

CHAPTER 2

POWER AND DIPLOMACY IN THE AMARNA LETTERS: CYPRO-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS IN THE MID-FOURTEENTH CENTURY BCE

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The 1887 excavations at Tell el-Amarna – the site of Akhenaten’s short-lived capital of Akhetaten – unearthed a cache of documents containing some 382 texts covering, at most, thirty years of the mid-fourteenth century BCE (1360-1331 BCE).¹ The documents cover the period before the capital was moved to Thebes, Akhenaten’s reforms were undone, and the site was finally abandoned.² The archive is primarily written in Akkadian cuneiform,³ and contains correspondence between the Egyptian court, its Levantine vassals, and its Near Eastern neighbours beginning in about the thirtieth year of Amenhotep III’s reign,⁴ and continuing during the reigns of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), and possibly a third king – either Smenkhkare or Tutankhamun.⁵ Of the corpus of Egyptian royal correspondence that would have been written during the fourteenth century BCE presumably only a small fraction remains, and then only from this short period, with none surviving from the earlier reigns of Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV.⁶ In addition to the extremely short period of time covered by the archive, further complications include the fact that we lack the Egyptian side of most of the correspondence and thus are reliant on context and educated guesswork to

¹ Moran, W.L. (1992) xxxiv. There is some uncertainty regarding the timespan according to Moran, which could be as little as 15 years.

² Moran, W.L. (1992) xxxiv.

³ The four exceptions to this are EA 15, EA 24, and EA 31-32, written in Assyrian, Hurrian, and Hittite, respectively. cf. Moran, W.L. (1992) xix.

⁴ Moran, W.L. (1992) xxxiv.

⁵ Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000a) 6.

⁶ Podany, A.H. (2010) 186-187.

fill in many of the blanks. The very nature of the archive poses additional difficulties; these were letters intended to convey a specific message to, or respond to a specific request or complaint from, specific rulers at a specific moment in time. They were part of a system of official communication with formal rules governing interactions with an ‘official’ language.⁷ Despite these limitations, the Amarna archive is an invaluable tool for examining the diplomatic networks and systems of the fourteenth century BCE Near East with regards to relations between the various major powers.

The letters to the pharaoh from the king of Alashiya throw a spotlight onto the external relations between Cyprus – all or part of which is generally agreed to be the location of Alashiya (see below) – and one of its most powerful neighbours during a specific historical interlude. One of the earliest references to Alashiya comes from an Egyptian Middle Kingdom description of a military campaign against it by Amenemhat II (c. 1900 BCE) against “Ura” and “Alasiya,”⁸ with further references found in several nineteenth century BCE documents from Alalakh, Babylon, and Mari. Alashiya continues to appear throughout the remainder of the Bronze Age and through the beginning of the Early Iron Age.⁹ While Cyprus had its own rich writing tradition during the Late Bronze Age (LBA) – Ferrara has identified 243 Cypro-Minoan texts from across the island, including every major coastal settlement and several inland sites¹⁰ – the textual evidence from beyond the island’s shores remains invaluable for understanding its relations with its Near Eastern neighbours when combined with the archaeological evidence. This paper is necessarily narrower in its focus upon the relationship between Cyprus and Egypt illustrated by the Alashiya Amarna Letters. The content of the letters will be considered alongside the context of the archaeological evidence of Cypro-Egyptian relations roughly contemporaneous to the Amarna period.

The Alashiya Problem

There is a great deal of discussion and debate surrounding the identification of all or part of LBA Cyprus with the kingdom of Alashiya of which the following serves as an overview of the main positions, as any examination of the Alashiya Amarna letters and their relation to Cyprus necessitates a

⁷ cf. Liverani, M. (2000) 26; Feldman, M.H. (2006) 147.

⁸ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 2.

⁹ Knapp, A.B. (1996); Knapp, A.B. (2008) 298.

¹⁰ Ferrara, S. (2012) 20-21.

discussion of the topic.¹¹ The majority opinion among scholars of the Cypriot Late Bronze Age agrees that Cyprus is the most likely candidate for the kingdom's location and that it corresponded to all or part of the island during this period.¹² However, there are still those who remain unconvinced.¹³ In his most recent discussion of the issue,¹⁴ Merrillees lays out his objections to the identification of Alashiya with all or part of LBA Cyprus. He states that an absence of identifiably palatial architecture from Bronze Age Cyprus "has long frustrated advocates of the equation of Alashiya with Cyprus, as it is undeniable that the king of Alashiya, who is conventionally seen as a peer of the pharaoh of Egypt, should have held sway from some grand building unit with all the attributes of the kind of monarchical establishment known from neighbouring centres, like, for example Ras Shamra/Ugarit."¹⁵ He is correct that no 'palaces' have so far been identified on any part of the island dating to the LBA as well as the difficulty in identifying what a centre of political administration (if any)¹⁶ would have looked like on Cyprus in the Bronze Age.¹⁷ However, this insistence that the king of Alashiya 'must' have had a palace such as those in the Near East is perhaps something of an assumption. Monumental architecture does exist on Cyprus, and while it is true that none has been found dating to LC I, it is also true that this may be a consequence of the state of excavation, with Merrillees himself acknowledging that no continuously occupied Middle and Late Cypriot town has been located and fully excavated to date.¹⁸ His point that no archive of Akkadian texts such as that from Amarna has been found on Cyprus¹⁹ is well made and makes the identification of Alashiya with Cyprus less certain to be sure, but he again places the emphasis on what has not been found rather than the evidence we have.

Merrillees fails to engage at all with the most recent attempt to identify the location of Alashiya using scientific data. The 2003 study by Goren *et al.* expanded upon two earlier studies that used neutron activation analysis

¹¹ Goren, Y. *et al.* (2003) 233.

¹² Georgiou, H. (1979) 85; Brown, M. (2013), 121; Crewe, L. (2007) 8; Knapp, A.B. (2008) 300-303; Mantzourani, E. *et al.* (2019) 1.

¹³ Merrillees, R.S. (2017); Merrillees, R.S. (2019).

¹⁴ Merrillees, R.S. (2019).

¹⁵ Merrillees, R.S. (2019) 1.

¹⁶ cf. Keswani, P. (1993); (1996).

¹⁷ Merrillees, R.S. (2019) 3.

¹⁸ Merrillees, R.S. (2019) 3.

¹⁹ Merrillees, R.S. (2019) 3.

(NAA) to examine the chemical composition of Amarna tablets EA 33, EA 34, EA 35, and EA 38.²⁰ These earlier studies determined that the clay used was neither from eastern Cyprus, nor were the tablets local copies made in Egypt, but they were unable to determine the tablets' place(s) of origin.²¹ Using a combination of petrography and inductively coupled plasma spectroscopy, Goren's team expanded upon these earlier studies by comparatively examining the same four Amarna tablets, a single letter arguably from the king of Alashiya found at Ugarit (RS L.1), a letter from the king of Carchemish to the king of Ugarit (RS 8.333), and nine Cypro-Minoan documents.²² Based on their findings they have suggested that the point of origin for the tablets may be the areas around Kalavassos-*Ayios Dhimitrios* and Alassa on the southern slope of the Troodos mountains (Fig. 2).²³ Smith notes that while there are tombs at Alassa dating to the early part of the Late Bronze Age, there is as yet no excavated settlement data prior to LC IIC (c. 1340/15-1200 BCE) at the earliest.²⁴ Additionally, some concerns have been raised regarding the methodology of the study, particularly with regards to sampling of clay sources in southern Anatolia and north-western Syria which have long been considered potential alternatives for the location of Alashiya,²⁵ although there is some disagreement as to whether this constitutes a serious issue.²⁶

²⁰ Goren, Y. *et al.* (2003).

²¹ Goren, Y. *et al.* (2003) 233-234.

²² Goren, Y. *et al.* (2003) 234.

²³ Goren, Y. *et al.* (2003).

²⁴ Smith, J. (2012) 40, n. 3.

²⁵ Gilbert, A.S. (2017).

²⁶ Knapp, A.B. (2008) 301.

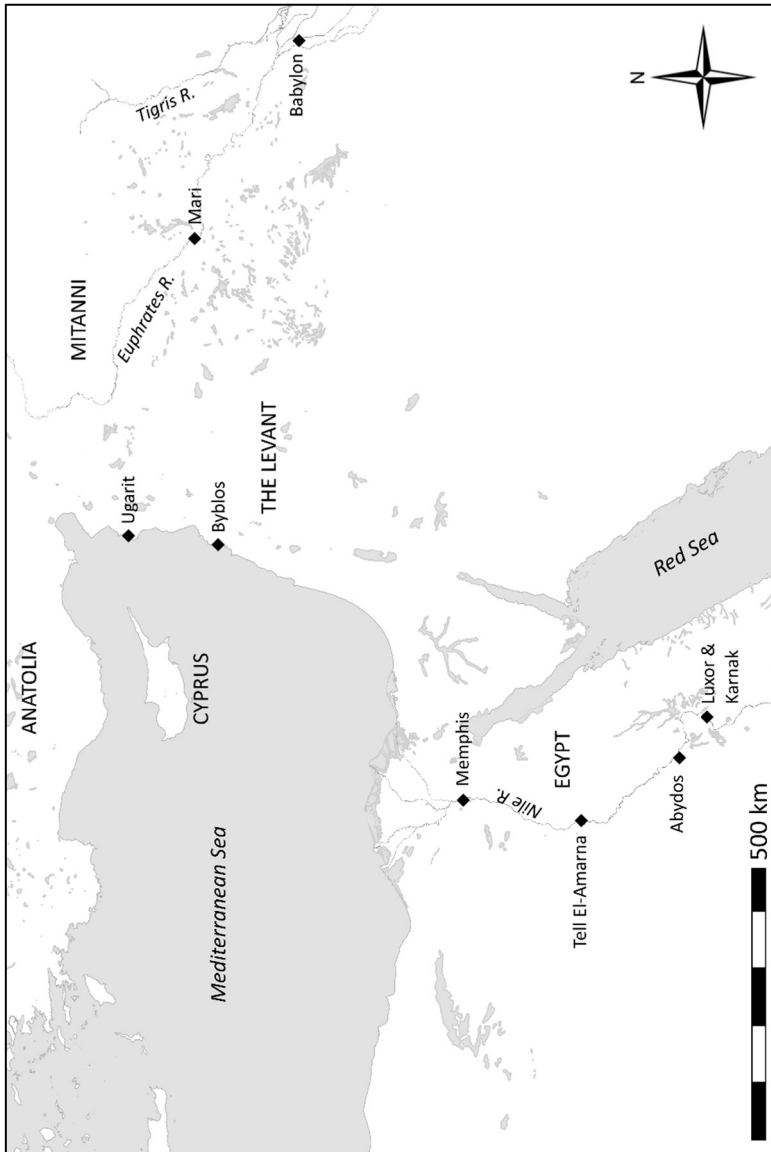


Figure 1: Map of the Late Bronze Eastern Mediterranean with locations mentioned in the text and important Egyptian sites (prepared by the author).

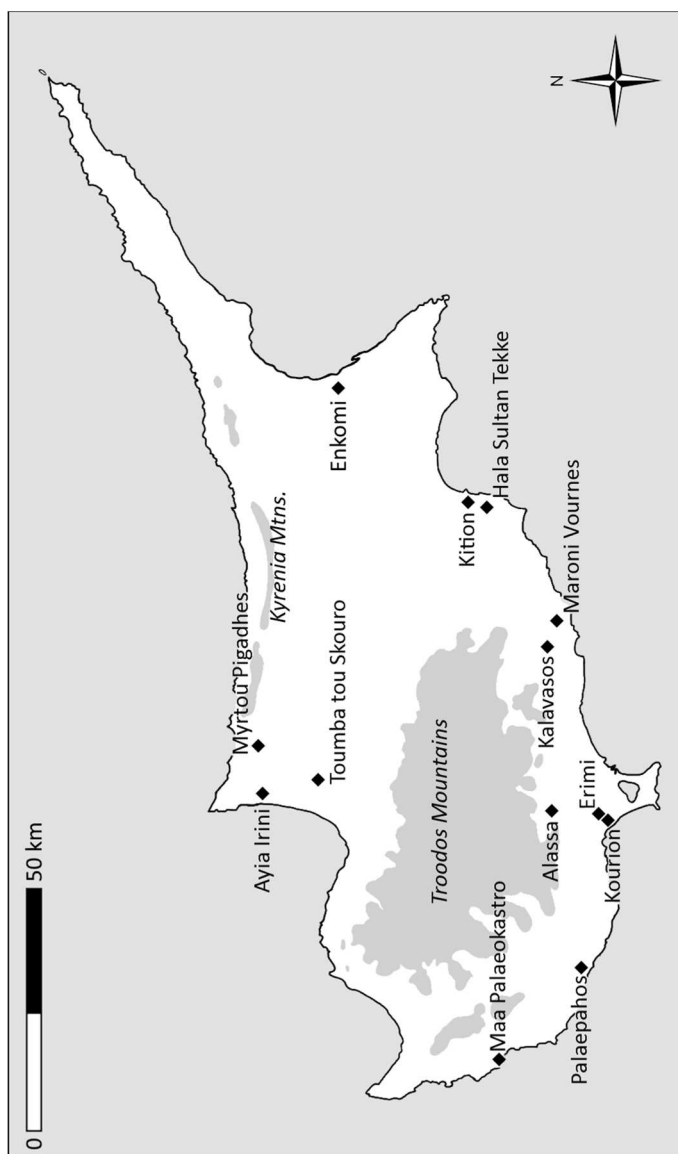


Figure 2: Map of Late Bronze Age Cyprus with major coastal sites (prepared by the author).

In a discussion of the Egyptian textual references to Alashiya, Kitchen argues that Alashiya cannot be located in southern Anatolia, as the area suggested – west of the mountains bordering the plains of Cilicia to the Kastlaya river – was taken up by kingdom of Tarhutassa, west of the river was Hittite Parha, then Lycia, at which point there is no room for a fully-fledged state.²⁷ Regarding a location in the Levant, Kitchen raises similar objections, stating that realistically, there is “neither physical nor hierarchical room for an Alasia in Northern Syro-Phoenicia” and that inland Syria is equally unlikely for the same reasons.²⁸ He also notes that, if Alashiya was located in Anatolia, it “was never molested by any imperial Hittite army marching into it overland” and that the only recorded conflict with Alashiya in Hittite records is a naval battle under Šuppiluliuma II²⁹ (late thirteenth century BCE).³⁰

The above is intended as a brief examination of the arguments for or against part or all of Cyprus being identified with Alashiya. While the location of Alashiya has yet to be conclusively proven, the current evidence, both textual and scientific, currently favours Cyprus as its location, and in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary this paper accepts the identification of part of Late Bronze Age Cyprus as the location of the kingdom.

Cypro-Egyptian Relations: The Archaeological Context

The archaeological evidence from Cyprus for contact with Egypt is challenging when attempting to investigate the period corresponding to the Amarna letters for several reasons, not least the fact that attempting to securely identify activity from such a short timespan (LCIIA-B and the beginning of IIC in Cypriot chronology) can be a difficult proposition at the best of times, and is further complicated by the current archaeological record. For instance Enkomi, the most extensively excavated site on the island, has largely not been excavated beyond the LC IIC/IIIA levels (1340/15-1100 BCE) and thus only just covers the very end of the Amarna period, with the rest of the occupation levels predominantly unexplored

²⁷ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 6.

²⁸ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 6.

²⁹ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 6-7.

³⁰ There is perhaps an earlier conflict mentioned on the same inscription (KBo XII 38) under Tudhaliya IV, but the method of invasion is not mentioned. See Beckman, G. in Knapp, B.A. (1996) 33.

outside of the relatively small Areas I and III excavated by Dikaios.³¹ The area around Alassa, as briefly noted above, has yet to see the excavation of settlement contexts dating earlier than LC IIC, and occupation at Kalavassos-*Ayios Dhimitrios* can only be securely traced to LC IIA:1 at the earliest.³² Furthermore, the import of Egyptian goods to Cyprus reached its zenith in the post-Amarna period between LC IIC and LC IIIA.³³

It should be noted that this is hardly evidence of a lack of higher level contact prior to LC IIC as has been argued in the past.³⁴ Cypriot MC II (1750-1650 BCE) and LC I (1650-1400 BCE) wares appear to have been relatively popular in Egypt,³⁵ and while Cypriot pottery exports throughout the Near East appear to decline from the LC II period, this has been attributed more to a shift towards a taste for Mycenaean pottery in the area (including on Cyprus) rather than a loss of contact.³⁶ Though earlier than the period in question, diplomatic contact between Cyprus and Egypt is attested from the fifteenth century BCE in the Annals of Tuthmosis III at Karnak, where the king of *Isy* – believed to be a form of *Alashiya*³⁷ – sent diplomatic gifts to the pharaoh on three separate occasions, two of which included copper, the production of which is well attested on Cyprus beginning in the LBA.³⁸

In terms of archaeological evidence from Cyprus, British Tomb 93 furnished some of the more striking pieces of evidence for elite (if not diplomatic) contact with Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt. The wealthiest tomb at the site, it was perhaps most intensively used during LC IIA-B (1400-1340/15 BCE) though there is evidence it saw use into LC IIC (1340/15-1200 BCE).³⁹ Among the finds was an exceptionally ornate Egyptian *wesekh* necklace.⁴⁰ The necklace is of Eighteenth Dynasty style and has close Egyptian parallels from the tomb of one of Tuthmosis III's Syrian wives (early fifteenth century BCE) as well as from the later tomb of 'Smenkhkare' (KV 55), successor of Akhenaten (died c. 1334 BCE). Of

³¹ Kiely, T. (2019) 262.

³² Fisher, K.D. *et al.* (2019) 477.

³³ Papasavvas, G. (2019) 237; Peltenburg, E. (1986).

³⁴ For the rebuttal of this, see Peltenburg, E. (1986).

³⁵ Hein, I. (2009).

³⁶ Peltenburg, E. (1989) 169.

³⁷ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 300-303.

³⁸ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 300-301; Ockinga, B.G. in Knapp, A.B. (1996) 42.

³⁹ Keswani, P. (1989) 62.

⁴⁰ Pectoral, gold (c. 1400-1100 BCE) The British Museum, Greek & Roman Antiquities, 1897, 0401.535.

particular interest is the fact that, according to Lagarce and Lagarce, *wesekh* necklaces are rarely found outside of Egypt, with other examples including a much earlier example from Byblos dating to the end of the third millennium BCE, another from Ebla dating to c. 1750-1700 BCE, and one contemporary to the Enkomi *wesekh* dating to the fourteenth or thirteenth centuries BCE.⁴¹ As well as these finds, there was also found a silver finger ring engraved with the name of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) and a scarab with the name of queen Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III and mother of Akhenaten.⁴² While the date of deposition is uncertain given the long use and the multiple inhumations from the tomb,⁴³ as well as the poor quality of the excavation,⁴⁴ the latest the objects would have been able to find their way to Enkomi is LC IIC (c. 1340/15-1200 BCE). As the tomb may have seen its most intense use in LC IIA-B and at the very least the finger ring and scarab date to roughly the same period – whereas the *wesekh* could date to the reign of Tuthmosis III (mid-fifteenth century BCE) – there is a possibility that the Aegyptiaca found in Tomb 93 found their way to Cyprus not long after their creation. That examples of *wesekh* necklaces are so rarely found outside of Egypt potentially increases the status of the necklace even beyond that held by virtue of its material, workmanship, and nature as an imported piece of exotica. That the Aegyptiaca from Tomb 93 comes from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the tomb itself is roughly contemporaneous to the Amarna period suggests at the very least contact between high status individuals in both Cyprus and Amarna Egypt.

A large scarab found in Tomb 89 from the Iron Age cemetery at Palaepaphos-Skales inscribed with the names of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye⁴⁵ offers more potential evidence for high level contact between Cyprus and Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt. Belonging to what Clerc identifies as the “série de la chasse aux lions”,⁴⁶ the scarab commemorates the lion hunts during the first ten years of Amenhotep III’s reign. Clerc states that these commemorative scarabs have generally been considered ‘court bulletins’ made at the palace, but also notes that due to variations in size and quality they could have been, like other scarabs, amulets intended to protect the wearer from harm “grâce au pouvoir du nom d'un souverain et d'une

⁴¹ Lagarce, J. and Lagarce, E. (1986) 109-110.

⁴² Keswani, P. (1989) 63.

⁴³ Crewe, L. (2009) 28.

⁴⁴ cf. Keswani, P. (1989) 52.

⁴⁵ Clerc, G. (1983) 389. The dimensions of the scarab are 90 mm long, 61.5 mm wide, and 34.5 mm thick.

⁴⁶ Clerc, G. (1983) 389. ‘Lion hunt series’.

inscription royale.”⁴⁷ In analysing the scarab’s significance, Clerc suggests that tomb 89 was of an important figure based on the richness of the material, and that the individual or their family had relations with Egypt based on the presence of the scarab as well as a faience seal with hieroglyphic inscription (T.89:55).⁴⁸ It is important to note that while this scarab may have come directly from Egypt to Cyprus, it is impossible to prove this, and it is equally possible that it spent some or most of the preceding centuries in circulation in Egypt before finding its way to the island and eventually into the archaeological record via Tomb 89.

We run into a similar issue with a faience sceptre head bearing a cartouche of Horemheb (late fourteenth century BCE) found at Hala Sultan Tekke in an early twelfth century BCE context. While it is certainly possible that it found its way to Cyprus during the reign of the pharaoh – who was, incidentally, responsible for undoing the last of Akhenaten’s reforms and launching a “program of annihilation” against his monuments and memory⁴⁹ – as the sceptre head, like the scarab from Palaepaphos, entered the archaeological record after a use-life of roughly two centuries, it is impossible to know at what point between its creation and its final deposition the object made its way to Cyprus.⁵⁰

This – necessarily brief – survey of the archaeological context of Cyprus during the Amarna period illustrates some of the key difficulties of attempting to definitively identify high level contact between Egypt and Cyprus during such a narrow period of time. That contact between Egypt and Cyprus was occurring is largely without doubt, however the fact that two of our potentially diagnostic items – the Amenhotep III scarab from Palaepaphos-*Skales* and the sceptre head from Hala Sultan Tekke – had such long use-lives and it is unclear when they arrived on the island, it becomes difficult to state with any certainty the precise nature of the contact. The *wesekh* from Tomb 93 is more certain evidence for high level contact with Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt when taken with the other Aegyptiaca from the tomb and the tomb’s date suggesting the *wesekh* entered the archaeological record during or shortly after the Amarna period. Whether the contact was direct or diplomatic in nature is difficult to say.

⁴⁷ Clerc, G. (1983) 390. “Thanks to the power of a ruler’s name and a royal inscription”.

⁴⁸ Clerc, G. (1983) 391.

⁴⁹ Papaavvas, G. (2019) 238.

⁵⁰ cf. Peltenburg, E. (1986).

Cypro-Egyptian Relations: The Letters

Of the 350 letters from the Amarna archive only eight are addressed to the Egyptian court from Alashiya,⁵¹ with a ninth (EA 36) having an uncertain point of origin due to its fragmentary state. Seven of these nine texts (EA 33-35 and EA 37-39) record the Alashiyan side of a series of diplomatic exchanges with the pharaoh, while EA 40 records an exchange between the chief official of Alashiya and his Egyptian counterpart. By looking at these letters it becomes possible to examine some of the dynamics of power between Egypt and a smaller but independent polity. It is important to remember that these letters were communication between a polity on Cyprus and an external power, and provide a very specific, very narrow point of view that makes discerning clues to the internal politics of the island dangerous at best.⁵² The remainder of this paper examines the content, diplomatic language, and etiquette of the eight Alashiya tablets as a means to better understand the relations between Egypt and Cyprus in the mid-fourteenth century and how Alashiya conducted itself in its dealings with its more powerful neighbour during the thirty years of the Amarna period.

While it is impossible to definitively establish an order for the Amarna tablets, the numbering system in use today and first implemented by J.A. Knudtson in 1907 is considered to be a reasonably accurate guideline to the chronology of the letters.⁵³ However, the order can only be taken as a rough guide for many of the letters, as they often lack the name of the sender, recipient, or both. The Alashiya letters suffer from issues of chronology in general as it is largely uncertain when within the period of correspondence they occurred.⁵⁴ Here they have been grouped in general terms from most to least positive for the purpose of – very tentatively – comparing the state of relations between Alashiya (Cyprus) and Egypt throughout the period of correspondence, and should not be taken as a statement on the chronology.

Of the Alashiya tablets, EA 33 is the only one for which we can even assume the identity of the pharaoh it is addressed to, in this case Akhenaten. The letter clearly mentions the accession of the Egyptian king to the throne,⁵⁵ and none of the letters in the archive date early enough to refer to the accession of Amenhotep III. As such, we can tentatively date this letter to

⁵¹ Moran, W.L. (1992) xv.

⁵² Smith, J. (2012) 40.

⁵³ Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000a) 1.

⁵⁴ Moran, W.L. (1992) xxxv.

⁵⁵ EA 33: 9-18

some point around the beginning of Akhenaten's reign (c. 1350 BCE). Of the surviving texts, EA 33 appears to be the most unambiguously positive. The letter, after its formulaic opening, records greetings of friendship from the king of Alashiya to the Egyptian pharaoh on his accession to the throne. The letter states that it is accompanied by ten talents of "fine copper" as part of an exchange of "gifts of peace" and goes on to request continued exchanges between the two rulers, asking that "year by ye[ar] let my messenger go [into your presence], and, on you[r part], year by year, your messenger should come from [your] pre[sence] into my presence..."⁵⁶ The tone is the most positive example of correspondence between Cyprus and Egypt in the Amarna archive – though it is not suggested that the remainder are negative – and can perhaps be seen as an attempt to establish good relations from the outset of a new pharaoh's reign.

EA 36 offers the least detail in terms of evidence for the interactions between the two kingdoms as it is a fragmentary excerpt from a larger tablet detailing the exchange of certain goods and containing several references to 'making' or 'doing' copper. It is, according to Moran, too damaged to interpret with any reliability beyond noting that some form of economic exchange was occurring.⁵⁷ Further complicating matters, the same damage makes the identity of the sender unclear, and means that the tablet may not be Alashiyan in origin.⁵⁸ The largely complete EA 37 is among the shortest of the (complete) Alashiya letters at twenty lines of text and contains a request for "pure silver" in return for the five talents of copper that were sent as the greeting gift,⁵⁹ echoing the request for "very great quantities" of silver found in EA 35.⁶⁰

EA 34 offers an apology from the king of Alashiya to the pharaoh for not knowing of an imminent sacrifice, exhorting the Egyptian ruler not to take the matter "at all seriously."⁶¹ The message also states that it was accompanied by 100 talents of copper and requests various Egyptian goods in return and includes a statement that an alliance should be made between the two rulers.⁶² In terms of interpretation, EA 34 may indicate a mild

⁵⁶ EA 33: 27-32.

⁵⁷ Moran, W.L. (1992) 109-110; Knapp, A.B. (1996) 23.

⁵⁸ cf. Feldman, M.H. (2006) 130.

⁵⁹ EA 37: 13-20.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the implications of the Alashiyan king's requests for silver, see Kassianidou, V. (2009).

⁶¹ EA 34: 7-15.

⁶² EA 34: 42-49.

rebuke by the king of Alashiya in the first section. The letter begins with “Message of the king of Alashiya to the king of Egypt, my brother”⁶³ placing the king of Alashiya before the pharaoh in the order of address. While this will be discussed in more detail below, this order contrasts with protocol found in the majority of the Amarna letters addressed from foreign powers whereby the recipient is placed first, except where the sender is of greater standing than the recipient or insult is intended. This may represent a direct contravention of diplomatic protocol and a calculated slight against the Egyptian ruler.⁶⁴ Combined with the claim of ignorance regarding the pharaoh’s impending sacrifice – or perhaps a lack of any real concern regarding it – EA 34 may represent the signalling of some degree of irritation with the pharaoh on the part of the Alashiyan king.

EA 35 may represent either a continuation of Alashiyan ire with the pharaoh hinted at in EA 34 or, as we cannot be sure of the order or what may have filled the gaps between the surviving letters, an entirely separate instance of displeasure. The letter states that it was sent alongside 500 units⁶⁵ of copper for a greeting gift and excuses the (apparently) small quantity on the basis that the “hand of Nergal is now in my country; he has slain all the men of my country and there is not a (single) copper worker”, but that the pharaoh should not be concerned.⁶⁶ While Moran translates the name as Nergal, he notes that the identity of the deity in question is uncertain and may also refer to the West Semitic Rašpu, or even a local Cypriot god of pestilence.⁶⁷ Either way, this likely refers to some sort of plague or sickness ravaging Alashiya at the time and is also given as the reason for the three year stay of the Egyptian king’s messenger.⁶⁸ EA 35 is not the only reference in the Amarna archive to an epidemic afflicting the region during the mid-fourteenth century, as several other mentions of plague appear in correspondence from Babylonia (EA 11:9-15),⁶⁹ Byblos (EA 96 and EA 362), and Megiddo (EA 244). Evidence of plague roughly contemporaneous to the Amarna Letters can also be found in the so-called Plague Prayers of Muršili II addressing the plague which ravaged the Hittite heartland during

⁶³ EA 34: 1-7.

⁶⁴ Moran, W.L. (1992) xxii-iii; Jönsson, C. (2000) 195.

⁶⁵ In his translation Moran has placed ‘talents’ in brackets.

⁶⁶ EA 35: 10-15.

⁶⁷ Moran, W.L. (1992) 108 n. 3.

⁶⁸ EA 35: 35-39.

⁶⁹ cf. EA 7: 8-13. There is possible mention in this letter which indicates the king of Babylonia was ill and not receiving visitors.

the reign of Šuppiluliuma I (mid-fourteenth century BCE) and “decimated the population for more than two decades.”⁷⁰

That the hand of an indeterminate plague god represents a pestilence afflicting Alashiya at this time is important for two reasons. Firstly, the king of Alashiya appears to be attempting to excuse a less impressive greeting gift as beyond his control – in this case, as the result of a literal act of god – rather than it being a deliberate slight. If this is the case, a similar tactic can be seen in Letter EA 7 from the king of Babylon complaining to the pharaoh that he received no ‘get well’ message while he was ill (with plague?) and was only appeased when the pharaoh’s messenger noted the very great distances between the two kingdoms.⁷¹ Jönsson remarks that the idea that the Babylonian king was unaware of the distance between his kingdom and Egypt is patently absurd, but argues that the reason for its inclusion becomes clear later in the letter when the Babylonian king blames the smaller than average greeting gift sent on the great distance between the two kingdoms.⁷² Jönsson argues that this may have been an attempt to symbolically express discontent with the pharaoh while also avoiding impressions of stinginess or poverty.⁷³

The plague excuse in EA 35 may have had a similar intent, though if this is the case the measures taken suggest that the king of Alashiya may have been rather more vexed than his Babylonian colleague since the same reason is given for the three-year delay of the Egyptian messenger.⁷⁴ As the treatment of messengers was a crucial part of the diplomatic process throughout the Near East in the LBA, a three-year delay in the return of the Egyptian messenger would have had more serious implications. The seizure of foreign messengers is perhaps analogous (if more unpleasant for the messenger) to the modern practice of expelling a foreign nation’s diplomats as a mark of extreme displeasure. Jönsson points to several instances in the Amarna letters where the detainment of messengers served as an indication of cooling relations and hostility. Other examples of this can be found in EA 28 and again in EA 29, where Tushratta, the Mitannian king, repeatedly threatens to detain the pharaoh’s messenger until he agrees to release Tushratta’s, and is implied in EA 38 (see below).⁷⁵ Alone, the excuse of the

⁷⁰ Singer, I. and Hoffner, H.A. (2002) 46.

⁷¹ EA 7: 14-25.

⁷² Jönsson, C. (2000) 198.

⁷³ Jönsson, C. (2000) 198-99.

⁷⁴ EA 35: 35-39.

⁷⁵ Jönsson, C. (2000) 197, 200.

figurative ‘hand of Nergal’ could be taken as a legitimate reason for a reduced greeting gift and a delayed messenger considering the potential corroboration of an epidemic, but the remainder of the letter casts doubt upon this interpretation.

Between these two sections is a request that the Egyptian king send “silver in very great quantities”⁷⁶ and that he also provides the payment due for timber previously provided to the pharaoh.⁷⁷ Kassianidou has suggested the possibility that the silver requested was a strengthened demand to pay for the lumber.⁷⁸ There is an implication in this demand for payment that the Egyptian ruler may have reneged on a previous commitment. If this is the case, then we have a possible reason for the king’s annoyance. The “hand of Nergal” could thus be seen as a justification intended to provide plausible deniability for a smaller greeting gift and detained messenger in response to an earlier insult. The potential plague ravaging the region may have provided the Alashiyan king with a convenient pretext that pharaoh could not reasonably object to – plague is, after all, not something one would want accidentally carried back via diplomatic courier.⁷⁹

The letter continues by requesting the repatriation of the belongings of an Alashiyan man who died in Egypt, the goods to be handed over to the Alashiyan messenger.⁸⁰ The penultimate section of the letter is somewhat difficult. Moran translates the first part of lines 49-53 as “You have not been put (on the same level) with the king of Hatti or the king of Shankhar”⁸¹ whereas the same lines are translated in Knapp’s volume as “Do not make an alliance with the King of Hatti or the King of Shankhar” – another name for Babylonia used in the letters⁸² – which is argued to be a better fit for the historical context.⁸³ Mantzourani *et al.* follow Moran’s interpretation of these lines and contend that the king of Alashiya is boasting of his relationship with the kings in question.⁸⁴ The first can be seen as both a slight against the pharaoh as well as a pointed reminder that Alashiya has

⁷⁶ EA 35: 19-22.

⁷⁷ EA 35: 27-29.

⁷⁸ Kassianidou, V. (2009) 54-55.

⁷⁹ cf. EA 96: 1-11 where Rib-Hadda bars men from Sumer from entering Byblos as there “is a pestilence in Sumer.”

⁸⁰ EA 35: 30-34.

⁸¹ Moran, W.L. (1992) 108.

⁸² Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000) 7.

⁸³ Knapp, A.B. (1996) 22.

⁸⁴ Mantzourani, E. *et al.* (2019), 11. Mantourani, E. *et al.* incorrectly identify Shankhar with Mitanni. cf. Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000a) 7.

cordial relations with Egypt's largest rivals, whereas the second interpretation would emphasise Alashiya's ties to Egypt in requesting that they not make common cause with Hatti or Babylonia.

EA 38 is a more definitive example of a less than cordial interaction between Alashiya and Egypt during the period. The letter is a response to Egyptian accusations of piracy and banditry against Egypt alongside "men of Lukki" – possibly the Lukka people of Anatolia mentioned in Hittite documents and later associated with the "Sea Peoples" in a late thirteenth century BCE Egyptian inscription.⁸⁵ The king of Alashiya refutes the accusation by stating that the Lukki in question "year by year, seize villages in my own country".⁸⁶ He then states that if Alashiyans were indeed present, it was not his doing, and that if any were captured they should be returned to be dealt with or that the pharaoh should do with them as he sees fit.⁸⁷ The letter's penultimate paragraph states that the pharaoh had not returned the king's messenger and that the messenger sent with EA 38 was the king's brother. Moran notes here that this is only one possible interpretation due to the poor quality of the writing for this section.⁸⁸ That the writing for an official piece of diplomatic correspondence is described by Moran as "inept" is interesting, though it would be unwise to draw any conclusions beyond poor 'penmanship'. The detainment of the Alashiyan messenger has not been disguised as an unfortunate happenstance and can be seen as a direct result of the pharaoh's suspicions of Alashiyan aggression. That the messenger sent with the tablet is described as the Alashiyan king's brother is of note, as a review of the international correspondence (EA 1–44) shows that the only other instance of the word "brother" applied to anyone other than the recipient or the sender is found in EA 17 where Tushratta states that he killed those responsible for the murder of his brother, Artasumara.⁸⁹ Alternatively, the word "brother" used to refer to actual kin occurs comparatively frequently in the correspondence from Egyptian vassals, though mostly those from or about Byblos, as Rib-Hadda was overthrown and ejected by his brother.⁹⁰ Whether meant literally, or as a declaration of

⁸⁵ Bryce, T. (1974) 395-397.

⁸⁶ EA 38: 7-12.

⁸⁷ EA 38: 19-22.

⁸⁸ Moran, W.L. (1992) 112 n. 4.

⁸⁹ EA 17: 19.

⁹⁰ EA 137; EA 138; EA 142; EA 162.

the Alashiyan king's regard,⁹¹ this may suggest that he considered it a serious matter.

EA 39 and 40 were, according to Moran, written by the same scribe, likely one after the other, and delivered at the same time.⁹² EA 39 is from the Alashiyan king to the pharaoh, while EA 40 is addressed from the chief courtier of Alashiya to his Egyptian counterpart. The former is tied with EA 37 for being the shortest of the Alashiya letters at twenty lines of text and is an exhortation to swiftly release the Alashiyan messenger delivering the letter, followed by a statement that the merchants apparently accompanying the messenger are to be released promptly and that no one "making a claim" in the pharaoh's name is to approach them or the king of Alashiya's ship.⁹³ EA 40 is slightly longer at twenty-eight lines and contains similar content regarding the merchants and the ship mentioned in EA 39.⁹⁴ EA 40 differs in that it mentions a previous lack of reciprocity – possibly regarding a greeting gift – on the part of the Egyptian 'governor'⁹⁵ and then mentioning the greeting gift sent with the letter.⁹⁶ The unusual nature of these two missives in comparison to the other Alashiya letters makes any conclusive statements about their tone difficult, although the lack of any mention of a greeting gift in the king's missive (EA 39) combined with the mention of a lack of reciprocity in the governor's may suggest some tension.

While the Alashiya tablets are few in number, certain trends become apparent when compared to the rest of the international correspondence in the Amarna archive. Of the Alashiya tablets all but EA 34 place the recipient before the sender in the greeting. While Moran argues this is indicative of some level of deference towards the pharaoh,⁹⁷ Jönssen states that this was an aspect of the particular diplomatic 'code' used among the Great Kings of the time, and to break this convention was a deliberate insult or provocation.⁹⁸ This distinction affects how we read the Alashiya tablets, with Moran's interpretation leading to the implication that Alashiya deferred to Egypt in their interactions, while Jönssen's makes it a matter of standard diplomatic protocol among foreign powers. It is interesting to note EA 114 from the

⁹¹ For another use of the term "brother" in reference to either a blood relation or a member of the sender's immediate entourage, see Moran, W.L. (1992) 313, n. 2.

⁹² Moran, W.L. (1992) 113 n. 1.

⁹³ EA 39: 14-20.

⁹⁴ EA 40: 16-20, 24-28.

⁹⁵ EA 40: 6-11.

⁹⁶ EA 40: 12-15.

⁹⁷ Moran, W.L. (1992) xxii-iii

⁹⁸ Jönsson, C. (2000) 200.

king of Byblos, an Egyptian vassal, which places the sender first and the recipient second, albeit using far more obsequious language.⁹⁹ In this case, the sender is clearly subordinate to the pharaoh, but the order of address fails to conform to the apparent protocol.

Further support for Jönssen's interpretation can be seen in the letters from kingdoms firmly outside of Egyptian control. The ten letters from Tushratta, king of the Mitanni, all place the recipient first in the greeting, even those which indicate a cooling of relations between the two Great Kings such as EA 28 and EA 29 briefly mentioned above.¹⁰⁰ Even EA 26, which is addressed to the pharaoh's mother, Queen Tiy, regarding the fulfilment of a promise made by her late husband, places the recipient first.¹⁰¹ The same trend is found in the letters from Babylonia to Egypt (EA 2–12). Given these examples, it seems more reasonable to interpret the format of 'recipient first, sender second' found in most of the Amarna letters as more of a diplomatic protocol or show of manners than a display of deference to the king of Egypt.

That breaking this convention would constitute a serious slight is somewhat less clear given that EA 114 is a plea from a vassal to his overlord for aid against their enemies, and EA 28 and 29 announce the detainment of the pharaoh's messengers as an indication of displeasure but refrain from breaking this protocol. Further obfuscating the matter is EA 42, which Jönssen points to as indicative of the potentially serious implications.¹⁰² This letter from the Hittite king upbraids pharaoh for placing his name first on a previous piece of correspondence, stating "...as to the tablet that [you sent me], why [did you put] your name over my name? And who (now) is the one who upsets the good relations [between us] ...".¹⁰³ In contrast, EA 41 shows Šuppiluliuma I committing the same diplomatic *faux pas* he accuses the pharaoh of in EA 42 by placing himself first in the order of address.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, we lack the Egyptian side of this correspondence and as such have no insight into the response that may have resulted. As it is, the inconsistency – and depending on the chronological order of EA 41 and EA 42 the hypocrisy – of the order of address across the body of

⁹⁹ EA 114: 1-7.

¹⁰⁰ EA 17: 1-10; EA 19: 1-8; EA 20: 1-7; EA 21: 1-12; EA 23: 1-12; EA 24: 1-7; EA 27: 1-6; EA 28: 1-11; EA 29: 1-5.

¹⁰¹ EA 26: 1-6.

¹⁰² Jönssen, C. (2000) 195.

¹⁰³ EA 42: 15-26.

¹⁰⁴ EA 41: 1-5.

international Amarna texts makes it difficult to determine exactly how insulting such a break with protocol was. The answer to this is likely dependent on the context of who issued the insult, whether it was a one-off occurrence or part of a longer trend, or whether the insult was compounded by additional slights within the same missive. Here we re-encounter the largest challenge presented by the Amarna archive; that it is far from complete, and that even for those letters that survive we have only half of the picture. Regarding the letter from the king of Alashiya that dispenses with this established protocol (EA 34); it is difficult to imagine that such an action was accidental given the other Alashiya letters all follow protocol. As noted previously, it seems possible that this was a deliberate but relatively minor slight against the pharaoh. Unfortunately, we do not know if there was an Egyptian reaction such as we see from the Hittite king in EA 42, or if there was a subsequent Alashiyan exhortation to not take the matter ‘at all seriously’ as with the missed sacrifice in EA 34.

While the order of address has a multitude of implications, the *form* of address within the Amarna letters is perhaps more important when attempting to parse the relations between Egypt and the various powers it was in regular contact with. With few variations¹⁰⁵ the rulers of powerful independent kingdoms referred to pharaoh as ‘brother’, suggesting a symbolic familial relationship and re-contextualising the ‘international’ character of diplomatic relations onto a much more ‘local’ and personal level.¹⁰⁶ The use of the term ‘brother’ has been seen by Amarna period scholars as an indication of relative importance – those who were permitted to use the term of address were part of the exclusive ‘club’ of Great Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean in the mid-fourteenth century BCE¹⁰⁷ – specifically Egypt, Babylonia, Mitanni, Hatti, and Assyria.¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that Alashiya is specifically *not* included in this list, and yet it appears to occupy a place among the Great Powers with regards to the Amarna correspondence, as the king of Alashiya refers to the pharaoh as ‘brother’ in every message. In contrast it bears mentioning a text more recently discovered at Ugarit in the ‘House of Ourtenou’, as Kitchen summarises nicely the king of Alashiya refers to the king of “big wealthy Ugarit as his ‘son’, which is fourteenth to thirteenth century BCE diplomatic-speak when

¹⁰⁵ See EA 19-21, EA 23, EA 24, and EA 27-EA 29 where Tushratta refers to the pharaoh as both ‘brother’ and ‘son-in-law’ in the initial greeting, supplementing the symbolic familial relationship with a legal one.

¹⁰⁶ cf. Liverani, M. (2000) 18.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000a) 6; Liverani, M. (2000) 18.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (2000a) 6.

addressing a ruler of inferior rank.”¹⁰⁹ This is not an isolated incident, either, as two late thirteenth century BCE letters written by the king of Ugarit refer to the king of Alashiya as holding superior rank.¹¹⁰

An argument has been put forward by Mantzourani *et al.* that Alashiya’s importance as a trading partner as well as its position beyond Egypt’s sphere of influence were sufficient reasons for Egypt to pretend that Alashiya was one of the Great Powers.¹¹¹ The importance of Egypt’s economic relationship with Cyprus has been emphasised by Kassianidou who argues that the amount of copper provided by Alashiya just mentioned in the surviving Amarna letters could be as much as 29.000 kg, and also noting that Alashiya’s is the only king mentioned in the Amarna letters to send copper to Egypt.¹¹² She also references the calculations done by Kitchen on the copper and tin found on the Ulu Burun wreck which would have produced roughly eleven tonnes of bronze, which could have then produced more than enough swords to “outfit an army such as the one led by Ramses II against the Hittites at Kadesh”.¹¹³ Even if we consider the assumption of the amount of copper sent by Alashiya to Egypt with the surviving letters overly optimistic, the amount is still significant. There is also textual evidence for close Cypro-Hittite relations in the mid-fourteenth¹¹⁴ and early thirteenth centuries BCE¹¹⁵ from Hattusa, as well as two mid-thirteenth century BCE texts from Ugarit detailing the practice of exiling Near Eastern undesirables to Cyprus/Alashiya from the Hittite sphere of influence.¹¹⁶ Combined with the more belligerent interpretation of the reference to Hatti and Babylonia in EA 35 given above, there is perhaps an argument to be made that Alashiya’s ties to Hatti lent it a degree of insulation when dealing with Egypt, which combined with Alashiya’s potential economic importance to give its king the privilege of referring to the pharaoh as ‘brother’.

¹⁰⁹ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 4.

¹¹⁰ RS 20.168; RS 20.238; see Beckman, G. in Knapp, A.B. (1996) 26-27.

¹¹¹ Mantzourani, E. *et al.* (2019).

¹¹² Kassianidou, V. (2013) 138.

¹¹³ Kassianidou, V. (2013) 138.

¹¹⁴ KUB XIV 14 obv:16-22 – see Beckman, G. in Knapp, A.B. (1996) 31.

¹¹⁵ KUB I 1:18-19 – see Beckman, in Knapp, A.B. (1996) 31-32.

¹¹⁶ RS 17.352 and RS 17.035 – see Beckman, G. (1996) 164-65.

Concluding Remarks

By examining the archaeological evidence from Cyprus we can state with certainty that there was contact between Egypt and Cyprus before, during, and after the Amarna period. It is also evident that high-status Egyptian objects were making their way to the island. However, based on the currently available data, the identification of diplomatic contact between the two during the Amarna period remains tentative, though certainly possible. If we accept the – likely – conclusion that Alashiya was located in Cyprus, the textual evidence from the Amarna letters raises similar issues. While they enable us to gain snapshots of the relations between the two kingdoms during this thirty-year period, the nature of the evidence – we are working from only eight letters of largely uncertain chronological order – makes attempting to plot the course of relations from the beginning to the end of the period just not possible. We can, however, draw some general conclusions.

Despite Egypt being far more economically and militarily powerful, the king of Alashiya was accorded a similar, possibly symbolic, degree of standing to that of the pharaoh's genuine peers in Hatti, Babylon, and Assyria in being permitted to refer to the pharaoh as 'brother', setting Alashiya apart from the kingdoms from Ugarit in the north, south to Ascalon and many inland kingdoms as well.¹¹⁷ As shown above, we can see that while EA 33 is cordial and EA 37, 39, and 40 can be said to be neutral at worst, there is at least some evidence in EA 34 – the order of address and the seeming dismissal of the pharaoh's rebuke – that the king of Alashiya was not cowed by its larger, more powerful neighbour. EA 35 provides more secure evidence for this, as despite the disparity in power and prestige, the king of Alashiya appears – in the admittedly limited evidence available – to feel secure enough to offer deliberate slight to the pharaoh, possibly hold his messenger hostage, and then – depending on the translation – boast about his ties to Babylon and Hatti. The Alashiya shakily outlined in the Amarna letters does not appear inclined to shy from diplomatic confrontation with the pharaoh despite the power differential, though EA 38 may show the limits of how far the king of Alashiya was willing to push his luck.

¹¹⁷ Kitchen, K.A. (2009) 4.

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