



NEW EVIDENCE FOR CONTACTS BETWEEN EGYPT AND THE NORTHERN LEVANT DURING THE AMARNA PERIOD—A CLAY SEALING WITH THE THRONE NAME OF AKHENATEN AT TELL MIŠRIFE/QATNA (SYRIA)

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In recent years, the Bronze Age royal palace of the rulers of Qatna has been excavated by an international team of archaeologists. The excavations have brought to light a large number of new finds, among them two undisturbed Bronze Age tombs and Aegean style wall paintings. Recently, one clay sealing with five scarab impressions featuring the throne name of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten has been found within a room in the north-western wing of the royal palace. The densely packed refuse contained thousands of pottery sherds and hundreds of fragmented pottery vessels, more than ten thousand animal bones, and the extraordinary amount of 808 clay sealings, among which many other clay sealings with scarab impressions were found. In addition, there was a cylinder seal, several bronze arrowheads, and five administrative cuneiform tablets. This accumulation was deposited in what is the lower ground level of Room DK. The refuse must have been discarded into this room from a higher elevation, probably from a room in the main floor level (i.e. the upper ground level) of the palace, which has not been preserved. The deposit is attributed to the pre-destruction phase of the royal palace, dated to the Late Bronze Age IIA period, i.e. the Amarna period.

The sealing with the impression of the scarab of Akhenaten can be closely connected to the administrative and economic activities of the royal palace of Qatna during the 14th century B.C., as it stems from a functionally and stratigraphically very well defined context within the palace. This strengthens the historical importance and relevance of the object. The clay sealing features the impressions of one single seal that was used five times to evenly cover the entire surface of the sealing. The actual seal that was used for the impression carried the throne name of Akhenaten (c. 1340–1324 BCE) in hieroglyphs (*Neferkheperura Waenna*). The throne name of the king is also the name commonly featured in the corpus of the Amarna letters, here rendered as Naphururija, Namhurija and other variations in the cuneiform texts, all without the epithet Waenna. Numerous parallels for clay sealings with impressions featuring the throne name of Akhenaten, as well as scarab seals

and faience bezel rings displaying this specific arrangement of hieroglyphs, are attested in Egypt, notably at Tell el-Amarna, the ancient capital Akhetaton. The clay sealing from Room DK is the first archaeological attestation of Pharaoh Akhenaten at Qatna. It is also of prime importance as only few objects naming Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten have been found in the entire Levant so far. These objects consist of three fragmentary stone vessels made of calcite-alabaster from the royal palace at Ras Shamra/Ugarit and one scarab made of gold naming Queen Nefertiti from the Late Bronze Age shipwreck at Uluburun in southern Turkey. However, the sealing found at Qatna – most probably along with the other clay sealings with scarab impressions found in this room – was surely disposed of soon after the objects' arrival at the site. These sealings from the royal palace are the only archaeological proof known thus far – apart from the evidence of such Egypto-Levantine contacts provided in the corpus of the Amarna letters – of a shipment of Egyptian goods to the northern Levant, and Qatna, during Akhenaten's reign. Additionally, it seems highly unlikely that a seal naming Akhenaten was still used after the king's death. Typologically, the clay sealing probably sealed a small container or vessel, as clay sealings of that specific size generally seem to be restricted to smaller objects on the basis of the sealings found at Tell el-Amarna. With a very high probability, the clay sealing with the throne name of Akhenaten found in Room DK most likely attests to a larger group of Egyptian objects that were dispatched to the site of Qatna, as is also clearly evidenced by the numerous other scarab impressions found in the refuse deposit of the same room.

A detailed study of the clay sealing authored by Alexander Ahrens, Heike Dohmann-Pfälzner and Peter Pfälzner (“New Light on the Amarna Period in the Northern Levant: A Clay Sealing with the Throne Name of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten from the Royal Palace at Tell Mišrife/Qatna”) can be found in the *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 5 (2012), issued by the Orient Department of the German Archaeological Institute.