

The Essence of Amarna Monotheism

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This article, which contains what I regard as the most important result of my classifier studies to date, would not have come into being if not for Friedrich Junge. It was Friedrich, with an open-mindedness rare in Egyptology, who was willing to take a chance on a joint project in what seemed then a rather adventurous new subject in Egyptology. The results of this partnership, which incidentally renewed the close ties between Jerusalem and Göttingen, speak for themselves in a number of publications.

I am honored and pleased to dedicate this article to an excellent Egyptologist and a very good friend.

Introduction

The theoretical problem to be addressed in this paper is the understanding and definition of the *essence of the concept of oneness* in the Amarna religion. In what may be called *reduced monotheism*, god is defined as the single god, the one god to be worshiped. Yet, the existence of other gods is acknowledged, albeit being the „wrong gods“ or the gods of the „other“ or of other places. In *mature monotheism*, god is the „one and only“ and the option of a simultaneous existence of any other gods is not acknowledged, or even perceived as theoretically possible.

Biblical monotheism in its early stages shows clear signs of *reduced monotheism*. Only in the later phase of post-exilic time, does the Bible reflect what may be perceived as *mature monotheism*.¹

The Egyptian intellectual achievement, often compared with Biblical monotheism, is the unique solar religion of King Akhenaton. In the last two decades, students of Egyptian religion have often labeled him „monotheist“, putting aside the earlier terminology that described him „only“ as „henotheist“. This opinion was strongly advocated, in the last two decades by leading scholars of Ancient Egyptian religion, among others, Erik Hornung and Jan Assmann.² However, the question to what version of monotheism did the Egyptian king abide by was not formulated.

Yair Hoffman, „The Conception of ‚Other Gods‘ in Deuteronomistic Literature“, in: Itamar Singer (ed.) *Concepts of the Other in Near Eastern Religion*. Israel Oriental Studies 14, Leiden 1994, 103-118, with earlier literature.

² Erik Hornung, *Akhenaton and the Religion of Light* (trans. David Lorton), Ithaca, London 1999; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge/Mass. 1997; Donald B. Redford, *Akhenaten the Heretic King*, Princeton 1984, 176 and passim. Hari clearly regards Amarna beliefs as „reduced monotheism“ as he writes „[...] Akhenaton semble avoir simplement méprisé le reste du panthéon traditionnel [...] ou l'avoir délibérément ignoré“, see Robert Hari, „La religion amarnienne et la tradition polytheiste“, in: Friedrich Junge (ed.), *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens. Zu Ehren von Wolfhart Westendorf überreicht von seinen Freunden und Schülern, Band 1: Sprache. Band 2: Religion*, Göttingen 1984, 1039-1055, here: 1043.

The king himself did not leave behind any contemplative texts³ explaining his new beliefs. The understanding of Amarna religion depends mainly on the readings of the few hymns and other texts originating from tombs of Akhenaten's followers in El-Amarna, and from the border stela texts. The corpus of the tomb texts from El-Amarna, particularly the two great hymns to the Aten, have been studied extensively in the last decades, yet they leave open the question addressed by this article. It is difficult to decide if the Amarna tomb texts just *avoid* the other gods, or indeed represent the negation of the very existence of the other gods. The negation of the other gods is never specifically mentioned, and even within the framework of the „great hymns“ – probably to be regarded as canonical texts of the period – a few other gods are constantly mentioned – Re, Maat and Hapi. The cartouches of Akhenaten include the names of Horakhty, Shu,⁴ and Re, who relate to each other in complex identity relations on one side, and familial relationship on the other. Other texts from El-Amarna tombs also mention Hapi, Shay and Rennutet.⁵

1 The *ntrw* evidence

Two additional facts, viz., that the plural form of *ntr*, i.e., *ntrw* „gods“, is avoided in the Amarna repertoire, and that this very word (*ntrw*) was effaced from monuments in the later part of Akhenaten's reign⁶ have also been taken into consideration by scholars for the assessment of the Amarna monotheism.

The Amarna period also saw the eradication of names of other gods of the Egyptian pantheon from various monuments elsewhere in Egypt. Nevertheless, each of these strands of information present some difficulties.

1.1 *Ntrw* in Karnak

The word *ntrw* „gods“ can still be found in the corpus of the early canonical texts from Karnak, dating to the Theban period of Akhenaten's reign. It appears there in a fragmentary text, which seems to be a religious speech of the king, i.e., right in the

3 One possible badly preserved fragment of such a text was published by Redford (Anm. 2), 172, see also below Anm. 7.

4 On the identity and meaning of Shu in the Amarna texts, see Gerhard Fecht, „Zur Theologie Amarnas“, *ZÄS* 85 (1960), 91-118, and earlier bibliography there. See also Baudouin van de Walle, „Survivances mythologiques dans les coiffures royales de l'époque atonienne“, *CdE* 55 (1980), 23-36 and Alessandro Bongioanni, „Consideration sur les ‚noms‘ d'Aten et la nature du rapport souverain-divinité à l'époque amarnienne“, *GM* 68 (1983), 43-51. A personified Shu appears in the El-Amarna tomb of Apy, on a decorated object offered by Akhenaten to his lord the Aten, see van de Walle (above), fig. 2. In an early form of his Horus name Akhenaten is called *k3-šwty* which is an attribute of Ounuris-Shu (see here fig.1). The epithet *k3-šwty ḥn* for the king still appears in the El-Amarna tombs, e.g. Maj Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten*, Bruxelles 1938, 65, 12.

5 Sandman (Anm. 4), 39, 19; 31, 14; 69.5. On the close relationship of these three gods and the roots of Shay in the Amarna period, see Dimitri Meeks, „Génies, anges, démons en Égypte“, in: *Génies, anges et démons*, Sources Orientales 8, Paris 1971, 17-84, here: 43 and passim. For the god Shed and other „popular“ gods, see Helmut Brunner, „Kein Amarna-Prinz, sondern ein Gott“, *GM* 78 (1984), 49-50 and Rita E. Freed, Yvonne J. Markowitz, Sue H. D'Auria, *Pharaohs of the Sun*, Boston 1999, 257.

6 Hari (Anm. 2) believes that the obliteration of *ntrw* is explained by the hostility of the Amarna religion to the Theban triad.

center of the canonical repertoire of the period.⁷ The word *ntrw* is also found on some other early talatats from Karnak (e.g. fig. 1⁸).

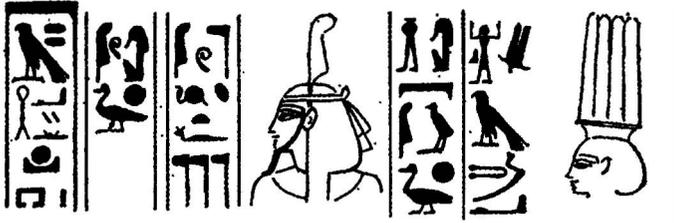


Fig. 1. An inscription from Karnak (after van de Walle [Anm. 4], fig. 1)

1.2 *Ntrw* in El-Amarna

The plural *ntrw* „gods“ is indeed expelled from the tomb repertoire of El-Amarna, but it appears in the border stelae, situated on the borders which Akhenaten has set to his town. These stelae are legal documents in essence, although like most official royal documents, they are imbued with religious statements of various kinds. Yet, as administrative-legal documents they address „real life“ problems. The early border stelae („the early proclamation“) accept, ipso facto, the existence of other gods. When discussing the legal status of the Amarna lands, and the rights on these lands, the texts use a linguistic register fit for this subject. Hence we find the public statement *tw bn ni-sw ntr tw bn ni-sw ntrt tw bn ni-sw hk3 tw bn ni-sw hk3yt tw bw^{sic} ni-sw rmt nb r irt(?)nkt im* „[...] it does not belong to any god, it does not belong to any goddess, it does not belong to any male ruler, it does not belong to any female ruler, it does not belong to anybody to do anything therein.“⁹ Later in the text, in an unclear context the words *ntr nb ntrt nb* („every god [and] every goddess“) are mentioned again.¹⁰

The obliteration of the word *ntrw* from monuments elsewhere in Egypt is far from being consistent as far as modern scholarship can follow the procedure,¹¹ and may be confined to particular areas.¹² It may have been directed mainly against the Theban

7 The text was published by Donald Redford, „A Royal Speech from the Blocks of the 10th Pylon“, *BES* 3 (1981), 87-102. In this badly preserved text the word *ntrw* appears in what Redford translates as a polemic sentence negating the possible existence of *ntrw*.

8 This inscription is known only by a copy of Prisse d'Avennes, see van de Walle (Anm. 4), the phrase reads *Šw s3 R^c it ntrw*. For another possible occurrence of the word *ntrw* in Karnak, see Donald Redford, *The Akhenaten Temple Project*. Vol. 2, Toronto 1988, Fig. 16.

9 William J. Murnane, Charles C. van Siclen, *The Boudary Stelae of Akhenaten*, London, New York 1993, 21. The register of language used here, as might be expected, is a clear non-literary Late Egyptian register, using the *bn* and *bw* negations. In the same stela, when the topic is a religious one, the linguistic register used is different, using many more typical Middle-Egyptian forms. On registers in Late Egyptian, see Orly Goldwasser, „On Dynamic Canonicity in Late-Egyptian: The Literary Letter and the Personal Prayer“, *LingAeg* 1 (1991), 129-141.

10 Murnane, van Siclen (Anm. 9), 32. Strangely enough, these stelae also mention the Mnevis bull, of all gods, as a candidate for burial in Akhetaten, see Murnane, van Siclen (Anm. 9), 25 - K, 19; X, 21.

11 No comprehensive study of the erasure phenomenon has yet published, however, see, Hari (Anm. 2), 1040, n. 3 (Ramadan Saâd, *Les martalages de la XVIIIe Dynastie dans le temple d'Amon-Ré à Karnak*. Thèse inédite, Lyon 1972).

12 For an erasure on a stela from Memphis, see Freed et al. (Anm. 5), 206 fig.17.

triad Amon, Mut and Khonsu. Some gods seem to remain untouched, such as Khnum of Nefrusi, which was situated just 25 kilometers away from Amarna.¹³

Archeology contributes to this vague picture the insight on „fringe religion“ in Amarna. Statuettes of various gods which were found mainly in domestic context in the town, testify to the continuation of (secret?) adherence to the old gods. In the private chapels Rennutet, Wpawat and probably even Amon, were venerated.¹⁴

In view of this perplexing material, it is questionable if the above evidence allows us to accurately evaluate the essence of the oneness of the Aten, and correctly assess the level of monotheism that the Amarna doctrine reflects, even in its later Amarna stage. All of the above strongly points to the probability that the Amarna religion is a version of *reduced monotheism*.

I would like to propose to review a new source for the study of the Amarna religion. New insight may be gained through a body of knowledge that has gone unnoticed until now by students of Egyptology – the classifier system of the script.

2 Divine classifiers

In various recent publications I have argued that the so-called „determinatives“ of the hieroglyphic script are actually a highly constrained system of *graphemic classifiers*.¹⁵ In this perspective, *all words collected under a specific classifier reflect a „class“* – a cognitive category in the map of world organization of the Ancient Egyptians. Two or more co-existing classifiers for the same word represent a network of knowledge organization surrounding a word, usually of metonymic and taxonomic order. Constantly alternating classifiers or unstable classification may point to fringe membership in a category, that is, to a word that stands on the border of a category.¹⁶ Taxonomic categories are constructed hierarchically. Categories move down in specification from the superordinate¹⁷ down to basic level terms and then to subordinate terms¹⁸.

13 Hari (Anm. 2), 1043.

14 Divine statuettes and stelae in Amarna show Taweret, Bes, Cobra goddess, Ram, votive bowl with a snake, mold of a Hapi image, molds of Hathor; see W. Flinders Petrie, *Tell el Amarna*. London 1894, Pls. XVII and XXIII; Freed et al. (Anm. 5), 257-258; Hari (Anm. 2), 1044-1046. For the private chapels, see Ann Bomann, *The private Chapel in Ancient Egypt*, London, New York 1998.

15 Orly Goldwasser, *Lovers, Prophets and Giraffes. Wor(l)d Classification in Ancient Egypt* (with an appendix by Matthias Müller), Göttinger Orientforschungen IV: Ägypten, Bd. 38. Classification and Categorization in Ancient Egypt, 3, Wiesbaden 2002; eadem, „Where is Metaphor? Conceptual Metaphor and Alternative Classification in the Hieroglyphic Script“, *Metaphor & Symbol* 20/2 (2005), 95-113; eadem, „A Comparison Between Classifier Languages and Classifier Script: The Case of Ancient Egyptian“, in: Gideon Goldenberg, Ariel Shisha-Halevi (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian, Neo-Semitic, Methods in Linguistics: Polotsky Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 2006. See especially Goldwasser 2006, with a comparison to morphemic classifiers in „classifier languages“.

16 Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), 29-33. Context usually does not affect classification. However, metaphoric movements and ad-hoc classification may surface in the graphemic system. This subject is studied in detail in a forthcoming publication of the present writer.

17 The most inclusive „unique beginner“ is unknown, to the best of my knowledge, in the Egyptian language or script. For a general introduction on the theory of categorization, see John R. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory*, Oxford 1995.

18 E.g., in the category of furniture, the superordinate is [FURNITURE], basic level members are table, chair, sofa, desk, bed, picture, lamp, phone etc. Table and chair are central or prototypical

A taxonomic superordinate is a noun with an inclusive, more general meaning that stands in an „IS A“ relations with a group of nouns with which it can build identity relation,¹⁹ e.g. „an oak IS A tree.“

Being a highly iconic graphemic system, the Egyptian script tends to represent in many cases the abstract superordinate by a prototype taken out from the group of the basic level noun icons²⁰; e.g. the category [BIRD] is represented by the duck  and the category [TREE] by the sycamore . However, when playing the role of a superordinate, the „prototype icon“ is stripped off its original, basic-level identity and becomes the representative signifier for the more abstract signified – the superordinate term.

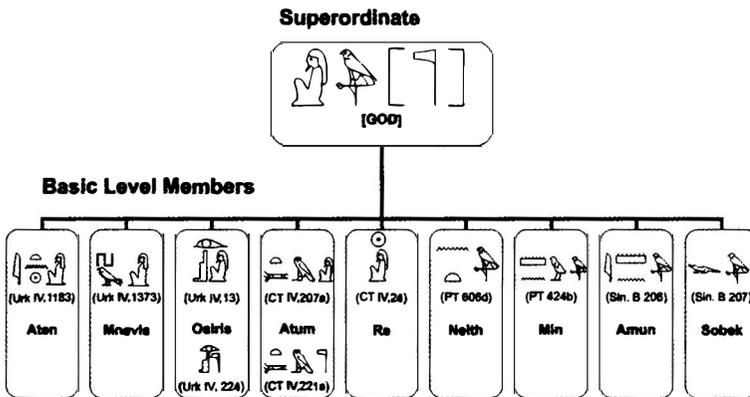


Fig. 2. The structure of the category [GOD] as represented by the script

Fig. 2. above presents a tentative visual representation of the category [GOD]²² as it is mirrored in the Egyptian script by the New Kingdom. It is, needless to say, a very partial representation, as the category has dozens of basic level members and hundreds of subordinate members.²³ During the New Kingdom, it is a highly visible category in which three graphemes interchange in the role of classifier: , , . Thus we have three iconic embodiment of the evasive superordinate.

members of the category; lamp and phone are fringe members. Subordinate members are kitchen-table, coffee-table, or table-lamp, and standing-lamp.

19 E.g. „a cat is an animal“, „a swallow is a bird“.

20 On the same procedure in classifier languages compare Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, *Classifiers. A Typology of Noun Categorization Devices*, Oxford 2000, 403. A prototype representing a superordinate is a well known phenomenon in cognitive linguistics, see Samuel Glucksberg, Boaz Keysar, „Understanding metaphorical comparisons: Beyond similarity“, *Psychological Review* 97 (1990), 3-18; e.g. „Silver“ in English, standing for „cutlery“.

21 Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15).

22 The category shows an exceedingly complex evolution which is presented and discussed in Racheli Shalomi-Hen, *The Writing of Gods. The Evolution of Divine Classifiers in the Old Kingdom*. Göttinger Orientforschungen IV: Ägypten, Bd. 38. Classification and Categorization in Ancient Egypt, Wiesbaden (forthcoming).

23 Subordinate members are, e.g., Khnum of Nefrusi (basic level, Khnum), Anubis of Gebelein, (basic level, Anubis). For the enumeration of basic level and subordinate members, see recently Christian Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter and Götterbezeichnungen VIII*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 129, Leuven 2003.

The basic level members of this category are various Egyptian gods, such as Re, Amon, Sobek, Atum, Neith, Min, Osiris, Ptah and many others. By the Middle Kingdom, female goddess may get divine classifiers of their own, i.e. they are classified under , or . All members of the [GOD] category can be put in the nominal identity sentence – X „is a“ god, e.g., „Sobek is a god“, „Re is a god“ and so on.

The hieroglyphs that represent the superordinate [GOD] are of special interest. The „falcon on the standard“ and the „*ntr* pole“ are very early hieroglyphs, documented as early as the proto-dynastic and early dynastic periods.²⁴ The seated human figure appears somewhat later in the Old Kingdom.²⁵ Due to their animated nature, both  and  may be activated as „third gender“ signifiers in first person pronouns, moving the actor into a different class of existence.

2.1 The falcon on the standard –

A sacred falcon came very early in the history of the Egyptian culture to represent the superordinate idea of „god“. In a few early examples in the Old Kingdom, the hieroglyph  noticeably stands for the signified „god“.²⁶ However, as early as the fifth dynasty, the falcon clearly appears in the role of classifier following names of different gods, such as Anubis or the female goddess Neith.²⁷ It seems that the , a prototypical member in the category, comes to stand for the whole category.²⁸ The centrality of the falcon god in early Egyptian history is well documented, and its choice will not come as a surprise to any student of the hieroglyphs.

When appearing in role of classifier the icon of the falcon has to relinquish his specific meaning „divine falcon“ or „Horus“ and move to the status of superordinate term with the general meaning [GOD] or [DIVINE BEING]. This procedure becomes very transparent already in the Pyramid Texts. The icon  still carries in the Pyramid Texts the full meaning „Horus“.²⁹ However the  is frequently activated as divine classifier, consistently classifying male and female gods and goddesses as well as divine epithets and appositions referring to the gods or the king.³⁰

2.2 The seated anthropomorphic image of god –

This classifier appears on the stage of the script much later, simultaneously with the appearance of Osiris in the texts. In one rare example it stands as a logogram (or

24 Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many* (trans. John Baines), Leiden 1983, 33-40; George R. Ogden, „Studies in Archaic Epigraphy“, *GM* 67 (1983), 65-67.

25 On the birth of this classifier and its connection to Osiris, see Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 22).

26 Peter Kaplony, „Eine neue Weisheitslehre aus dem Alten Reich“, *Orientalia* 37 (1968), 1-61, here: 23-26, Jochem Kahl, *Das System der ägyptischen Hieroglyphenschrift in der 0.-3. Dynastie*. Göttinger Orientforschungen IV: Ägypten, Bd 29, Wiesbaden 1994, 515-517, and Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 22), who discusses the intertwining relations between the god and the king as mirrored by the  classifier during the Old Kingdom.

27 In private tombs, and later in the Teti Pyramid Texts, see Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 22).

28 On the same procedure in classifier languages compare Aikhenvald (Anm. 20).

29 E.g. *Pyr.* 17b, for examples from *Urk.* I, see Kaplony (Anm. 26), 23.

30 On the inclusion of epithets and appositions in the category see discussion below, and Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 22).

ideogram?) for the signified *ntr*.³¹ However, already in the end of the Old kingdom it starts to compete with the older zoomorphic classifier for the status of the „representative prototype“. By the Middle Kingdom, it becomes a popular divine classifier of the religious corpus.³² By producing a new pictorial classifier for the superordinate [GOD], it mirrors the fact that the „idea of god“ is conceptualized through an anthropomorphic image that leads to different paradigm of concepts – god may look for justice, be disappointed, punish, show mercy, reward, plan, be jealous or even fail or behave stupidly. Indeed in this case „god“ does not fly high, nor is he speedy and sharp-sighted as a falcon.

2.3 The *ntr* pole

The icon  acquired the meaning „god“ through a metonymic process. Being „a pole with flag“ on early temples, it came to stand for the hidden god, or divine power that would have dwelt in each sanctuary.³³ By this metonymic representation, the scribes created, in a semiotic procedure rare in the script,³⁴ an icon that carries the meaning „any god“ and thus the generic idea of god.

The use of the  hieroglyph in the role of the classifier [GOD] is rare. However, it is attested as a classifier from the Middle Kingdom on, and becomes popular in the Late Period. It appears as a parallel option to the falcon and human classifiers in the Coffin Texts mostly in versions that show a dislike of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic hieroglyphs³⁵. In the 18th dynasty it plays a prominent role as classifier in the religious inscriptions on the sarcophagi of the Tuthmoside royals.³⁶ A careful reading of these texts yields an unexpected compilation of divine names, all written with the  classifier. The group includes Osiris, Gesty, Dwamutef, Geb, Shu, Tefnut, Isis and Nebtis, Selket Rennutet and others.³⁷ The extensive use of the  pole as classifier is part of Hatshepsut's „identity struggle“ which also surfaces in her refraining, in certain cases, from the use in the script of the iconic 1st person suffix pronouns, where she often uses instead the neutral  sign, which refers to the phonetic signifier.

31 See Kaplony (Anm. 26), 23-24. Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 22), traces the origin of this icon in the hieroglyphs representing Asiatics in the early dynasties, hence pointing to the possible foreign origins of Osiris. She also gives a detailed history of the classifier in the Old Kingdom.

32  is very popular in the corpus of the Coffin Texts.

33 For the possible meanings of the icon see Hornung (Anm. 24). For early references, see Kahl (Anm. 26), 678-679. Two clear *ntr* poles appear in front of a temple, on an early Naqada seal. A sacred tree can also be identified, see Werner Kaiser, „Zur Entstehung des gesamtägyptischen Staates“, *MDAIK* 46 (1990), 287-299, here: Taf. 86,12. For an elaborate discussion of the *ntr* sign see John Baines, „Symbolic Context of the Principal Hieroglyph for ‚God‘“, in: Ursula Verhoeven, Erhart Graefe (eds.), *Religion and Philosophie im Alten Ägypten*, Leuven 1991, 29-46, here: 41. For a phonetic approach see Thomas Schneider „Sur l'étymologie de nṯr ‚dieu‘. A propos d'une interprétation récente“, *Studi di Egitologia e di Antichità Puniche* 12 (1993), 77-86, with detailed references to earlier literature.

34 Synecdoches are more frequent in the script, when „a part of the whole“ represents the whole, see Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor. Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs*, OBO 142, Freiburg 1995.

35 Shalomi Hen (Anm. 22), 43. In the Coffin Texts, the  is found also with female divine names, e.g., *Nsrt* – „the fiery serpent“, CT IV261c BH1Br, after Shalomi Hen (Anm. 22), 123.

36 See Anthony Leahy, „The Name of Osiris Written “, *SAK* 7 (1979), 141-153; I am grateful to Claus Jurman for this reference.

37 William C. Hayes, *Royal Sarcophagi of the XVIII Dynasty*, Princeton 1935.

However, $\bar{\text{I}}$ as classifier is still well known in other inscriptions of the 18th dynasty, where it appears in hieroglyphic inscriptions, outside the distinctive religious corpus³⁸. Another important example of $\bar{\text{I}}$ classifying the god Shu³⁹ appears in an early inscription of king Akhenaten, probably originating in the Aten temple in Karnak (fig. 1). The classifier becomes very prominent with the name of Osiris in the Late Period.⁴⁰

The appearance of $\bar{\text{I}}$ as a parallel option in the classifier slot is of paramount importance. It enters the classification slot not as a prototype that stands as a representative for the category, but probably through its lexical signified „god“. In a somewhat sportive attitude, maybe initially in an attempt to avoid anthropomorphic or zoomorphic associations and connotations, the scribes put in the classifier slot an icon which actually refers to the „name“ of the category, and is not „an example of“. The semiotic operation in this case does not require the relinquishment of the iconic and lexical meaning of the original sign. By that, in a rare instance, the Egyptian material itself presents us with the *superordinate*, i.e., the graphemic and linguistic superordinates coincide in this case.



Fig. 3. A scarab from Tell el Daba'a, Hyksos period (after Mlinar [Anm. 42]).

3 The ascent of the Aten – from sun disk to the „only god“

It is very clear that from the 2nd Intermediate period onwards (and maybe even earlier, already from the Coffin Texts era⁴¹) the Aten starts its lexical ascent from a designation of the sun as celestial being into an important configuration of a *divine* celestial being – one of the manifestations of the sun god.⁴² This change of status is reflected in the center-stage role that the Aten slowly comes to play in the sun hymns

38 E.g. *Urk.* IV, 224.

39 For an interesting contribution on the feathers of Shu, see Katja Goebis, „Expressing Luminosity in Iconography: Features of the Solar Bark in the Tomb of Ramesses VI“, *GM* 165 (1998), 57-71.

40 For a thorough discussion on the $\bar{\text{I}}$ classifier in the Late Period, see Leahy (Anm. 36). $\bar{\text{I}}$ is also known as classifier for Re and Atum in late versions of the Book of the Dead, see Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), here: 115 n. 13.

41 For a painstaking discussion, see Donald B. Redford, „The Sun-Disk in Akhenaten's Program: Its Worship and Antecedents“, *JARCE* 13 (1976), 47-61. Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), here: 123-129.

42 For a similar process regarding the god Re, see Winfried Barta, „Re“, in: *LÄ V*, 156-180, here: 157. A scarab from Tell el Dab'a, dating to the Hyksos period shows an image which is very similar to the pictorial representation of the Aten (fig. 3). Mlinar remarks that this scarab has no parallel „Als Einzelercheinung muß auch die Art der Darstellung der Sonnenscheibe mit Strahlen gelten, kein anderes Beispiel ist dafür bekannt“, see Crista Mlinar, *Die Skarabäen von Tell el-Dab'a. Eine chronologische und typologische Untersuchung der Skarabäen von Tell el-Dab'a aus der 13.-15. Dynastie*, Universität Wien (Diss.), 2001, 136.

and other texts, and is also manifested in the growing tendency of the word Aten to take a [GOD] classifier besides the old solar repeater⁴³

However, it is during the Amarna period that the Aten enjoys a steep ascent in his status and reaches the peak of its esteem. It quickly assumes a power no other Egyptian gods ever knew, and would never reach again. He is the one and only god, *nn ky wpw hr.f*⁴⁴ – „there is no one but him“ – the divine *par excellence*.

3.1 A classification issue

At this stage of our discussion, the student of the Egyptian classifiers would naturally expect the spelling of the word Aten to reflect this change of status, and to persistently appear with a divine classifier. Aten is now a sole god, the only god of the official regime.

However, Louis Zabkar, in an article written in 1954, already remarked with some disappointment or surprise: „[...] the Amarna texts do not add any theological specifications to the spelling of the word ‚Aton‘: never is the word followed by a determinative of god; as we have seen in an example from the reign of Thutmose I.“⁴⁵ The fact that Akhenaten’s Karnak and Amarna texts almost totally refrain from giving the Aten a divine classifier (hundreds if not thousands of occurrences of the word are known, with very few exceptions) must be an important, meaningful theological specification. The effort that the Amarna thinkers put in a meticulous and sophisticated definition of the „names“ of the Aten, makes the option of a meaningless or accidental explanation in this case highly unlikely.

I would like to suggest that the thinkers of Amarna religion deliberately do not add a [GOD] classifier after the word Aten, because their revolutionary doctrine has actually cancelled the option for a „category of gods“. Putting any [GOD] classifier after the combination  would mean that the Aten is the chosen one, but still *one among the many*. It would still be an „example of“, one example, or one option of the superordinate [GOD] – just like the good old gods of the earlier times.

What speaks in favor of such a conscious move is a unique early inscription from Karnak already mentioned above (fig. 1), executed in the old style of the 18th dynasty. In this inscription we encounter the name of the god Shu, alternating in sportive spellings between two possible classifiers – the conventional  and the rare . The fact that the *ntr* pole  alternates with the more conventional human classifier, shows that it was still a relevant classification option for the Amarna thinkers. When discussing the Aten’s avoidance of the [GOD] classifier, one might argue that the  and  classifiers „were rejected on the grounds of their latent iconic meaning“⁴⁶ (a falcon, or a full-fledged human being), which collides with the essence of representation of the Aten and not due to their classificatory role. In contrast to these

43 On the status change of the Aten, see Sayed Tawfik, „Aton Studies“, *MDAIK* 29 (1973), 77-86, here especially: 78-79 (his example from *Urk.* IV, 1667, 5, may also be read Re); Redford (Anm. 41); Graciela N. Gestoso, „El culto a Aton en el Egipto de la Dinastía XVIII. Sus antecedentes“, *Revista de Estudios de Egiptología* 2 (1991), 45-54. For the term „repeater“, see Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), 15 and Goldwasser 2006 (Anm. 15).

44 Sandman (Anm. 4), 7, 7; similarly 94, 17.

45 Louis V. Zabkar, „The Theocracy of Amarna and the Doctrine of the Ba“, *JNES* 13 (1954), 87-101. For a similar remark see Murnane, van Siclen (Anm. 9), 68.

46 For the latent iconic meaning, see Goldwasser (Anm. 34).

two signs, the *ntr* pole  is a sign void of any personification or anthropomorphic trace. As the pole was a metonymic representation of „any god“, the *ntr* could have been used (theoretically) as a classifier for the Aten without jeopardizing the abstract nature of the new god.⁴⁷

Thus, the rare early inscription is of the utmost importance, as it shows that the avoidance of the [GOD] classifier is not accidental. It points to high awareness of classification, and strengthens the theory that the strict avoidance of classifier was a conscious move. Moreover, the divine classifier, or at least one of the divine classifiers, the [DIVINE-HUMAN] – is eminent in the Amarna texts in other contexts (see below). Therefore, the absence of the classifier cannot be blamed on a general tendency of the Amarna texts.⁴⁸

For a quick comparison we may turn to the elegantly executed stela of king Horemheb, which somewhat surprisingly mentions the Aten *amongst* other gods. Returning to a status as „one of the many“, the Aten again shows the divine classifier .⁴⁹ Here the Aten has *descended* back to the status it would hold from now on, being just one „example of“, another member and surely not a central one in the great Egyptian category [GOD].

It seems that in the high circles of Amarna thinkers, the conscious avoidance of the divine classifier actually shows that the intellectual elite of the period came very close to what we called before *mature monotheism*. The spelling of the word Aten points to a conscious organized effort, which aimed at the canceling of the possible existence of „other examples“ of „other gods“ – by canceling the very option of a category. This great achievement leaves open the question of a hypothetical influence of this group and its descendants on later ideas born in the Near East.

Appendix – A few exceptions and some other occurrences of the [GOD] classifier in Amarna

1 The Aten with divine classifiers in the Amarna repertoire

All of the hundreds or more of examples of the spelling of the name of the Aten in hieroglyphs – alone or as part of places or institutes' names – consistently show the spelling with the sun disk and repeater alone.⁵⁰ However, two exceptions appear within the official hieroglyphic repertoire of Amarna, both originating from the border stela texts. In the last line of the „early proclamation“ the name of the town, Akhetaten, shows the spelling . This spelling survived only in stela K as it appears in the very end of the text.⁵¹ Stela S of the second proclamation, shows once

47 The word *ntr* is very common in the Amarna texts.

48 Unlike the opinion of Redford (Anm. 2), 176, who suggests that „even the script and decorative arts are purified of objectionable items such as anthropomorphic or theriomorphic signs; words tend to be written phonetically.“

49 Geoffrey T. Martin, *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis*, London 1992, 51 (ill. 17); Compare here *Urk.* IV, 1935, 17 (= Tawfik [Anm. 43], 79 Anm. 14), a graffito from the time of Amenophis III, where Aten is written .

50 The repeater represents different variations, from round sun-disk with no ornament, to a big sun-disk with an hanging *ꜥnh* sign. Nowhere (!) does the *Im* take as classifier the sign  – sun disc with rays ending with human hands. For a discussion of this classifier see Goldwasser, forthcoming.

51 See Murnane, van Siclen (Anm. 9), 34.

the spelling with a classifier in the innovative Amarna combination  p3-itn.⁵² The stelae, as we have argued above, are official administrative proclamations. Thus, they might have been copied from an administrative hieratic document (on such spellings in hieratic, see below).

Two other hieroglyphic examples come from votive bowls which were very common in the Amarna period and certainly belong to the fringes of the written repertoire.⁵³

Other fringe texts (hieratic ostraca, labels, etc.) often show the word Aten with the divine classifier .⁵⁴ In hieratic, the covert zoomorphic iconic identity may be less conspicuous, and moreover, the text may come from less canonical environments. Nevertheless, seal-stamps of diverse institutions show a very stable spelling of the Aten without any additional divine classifier. Seals were manufactured in official royal workshops and were not subject to the idiosyncratic tendencies of the individual as hieratic labels or ostraca may be. Nevertheless, one may assume that the revolutionary new conceptualization of the divine was not fully understood or accepted by all circles of society, even the literate ones.

2 Divine classifiers in some other contexts in Amarna.

2.1 Divine names

The [GOD] classifier, or more correctly the human version  of the classifier, is by no means absent from the Amarna repertoire of signs.⁵⁵ However, some important occurrences will be mentioned briefly.

The most conspicuous appearance of  is with the word *ntr*, when it carries the meaning „god“.⁵⁶ In this case the classifier is activated as a kind of *repeater*⁵⁷, which may enhance the personified aspects of the divine.

The  classifier is also rather frequently found with spellings of the name of the god Re.⁵⁸ Re is written in the Amarna texts with or without a classifier.⁵⁹ This conspicuous „old-fashioned“ writing of Re may be related to his survival and special status in the Amarna repertoire and should be dealt with in the framework of a much extended discussion of the topic.

 also appears once as classifier for the divinity Shay in an inscription on a door jamb of a private house in Amarna. The same private inscription shows the goddess Rennutet with a cobra classifier, the typical classifier of female goddesses in the New

52 Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna I-VI*, ASE 13-18, London 1903-1908, here: *Amarna V*, pl. XXVII. 6 [main text].

53 Labib Habachi, „Varia from the Reign of King Akhenaten“, *MDAIK* 20 (1965), 70-73, fig. 1; Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), 125.

54 Goldwasser 2002 (Anm. 15), 125-126.

55 A detailed discussion of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of the present article.

56 E.g. Sandman (Anm. 4), 100, 12.

57 On the difference between the iconic repeater in the script and the verbal repeater in classifier languages, see Goldwasser 2006 (Anm. 15). The signified of a picture is never identical to a signified of a word.

58 E.g. Sandman (Anm. 4), 17, 3-4; 48, 13; 61, 8; 101, 17.

59 E.g. Sandman (Anm. 4), 19, 6; 61, 15 – without classifier.

Kingdom.⁶⁰ Other occurrences of Rennutet in Amarna show varied iconic repeaters, but never a female divine classifier.⁶¹  appears again as a classifier for the god Shay in a rare occurrence in the tomb of Panesesy.⁶² On the other hand, the goddess Maat which is very often mentioned in the Amarna inscriptions appears as a logogram  without any classifier, or in a full writing with  as repeater. Maat may also show a phonetic writing without a repeater and without classifier.⁶³

2.2 Ad-hoc members and epithets belonging to the [GOD] category.

The word *it* - „father“ tends to take the divine  classifier in the Amarna repertoire. As the signified of this noun phrase in the context of Amarna is always the Aten, the occurrence of the classifier is predictable. In her book *Classifying the Divine*, Shalomi-Hen suggests seeing in these type of nouns and epithets, which are characteristic of the religious literature, subordinate members of the category [GOD].⁶⁴ Indeed as such, they may be defined as „ad-hoc“⁶⁵ members of the category. The word *it* is generally classified into another category, i.e. the  [HUMAN-MALE] category, and is temporarily moved by the context to the [GOD] category.

Two remarkable occurrences of the  classifier appear in the second proclamation stela.⁶⁶ Border stela S shows the combination *ir sw* (twice, lines 2, 3⁶⁷) and *ms sw* (line 2) with the  classifier. The signified of these two combinations, in the context of the stela text, is probably the god Aten, who „made“ the king and „created“⁶⁸ the king. *Ir sw*, and *ms sw* are both closed semantic combinations. Their signified is the participle that stands for a god, or a creator, and not the result of the creation, in this case – *sw*, i.e. the king. The correct signified is reiterated by the classifier – that classifies the noun phrase – as a member of the category [GOD]. However, the semantic status of the combination is different from a „name“ of a god, as it may be context dependent and does not refer inherently to a divine being, as a god’s „name“.

60 Sandman (Anm. 4), 170, 5; on the cobra classifier, see Racheli Shalomi-Hen, *Classifying the Divine*, Göttinger Orientforschungen IV: Ägypten, Bd. 38, 2. Classification and Categorization in Ancient Egypt. Göttingen 2000, Göttingen, 62-63. The divine cobra plays the role of the superordinate [GODDESS]; the process activated in this case is of a prototype that ascends the echelon of classification to become the representative of the superordinate.

61 Sandman’s transcriptions of the classifiers are not always accurate and in all cases the originals should be consulted, if possible. In the tomb of Parennefer (Davies [Anm. 52], here: *Amarna VI*, pl. III = Sandman [Anm. 4], 69, 4) Rennutet receives a classifier of a mother suckling a child, while in Sandman the sign is unclear. On Rennutet and motherhood see Meeks (Anm. 5), 30-33.

62 Davies (Anm. 52), here: *Amarna II*, pls. VII, VIII.

63 For many variations for the spelling of *M3ʿt* see Murnane, van Siclen (Anm. 9), 84.

64 Shalomi-Hen (Anm. 60), 49-53.

65 The term ‚ad hoc‘ category was coined by Glucksberg, Keysar (Anm. 20). On the relation of ‚ad hoc‘, categories and metaphor, see also Goldwasser 2005 (Anm. 15). A pen is generally classified into the category [WRITING UTENSIL], however, it can be conceived as a dangerous weapon in the hands of a clever writer, and thus be classified in an ‚ad hoc‘ classification into the [WEAPON] category.

66 Stela Q and stela R might have had the same spellings here. However, it cannot be checked. The other versions seem to avoid the classifier. Stela S and stela Q are very similar in the first lines of the text, and might have used the same or similar source.

67 Davies (Anm. 52), hier: *Amarna V*, pl. XXVI.

68 For *ms* with the meaning „to create“ – when the actor is a god, see Jan Zandee, „The Birth-giving Creator-God in Ancient Egypt“, in: Alan B. Lloyd (ed.), *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honor of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, London 1992, 169-185.

The classification process in these cases is also a joining of an ad-hoc member to the category. The hieroglyphic classifier system testifies that the combinations *ms sw* and *ir sw* enter the [GOD] category as fringe or ad hoc members already before Amarna.⁶⁹

69 E.g. *Ms sw* can be found in an eulogy of Thutmosis I with the  classifier (*Urk.* IV, 267,5).