
Rosetta

Booth, C.; William Schniedewind & Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (eds.), *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets*; Brill 2015

Rosetta **17**: 137 – 139

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue17/booth.pdf>

**Review: William Schniedewind & Zipora Cochavi-Rainey
(Eds), *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of
the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on
Collations of all Extant Tablets*. Brill, 2015, pp xv & 1648 (2
Volumes) €226. ISBN: 978-9004281455**

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This excellent scholarly work comes in two volumes which need to be used in conjunction with one other. Volume 1 is the larger of the two and comprises an introduction of the discovery, research and excavation of the Amarna Tablets, as well as the transcription and translation of the letters themselves. Volume 2 consists of a letter-by-letter commentary on linguistics and translation interpretations. This 2-volume layout was somewhat cumbersome as it necessitated having both books open at the same time, making reference to Volume 2 whilst reading the letters in Volume 1. Having the translation and the notes together as footnotes/endnotes may have been easier.

The majority of Volume 1 is taken up with the translations of the Letters, but there are three papers at the beginning providing an overview of the collection in a well-researched impartial way. In a publication of this type it is tempting to jump straight to the letters but the information provided in these papers is worth reading.

The *Foreword* is written by the late Anson Rainey and discusses the scope of his project to re-collating the Amarna Letters which he started in the 1970s and continued well into the 2000s. He emphasised that this volume of the Amarna Letters will benefit not only Egyptologists but also Assyriologists and it will correct erroneous translations in previous publications. The book is “for professionals; the translations are intended for those who can critique them independently by comparison with the transcriptions”(p.xi) which could explain some of the cumbersome aspects of the

layout. Upon Rainey's death the project was passed on to William Schniedewind to complete with the aid of Rainey's widow Zipora Cochavi-Rainey.

The *Introduction* provides a pocket history of the Amarna Letters Collection starting with the first recorded image of a boundary stela at Tell el Amarna in 1714 by Claud Sicard continuing to Barry Kemp's current concession. The letters were mostly discovered in building 19 (Q42.21), and the author claims the story of a peasant woman first discovering the tablets, was in fact a cover-up to "hide clandestine antiquities theft" (p.1). Mynářová elaborates on this and claims their discovery can be traced back to private excavations carried out by the antiquities dealer Farag Ismain of Giza in the late 1880s.

In total 382 texts and fragments have been collated and published in this volume, although there are others which have been lost over the twentieth century, meaning the collection should be viewed as the 'remnants of an archive' (p. 14). The languages represented in the letters are Hurrian, Hittite and various Akkadian dialects. Some of them have hieratic notation made by the ancient Egyptian archivist who worked in the 'The House of the Pharaoh's Letters'. Seventy of the letters are replies ordered by the Egyptian king and were kept as 'office copies'.

The importance of the letters lies in the information they provide about the political situation in the whole Near Eastern region as well as providing insight into some hotly debated topics such as the co-regency between Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, and the identification of the so-called 'Apîrû, all of which are discussed in brief here.

Mynářová's article on the *Discovery, Research, and Excavation of the Amarna Tablets – the Formative Stage* discusses the collection in more detail, claiming of the 382 texts and fragments the find provenance is available for only 31 of them. The author then provides a potted history of the acquisition of the tablets including 82 tablets by Wallis Budge for the British Museum between 1887-91, four sets of tablets purchased by the Cairo Museum, some from Farag Ismain, and a large collection which can be found in Berlin. In addition to these initial purchases the chapter outlines the acquisition, by purchase and donation, of tablets by other European museums. This chapter is potentially useful to those studying the archaeology of the tablets although the author states that "it is highly probable that one will never be able to fully reconstruct the wanderings of the individual tablets" (p.46).

This publication of Amarna Letters is clearly a well-produced piece of scholarship and will be valuable for all Egyptologists interested in the history of the Near East during this period. However in Mynářová's article some non-native English structures were not picked up by the editing team; for example "he inaugurated his excavations already shortly after his arrival" (p.37), 'three more tablets arrived to the museum' (p.43) meaning it was a little difficult to follow. Other common grammatical errors were missed such as 'strong Anglo-French rivalry of the 1880's and 1890's' (p.39) which is unacceptable in a book of this standard and price. However the presentation of the translations of the Letters themselves cannot be faulted. From EA1 to EA382 the format is the same with the left-hand page presenting the transliteration of the original text, and on the right-hand page the English translation. At the end of the translations there is a glossary, prepared by Alice Mandell, of all of the Akkadian texts, but excluding the Hurrian and Hittite letters. She bases this on the translations of Rainey, although he had passed away before the glossary was prepared so there are a few variants. In addition to the glossary there is an extensive bibliography, running to eight pages on the Amarna Collection as a whole (Volume 1) and ten pages on linguistics (Volume 2).

Whilst being exceedingly valuable as a piece of research this is not the most user-friendly publication. The letters are presented in numerical order (EA1, EA2 etc.), as devised by Knudtzon organising the texts according to geographical, chronological and functional attributes. However, with the absence of a reference list of the contents, recipient or author and no index, in order to find a particular letter you need to know the EA number. Volume 2 does head each letter with the recipient and author (e.g. EA57, Akizzi, The Ruler of Qatna, to Amenhotep IV, the King of Egypt), something missing in Volume 1 with the translations, but a single reference list would avoid the need to scan through the entire volume looking for a particular letter.

The prohibitive cost will ensure this publication is limited to university and research libraries but there is no doubt that it is a valuable update on this archive and one that all researchers on the Amarna period in Egypt and the Near East will have need to use.