

## The Dakhamunzu affair

### Searching for clues

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## 1 Summary of events

In the second half of the 14th century BC, an Egyptian queen caused serious diplomatic discord between Egypt and the Hittite Empire. This so-called “Dakhamunzu affair” remains enigmatic to this day and is the subject of controversial debate.

### 1.1 Historical background

Until the middle of the 14th century BC, the Hittite Empire was confined to central Anatolia. Around 1350 BC, Great King Shuppiluliuma (I) succeeded in pushing back the neighboring kingdom of Mittanni in the southeast, which was an ally of Egypt at that time. After conquering territories west of the Euphrates, Shuppiluliuma was able to extend his influence in the northern Levant.<sup>2</sup> His sphere of influence thus bordered on territories controlled by Egypt (Fig. 1). In the course of history, there were frequent territorial conflicts and changes of allegiance in this region.<sup>3</sup>

In Egypt, King Amenhotep IV was crowned around 1353 BC, calling himself “Akhenaten” from the fifth year of his reign. He founded a new royal residence city in Middle Egypt named Akhet-Aten (Tell el-Amarna) and imposed a far-reaching religious reform on his kingdom. Foreign policy tensions were thus compounded by domestic political tensions.

Despite all their differences, the Egyptian court maintained diplomatic correspondence with the Hittite court in Khattusha. The letters were written in cuneiform script on clay tablets. Tens of thousands of fragments of them have been preserved.<sup>4</sup> Since Akkadian was the *lingua franca* of diplomacy at that time,<sup>5</sup> letters written in Hittite were probably drafts.

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<sup>2</sup> He became sovereign over Kizzuwatna, Amurru, and smaller city-states in the region, including Qadesh.

<sup>3</sup> The conflict culminated in the battle of Qadesh in 1274 BC followed a few years later by a peace treaty with the Hittite King Khattushili III. A concise overview of the relations between Egypt and the Hittite Empire in the second half of the 14th century BC is provided, for example, in Ref 1, pp. 1–51, and Ref 2, pp. 228–240.

<sup>4</sup> The most important collections of cuneiform tablets come from Khattusha, the capital city of the Hittite Empire (published under the acronyms KBo and KUB), and from the palace of Tell el-Amarna (“Amarna letters” [EA]).

<sup>5</sup> Ref 3, p 57; Ref 4, p 220.



Fig. 1: Political spheres of influence in the Middle East between 1500 and 1300 BC



Fig. 2: Hittite cuneiform tablet of “The Deeds of Shuppiluliuma” (CTH 40) from Boghazkoy, clay, late 14th century BC, Museum of Archaeology, Istanbul

## 1.2 The Dakhamunzu affair

The most important source of information about the events of the Dakhamunzu affair are the Hittite annals of “The deeds of Shuppiluliuma” (CTH 40, fragments 28–31). The matter is also briefly touched upon in two other texts, the Second Plague Prayer (CTH 378, KUB 14.8) and CTH 379 (KUB 31.121a). Shuppiluliuma (I) was a Great King of the Hittite Empire, who reigned in the second half of the 14th century BC. All three texts date from the reign of Shuppiluliuma's son, Mursili II.<sup>6</sup>

The Hittite annals report that an Egyptian king named “Nibkhururiya”<sup>7</sup> had died, and his widow, a queen named “Dakhamunzu”, approached Shuppiluliuma with a very unusual request.<sup>8</sup> Part of the correspondence exchanged on this matter is quoted in the annals:

- (1) “My husband died. A son I have not. But to thee, they say, the sons are many. If thou wouldst give me one son of thine, he would become my husband. Never shall I pick out a servant of mine and make him my husband! [...] I am afraid!”<sup>9</sup>

Shuppiluliuma, the father of several sons, surely wondered why the Egyptian queen had neither a son nor a suitable candidate for remarriage. He was therefore rightly suspicious.<sup>10</sup> He first sent an envoy, who returned a few months later together with an Egyptian envoy and another letter from Dakhamunzu:

- (2) “Why didst thou say ‘they deceive me’ in that way? Had I a son, would I have written about my own and my country's shame to a foreign land? Thou didst not believe me and hast even spoken thus to me! He who was my husband has died. A son I have not! Never shall I take a servant of mine and make him my husband! I have written to no other country, only to thee have I written! They say thy sons are many: so give me one son of thine! To me he will be husband, but in Egypt he will be king.”<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, Shuppiluliuma had completed a successful campaign of conquest in Karkemish<sup>12</sup> and allowed himself to be persuaded to send one of his sons, Prince

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<sup>6</sup> Ref 5, p 61.

<sup>7</sup> “Nibkhururiya” in KBo 14.12, “Pipkhururiya” in KBo 5.6 (Ref 4, p 239; Ref 6; Ref 7, p 305).

<sup>8</sup> The two names were derived from Akkadian cuneiform transcriptions of Egyptian names.

<sup>9</sup> CTH 40 (KBo 5.6, fragment 28) (Ref 8, p 94; similarly, in Ref 4, p 239).

<sup>10</sup> Some Egyptian kings of the New Kingdom married foreign princesses. However, the idea of an Egyptian princess marrying a foreign husband, as requested by the Babylonian king Kadashman-Enlil from Amenhotep III, was strictly rejected (Ref 9, p 64).

<sup>11</sup> CTH 40 (KBo 28.51) (Ref 8, pp 96–97; similarly, in Ref 4, p 239). See also the speech of the Egyptian envoy, Chani, before Shuppiluliuma (Ref 8, pp 97–98).

<sup>12</sup> Ref 1, p 20; Ref 4, p 239; Ref 7, pp 302–303; Ref 8, p 95.

Zannanza, to Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Shuppiluliuma's son, Mursili II, wrote in the annals:

- (3) “So, since my father was kindhearted, he complied with the word of the woman and concerned himself with the matter of a son.”<sup>14</sup>

However, Zannanza died either during the journey or shortly after his arrival in Egypt. Shuppiluliuma accused the Egyptians of killing Zannanza. The Hittite annals report:

- (4) “[When] they brought this tablet, they spoke thus: ‘[The people of Egypt (?)] killed [Zannanza] and brought word: Zannanza died!’ And when my father heard of the slaying of Zannanza, he began to lament for Zannanza [and] to the gods he spoke thus: ‘Oh gods! I did [no] evil, [yet] the people of Egypt [did this to me], and they (also) [attacked] the frontier of my country’.”<sup>15</sup>

What actually happened to Prince Zannanza remains unclear. The Hittite annals and the Second Plague Prayer of Mursili II speak of “slaying” (see quotation 4).<sup>16</sup> It is quite possible that Zannanza was intercepted and killed in order to thwart Dakhamunzu's plan. However, a natural death cannot be ruled out either, given the epidemic that raged in the eastern Mediterranean region towards the end of the 18th Dynasty of Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

A fragmentary letter from Shuppiluliuma to the Egyptian royal court suggests that a new king had been crowned in Egypt shortly before or after Zannanza's death:

- (5) “[When the queen of] Egypt wrote again and again, you (?) not [...] was you/she (?). But if you [in the meanwhile? had seated yourself on the throne, then] you could have sent my son back home. [...] Your [servant] Chani held us responsible [...] What [have you done] with my son?! [...] If you now perhaps also have [done harm to my son?], then perhaps you have also killed my son! You continuously praise [your troops] and charioteers, but I shall [praise?/mobilize?] my troops and [charioteers], everything I have as army.”<sup>18</sup>

So, even Shuppiluliuma was not entirely sure who or what had killed Zannanza.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> This is why the affair is sometimes called the “Zannanza affair.”

<sup>14</sup> CTH 40 (KBo 5.6, fragment 28) (Ref 8, p 97).

<sup>15</sup> CTH 40 (KUB 19.4) (Ref 10, pp 107–108).

<sup>16</sup> Ref 7, pp. 303–304.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ref 1, pp 34–35; Ref 11, pp 3–5.

<sup>18</sup> KUB 19.20+KBo 12.23, verso 6–16 (Ref 5, p 69; Ref 12, citing Ref 13).

<sup>19</sup> However, the phrase “*perhaps* you have also killed my son” could have been a cautious diplomatic formulation to avoid a major war with Egypt. This would have jeopardized Shuppiluliuma's plans to conquer further territory from the Mittanni (Ref 5, p 84).

exact content of this correspondence is uncertain due to the fragmentary nature of the tablet.

As indicated by a direct quote in another letter by Shuppiluliuma, the new Egyptian king denied any responsibility for Zannanza's death:

(6) “[Concerning that what you] wrote: ‘Your son has died [but] I have done [him no] harm’.”<sup>20</sup>

Shuppiluliuma lived only a few years after the Dakhamunzu affair, as did his son and direct successor, Arnuwanda II.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the sources cited above provide the following clues:

- The events took place towards the end of the reign of the Hittite Great King Shuppiluliuma (I).<sup>22</sup>
- The parties involved in Egypt were a deceased king whom the Hittites called Nibkhururiya and his widow called Dakhamunzu. Dakhamunzu had no son. There were one or more unnamed Egyptian candidates for marriage and succession to the throne who ranked below the queen and whom she disliked [see quotations 1 and 2].
- Dakhamunzu wrote her plea to the Hittite king with the courage born of desperation, because she wrote, “I am afraid” (see quotation 1).
- The desired marriage to the Hittite Prince Zannanza, did not take place because he died under unexplained circumstances (see quotations 4 and 5).
- In Egypt, a new king was crowned around the time of Zannanza's death (see quotation 5). Dakhamunzu had apparently relented and chosen a “servant” (probably meaning a vizier or other high-ranking official) as her husband, thereby legitimizing his claim to the throne.

## 2 Who were Nibkhururiya and Dakhamunzu?

The name of the King “Nibkhururiya” is written in the cuneiform text with the syllable sequence Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia-aš.<sup>23</sup> During the period in question, four confirmed kings were

<sup>20</sup> KUB 19.20, recto 24–25 (Ref 5, p 69; Ref 12, citing Ref 13).

<sup>21</sup> Ref 1, pp 33 [note 40], 39; Ref 2, pp 257; Ref 14, p 298. The two kings may have fallen victim to an epidemic (Ref 1, p 33, note 40; Ref 15).

<sup>22</sup> Chronological considerations: Ref 2, pp 240–247; Ref 5, pp 85–88.

<sup>23</sup> The final consonant -š is the Hittite nominative ending (Ref 16, p 14, note 15). Therefore, the syllable -aš can be omitted.

in power in Egypt: Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten (c. 1353–1337 BC), Semenkhkare (c. 1338–1336 BC), Tutankhamun (c. 1336–1327 BC), and Ay II (1327–1323 BC).<sup>24</sup>

The name “Dakhamunzu” referring to the king's widow was written in Hittite cuneiform syllables as Da-ḥa-mu-un-zu-uš.<sup>25</sup> W. Federn (1960) suggested that it was not a name at all, but rather the misread title *tʾ ḥm.t njzw* (pronounced ta ḥmet nizu), meaning “the consort of the king.”<sup>26</sup> It was quite common for Egyptian royals to be addressed with a title or epithet in diplomatic correspondence.<sup>27</sup> However, it is surprising that in the Hittite transcription of the queen's title, the important feminine *t*-ending was neglected. Without this *t*-ending, the title takes on a completely different meaning, namely *tʾ ḥm njzw* “the servant of the king.” In any case, Federn's suggestion does not help us to identify Dakhamunzu.

## 2.1 Akhenaten and Nefertiti or Meretaten

King Akhenaten's throne name was Nefer-kheperu-Ra.<sup>28</sup> The cuneiform transcription of this name was Na-ap-ḥu-ru-ri-ia,<sup>29</sup> Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia (controversial),<sup>30</sup> or simply Ḥu-ru-ri-ia<sup>31</sup>. Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia may have been derived from *nb ḥprw-Rʾ* meaning “the lord, Kheperu-Ra.”<sup>32</sup> The Egyptian word *nb* (“lord”) was regularly transcribed in cuneiform texts with ni-ib.<sup>33</sup>

The Dakhamunzu affair took place 6 to 7 years before Shuppiluliuma's death.<sup>34</sup> His death is dated to between 1330 and 1320 BC.<sup>35</sup> Dakhamunzu can only be identified as a wife or daughter of King Akhenaten if Shuppiluliuma died around 1330 BC.

With his principal wife, Nefertiti, Akhenaten had six daughters, but no sons. Nefertiti's last known mention in a quarry inscription dates from the 16th year of Akhenaten's reign.<sup>36</sup> If she survived her husband, she had every reason to be afraid (see quotation 1) and seek a quick remarriage. She had enemies, especially among the priests of Amun, who had been

<sup>24</sup> Ref 17, p 205, citing K. A. Kitchen (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Ref 18. See note 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ref 18.

<sup>27</sup> The title *njzw-bjtj* “King of Upper and Lower Egypt” was transcribed as in-si-ib-i-ya. The title *nb tʾwj* „Lord of the Two Lands” was transcribed as ni-ib-ta-a-ua (Ref 16, p 15; Ref 19, p 57; Ref 20, p 240).

<sup>28</sup> The throne names of the Egyptian kings of the New Kingdom were followed by epithets, some of which were included in the cartouche but are omitted here.

<sup>29</sup> Ref 16, pp 14, 15; Ref 21, pp 97, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Ref 22, p 164; Ref 23, p 11. Contra A. R. Schulman 1978 and A. Dodson 2018, cited in Ref 24, p 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ref 1, p 1, note 1; Ref 21, pp 96–97.

<sup>32</sup> Ref 21, p 97.

<sup>33</sup> Ref 16, pp 14–15; Ref 19, p 57; Ref 20, p 240.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ref 2, pp 247 (note 66), 257; Ref 21, p 94.

<sup>35</sup> Ref 2, p 257; Ref 7, p 315; Ref 11, p 8; Ref 35, p XV; Ref 36, p 256, fig 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ref 25, pp 195–197.

stripped of their power by her late husband's religious reform.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Nefertiti's personality does not fit with a pleading letter to Shuppiluliuma. By Egyptian standards, she had been an unusually influential partner at Akhenaten's side and would never have humiliated herself in this way before a hostile Hittite king.<sup>38</sup> But Nefertiti did not have to endure such humiliation, nor was she obligated to marry a subordinate. Her stepson, Tutankhamun,<sup>39</sup> was a suitable candidate to succeed to the throne. Tutankhamun was still a child at that time,<sup>40</sup> but youth had never been an obstacle to coronation until then. On the other hand, Nefertiti may have been keen to avoid having to take on the role of regent for Tutankhamun. It made a big difference whether the biological mother or the stepmother of a child king took on this task. While the former was honored with great respect, the latter was reviled after her death to make people forget that the heir to the throne was the child of a secondary wife.<sup>41</sup> This could be the reason why Semenkhkare, her son-in-law,<sup>42</sup> who fulfilled the legitimacy even less than Tutankhamun, ultimately came to power. Some scholars believe that Semenkhkare had already been Akhenaten's co-regent for at least one year.<sup>43</sup> If this was the case, Nefertiti could not possibly have been Dakhamunzu.

If Nefertiti was no longer alive at the time of King Akhenaten's death, his eldest daughter, Meretaten, was to secure the succession to the throne by marrying a man of appropriate rank. A single source suggests that Meretaten bore the title *ḥm.t mrj.t wr.t* "greatly beloved consort" (of Akhenaten).<sup>44</sup> The Hittite scribes may have confused this title with *b3 ḥm.t njzw* "the consort of the king," and translated it as Da-ḥa-mu-un-zu-uš. However, the title "greatly beloved consort" did not necessarily imply a real marital relationship of Meretaten with her father. Perhaps she served as regent for the terminally ill Akhenaten.<sup>45</sup> It is not known, when she married the later king, Semenkhkare.<sup>46</sup> In any case, she would

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<sup>37</sup> Akhenaten and Nefertiti were subjected to damnation, which means the destruction of monuments, the removal of their names from remaining inscriptions, and the omission of Akhenaten from subsequent king lists.

<sup>38</sup> Both Dakhamunzu and her envoy wrote to and spoke to Shuppiluliuma of Egypt's "shame" (see quotation 2 above and Ref 8, pp 96–97).

<sup>39</sup> Genetic data suggests that Tutankhamun was a son or at least a very close relative of Akhenaten (Ref 26, p 278; Ref 27, pp 196–199).

<sup>40</sup> Ref 28, p 1278.

<sup>41</sup> Ref 29, p 12.

<sup>42</sup> Semenkhkare was the husband of Meretaten, the eldest daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti (Ref 30, plt 41; Ref 31, p 90).

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Ref 17, p 205, 212, 219–220; Ref 32, pp 169–179; Ref 33, p 84–87.

<sup>44</sup> Ref 26, p 278.

<sup>45</sup> It is believed that Meretaten was the *ma-i-ia-ti* or *ma-ia-tu-ma* mentioned in three diplomatic cuneiform letters, EA 10, EA 11, and EA 155 (Ref 45, pp 19–20, 21–24, 241–242).

<sup>46</sup> This marriage is also documented by only a single source (Ref 30, plt 41; Ref 31, p 90).

hardly have written about her father: “My husband died” (see quotation 1).

For the sake of completeness, it is also worth mentioning W. Helck’s suggestion that Dakhamunzu could be identified with Kiya, Akhenaten’s secondary wife.<sup>47</sup> However, a secondary wife was in no position to promise a Hittite prince the throne of Egypt (see quotation 2).

## 2.2 Semenkhkare and Meretaten

The first and second throne name of Semenkhkare, who reigned for a maximum of five years, was Ankh-kheperu-Ra and Djeser-kheperu-Ra, respectively. This is only compatible with Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia if the Hittite scribe called the king “the lord, Kheperu-Ra.”<sup>48</sup> Semenkhkare’s wife, Meretaten, had one or two daughters; no son is known. This makes Meretaten a suitable candidate for Dakhamunzu after Semenkhkare’s death. However, this would mean that the next king, Tutankhamun, was the unwanted marriage candidate. Yet this is implausible because Dakhamunzu wrote of a “servant.” Tutankhamun was most likely Meretaten’s younger half-brother,<sup>49</sup> whom she would hardly have referred to as “servant.” There is also no evidence of a forced marriage between Tutankhamun and Meretaten; she might even have died before Semenkhkare.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.3 Tutankhamun and Ankhesenamun

King Tutankhamun’s throne name was Neb-kheperu-Ra. From a linguistic perspective, this makes Tutankhamun the most suitable candidate for Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia. Tutankhamun is considered to be the recipient of the Amarna letter EA 9, in which an Egyptian king is addressed in this way.<sup>51</sup>

The chronology supports this hypothesis. As mentioned above, the Dakhamunzu affair is said to have taken place 6 to 7 years before Shuppiluliuma’s death.<sup>52</sup> This fits well with Tutankhamun’s supposed year of death, 1327 BC.<sup>53</sup> Tutankhamun died in December or

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<sup>47</sup> Ref 22, p 159–161.

<sup>48</sup> In the case of Egyptian throne names from the New Kingdom ending in -kheperu-Ra, some Hittite scribes apparently contented themselves with this part and wrote ḥu-ru-ri-ia (cf. Ref 1, p 1, note 1; Ref 21, p 96–97).

<sup>49</sup> Ref 28, p 1278.

<sup>50</sup> Ref 7, p 313; Ref 31, p 90–91.

<sup>51</sup> Ref 16, p 15; Ref 34, pp 445–451; Ref 45, pp 18–19.

<sup>52</sup> Time of the Dakhamunzu affair relative to Shuppiluliuma’s death: Ref 2, pp 247 (note 66), 257; Ref 21, p 94. Time of Shuppiluliuma’s death: Ref 2, p 257 (this author dated Tutankhamun’s death after Shuppiluliuma’s death); Ref 7, p 315; Ref 11, p 8; Ref 35, p XV; Ref 36, p 256, fig 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ref 17, p 213, citing K. A. Kitchen (2000).

January and was buried 70 days later.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, his widow, Ankhesenamun, may have sent her letter to Shuppiluliuma in the spring. It arrived in the Hittite Empire in early fall.<sup>55</sup>

The name “Ankhesenamun” (Ankh-es-en-Amun),<sup>56</sup> was spelled *Jmn-ḥs-n* (Amun-ankh-es-en), because a god’s name was always placed in front out of honor. With the article *tʿ*, the sequence of hieroglyphs was therefore *tʿ Jmn-ḥs-n*. There is a parallel for the consonant sequence “s-n” at the end of a name: the Akkadian name Narâm-Sin was transcribed with Na-ra-am-zu-un in cuneiform script.<sup>57</sup> However, an omission and rearrangement are still required to transcribe *tʿ Jmn-ḥs-n* with Da-ḥa-mu-un-zu. There is still the possibility that Da-ḥa-mu-un-zu did not refer to a name at all, but rather to the title *tʿ ḥm.t njzw* “the consort of the king,” as W. Federn has suggested.<sup>58</sup>

From a historical perspective, the royal couple Tutankhamun and Ankhesenamun can be easily reconciled with the content of the correspondence between Dakhamunzu and the Hittite court. Tutankhamun died at the age of 19.<sup>59</sup> As far as we know, he had no living children with Ankhesenamun.<sup>60</sup> His successor was Ay, a high-ranking official of advanced age who had served Tutankhamun as his tutor and fatherly advisor. Ay was related to the royal family, but as a vizier he was subordinate to Ankhesenamun. The cartouches on two finger rings indicate that Ankhesenamun did indeed end up becoming Ay’s wife.<sup>61</sup> It would be understandable if the young woman had initially resisted marrying the old vizier. But this marriage was the only way for Ay to succeed Tutankhamun on the throne. According to Van de Hout (1993), Ay may be the addressee of the letter in which Shuppiluliuma announced retaliation for the murder of his son (see quotation 5).<sup>62</sup> However, the heading of the letter, in which the addressee is named, has been lost.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The embalming of the corpse was a ritual with a fixed duration of 70 days. The cornflowers, poppies, and picris flowers in floral wreaths used to decorate Tutankhamun’s mummy (e.g., MMA 09.184.214) bloom in Egypt from late February to April (Ref 7, p 311; Ref 24, p 8; Ref 37, pp 25–28; Ref 38, pp 227–254).

<sup>55</sup> Ref 9, pp 176–177. C. Theis calculated the duration of the envoy’s journey to northern Syria at 1.5 months (Ref 7, p 308). However, the journey was certainly made more difficult by the politically charged situation in the Near East.

<sup>56</sup> Ankhesenamun was the third daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. She was called “Ankhesenpaaten” during the Amarna period.

<sup>57</sup> Ref 18, citing E. A. Speiser 1941.

<sup>58</sup> Ref 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ref 39, p 640, tbl 1.

<sup>60</sup> The two stillborn fetuses whose mummies were found in Tutankhamun’s tomb are most likely his daughters. However, the identity of their mother could not be determined through DNA analysis (Ref 27, p 186; Ref 39, pp 640, tbl 1, 641, fig 2).

<sup>61</sup> Ref 26, p 292; Ref 40, pp 50–52. These rings provide the only clue as to what became of Ankhesenamun after Tutankhamun’s death.

<sup>62</sup> Ref 12, citing Ref 13.

<sup>63</sup> Ref 12, citing Ref 13.

A serious counterargument to the hypothesis that Ankhesenamun was Dakhamunzu is the letter EA 170 found in Tell el-Amarna. This letter mentions a Hittite campaign of revenge in the land of Amqu in the Hittite-Egyptian border region.<sup>64</sup> Scholars believe that this campaign was the vendetta for the murder of Prince Zannanza. They argue that the letter must have been written long before the death of Tutankhamun because by the time of his death, the city of Akhet-Aten (Tell el-Amarna) had long been abandoned.<sup>65</sup> This counterargument is weak, because Amqu was the target of at least two Hittite military campaigns, including one before the Dakhamunzu affair.<sup>66</sup> It is not clear which one is mentioned in the letter EA 170.

#### 2.4 Ay II and Ankhesenamun

But perhaps Ankhesenamun had no objection whatsoever to marrying Ay. She knew him well as a relative and advisor to Tutankhamun.<sup>67</sup> As far as we know, neither Ay nor Ankhesenamun had a son. The death of Ay II shortly after their marriage may have triggered the Dakhamunzu affair. This would shift the absolute chronology of events by a maximum of four years. The throne name of Ay II was Kheper-kheperu-Ra. The cuneiform transcription of this name as Ni-ib-ḥu-ru-ri-ia could again be explained by the fact that the Hittite scribe referred to him as “the lord, Kheperu-Ra.”<sup>68</sup> Ankhesenamun is not mentioned in the decoration of Ay II's tomb (WV23). This fuels speculation that she was erased as punishment for the Dakhamunzu affair.

So, if Nibkhururiya is identified with Ay II, and Ankhesenamun with Dakhamunzu, the disagreeable marriage candidate for the twice widowed Ankhesenamun must have been Horemheb. Horemheb's second wife was called Mutnedjmet, who is said to have been a younger relative of Nefertiti.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that “Mutnedjmet” was a second name or pet name of Ankhesenamun.<sup>70</sup> Horemheb was not related to the royal family and was therefore, more than any other candidate mentioned so far, a servant. He, an ambitious military commander, who had already led campaigns against the Hittite Empire under King Akhenaten,<sup>71</sup> could not allow a Hittite prince to thwart his plan for marriage and

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<sup>64</sup> Ref 9, p 177.

<sup>65</sup> Ref 9, p 177. The city of Akhet-Aten (Tell el-Amarna) was abandoned in the second year of Tutankhamun's reign (Ref 7, pp 316–317).

<sup>66</sup> Ref 2, p 255; Ref 5, p 83; Ref 8, pp 94, 97; Ref 21, pp 101–102, 104–105; Ref 41, 2nd paragraph (KUB 14.8, lines 13–24).

<sup>67</sup> A wall painting in Tutankhamun's tomb (KV 62) shows Ay performing the mouth-opening ritual on the mummy.

<sup>68</sup> See note 48.

<sup>69</sup> Ref 42, p 156.

<sup>70</sup> The name means “sweet/friendly Mut,” a reference to the goddess Mut.

<sup>71</sup> Ref 1, p 11; Ref 43.

kingship. It was easy for him to have his rival eliminated.<sup>72</sup> J. F. Miller's counterargument that Horemheb was still an official many years after the Dakhamunzu affair is poorly substantiated.<sup>73</sup>

In summary, with regard to the question of the identity of the Egyptian royal couple Nibkhururiya/Dakhamunzu, there are good reasons to exclude Akhenaten/Nefertiti, Akhenaten/Meretaten, Akhenaten/Kiya, and Semenkhkare/Meretaten. In contrast, Tutankhamun/Ankhesenamun and Ay II/Ankhesenamun are ideal candidates, especially considering that the respective heir to the throne was an official.<sup>74</sup>

## 2.5 Postscript

Given that the ignominious division of the Egyptian kingdom during the Hyksos period was still deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the Upper Egyptian elites, it is hard to believe that a widowed queen would have wanted a foreigner to be her husband and heir to the throne. Moreover, with Zannanza on the throne, Egypt would have become a province of the Hittite Empire. If in fact Dakhamunzu turned to Shuppiluliuma, it was either downright adventurous or naive. As already mentioned, the Hittite Empire was not an ally at that time, but, on the contrary, Egypt's most dangerous political rival in the Near East.<sup>75</sup> Not long before the affair, they had attacked Egyptian territory.<sup>76</sup> Despite all this, Dakhamunzu even emphasized that she had only written to Shuppiluliuma (see quotation 2). Why Shuppiluliuma, of all rulers? She could have turned to the allied king of Mittanni or a Levantine prince.

The following facts make the story even less credible: A letter from Upper Egypt to northern Syria took at least one month and a half.<sup>77</sup> If the addressee, Shuppiluliuma, was in the capital city of Khattusha,<sup>78</sup> the envoy had to travel hundreds of additional kilometers overland through Anatolia. The legate that Shuppiluliuma sent to Egypt before winter to evaluate the sincerity of Dakhamunzu's request did not return until the following spring.<sup>79</sup> With the three letters (Dakhamunzu's request, Shuppiluliuma's reply, Dakhamunzu's response), it took more than a year before Prince Zannanza set off for

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<sup>72</sup> Egyptian troops were stationed on the Hittite-Egyptian border (Ref 1, pp 33–34).

<sup>73</sup> Ref 36, p 252–254; cf. Ref 1, p 39; Ref 2, pp 245–246.

<sup>74</sup> To my knowledge, Ay II/Ankhesenamun have only been considered once so far (Ref 44 pp 33–38).

<sup>75</sup> The first peace treaty was soon broken by the Hittites (Ref 1, pp 41–47; Ref 5, p 83).

<sup>76</sup> As mentioned above, the Hittites had attempted to conquer the Egyptian-controlled region of Amqu shortly before the Dakhamunzu affair, (Ref 2, p 255; Ref 5, p 83; Ref 8, p 94; Ref 21, p 104–105).

<sup>77</sup> Ref 7, p 308.

<sup>78</sup> As indicated in KBo 5.6, fragment 28 (Ref 8, p 96).

<sup>79</sup> Ref 5, p 85; Ref 8, p 96.

Egypt.<sup>80</sup> Such long vacancy of the Egyptian throne is completely implausible, as it was an unacceptable violation of the all-encompassing order (Ma'at).<sup>81</sup>

So, did the Dakhamunzu affair actually take place? There are several copies (series of clay tablets) of the annals of the deeds of Shuppiluliuma, but only parts of each have been found so far.<sup>82</sup> The text KBo 5.6, which describes the Dakhamunzu affair, is written in unusually short columns with extremely large characters.<sup>83</sup> I believe that the Dakhamunzu affair was a story fabricated by Musili II and supported by feigned correspondence. He may have done this to blame the Egyptians for the death of his brother, Prince Zannanza, and to use it as anti-Egyptian propaganda for some time to come.<sup>84</sup>

#### Abbreviations

AAMO: Acta Antiqua Mediterranea et Orientalia; AeA: Ägyptologische Abhandlungen (Wiesbaden); AeUL: Ägypten und Levante/Egypt and the Levant; AOAT: Alter Orient und Altes Testament; AOF: Altorientalische Forschungen; BC: Before Christian era; CC: Creative Commons; CTH: Catalogue des textes hittites; DNA: Desoxyribonucleic acid; EA: El-Amarna (abbreviation used in the classification scheme of cuneiform Amarna letters); ed/eds: editor(s); et al.: et alii; Fig.: Figure; HAeB: Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge; JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association; JCS: Journal of Cuneiform Studies; JEA: The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology; JNES: Journal of Near Eastern Studies; KBo: Keilschrifttexte aus Boğazkale (formerly Boghazköy; archive of Hittite cuneiform tablets from the ancient city of Khattusha); Kêmi: Kêmi, Revue de philologie et d'archéologie Égyptiennes et Coptes; KUB: Keilschrifturkunden aus Boğazkale (similar as KBo); KV: Kings' Valley; MDAIK: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo; MMA: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; p/pp: page(s); plt: plate; Ref: reference; SAK: Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur; SAOC: Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation; SMAL: Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology and Literature; tbl: table; Trop. Med. Int. Health: Tropical Medicine and International Health; Vol.: volume; WV: West Valley (section of the Valley of the Kings, Thebes).

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Ref 2, p 257 (table); Ref 7, pp 306–310, 315, 325–326.

<sup>81</sup> In order to avoid this situation as far as possible, there were overlaps between the reigns of one king and the next (co-regency; Ref 32).

<sup>82</sup> Ref 2, p 241. The deeds of a Hittite Great King were recorded during his lifetime. Scholars believe that after his death, a “clean copy” of the annals was made on bronze tablets and deposited in a temple (Ref 2, p 245).

<sup>83</sup> Ref 2, p 242.

<sup>84</sup> At least three cuneiform text fragments provide evidence of a (vengeful?) Hittite campaign against Egypt relatively shortly after the Dakhamunzu affair (Ref 1, pp 25–26; Ref 2, pp 230–231, note 19; Ref 5, p 85; Ref 8, pp 97–98, 108; Ref 14, p 298).

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Fig. 1: Political spheres of influence in the Middle East between 1500 and 1300 BC. Image: Simeon Netchev, <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/14807/ancient-near-east-c1500-1300-bce> (detail; accessed September 19, 2025; CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Fig. 2: Cuneiform tablet from Boghazkoy (CTH 40), late 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, clay. Photo: Steve Lew, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stevelewalready/18728689045> (accessed September 12, 2025; CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).