

Bronze Age Egypt and Globalisation

Bronze Age Egypt and Globalisation

By

David A. Warburton

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Bronze Age Egypt and Globalisation

By David A. Warburton

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by David A. Warburton

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-9215-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-9215-5

[...] countenancing the idea of globalization [...means that] once the realm of 'the international' is problematized in [International Relations] theory, such that the international system can no longer be 'treated as an ontological given', the scope for theoretical transformation vastly increases [...allowing] a more obviously historicist approach, [...] The idea of a sustained historical narrative isn't all that hard to conceive, but it does impose exacting criteria on any attempt to overcome tempocentrism [...]

Barrie Axford (2012: 123, 125)

In this spirit, this volume is dedicated to the memory of

André Gunder Frank (1929-2005),

Elmar Edel (1914-1997),

and Rolf Gundlach (1931-2016).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	ix
Figure Acknowledgements.....	xi
Some Abbreviations	xiii
Preface	xv
Clarifications	xvii
Some Dates.....	xxiv
Introduction	1
The List: Ideology & Science.....	19
The Late Bronze Age Near Eastern World System	27
Religion & Ideology.....	41
Bronze Age Civilisations.....	53
Communications: Knowledge, Science & Literature	73
The Joy of Love.....	83
Economics: Subsistence & Trade.....	95
Historical Understanding & Theoretical Implications.....	103
Further Reading and References.....	109

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. (Sketch map of) The Limits.....	xxiii
Fig. 2. (Sketch map of) The Core	xxvi
Fig. 3. Throne scene with list of Egyptian enemies.....	3
Fig. 4. List of Aegean placenames.....	5
Fig. 5. Minoan fresco from Tell ed-Daba'a.....	6
Fig. 6. Tablet fragment from Tell ed-Daba'a.....	7
Fig. 7. Vessel lid from Knossos with name of Hyksos king Khiyan	8
Fig. 8. Scene of Tribute from TT 100.....	10
Fig. 9. Egyptian and Cycladic Prehistoric Figurines	12
Fig. 10. Schematic distribution of early gold ingots	14
Fig. 11. Schematic distribution of early gold beads.....	15
Fig. 12 Schematic distribution of early alabaster vessels	16
Fig. 13. Schematic distribution of barrel-shaped stone beads.....	17
Fig. 14. Royal stelæ from First Dynasty at Abydos.....	42
Fig. 15. Schematic reproduction of Second Dynasty Seal Impression	43
Fig. 16. Royal Cemetery at Abydos.....	45
Fig. 17. Sketch of Egyptian stand balance.....	48
Fig. 18. Scenes of urban industrial work	52
Fig. 19. Houses from ancient Elephantine.....	57
Fig. 20. Urbanisation. Schematic version of Egyptian cities.....	57
Fig. 21. Orthogonal town planning.....	58
Fig. 22. Bust of Queen Nefertiti	59
Fig. 23. Egyptian image of a New Kingdom official's wife: Tawy.....	60
Fig. 24. Middle Kingdom Girdle	61
Fig. 25. Sketch map of origins of materials.....	61
Fig. 26. Scarab of Tutankhamun.....	62
Fig. 27. Glass vessel	63
Fig. 28. Fragment of jasper bust.....	64
Fig. 29. Composite jewellery of Tutankhamun	65
Fig. 30. Egyptian glass Ingot.....	66
Fig. 31. Prehistoric lapis lazuli figurine.....	67
Fig. 32. Egyptian ivory bracelet	68
Fig. 33. Egyptian silver lion	68
Fig. 34. Page of papyrus with handwriting.....	78
Fig. 35. Egyptian scene of guests at a party.....	84
Fig. 36. Dark skinned Egyptian musicians	85

Fig. 37. Sketch of Ostrakon British Museum EA 501714 88
Fig. 38. Sketch of Egyptian hand balance 89
Fig. 39. Egyptian scene of a port 96
Fig. 40. Depictions of Ouroboros 104

FIGURES ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful for Fig. 4, modified after Edel & Görg 2005, with kind permission of Stefan Wimmer; Fig. 22, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. ÄM 21300, Photo: Margarete Büsing; Fig. 31, The Egyptian figurine: AN1896-1908. E.1057 Figure of a woman, early Dynastic Period (c.2950-2575 BC) Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (their date applies to the findspot, not the date of the figurine, DAW).

Others are public domain, many of the best of them from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for which all should be very grateful. Many I created myself using what I could find (my apologies). Others are through the GNU Free Documentation Licence or attached to the Wikipedia Creative Commons licences; some have been extensively adapted:

- Fig. 5, Martin Dürschnabel;
- Fig. 7, Schuppi;
- Fig. 14, Guillaume Blanchard & لاروسا;
- Fig. 16, Laszlovszky András;
- Fig. 19, Olaf Tausch;
- Fig. 20, Didia;
- Fig. 30, Martin Bahman;
- Fig. 40, Haltopub.

SOME ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANET</i>	see Further Reading and References
AD	Common Era
BC	Before Common Era
BP	“Before Present”
<i>CT</i>	see literature
Dyn.	“Dynasty” (Egyptian)
MK	Middle Kingdom (see chronological table)
NK	New Kingdom (see chronological table)
OK	Old Kingdom (see chronological table)
P.	Papyrus (plus name)
TSJ’s	Transport Stirrup Jar(s) (Bronze Age Aegean amphora)
TT	Numbered private Theban Tombs
<i>Urk.</i>	See Further Reading and References

PREFACE

Globalisation is associated with recent decades and rapid change – neither of which apply to Ancient Egypt. However, Axford states that one necessary task is establishing the historical origins and development of an international system that can be theoretically examined, and that takes us back much further than most imagine.

Ancient Egypt was the only major player in the Bronze Age World System to survive the entire Bronze Age (from 3000 BC to 1200 BC), and is thus the pre-eminent candidate when focusing on the origins and early development of the first international system. However, in dealing with Ancient Egypt, all investigations begin and end with lost and fragmentary stones offering little or no soil for theory, let alone real history. Although some progress has been made in integrating Egypt into early history, most of the work really remains to be done.

Here, I present some of what I find relevant to understanding the origins and development of interregional interaction motivated by political and economic goals. My aim is, using this debris, to explore aspects of how – for the first two millennia of history – Egypt was interacting with the civilised and barbaric worlds, with unexpected and unintentional repercussions. Isolating Egypt's role in the Bronze Age leads to elements in our world at large, some of which offer hints about cognitive globalisation through time. Thus, as I advance through the book, there is a progressive tendency to explore how Egypt had an impact contributing to our understanding of our world.

The dedication includes (a) Gunder Frank, who understood what we should seek; (b) Elmar Edel, who found a lot (without guidance from sociologists), but did not write it all down for us; and (c) Rolf Gundlach, who lacked the time to analyse everything. We can ponder on what Gunder Frank & Co. think, but will never know how Gundlach and Edel would have put it.

You have the following work from me because Juan Carlos Moreno García unexpectedly asked me to write it, saying that I was the only one who could do it, and that it had to be short and to the point. I could not quite understand how ancient Egypt can be associated with globalisation, nor can I judge his choice of the author, but realised that something could be said, and appreciated that if so, then he was right that it had to be brief. Therefore,

this advice unfortunately forbids full coverage – but it is better not to aim at being exhaustive as that would misleadingly exaggerate. Rather, it is offered as a taste of what can be found. It is thanks to the Cambridge Scholars Publishing team that my manuscript has become what it is; the failings that linger are mine. I hope that some can appreciate what is here, but it is more important that we can carry on with the project (which can only be done together).

Berlin, Summer 2022.

CLARIFICATIONS

Geography

Ancient Egypt was not that rectangle in Northeast Africa that you see on modern maps, but rather the fertile “Black Land” of the oasis of the Nile Valley to the North of the First Cataract at Aswan, and the Delta. The foreign lands were the “Red Land”: the deserts to East and West which stretched – with interruptions – from the Atlantic to India.

Languages & Writing

In the ancient Near East of the second millennium BC, two of the most important languages were Egyptian (written in hieroglyphs in stone, and cursive hieratic on papyrus) and Akkadian (written in cuneiform in stone and clay). In the second millennium BC, Egyptian was not spoken much outside Egypt (except among the neighbours), and the diplomatically accepted language was usually Akkadian of a Babylonian dialect. Both these languages were Semitic (*i.e.*, related to Arabic and Hebrew), but Akkadian was more influenced by Sumerian than other Semitic languages, and Egyptian further removed from the Semitic homeland, largely isolated in Africa on its Western periphery. Thus, they are not ideal prototypical Semitic languages – even if they are among the oldest.

Yet, they have many points in common. One is the .t suffix or ending, denoting females and grammatically feminine phenomena. Along with many other Semitic languages, they had a phonetic sh (*shin* type)-sound, transliterated as š (with the Hebrew ש becoming the Greek ὀ-mega ω, where a *shin*-sign was useless, but re-appearing in the Russian ш where it was needed), and a slightly aspirated h (similar to the sound of breathing hard, as when cleaning one’s spectacles), along with a couple of rather guttural h’s, one of which is transcribed ħ and pronounced as a soft *kh*. As well as these was a guttural q, which is an almost unpronounceable k-like sound. Aside from a relatively unpronounceable ah-like sound, transcribed ʿ, they also had a simple long ah, transcribed as ʾ. The Egyptians also had a č/tj-like sound we transcribe as ȥ.

To the north-west of the Ancient Near East (in the second half of the second millennium BC) were the Indo-European speaking Mycenaean

Greeks of the mainland and Aegean. Their relatives, the Hittites, dominated inland Anatolia and used a form of Near Eastern cuneiform to write their Indo-European language. To write their Indo-European language, on the other hand, the Mycenaean Greeks used what we call Linear B, which was a modified version of the Linear A writing system used by the Cretan Minoans (who were probably writing a north-west Semitic language).

Almost all the languages of the Bronze Age Near East were written, at least partly, syllabically (at the end of the Bronze Age, Ugarit invented an alphabet, but this idea did not spread until the Iron Age). However, not all of the writing systems insisted on absolute clarity about the writing of vowels (as opposed to consonants). For Akkadian, it is rather simple to transcribe phonetically, but for Linear B, we copy the syllabic forms, and for Egyptian, we basically cannot master how to read the syllables (or at least, I claim we can't), so we arbitrarily insert a mild vowel (like ə) between the consonants. Thus, the transcriptions differ from the rapidly consonantal Egyptian to the insistently syllabic Linear B.

Chronology

More complicated and far more serious than transcriptions are disagreements about Egyptian and Mesopotamian chronology – and these must be interlocking to create a coherent historical narrative. The ultimate basis of any Bronze Age chronology is founded on adding up the known reign-lengths of the kings, but uncertainties make it impossible to use such dates alone: the only means of correlating the chronologies is finding absolute dates for both regions, which requires astronomical support.

Warning! Readers just starting the book should read no further here now, but go on to the text – and come back if questions come up.

In general, dates are organised in four fundamental ways. (1) There is customarily a break around 2000 years ago, when it is alleged that Jesus of Nazareth was born, and giving rise to dates since then being AD (Latin for “year of our lord” – which believers write before the date, rather than after it, as I do) or CE (a convention for naming the same epoch the “Common Era”); dates before then are BC (for obvious reasons) or BCE (meaning “Before Common Era”). (2) Dates understood in years according to this system are then termed “absolute dates”, with the minor difference that some people use a “-” where I use a “BC”, with the astronomers adding in a “Year 0” (because this is missing in the BC/AD system, and mathematically necessary), and thus, *e.g.*, -1763 = 1764 BC. (3) A “BP” for “Before Present” is used to define raw but unreliable data, which must be calibrated. (4) Dates that cannot be assigned a specific year are dated “relatively” by arguing that

such-and-such a person or thing is to be dated before or after or around the time of some known phenomenon (a king, a solar eclipse, whatever).

The best way to get “relative” dates “absolute” is to have an astronomical event (*i.e.*, a singularity) or a dendrochronological date, *i.e.*, a tree-ring, which can be identified as part of a sequence or linked to a radiocarbon date. Radiocarbon dates must be calibrated (because the amount of radioactive carbon in the atmosphere allegedly fluctuates, and fortunately tree-rings can aid in supplying the dead carbon required), but are uncertain as it frequently turns out that the laboratories have not checked their equipment and/or calculations carefully. Thus, there are several variables involved in trying to establish when any given king lived and died. Debates hinge on being certain about the king lists, reign-lengths, solar and lunar eclipses, and dendrochronological dates. This leads to competing systems.

For Mesopotamia, there are about five basic systems: a “long chronology”, a “middle chronology” (with a slightly shorter middle variant), a “low chronology”, and an “ultra-low chronology” (with a slight variant) – and all are ultimately based on sightings of Venus in the first half of the second millennium BC. The most common one is that used in textbooks and museum display cases, which is usually the ordinary “Middle Chronology”, meaning that Hammurabi of Babylon ruled *ca.* 1792-1750 BC. This chronology is accepted because it is convenient.

However, there are fundamental problems with the widely-used Mesopotamian “Middle Chronology”, because it incorporates internal methodological contradictions and inconsistencies – problems which are rarely taken into consideration (*e.g.*, Höflmayer 2022).

One matter is (a) that it is based on the astronomical Venus cycles, but lacks a corresponding (astronomical) solar eclipse which should be found if astronomically coherent, but such is not forthcoming (Larsen 2015: 66–67).

Another matter is (b) that the Middle Chronology is based on the dendrochronological calibration of radiocarbon dates (Manning *et al.* 2016, 2020), which are not entirely secure – but demand that the proposed correlation with the dendrochronological Porsuk 854 anomaly with the Minoan eruption of Santorini/Thera must be abandoned. Yet, nothing similar has been found where traces of the Thera eruption should be situated according to the Middle Chronology, although it is known that Thera was far more powerful than was known at the time Manning (1999) originally proposed a mid-17th century BC date.

Calibrations depend upon tree-rings, and dendrochronological dates depend on calibrations, meaning there is some circular logic involved. Significant is that with the Intcal13 calibrations, it would appear that there is a period (*ca.* 1540-1480 BC) when most of the projected C-14 radiocarbon

dates for the period fluctuate around 3290 BP (where with Intcal20 the dates for 1550-1490 BC fall around 3300 BP; *cf.* Plicht *et al.* 2020: 1104, Fig. 2). This means that there is more than half a century where the raw data of the radiocarbon dates is virtually identical (*i.e.*, fluctuating around the same date, *ca.* 3300 BP) and does not correspond to the arithmetic date (of *ca.* 1300 BC), but is instead distributed over decades due to the necessary calibration. For an outside observer, however, it would appear that the calibration is arbitrary, possibly due to filling a period that does not exist. Thus, aside from the point that there is a considerable margin for revision by re-calibrating, it is probably not coincidental that by stretching this era out a bit longer than would be the ordinary reading of the data, the dates allow the presentation of “scientific proof” for (a) an untenably early date for Dyn. XVIII in Egypt and also (b) illusory support for the Mesopotamian Middle Chronology.

For Mesopotamia, Gasche *et al.* (1998a&b) proposed an alternative Ultra-Low chronology (reducing the Middle Chronology by roughly a century: Hammurabi 1696-1654 BC) – one based on lunar eclipses, king lists, Venus cycles and pottery sequences, thus compatible with the givens of the region, but valid for Mesopotamia alone. When I (Warburton 2000) proposed a chronology compatible with Gasche’s, taking account of Levantine archaeology and Egypt, I proposed that, using Gasche’s chronology, the solar eclipse associated with the birth of Šamši-Adad (that is lacking for the Middle Chronology) should be that of 08 October 1764 BC – and Nasa’s Espenak has since confirmed that it would have been “seen” in the regions where Šamši-Adad might have been born, in southern Iraq (:https://eclipsewise.com/solar/SEprime/-1799--1700/SE-1763Oct08A_prime.html).

Egyptian and Aegean chronology is more complicated. A controversy about the correct dates for Dyn. XII endures, given a disagreement about the date of the heliacal rising of Sothis (mentioned pp. 74–75, below). This is relatively harmless, because the Aegean and Egyptian dates must correlate (because of the Egyptian finds on Crete), but correlating Egypt with Western Asia remains guesswork. As Dyn. XII Egypt was not deeply involved in Western Asia at that time, the problem can be overlooked.

We (Hornung *et al.* 2006: 490–495) published an Egyptian chronology we viewed as correct (our dates were and are disputed by others, *e.g.*, Luft 1992, Shortland & Bronk Ramsey 2013), but our system was destabilised shortly thereafter by the discovery that Horemhab (last king of Dyn. XVIII) probably ruled for about half the time we had reckoned. This meant reducing the chronology of Dyn. XVIII by around 15 years. Krauss and I (in Warburton 2009b: 125–144) found no lunar dates supporting an astronomically based

absolute chronology for Dyn. XVIII. However, a solar eclipse relating to a Hittite omen has been discussed again recently (*e.g.*, Gautschy 2017), and if the solar eclipse of 17 November 1301 BC matches with year 10 of the Hittite king Muršili, this suits the date for the death of Tutankhamun in 1311, and our chronology (Warburton 2009b: 134) might yet be correct.

At that time (Warburton 2009b), however, the main point was settling a radiocarbon date for Thera, and the calibrations at that time meant that this took place in 1613 \pm 13 (*i.e.*, 1600-1627 BC). However, it has since turned out that these calibrations were mistaken and that the eruption took place in the 16th century BC, while the date for the Porsuk 854 anomaly has been pushed up to early in the 17th century (rather than the middle as Manning had originally proposed) in correlating with the Mesopotamian Middle Chronology. This, however, makes no sense, as one would have to find another dendrochronological anomaly for Thera – and then invent another weather event to account for the Porsuk 854 anomaly. I therefore propose that the Porsuk 854 anomaly be used to secure the date for Thera (*i.e.*, calibrating from the date for Thera according to the rings, and the new radiocarbon date). This should be possible because of (a) the superfluous decades in the IntCal13 and IntCal20 systems and (b) the “defined sequence” of the rings on the olive branch from Thera.

This would then align the dendrochronology with Gasche’s Ultra-Low Mesopotamian chronology. The meaning of this is that my accounts of military activity in Syria are based on consistent attention to three different relatively accurate chronological systems, each relatively valid for its own region (Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Aegean), and situating events in history so that the narrative is realistically possible.

Most using the Middle Chronology are not conscious that this might be incorrect; those aware of these general chronological problems assume that it makes no difference because one single system is adequate for their region (whether individually Egypt, the Aegean, the Levant, Mesopotamia, or Central Asia) – even if fundamentally wrong. This remains true as long as they do not care about correlations with all of the relevant regions. When trying to give a broader orientation, they will, however, accordingly produce two or three different, arbitrarily chosen (and possibly erroneous) chronologies to give others an idea of where what they are doing is situated.

Grandet 2008 exemplifies a system based on mistaken concepts of Bronze Age military strategy, markets, economics and international relations, and Grandet 2022 exemplifies the misunderstanding of chronological correlations disregarding history. Such scholars do not understand that chronological systems must be aligned coherently – and that history depends upon chronological truth and not statistical analysis. In the case of

bringing Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia together, a coherent system is required. It would be nice if it also has a chance of being correct. This condition does not apply when using the Middle Chronology.

It is possible that, for the beginning of history, both disciplinary borders and the influence of the conceptual timelessness of Anthropology have contributed to an atmosphere disregarding the importance of understanding history, and thus allowing arguments about chronology to blossom as a field apart. Many scholars dealing with the earliest era seemingly fail to realise that history also requires understanding – and so the enterprise is doomed from the start. Thus, my chronology differs from what you read elsewhere, because I think and argue differently.

Figure 1. The Limits



Dates	Egypt	Near East	West	Further East
4400 BC	Neolithic	Neolithic	Neolithic	Neolithic
3000	Narmer (Dyn. I)	End of Uruk Period/Beginning of Gilgamesh	Neolithic Varna cemetery	Neolithic
2900				
2850	Meryt-Neith			
2750	Qa'a			
2700-1900				
2600	Khasekhemwy (Dyn. II)			Indus Civilisation
2500	Djoser (Dyn. III)			
2600-2100	Old Kingdom, Dynasties IV-VI	(OK, Dyns. IV-VI)		
2600-2200		Early Dynastic III Mesopotamia	KUG.Baba	Pre-Palatial Crete
2200-2100		Agade, Sargon, Naram-Sin	of Agade	
2000-1900		Ur III, Shulgi		
2000-1600	Middle Kingdom (MK)	Dyns. XI-XIII		
1900-1550			Palaces of Minoan Crete	
1764-1680		Šamsi-Adad		
1696-1654		Hammurabi		
1600-1500	Hyksos in Delta (Dyn. XV)			
1600-1100				
1524-1499	Ahmose (Dyn. XVI/XVII)			
1500-1100	New Kingdom (NK)	Dyns. XVIII-XX		
1499		Hittite Conquest: Fall of Babylon	to Kassites	
1476-1470	Thutmosis I			
1468-1445	Hatshepsut			
1468-1415	Thutmosis III	Idrimi (Alalakh)		
1389-1379	Thutmosis IV			
1379-1342	Amenophis III			
mid-14th century		Amarna Age		
1356-1322		Aššur-Uballit (Assyria)		
1342-1325	Akhenaten	Tushratta (Mitanni)		
1330-1311		Š/Suppilulima		
				Shang Dynasty

Bronze Age Egypt and Globalisation

Dates	Egypt	Near East	West	Further East
1321-1311	Tutankhamun			
1307-1292	Horemhab			
1300-1100	Ramesside era (Dyns. XIX-XX)			
1291-1279	Seti I			
1279-1213	Ramesses II			
1114-1076		Tiglath-Pileser I		Beginning Zhou Dynasty
667-627		Aššurbanipal		
357-30	Alexander, The Ptolemies	Alexander, Seleucids, Rome		Qin, Western Han

Figure 2. The Core



INTRODUCTION

The “Amarna Age” in Context

For a couple of centuries in the second half of the second millennium BC, Egypt was the greatest and wealthiest power in the world, at a time when neighbouring lands were gradually becoming important.

This contrasted starkly with the preceding millennia, when southern Mesopotamia was indisputably far ahead of all other lands on the surface of the earth, because that was where the locals first gradually eked urban civilisation out of the mud, creating the basis for economies to grow, and it was from southern Mesopotamia that the first armies spread out to conquer distant lands, creating empires, and thus provoking weaker neighbours who reduced them to dust. Egypt played no central role in these developments.

By contrast, in the late second millennium BC, while the oasis of the verdant Nile Valley was isolated, its dominant king was not alone, being but one member of the club of the kings who viewed themselves as the “brothers” personifying the known civilised world: Hatti, Mitanni, Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt. Beyond them were the peripheral Mycenaeans in the Aegean to the West, the Nubians in Africa to the South, and the Elamites in Iran to the East – but North of the semi-civilised Hittites was already the end of the civilised world (for the Chinese were still unknown and irrelevant). This is the origin of the international system.

The Egyptian path to supremacy in this world is difficult to follow. After some initial setbacks, Egypt eventually subdued Nubia, which was not a terribly important land – and Egypt was rarely successful in its forays into Western Asia. Nevertheless, all the brothers stood in awe of Egypt. We know that the Assyrian king had no hesitation about insulting the Hittite king, at one point dismissing him directly in a letter addressed to him as but a “substitute” for a king (Bryce 2003: 214). By contrast,

If the pharaoh’s ‘royal brothers’ believed that Egypt was now in decline and had lost its international standing, they certainly gave no indication of that in their letters. Even the great Hittite warlord Suppiluliuma was anxious to assure the pharaoh of his friendship [...] (Bryce 2003: 23).

This situation of undisputed *primus inter pares* leads modern Egyptologists to share a rather exaggerated image of the Egyptian rulers who styled themselves as a *Dazzling Sun*, ruling the entire earth. In fact, the Bronze Age Egyptians should be celebrated for having had stay-at-home kings who successfully sold themselves as great conquerors. An ideal prototype was King Amenophis III (ca. 1390-1350 BC), effeminate father of the fanatic Amenophis IV/Akhenaten. Amenophis III had at least one Babylonian princess for his bed (cf. Bryce 2003: 109–110) and seemingly extrapolated from this conquest the right to the title “Conqueror of Babylon” (Edel & Görg 2005: 4), which would otherwise be rather inexplicable. Like most Egyptian kings, Amenophis III probably lacked real virile prowess; his only documented military “campaign” was an excursion to Nubia, probably as a teenager. The philologist Gardiner (1961: 214) was not oblivious to the testimony of art, and justly remarked that “a son of more unlikely an appearance than Amenōphis IV could hardly have been born to altogether normal parents”.

Yet this family situation may be relevant to Egyptian success. Bryce (2003: 108) observes that there was an “established tradition” that Egyptian princesses never went out to embrace foreign kings, but foreign princesses were regularly locked into the Pharaonic embrace as the others indulged “a case of pharaonic hubris, of maintaining the pharaoh’s self-assumed image as the senior member of the club of royal brothers”. Even at its zenith, Egypt did not appear to be a menacing foe and thus hardly a serious contender for uncontested leadership – and yet it was accepted, making this situation a bit mysterious.

The real explanation for Egyptian hegemony in this world lay elsewhere. The content of a very short but polite letter “from a Hittite prince” to Pharaoh consists of:

I myself am desirous of gold. My father, send me gold! (after Moran 1992: 117)

Although more long-winded, the pharaohs received similar requests from the other “brothers” and “sons” of a suitable rank. Aššur-uballiṭ, the Assyrian king who would put Assyria back on the map, recalls that one of his ancestors had received “20 *talants* of gold” (which would be well over half a tonne), and expected similar shipments himself because “gold in your country is dirt”, and thus the Assyrian cannot understand why, in his day, his Egyptian counterpart “is so sparing of it” (Moran 1992: 39).

To gain access to the gold, the mightiest kings in the world would gladly offer their sisters and daughters to the pharaohs. This was the key to Egyptian hegemony. There was no reason to conquer Egypt as long as Egypt

was free with its gold. Conquering the southern neighbour Nubia – with its gold deposits and locally available servile labour force – was probably the most sensationally successful case of the application of *The Strategy of Indirect Approach* in human history, not only deviously guiding ancient political behaviour, but also deceiving modern historians who dream of a fairy-tale world *When Egypt Ruled the East*.

Aside from craving to collect foreign wives, Amenophis III and Akhenaten did not care very much about far-off lands, because they knew that other lands were a long way off, so there was no chance of anyone dangerous coming close to them – and because they could confidently assume that they would always be the masters of all that they surveyed.

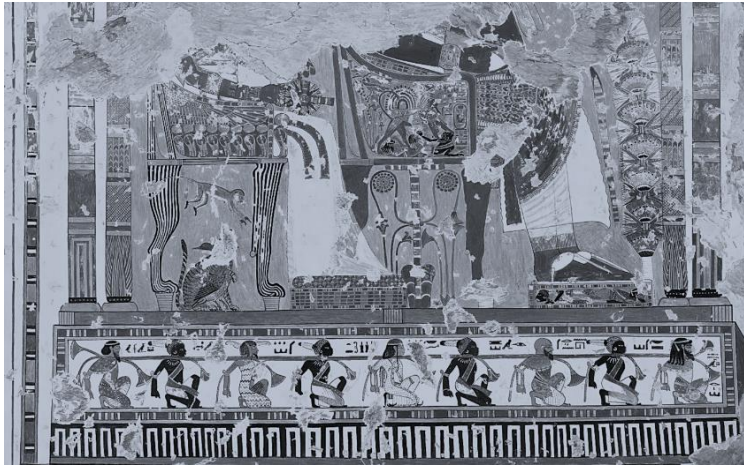


Figure 3. Ancient artistic representation of a palatial scene with a band of the enemies of Ancient Egypt gently but firmly bound by the flowers of Upper and Lower Egypt beneath the thrones of Amenophis III and a companion. The list specifically includes Babylon (Singar), Kush (Nubia), and Mitanni (Nahrayn, first three figures right) as well as Minoan Crete (Caphtor, middle figure), the rest being various named African and Levantine troublemakers. (Readers will note that under the companion's chair, we see some pets kept in the palace – an Ancient Egyptian royal custom which has since spread to commoners).

In the third millennium, the Akkadians had smitten Anšan in Iran and erased Ebla in Syria, and in the second, the Hittites would smite Babylon and dismember Mitanni – throughout, however, the great ones generally kept away from Egypt. A consequence was that the Egyptians found the irritating nomads constantly penetrating into Egypt a nuisance, and this

local nuisance was far more relevant to Egypt than the other great powers. Indeed, under the name of the “Hyksos”, crowds of unemployed Levantines had actually taken over the Nile Delta when the Egyptian Middle Kingdom fell apart: something no major Bronze Age power ever achieved. Akhenaten knew perfectly well that (a) Hittite and Assyrian kings could conquer Babylon itself, whereas the contemporary Babylonian king Burra-Buriyaš would write to the Egyptian court at this time (b) professing to have sovereignty over Assyria, and (c) claiming not to know that Egypt was far from Babylon (Moran 1992: 18, 12–14; Bryce 2003: 78–80, 81–82). Akhenaten grasped the overall situation – historically and geographically – and he knew that the claims of his Babylonian “brother” were absurd. This made Egypt a land apart, and its rulers were suitably haughty. It was one thing to write at home – as the Pharaohs did, in Egyptian hieroglyphs that no one could read (Figs. 3, 4) – that they ruled the world; it was another to make such claims in letters to foreign kings using a relatively civilised version of

the more or less barbaric Middle Babylonian, which – in the 15th and 14th centuries [BC, DAW] – was the diplomatic *lingua franca* from Babylon to Hattuša [the capital of the Hittite Empire, DAW] and Egypt (Edzard in Edzard *et al.* 1970: 57).

This brings us to a rather improbable difference between East and West, as a later pharaoh – Ramesses III (*ca.* 1187-1157), who actually won some battles before withdrawing to the harem – decorated his mortuary temple with long lists of foreign countries he allegedly ruled. Among the names listed are places to the East of the Tigris, beyond the Babylonian hinterland. It is obvious that displaying knowledge in the form of lists was very important to the Egyptians, for we find names of foreign lands not just on potshards and flimsy papyri but also prominently inscribed on monumental stone wall-faces. We can only stand mystified before these monumental lists, for there is no way that any Bronze Age Egyptians ever campaigned anywhere near some of the distant places behind these names.

A Topographical Error

It was mere display, declaring an unrealistic but comprehensive domination of the known world: what should be remarkable for us is that they even knew and cared about these places at all.

However, they did care. Sometime around the middle of the 14th century BC, an Egyptian bureaucrat was inspecting the hieroglyphic inscriptions carved into the stones forming the socles of the royal statues in the memorial