in general and to Hebrew philology and lexicography in particular.

4. The publication of the Amarna letters immediately spawned a dynamic new subfield of research within ancient near Eastern studies which has survived on up to the present day. In 1891, just four years after the tablets were found, H. Zimmern published an initial work regarding the so-called “Canaanite glosses” of Amarna.⁶ In the ensuing years, studies focusing on the language, toponymy, and history of the letters were to follow. Zimmern's work alone had repercussions for other works including the 26th edition of the W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch's *Hebrew Grammar*⁷ and on the *Grundriss* by C. Brockelmann.⁸ Winckler's edition (§2) served as the basis for the integration of the Amarna Canaanite linguistic elements into the Hebrew dictionary from F. Brown, S. R. Driver and Ch. A. Briggs.⁹

5. After Winckler's edition, regular excavations in Tell el-Amarna brought new texts belonging to the same corpus to light. In 1907, Norwegian Semitist and Assyriologist Jørgen Alexander Knudtzon produced a new edition of the entire corpus.¹⁰ Due to health reasons, Knudtzon could not complete the second part of the work forthwith and it was not published until 1915 when it included historical and philological comments on each letter by O. Weber.¹¹ It also featured a comprehensive glossary by E. Ebeling.¹² Knudt-

6 ZIMMERN, *Kanaanäische Glossen*, 154–158.

7 GESENIUS / KAUTSCH, *Hebräische Grammatik*²⁶.

8 BROCKELMANN, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*.

9 BROWN / DRIVER / BRIGGS, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

10 KNUDTZON, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*. See biographical sketches on Knudtzon in BUDGE, *The Rise and Progress of Assyriology*, 243; BORGER, *Knudtzon*, 45; BIRKELAND, *Biography of J. A. Knudtzon*, 499–502 (cited by Borger, *ibid.*). Knudtzon also made the first attempt at explaining the Hebrew verbal system in the light of Akkadian cf. VAN DE SANDE, *Nouvelle perspective sur le système verbal de l'hébreu ancien*, 113.

11 WEBER, *Anmerkungen*, 1009–1357. Knudtzon made the manuscript he had already prepared for this second part of the work available to Weber. These notes are constantly cited by Weber throughout his commentary.

12 EBELING, *Glossar*, 1358–1554.

zon collated and ordered all the texts, producing an edition of such high quality that it signaled the end of the first stage of the studies pertaining to Amarna¹³ and marked a new starting point. Knudtzon's edition, considered a masterpiece in Assyriology, continues to be the basis and reference point for any investigation of this documental corpus.¹⁴ Almost parallel to this, O. Schroeder published all the Amarna tablets kept at the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin in high quality cuneiform copies in 1914 and 1915. This work largely complements Knudtzon's edition.¹⁵

6. Knudtzon's edition had an immediate impact on several kinds of work focused on the Amarna letters, in regard to both grammar¹⁶ and history.¹⁷ But it also had repercussions for the field of Hebrew lexicography; especially for the 16th edition of the Gesenius dictionary edited by Frants Buhl¹⁸ and published in 1915 (republished, unchanged, in 1921 as the 17th edition). Buhl had already incorporated elements from the Amarna letters into previous editions of the dictionary.¹⁹ However, for the 17th edition he had the essential contributions of Knudtzon, an author with whom Buhl kept direct contact with when updating the Amarna information in the dictionary.²⁰

7. In the Gesenius dictionary, Buhl granted the historical and linguistic material of the Amarna letters all the significance it deserved. The 17th edition contains over 220 references to the Amarna letters. Thus Buhl gave a decisive boost to the interaction of biblical Hebrew with the Canaanite linguistic elements of the second millennium BC. To achieve this purpose, Buhl made thorough use of Knudtzon's edition, Weber's com-

13 Cf. HEINTZ, *Index Documentaire d'El-Amarna*, 3–18, for a bibliography of Amarna studies between 1888–1915.

14 Knudtzon's text numbering which is preceded by the abbreviation "EA" (= El Amarna) has become the canonical system.

15 SCHROEDER, *Die Tontafeln von El-Amarna*.

16 BÖHL, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kanaanismen*; EBELING, *Das Verbum der El-Amarna-Briefe*, 39–79; DHORME, *La langue de Canaan*, 369–393; id., *La langue de Canaan*, 37–59, 344–372.

17 DHORME, *Les pays bibliques au temps d'El-Amarna d'après la nouvelle publication des lettres*, 500–519, id., *Les pays bibliques au temps d'El-Amarna*, 50–73, 368–385; CLAÜß, *Die Städte der El-Amarnabriefe und die Bibel*, 1–79.

18 For more on Buhl cf. MUIKENBURG, *Buhl*, 1468.

19 Cited by CLAÜß, *Die Städte der El-Amarnabriefe und die Bibel*, 1. Cf. STRECK, *Altorientalistik*, 350: "Die altorientalischen Beiträge der 12. bis 16. Auflage des hebräisch-aramäischen Standardwörterbuchs von W. Gesenius und F. Buhl (1895–1915) stammen ebenfalls aus [H.] Zimmers Feder."

20 BUHL acknowledges Knudtzon's influence in the preface to the dictionary, p. VI.

ments, and of Ebeling's glossaries. But he also found support in the important linguistic study by F. M. Th. Böhl²¹ and in H. Clauß' exhaustive research²² relating to the Amarna toponyms which are also attested in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Buhl always maintained a critical approach towards these works, qualifying them or disagreeing with them whenever he thought appropriate. To give one example, Knudtzon translates the gloss *ḥa-ab/p-ši* in the letter from Tyre EA 147 (l. 12) as "hand."²³ Both Weber²⁴ and Ebeling²⁵ cautiously consider it to be an Egyptian term with the meaning "thigh, arm, strength." However, Buhl suggests we consider it a Semitic term – a Canaanite gloss *ḥabši* which could be linked to the Hebrew root *ḥbš* "to tie."²⁶ Buhl²⁷ also does not accept Ebeling's proposal²⁸ to consider *aḥni* in EA 224:8 (which he translates as "I answered") as a possible form of the verb *ḥanû* "to answer" linked to the Hebrew 'nh of the same meaning. The reading of the fragment by Knudtzon,²⁹ Ebeling's own comments on this,³⁰ and recent studies on this fragment,³¹ show that there are more plausible readings and interpretations of the term. He is equally critical about some of the identifications of toponyms made by Clauß. In open confrontation with the author, Buhl put forward alternative possible matches between biblical and Amarnian toponyms³² and he also challenged proposals made by Clauß and Knudtzon.³³ More examples of this nature can be found.

8. The linguistic information included in the 17th edition of the Gesenius dictionary regarding Canaanite and Canaan-Akkadian from Syria-Palestine in the second millennium is completed with the information provided by the letters of Ta'anach,³⁴ published in 1904 and 1905 by F. Hrozný.³⁵

21 BÖHL, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe*.

22 CLAUß, *Die Städte der El-Amarnabriefe*.

23 KNUDTZON, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 609.

24 WEBER, *Anmerkungen*, 1246 with n. 1.

25 EBELING, *Glossar*, 1549.

26 GESB¹⁷, 212. Probably following Böhl's suggestion in this respect, cf. BÖHL, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe*, 82.

27 GESB¹⁷, 603.

28 EBELING, *Glossar*, 1414, 1545.

29 KNUDTZON, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 762 with note b.

30 EBELING, *Glossar*, 1414.

31 Cf. MORAN, *The Amarna Letters*, 287.

32 e.g. GESB¹⁷, 618 sub 'arō'er II, or 704 sub qedeš.

33 For example GESB¹⁷, 517 sub n^ešīb.

34 Ta'anach is located on the plain of Jezreel, about 8 km southeast of Megiddo, see BELMONTE, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen*, 281.

These letters are dated to the fifteenth century BC which makes them older than the Amarna letters. The linguistic significance of these letters rests on the fact that they provide, as A. F. Rainey put it,

[...] our earliest testimony for the use of the system of verbal morphosyntax discovered in the Amarna letters from Canaan [...]. They present a mixture of standard OB style and usage with some other, more Canaanized features.³⁶

Buhl immediately understood the importance of this small epistolary corpus for the dictionary and thus included some twenty references relating to it in the 17th edition.

9. Inevitably, research undertaken after the 17th edition of the dictionary caused some of Buhl's proposals relating to the Amarna letters to be qualified or corrected. This is the case with the abovementioned (§7) gloss *ḥa-ab/p-ši* of the letter from Tyre EA 147 (l. 12) which Buhl suggested should be considered a Canaanite gloss linked to the Hebrew verb *ḥbš* "to tie." However, Ebeling's initial suggestion³⁷ to consider the term Egyptian has been habitually accepted by later studies and continues to today.³⁸ One could summarize by saying that from our current perspective, the 17th edition of the Gesenius dictionary became a working tool of eminent quality and usefulness for following decades and, in general, it was more precise and comprehensive in the exploitation of the Amarnian linguistic material than later lexicographic works of biblical Hebrew e.g., the L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner *Lexicon*.³⁹

10. In the decades following the publication of the 17th edition of the Gesenius dictionary and the second volume of Knudtzon's edition (both in 1915), studies of the Amarna letters continued to be conducted at a good pace. In many respects, Knudtzon's edition, Ebeling's glossary, and the then most recent edition of the Gesenius dictionary continued to provide the most important textual and lexicographic basis for the investigation of this corpus. Further, the Amarna corpus itself was steadily enriched by the gradual publication of fifteen new letters; later collectively republished

35 HROZŇ, *Keilschrifttexte aus Ta'anek*, 113–122; id., *Die neugefundenen Keilschrifttexte von Ta'anek*, 36–41.

36 RAINEY, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets*, vol. 2, 31; HOROWITZ/OSHIMA/SANDERS, *Cuneiform in Canaan*. Concerning these letters see also RAINEY, *Taanach letters*, and *idem*, *The Amarna Age*, 75–76.

37 Proposal which the author had already mentioned in: EBELING, *Das Verbum*, 78.

38 Cf. ALBRIGHT, *The Egyptian Correspondence of Abimilki, Prince of Tyre*, 196–197; IZRE'EL, *The Amarna Letters from Canaan*, 2416.

39 KÖHLER/BAUMGARTNER, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*.

with a corresponding glossary by Rainey.⁴⁰ Finally, archaeological excavations on various sites e.g., Kāmid el-Lōz or Tel Aphek have yielded new texts which do not directly form part of the Amarna epistolary corpus but are contemporaries and come from the same geographical areas and which, to a great extent, also share the same linguistic features.⁴¹

A doctoral thesis presented by W. L. Moran in 1950 marks the beginning of modern investigation of Canaano-Akkadian.⁴² The great merit of this work was to understand and correctly describe the general structure and function of Canaano-Akkadian verbs. Grammar investigation in the ensuing fifty years culminated in Rainey's grammar⁴³ which accurately reflects the current state of our knowledge regarding the language dynamic in the Canaanite letters of Amarna.⁴⁴ Our current understanding of the contents of this epistolary corpus can also be found in recent and comprehensive translations of the entire corpus into French,⁴⁵ English,⁴⁶ Italian,⁴⁷ and Hebrew.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, there still remains the important but unresolved problem of our understanding of the very nature of this language, which is not part of a uniform linguistic system.⁴⁹

11. Parallel to this, the Amarna letters and the linguistic material they provide for Northwest Semitic philology were integrated into the principal works on Hebraistics. From the *Historische Grammatik* by H. Bauer and P. Leander⁵⁰ to the History of the Hebrew language by Á. Sáenz-Badillos⁵¹ and in grammar reference works such as R. Meyer's⁵² or the most recent edition of the work by P. Joüon and T. Muraoka,⁵³ as well as the third edition of the dictionary by Koehler and Baumgartner⁵⁴ amongst many oth-

40 RAINEY, *El Amarna Tablets*, 359–379.

41 On this point cf. RAINEY, *KL 72:600 and the D-Passive in West Semitic*, 337–341, HOROWITZ/OSHIMA/SANDERS: *Cuneiform in Canaan*.

42 MORAN, *Amarna Studies*, 1–130 ("A Syntactical Study of the Dialect of Byblos as Reflected in the Amarna Tablets").

43 RAINEY, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets*.

44 See also IZRE'EL, *Canaano-Akkadian*; TROPPEL/VITA, *Das Kanaano-Akkadische der Amarnazeit*.

45 MORAN, *Les lettres d'El Amarna*.

46 MORAN, *The Amarna Letters*.

47 LIVERANI, *Le lettere di el-Amarna*.

48 COHAVI-RAINEY, *To the King my Lord*.

49 See TROPPEL/VITA, *Das Kanaano-Akkadische der Amarnazeit*, 20–24.

50 BAUER/LEANDER, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache*.

51 SÁENZ-BADILLOS, *History of the Hebrew Language*.

52 MEYER, *Hebräische Grammatik*.

53 JOÜON/MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*.

54 KBL³; English version: *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon on the Old Testament*.

ers.⁵⁵ Importantly, from early on, several authors pointed out the relevance of the Amarna letters for commenting on several biblical passages and books; particularly the Psalms.⁵⁶

12. As part of this evolution, the 18th edition of the Gesenius dictionary is, without a doubt, the most comprehensive and updated lexicographic instrument for the study of linguistic relations between biblical Hebrew and Canaanite in the second millennium BC as reflected in the Amarna letters. From this perspective, the new edition of the dictionary has benefited from being the direct heir to the material already compiled in the previous edition of 1915 and from garnering support in the most recent reference works on the Amarna letters, such as the anthroponymic studies by R. S. Hess⁵⁷ (especially since the third volume, published 2005) or Rainey's grammar. This edition also had the support of the *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* by J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling,⁵⁸ which includes abundant material from the Amarna letters.⁵⁹ In some cases, however, it would have been interesting to include some Canaanite glosses which did not appear in the 17th edition, such as the gloss *ga-ag-gi* (**gaggu*) "roof" (EA 287:37) in the entry corresponding to the Hebrew *gāg*⁶⁰ and glosses such as *tu-ra* "shot" (EA 245:8) in the entry corresponding to the verb *yṛh* "to throw."⁶¹

13. The Amarna letters continue to be an active and fruitful field of investigation. In this sense, the future republication of the entire corpus, transcribed and translated by Rainey will be a major contribution.⁶² This publication will undoubtedly provide new readings and new correlations with the Northwest Semitic vocabulary in general and biblical Hebrew in particular. The 18th edition of the Gesenius dictionary progresses at a good

55 See also papers such as RAINEY, *The Ancient Hebrew Prefix Conjugation*, 4–19.

56 E.g., BÖHL, *Hymnisches und Rhythmisches in den Amarnabriefen aus Kanaan*, 375–379, JIRKU, *Kanaanäische Psalmenfragmente in der vorisraelitischen Zeit Palästinas und Syriens*, 108–120. Other authors such as GEVIRTZ, *On Canaanite Rhetoric*, 162–177, HESS, *Hebrew Psalms and Amarna Correspondence*, 249–265, id., *Rhetorical Forms in Joshua 10:4*, 363–367, and RAINEY, *The 'Amārah Texts a Century after Flinders Petrie*, 50–53, are further recent attempts to study this question in depth.

57 HESS, *Amarna Personal Names*.

58 HOFTIJZER/JONGELING, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*.

59 See regarding this, the recension by IZRE'EL, *A New Dictionary of Northwest Semitic and the Amarna Glosses*, 421–429.

60 GesB¹⁷, 197. This gloss is actually included in the entry *gāg* in KBL³, 169. See also SIVAN, *Grammatical Analysis*, 217, IZRE'EL, *Canaanite Varieties in the Second Millennium BC*, 81.

61 GesB¹⁷, 494.

62 Cf. RAINEY, *Some Amarna Collations*, 193*.

pace and the upcoming revision of the Brown, Driver & Briggs dictionary will pay special attention to the etymology of Hebrew vocabulary.⁶³ It will be equally necessary in the future to revise some Hebrew-Canaanite equivalences presented as definitive from the 17th edition of Gesenius to date. This is the case, for instance, with the reading *p[u]-û* by Knudtzon in EA 104:53 which the author translated as "this."⁶⁴ In his glossary to the letters, Ebeling accepted Knudtzon's translation with some misgivings, but also alluded to Böhl's proposal to consider *pû* as the equivalent of the Hebrew adverb *pôh* "here."⁶⁵ This is how it appeared, with some reservations, in the 17th edition of Gesenius⁶⁶ and, following D. Sivan,⁶⁷ in the 18th edition too.⁶⁸ This reading, and therefore this interpretation of the term, was recently discarded by Rainey, according to whom, the correct reading should be *'bu'-û*, and the term should be understood as a verbal form of the verb *bu''û* "to seek."⁶⁹

14. It would be interesting if these important lexicographic projects focused on biblical Hebrew whilst also taking into account the aforementioned Syro-Palestinian texts which, although not a direct part of the Amarna corpus, are contemporary or even later. To take one example, this method could allow us to improve the Hebrew entry for "wine" (*yayin*) slightly by mentioning the Canaanite term *ye-nu* which appears as the equivalent of Akkadian *karānu* "wine" in a trilingual lexical fragment (Sumerian-Akkadian-Canaanite) found in Tel Aphek and dating from around 1230 BC.⁷⁰

63 See HACKETT / HUEHNERGARD, *On Revising and Updating BDB*, 227–233.

64 KNUDTZON, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 464.

65 EBELING, *Glossar*, 1493 sub I *pû*.

66 GesB¹⁷, 635.

67 SIVAN, *Grammatical Analysis and Glossary*, 130.

68 GESMD¹⁸, 1041. In the same sense cf. KBL³, 866.

69 RAINEY, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets*, 114.

70 Published by RAINEY, *A Tri-Lingual Cuneiform Fragment from Tel Aphek*, 137–140; cf. HOROWITZ/OSHIMA/SANDERS: *Cuneiform in Canaan*, 32. This reference was not included in both the 18th edition of Gesenius (GESMD¹⁸, 462) and in KBL³, 391.

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