

# Leggo!

Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales  
on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Edited by  
Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,  
Cinzia Pappi, and Simonetta Ponchia

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## Aten in Amurru?

Giorgio Buccellati

In his inimitable style, Aziru writes to a high official of Akhen-aten a letter in which he very adroitly tiptoes a fine line between assurances of devotion on the one hand and outright expression of mistrust on the other. “His” style – because, even though the letter would obviously have been written by a scribe, the voice seems to be the voice of the king, loud and clear, albeit through the veil of the Akkadian garb the scribe gave to his words.<sup>1</sup> The abruptness of the wording and the subtlety of the intimations can more readily be attributed to Aziru than to the scribe. The letter in question, EA 164, is written to Tutu whom Aziru addresses as “lord” and “father” (line 1). But Aziru expects pharaoh to be listening in, over the shoulders of Tutu, as it were:

*Ištu amāte bēlīya ilīya Šamšīya u ištu amāte Tutu bēlīya lā apaṭṭar* (14–17).

I will not deviate from the words of my lord, my god, my Sun or from the words of Tutu, my lord.

*Šarru bēlīya amātēya lišmē* (27–28).

Let the king my lord (in person!) listen to my words

Ostensibly, Aziru writes to assure the Egyptian court that he is planning to go to Egypt. But...

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1 The thought-provoking article by von Dassow (2004), proposes that the text of the letters written in the Syro-Palestinian cities was an essentially logographic rendering of “Canaanite” speech (I owe this reference to the courtesy of Alice H. Mandell). Tempting though this hypothesis is, it still seems to me more likely that the text (here as in the other Amarna age letters) is only the rendering into Akkadian of an original non-Akkadian (“Canaanite”) speech, taken under dictation. The result is an Akkadianizing pastiche, which I render here in the standard phonemic transcription. While it is beyond doubt that Aziru would not have been dictating a letter in Akkadian, the very personal style evinced in a letter like the one here under consideration would seem to reflect Aziru’s direct (non-Akkadian) speech. In other words, the text does not appear to be a mere scribal paraphrase reflecting only the content of what Aziru had to say, and not the phrasing. It seems also clear that the rendering by the scribe into Akkadian could not have happened under direct dictation at the moment this particular tablet was written – the cuneiform being impeccable and the size of the tablet matching perfectly the extent of the message. We may instead assume two scribal moments, a draft under dictation and a subsequent polished copy. Did the “translation” take place already at the first step? Or was a non-Akkadian notation used for the first draft? Be that as it may, my assumption is that we have here the original expression, if not the *ipsissima verba*, of Aziru.

First there is the problem that the Hittites may be coming to the region (specifically to Nuhasše, not far north of Amurru): if so, Aziru's claim (excuse?) is that he would be forced to remain behind (18–26).

Then – and here is the crucial point: without beating around the bush, Aziru says quite unequivocally:

*Bēlīya, palhāku ištu panī šarri bēlīya u ištu panī Tutu (28–30).*

I am afraid to be in the presence of my lord and in the presence of Tutu.

It is not reverential fear that we are dealing with. Rather, Aziru is worried, so much so that he states he will only go if an official oath on the part of the Egyptian court will assure him of his safety:

*U lū ū[ta]m[m]ī Tutu u rabūte šarri bēlīya, u lū allak. U kī'am Tutu u šarru bēlīya u rabūte: "Šumma-mi niškuk mimma muhhi Aziri ša lā damiq." (32–38)*

Let me put under oath Tutu and the grand officers of the king my lord, and then I will go. And thus Tutu and the king my lord [the king himself, though in second position!] and the grand officers (must swear): "(May we be damned) if we plot anything evil against Aziru."

It is a very solemn oath. For Aziru sends to Egypt, along with his messenger, his own "gods":

*U anumma ilānīya u mār šiprīya. (31–32)*

So here are my gods and my messenger.

He expects the oath to be sworn by these gods of Amurru (physically, i.e., as embodied in their statue or their emblem which he has sent), and at the same time by the god of Egypt. *But which one?* We are at the time of Akhen-aten, and Aziru, undoubtedly quite aware of the momentous changes that have been taking place in Egypt,<sup>2</sup> is probably not quite sure of what the Egyptian sensitivity might be at this precise point in time. Yet it is critical that, for the oath to be valid, it be taken by the currently "valid" deity. And so Aziru resorts to a splendid scribal artifice:

40 |  | 40

*U kī'am tuttamī ana ilānīya u ana <sup>DINGIR</sup>A (39–40)*

Why, let it thus be sworn before my gods and before the divine A.

2 For a recent assessment of the reception of Atenism in the Syro-Palestinian cities (and Tyre in particular) see Siddall 2010, especially 27–29. For Egypt's linguistic influence in Canaan see Cochavi-Rainey 1997 (I owe both references to the courtesy of Alexander Ahrens).

It is, undoubtedly, too important a juncture for a scribal error, and the cuneiform, in an unbroken context, makes it clear that there was ample space to complete the word if so desired. It is, I believe, an intentional apocope. One that was meant to leave open the possibility of two alternative readings.

As far back as 1915, Otto Schroeder<sup>3</sup> had suggested that what was meant was Amon, and this has been accepted routinely ever since. Schroeder did not elaborate on whether this was an error or an intentional (and unique) abbreviation of the divine name that is otherwise well attested in the Amarna letters, both as a divine name by itself:

<sup>d</sup>*A-ma-nu-um*, <sup>d</sup>*A-ma-a-nu*, *A-ma-a-nu*, <sup>d</sup>*A-ma-nu*, <sup>d</sup>*A-ma-na*<sup>4</sup>

and as the theophoric element in personal names:

*A-ma-an-ap-pa*, *A-ma-an-ha-at-pí*, *A-ma-an-ma-ša*<sup>5</sup>, *A-ma-an-ma-(aš)-šu*<sup>6</sup>

Schroeder gives no reasons for the apocope. As I just mentioned, it can hardly be a case of scribal error. Nor was the scribe forced to abbreviate because of lack of space on the tablet.

It seems most likely to me that this is an intentional diplomatic ruse on the part of Aziru, the intent being to refer to the deity who is assumed to be in vogue at the moment, Aten, but without spelling out the name in full for a number of possible reasons, of which three may be adduced. First, there was no scribal tradition for the writing of the name in cuneiform<sup>7</sup> – and it is likely that even in the Canaanite version of Aziru’s speech, as he was addressing his scribe, there may have been a hesitation as to the pronunciation of this new deity. Second, even from the little that may have transpired outside of the Aten circles, the very special sense of this new deity may have been so perceived as to suggest that it might have been more consonant with his mysterious nature, and at any rate with proper cultic protocol, not to even attempt to pronounce his name. Finally, there may have been an underlying uncertainty as to whether the deity was in fact still the “valid” one by which the oath would have to be sworn. Hence the possibility of such exquisitely diplomatic solution. It is tempting to imagine the grin on Aziru’s face as he was envisaging, concretely, the attitude of Tutu, and possibly even of Pharaoh, at the moment the scribe in the Egyptian court would come to this point in the letter and interpret the cryptic <sup>d</sup>*A* at the end of the fortieth line in the tablet...

I hope that, if nothing else, this brief note will similarly elicit that unique smile we so well know, and love, on Mario’s face. It is a pleasure to think back of the many times we have enjoyed togetherness, personal and collegial, and to share with

3 Schroeder 1915.

4 For a total of 12 occurrences, see Ebeling 1915: 1582.

5 Hess 1993: 234.

6 Gröndahl 1967: 300.

7 The personal name *Ma-ia-a-ti* presumably contains a very indirect reference to Aten, see Hess 1993: 106f.

him, in this way as well, and on the occasion of this beautiful celebration of his life-long work, the enjoyment that comes from probing the texts and reading, literally, between the lines.

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## Vorwort des Reihenherausgebers

Michael Streck

Der zweite Band der Leipziger Altorientalistischen Studien ehrt einen großen Wissenschaftler, der dem Altorientalischen Institut seit einigen Jahren eng verbunden ist. Mit rund einem Dutzend Vorträgen hat Mario Fales unsere Kenntnisse von Assyrien, den Aramäern oder Sigmund Freuds Beziehung zur Altorientalistik bereichert. Im Rahmen des Erasmus-Programmes studieren Studenten aus Udine in Leipzig und umgekehrt. Möge uns Mario Fales auch in Zukunft oft besuchen und uns durch seine außerordentlichen Kenntnisse bereichern!

Leipzig, im August 2011.

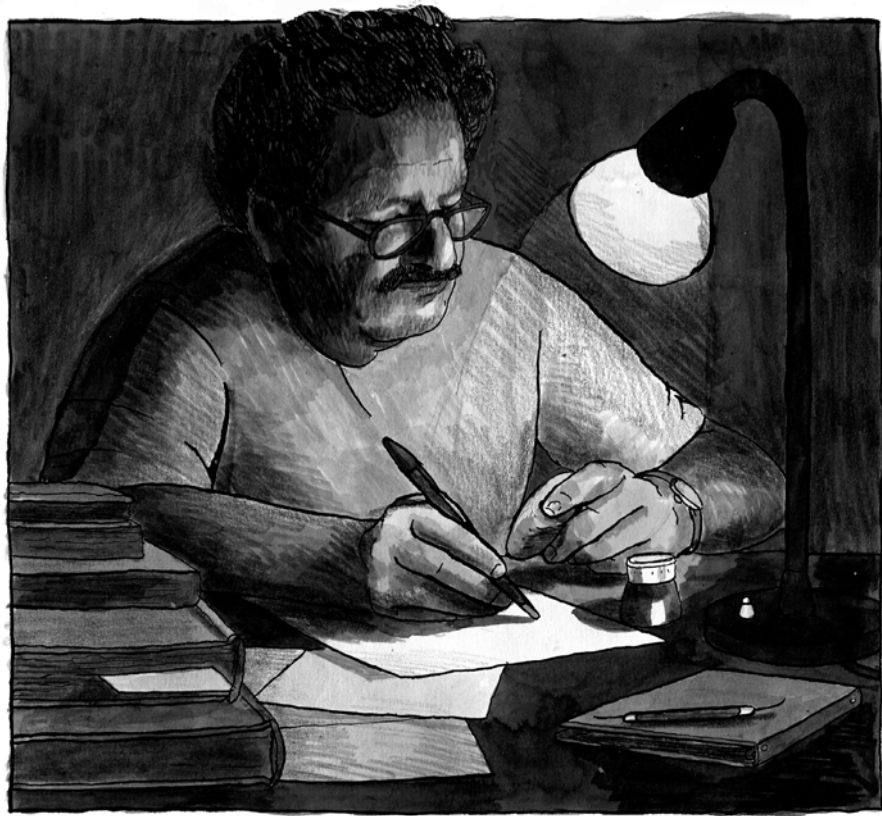
## Foreword

Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,  
Cinzia Pappi, Simonetta Ponchia

*Leggo!*, reminiscent of the Latin meaning “to observe, collect, choose, select”, and almost synonymous with “to evaluate”, is part of Mario’s famous idiolect, by which he has always entertained his students and friends, shifting from the highest scientific rigour to the ironic interpretation of questions and situations. Students have often heard and still often hear the word with a certain apprehension, fearing the immediate and severe judgment of their works it might announce. Sometimes, however, the expectant tone in which the word is pronounced promises an appreciative attitude in the evaluation of their efforts, and is perceived as an encouragement on the difficult path of historical and Assyriological studies. The expression is not less reassuring when the object of evaluation is a glass of wine raised in celebration of academic or social events, or the beginning of a new research project.

The levity of tone does not diminish but adds to the lucid and penetrating analytical capacity which characterizes Mario’s fundamental attitude. He has in fact extended the philological method, derived from his multilingual and multicultural education, to many fields of experience, in which analysis and criticism might be linked with tasting and appreciating, from music to literature, art, cuisine, etc. The method must of course have its roots in a Mesopotamian fondness for interpreting signs, for “reading” the multifarious messages of the universe, and condensing them into a text.

This time we have decided to anticipate Mario’s comment in receiving this homage to his scientific career, the reading of which we hope will please him and kindle his interest. In place of the long description of Mario Fales’ many merits and academic accomplishments and rewards, we leave to the reader a reconstruction of the honouree’s scientific and human stature, according to an own method of reading and interpreting. This text condenses, in the words of students, colleagues, and friends, many references to Mario’s themes of research, results of projects that have been originated in his school and in cooperation with colleagues all over the world, discussions, ideas and hints for future developments, as well as preoccupations and engagements that the historian of antiquity and of the Ancient Near East in particular must feel and undertake. Most of all, this book should be read as a token of our gratitude for Mario’s indefatigable enthusiasm in promoting Near Eastern studies as fundamental reading of human experience.



*Drawing by Andrea Ventura.*