



## THE EGYPTIAN DIPLOMATIC SYSTEM IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE BEYOND THE TERMS OF "BROTHERHOOD" AND "EQUALITY": THE EGYPTIAN "ABANDONMENT" OF POWER AND ASPECTS OF PHARAONIC IDENTITY AND KINGSHIP\*

Grigorios I. Kontopoulos  
University of the Aegean

The nature of diplomatic contacts between Egypt and the Near East during the Late Bronze Age is arguably one of the most challenging themes not only for Egyptology but also generally for the history of the ancient Mediterranean and the great civilizations of the past. Although aspects of this diplomatic procedure and the protagonists involved have been examined in several studies in the past<sup>1</sup>, a comprehensive analysis of all relevant primary texts and secondary sources is still lacking. Crucial questions related to the innermost mechanisms involved in the mobilization of the pharaonic institute and power towards the foreign rulers and hegemonies have not been properly investigated in the past. My thesis, to be submitted to the Department of Mediterranean Studies at the University of the Aegean, will cover this gap by searching and analyzing various modes of political thought and action: contacts and diplomatic marriages, the diverse notions of the uniqueness of pharaonic authority and the ideological abandonment of its power through the adoption of a common diplomatic language (Akkadian) and foreign customs and practices, as well as the reciprocal approach in these contacts by such diverse nations as the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Hittites. The crucial underlying theme, which will be thoroughly examined in the proposed research, is the Egyptian attitude toward the foreigners and the issue of political and cultural adaptation in the multicultural area of the southeastern Mediterranean basin of the second millennium BCE. Furthermore, the originality of the proposed topic lies in the involvement of certain interdisciplinary research methods that make use of modern diplomatic theories and techniques for analysis and evaluation of ancient practices. The aim is to collect all the available data and to mutually and contextually analyze them under the light of modern approaches and interdisciplinary theories.

Within this study I intend to reconstruct several aspects of the international relations shaped in the Near East during the Late Bronze Age. Firstly, attention will be paid to the aspects of negotiation (i.e., use of common language, diplomatic treaties, diplomatic marriage, alliances through vassalage, etc.) appearing in

different systems of diplomacy (i.e., Amarna Letters, Mari archive, Bogazkoy archive) during the Late Bronze Age. The basic aim of this study is not only to record and analyze the frame through which the diplomatic procedure and its practices took place among states with different cultural norms (Egypt, Assyria, Hatti, Mitanni, Babylon) but also to identify and investigate the universal features of international politics that remain changeless during the centuries by using interdisciplinary theories borrowed from other sciences (i.e., linguistics, political science, social psychology), perfectly applicable in Egyptology. Therefore, this study is going to be framed within broader emerging discussions concerning several aspects that co-act in the diplomatic procedure from the Late Bronze Age onward. One of these aspects is the vital need of a state to be part of a wider system of diplomatic relations. That perception was not solely a creation of the political thought of the ancient Greeks (Aristotle–Plato) or an amalgam of the political fermentations took place during the Renaissance (Machiavelli). It goes back in time, and it is applicable in periods such as the Late Bronze Age among states such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Mitanni etc. In order for Egypt to become involved in a wider system of diplomacy, it was necessary to be recessive in matters such as its ideology toward the “others” and the Egyptians’ “superiority” among them. Furthermore, the adoption of common codes of communication in a diplomatic system composed by states that had different perceptions of terms such as kingship and kinship was vital in order for Egypt to be accepted as a major “player” in the diplomatic procedure.

More specifically, the proposed research will address the following aspects:

1. The adoption by the Egyptians of a *lingua franca* (Akkadian) in order to communicate in a language understandable by all the other members of the diplomatic “community.” Although the adoption of the Egyptian language by the foreigners was highly regarded by the Egyptians, as several texts reveal, the acceptance of a foreign language by the Egyptians in

order to communicate with the “foreigners” inside the diplomatic community can be perceived a sign of ideological “retreatment.”

2. The application of the language of the “family relationships” to the political machinations of the Great Powers (Egypt, Hatti, Assyria, Mitanni and Babylon) during the Late Bronze Age and the differences in its understanding and usage among the parts that composed the Amarna system of diplomacy.
3. Various aspects of the “ideological abandonment” of the pharaoh’s uniqueness and divinity.
4. The role of propaganda in the record of several diplomatic practices (treaties, diplomatic marriages, diplomatic gifts, etc.). The difference in the way the

same acts of diplomacy were displayed for internal and external consumption revealed dissimilar perceptions of the diplomatic means by the participants and a high degree of impact of these acts inside the Egyptian community.

5. The use of the diplomatic marriage as a mean of obtaining diplomatic relationships between Egypt and its Near Eastern neighbors. Through the study of the terms, the procedures, and the ideology toward that diplomatic practice, different aspects of ideology can be revealed among the Near Eastern participants of the diplomatic correspondence of the Late Bronze Age (second millennium BCE).

#### NOTES

\* The members of the advisory committee consisted of Assistant Professor Panagiotis Kousoulis (supervisor, University of the Aegean) and Professor Anthony Spalinger (co-supervisor, University of Auckland). The PhD research is funded by the *Ypatia scholarships program* of the University of the Aegean. Its anticipated completion date is 2017.

<sup>1</sup> Bahr, S. Kahn, D. and Shirley, J.J. (Eds.) 2011. *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature. Proceedings of conference at the University of*

*Haifa, 3-7 May, 2009*, Leiden; Cohen, R. and Westbrook, R. (Eds.) 2000. *Amarna diplomacy. The beginnings of the international relations*, John Hopkins University Press; Knoppers, G.N. and Girsch, A. 2004. *Egypt, Israel and the ancient Mediterranean world. Studies in honor of Donald, B. Redford*, Brill; Liverani, M, 2001. *International relations in the ancient Near East (1696-1100 BC)*, Palgrave; Idem. 1979. *Three Amarna Essays*, Malibu; Redford, D. 1992. *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in ancient times*, Princeton University Press..