



The Shape of a God: A Graphic Variant of Duau's Emblem

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Function
Logogram

Value
Dw³w [Duau]

The god Duau, a little-attested deity throughout Pharaonic history (LGG VII: 506), is primarily known as the patron of oculists (Grdseloff 1942; Leclant 1979: 294; Waugh 1995: 332–337). His name appears as early as the Old Kingdom, chiefly in titles (e.g., Jones 2000: 351, no. 1308, and 585, no. 2142), and then reappears in the Middle Kingdom (Ward 1982: 85, no. 710; Vachala 2015).

The god is typically identified by his emblem  (R60), though the object depicted atop the standard remains uncertain. It has been proposed that the sign represents a sack (Waugh 1995: 332) or a piece of meat (Grdseloff 1942: 208)—the last hypothesis that should be clearly distinguished from the clavicle sign used for the Letopolite nome  (contra Grdseloff 1942: 208). The distinction between the two signs is clearly illustrated in the tomb of Metjen, where they are explicitly differentiated—see, for instance, ‘d mr ḥm/Tp-ḥpš (?)’ (Schäfer 1913: 79) versus *ḥrp w³bw Dw³w* (Schäfer 1913: 85). The emblem is generally shown with a slightly bulging contour, tapering subtly toward the base. In some instances, however, it adopts a more egg-like shape (LGG VII: 506; Collombert 2010: 128), possibly reflecting uncertainty about its original referent and a subsequent reinterpretation of the sign over time.

A particularly unusual variant of Duau's emblem appears in the inscription of vizier Amenemhat at Wadi Hammamat, dated to Dynasty 11 (Couyat & Montet 1912: 79–81, no. 113). The official's title *ḥm Dw³w* (“servant of Duau”) is archaizing and otherwise attested only once, in the Old Kingdom (Jones 2000: 594, no. 2177); the addition *m pd(t) šs* (“in stretching the cord”), referring to a ritual act related to the demarcation of sacred space, is unattested elsewhere in connection with this title. In this inscription, the divine standard is surmounted by a distinctive oblong, empty-filled sign that departs significantly from the conventional rendering. This variant appears to be without parallel in the known record.



This distinctive form may be connected to Duau's association with the city of 'Ayn, located in the Memphite region on the east bank of the Nile, in the vicinity of Turah (Montet 1957: 44–46). There, the god is attested as the city's tutelary deity (Grdseloff 1942: 210–211; Waugh 1995: 334), as evidenced by (a) a cylinder seal from the reign of Pepi I referring to the king as *mry Dw³w nt [sic] 'nw*, "beloved of Duau of 'Ayn," and by (b) a Middle Kingdom coffin invoking *Dw³w nb 'nw*, "Duau, lord of 'Ayn." In both cases, the toponym 'nw is written with an oblong-shaped sign ——interpreted by Sethe (as reported by Gardiner 1947: 129) as a "piece of water"—enclosing either an eye  (a) or a fish  (b). One might wonder whether this toponym influenced the empty-filled oblong sign found in Amenemhat's inscription—perhaps as a visual echo of the place where the god was chiefly venerated.

Notably, the city of 'Ayn is also mentioned in a Wadi Hammamat inscription from the time of Darius I (Couyat & Montet 1912: 68, no. 93), where the architect Khnumibre is described as a "priest of the gods who are in 'Ayn ( )." The occurrence of this otherwise rare toponym in an inscription located only a few meters away is particularly striking—especially given that earlier inscriptions at Wadi Hammamat were often consulted and drawn upon by later expeditions when composing their own commemorative texts (Morel *in press*)—and certainly merits attention.

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Document: Commemorative Inscription of Vizier Amenemhat

Date: Middle Kingdom, late Dynasty 11, reign of Mentuhotep IV (ca. 1981–1974 BCE)

Provenance: Wadi Hammamat quarries (Eastern Desert, Egypt)

Current location: *In situ*

Object type: Rock inscription

Material: Rock face (greywacke)


Hieroglyphic source


MdC: U36-R60-G17-T10:V6*Z1

Transliteration: *hm Dwⁱw m pd(t) ss*

Translation: Servant of Duau in stretching the cord

Location: Line 7 of the inscription